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## Victim of Emancipation: Adams County Flustered

John M. Rudy  
Gettysburg College

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# Victim of Emancipation: Adams County Flustered

## Abstract

Republican stalwart newspaper The Adams Sentinel ran nothing in its folds hinting at the editor's elation over the Emancipation Proclamation in the days following the document's release. In a [terse column](#), headed, "Proclamation of the President," ran the document, unadorned with either accolades or contempt. Elsewhere in the paper's folds, the news hovered back and forth over the fields around Sharpsburg and word of the lackadaisical pursuit of Lee's army into Virginia. The deep meaning of one of Lincoln's most momentous moments seemed to be lost on the Republicans of south-central Pennsylvania, as they eschewed the topic, pussyfooted around it and went out of their way to nearly ignore the document which sat in Washington City with its ink still drying.

## Keywords

CW150, Gettysburg, Gettysburg College, Civil War Era Studies, Civil War Interpretation, Emancipation, Adams County, Pennsylvania

## Disciplines

Cultural History | History | Public History | Social History | United States History

## Comments

*Interpreting the Civil War: Connecting the Civil War to the American Public* is written by alum and adjunct professor, John Rudy. Each post is his own opinions, musings, discussions, and questions about the Civil War era, public history, historical interpretation, and the future of history. In his own words, it is "a blog talking about how we talk about a war where over 600,000 died, 4 million were freed and a nation forever changed. Meditating on interpretation, both theory and practice, at no charge to you."

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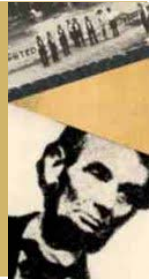
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# Interpreting the Civil War

Connecting the Civil War to the American Public

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## Victim of Emancipation: Adams County Flustered

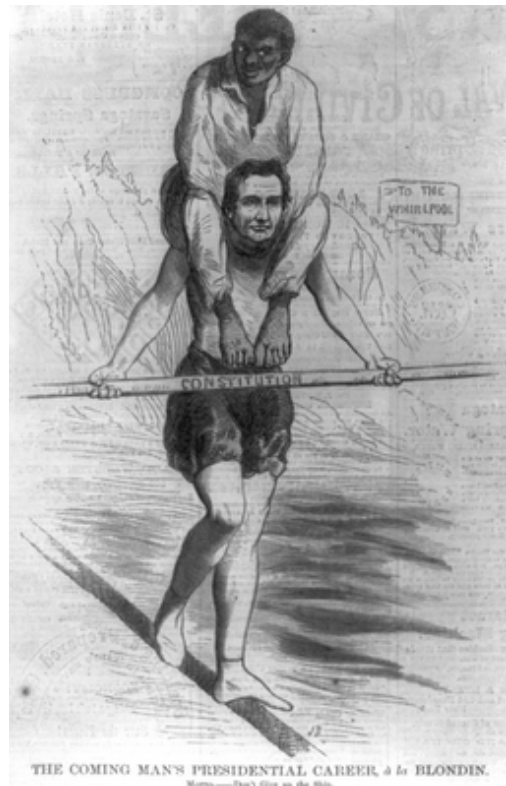
**SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 22, 2012**

Republican stalwart newspaper *The Adams Sentinel* ran nothing in its folds hinting at the editor's elation over the Emancipation Proclamation in the days following the document's release. In a [terse column](#), headed, "Proclamation of the President," ran the document, unadorned with either accolades or contempt. Elsewhere in the paper's folds, the news hovered back and forth over the fields around Sharpsburg and word of the lackadaisical pursuit of Lee's army into Virginia. The deep meaning of one of Lincoln's most momentous moments seemed to be lost on the Republicans of south-central Pennsylvania, as they eschewed the topic, pussyfooted around it and went out of their way to nearly ignore the document which sat in Washington City with its ink still drying.

The Democracy, on the other hand, was happy to make hay while the sun shone. "President Lincoln has issued a Proclamation setting free all the slaves in the States in rebellion on the first of January next," the *Compiler* [suscinctly noted](#) to its readers. "We believe this movement," editor Henry J. Stahle continued, "to be highly inopportune, and will, we are confident, be questioned by all men not utterly Abolitionized." The folds of the paper then paraded forth extract after extract from Democratic newspapers chastising Lincoln's actions, comparing him, the *New York World* adeptly chided, to, "Blondin in the art of political balancing."

In article after article, for the next few weeks, the *Compiler* excoriated the Lincoln administration and its supporters for the bold action of Emancipation. Running under the headline, "FREEING THE NEGROES," Stahle [printed the Proclamation](#) in its entirety.

