

Lincoln and His Enemies - Part V

Lead: In 1864, with the country mired in a Civil War, the re-election of President Abraham Lincoln was by no means assured.

Intro: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: In retrospect, by the early months of 1864 it is possible to see the Confederacy as being on the ropes. Southern resources and troops were running out and the last great attempt at invasion had come to grief on the gentle slopes of Gettysburg the previous summer. But this was not

apparent to a United States electorate weary of war and three years of sacrifice, and they were flirting with idea of dumping the incumbent. Whatever may have been the role played by Cabinet officials, military officers, or members of Congress, in the people's mind, the Chief Architect of the war to restore the Union was Abraham Lincoln. He was the object of praise in victory but in the winter of 1864, fairly or not, he was viewed by many as the author of stalemate. For that Lincoln was in political trouble.

The Democrats were divided. Regular or Peace Democrats wanted the War over as soon as possible whether the South was defeated militarily or not. Even many of those

Democrats who supported the war effort were not enthusiastic about the President's efforts to emancipate the Slaves. The War Democrats had joined with the Republicans to form the National Union Party in 1862 but still were a continuing source of conflict. The Regular Democrats nominated General George B. McClellan, whom Lincoln had relieved after nearly two years of failure as commander of the main Union army in Virginia.

Radical Republicans also believed Lincoln should be replaced and conspired with Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase of Ohio. Knowing of the conspiracy, Lincoln cleverly kept the ambitious Chase in the Cabinet until the nomination was

locked up and the Radicals had to fish elsewhere for a candidate. They nominated John Charles Frémont, another general whom Lincoln had relieved.

In the end the election was decided not by political intrigue but by victory on the battlefield. In the summer, Sherman captured Atlanta and General Philip Sheridan, in a brilliant campaign, defeated the Confederates under Jubal Early in the Shenandoah Valley, thus relieving the City of Washington of the threat of capture that had hung over it since the beginning of the war.

In November Lincoln, who in the spring had himself dismissed his

chances of re-election, but by the fall, increasingly appeared the victorious war leader, won comfortably in the popular vote and buried McClellan in the Electoral College.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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