The Republicans must have felt the soft underbelly of election politics that the Emancipation Proclamation had left exposed. Across the white North, the majority of whose citizens made no pretense toward equality of the races, voters were headed to the polls that fall. Some, particularly Pennsylvanians, would cast their ballots less than a month after the document hit the street. Among



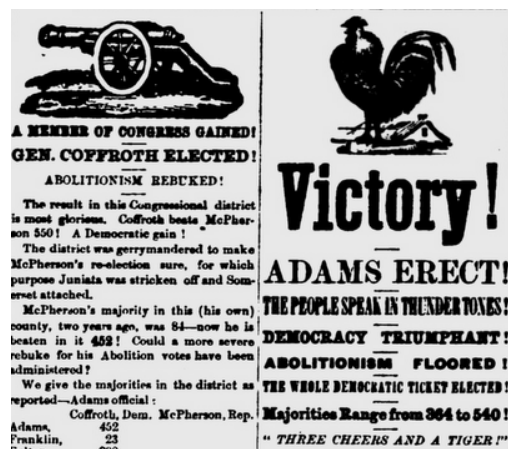
Lincoln *ala* Blondin walking the political tightrope of Emancipation. / PD LOC

those wishing to return to office was Gettysburgian and Pennsylvania College graduate Edward McPherson, trying to hold tight to his seat representing the 16th District in the U.S. House of Representatives.

The Emancipation Proclamation became the perfect cudgel with which to beat McPherson. "VOTERS, REMEMBER!" the *Compiler* trumpeted, "that Edward McPherson voted with the Abolitionists for the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia!" The paper swung again. "REMEMBER - that Edward McPherson voted with the Abolitionists for the Confiscation Bill, in pursuance of which President Lincoln has declared his purpose to liberate the negroes of the South!" Again and again the blows came down.

The *Sentinel* timidly replied with small jabs, claiming that the only souls who could support the Democratic tickets were, "every voter who loves Slavery more than he does the Union - who loves party more than his country."

The *Sentinel* did adeptly predict that, "the victories in Maryland, the emancipation proclamation, and the one which threatens traitors in the North with punishment when obstreperous, have worked [a] wondrous change. The future is darker and bloodier to the rebels than the past and present."



**A MEMBER OF CONGRESS GAINED!  
GEN. COFFROTH ELECTED!**  
ABOLITIONISM REBUKED!  
The result in this Congressional district is most glorious. Coffroth beats McPherson 550! A Democratic gain!  
The district was gerrymandered to make McPherson's re-election sure, for which purpose Junius was stricken off and Somerset attached.  
McPherson's majority in this (his own) county, two years ago, was 84—now he is beaten in it 452! Could a more severe rebuke for his Abolition votes have been administered?  
We give the majorities in the district as reported—Adams official:  
Coffroth, Dem. McPherson, Rep.  
Adams, 452  
Franklin, 23  
Total, 475

**Victory!**  
**ADAMS ERECT!**  
**THE PEOPLE SPEAK IN THUNDER TONES!**  
**DEMOCRACY TRIUMPHANT!**  
**ABOLITIONISM FLOORED!**  
**THE WHOLE DEMOCRATIC TICKET ELECTED!**  
**Majorities Range from 364 to 540!**  
"THREE CHEERS AND A TIGER!"

Edward McPherson lost the election in a landslide victory for the Democracy. [Early returns](#) showed McPherson losing by over 450 votes in his home county alone. "We assume," The *Sentinel* lamented, that even, "the Army vote of the District will not overcome Mr. Coffroth's majority on the Home vote, and therefore concede the defeat of Mr. McPherson for Congress." For local Republicans, the root of the loss was quite clear. McPherson, "was pursued with steady and calculating malignity. His opinions were misrepresented, his record perverted, his motives misconstrued, his purest acts maligned, and everything said and done, which an artful foe could concoct to his injury."

Democrats crowed over their victory in 1862. "Abolitionism Rebuked!" the *Compiler* boasted.

But McPherson's record was not twisted all that much. His stand for the freedom of four million in bonds in the

South were relatively consistent and unwavering. The Emancipation Proclamation had simply awoken an angry and racist sentiment within the American Democracy, prompting the *Compiler* at the bottom of [one column](#) to urge locals to, "VOTE THE WHITE MAN'S TICKET!"

Lincoln sold Edward McPherson's seat in the United States House of Representatives in a calculated gamble. Lincoln sold that seat and many like it with the simple stroke of a pen in September of 1862. In exchange, Lincoln took a step down the road toward freedom and equality. McPherson's seat was collateral damage in a war for freedom.

Like Lyndon Johnson did while sweeping his pen across a sheet of paper in the East Room of the White House in 1964 then glibly noting to his comrades that his party had, "lost the south for a generation," Lincoln was willing to take a political drubbing precisely for doing the right thing rather

than the popular. Lincoln was willing to alienate pockets of the white North, to lose precious seats in the House or Senate and perhaps even cement himself as a devil of epic proportions in the eyes of American racist ideology precisely because it was the virtuous path and the path that fulfilled the true promise of the nation.

And after all, Lincoln had, "made a solemn vow before God that if General Lee was driven back from Maryland I would crown the result by the declaration for freedom to the slaves."

Emancipation was right, not popular. And Lincoln was brave precisely because of that fact, not in spite of it.

So celebrate the Emancipation Proclamation, don't simply commemorate it. It truly is a political gamble worth shouting for.