

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

A P R E S I D E N T ' S V I S I O N

PRIMARY SOURCE WORKSHEET

ABRAHAM LINCOLN TO GENERAL WILLIAM T. SHERMAN, DECEMBER 26, 1864.

Transcribed and annotated by the Lincoln Studies Center, Knox College, Galesburg, Illinois.

Executive Mansion
Washington Dec. 26. 1864

My Dear General Sherman

Many, many thanks for your Christmas gift, the capture of Savannah.

When you were about leaving Atlanta for the Atlantic Coast, I was anxious, if not fearful; but feeling that you were the better judge, and remembering that “nothing risked, nothing gained,” I did not interfere. Now, the undertaking being a success, the honor is all yours; for I believe that none of us went farther than to acquiesce. And taking the work of Gen. Thomas into the count, as it should be taken, it is indeed a great success. Not only does it afford you the obvious and immediate military advantages; but, in showing to the world that your army could be divided, putting the stronger part to an important news service, and yet leaving enough to vanquish the old opposing force of the whole—Hood’s army—it brings those who sat in darkness to see a great light. But what next! I suppose it will be safe, if I leave Gen. Grant and yourself to decide.

Please make very grateful acknowledgements to your whole army—officers and men.

Yours very truly

A. Lincoln

QUESTIONS

Answer the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What prompted President Lincoln to write this letter?
2. Where is Savannah in relation to Atlanta? What did the capture of Savannah mean in terms of the military strength of the Union compared to that of the Confederacy in 1864?
3. How does this letter suggest that while Lincoln took advice from his generals, he was a highly engaged Commander-in-Chief?
4. What political meaning or opportunity does Lincoln see in Sherman’s military victory?

ACTIVITIES

Use your textbook and other print and online resources to complete the following activities.

1. Read this letter along with Lincoln’s second inaugural address. How does Lincoln’s knowledge of the Union’s military success inform that address?
2. General Sherman was known for his “scorched-earth tactics.” Using a library database, your textbook, or an online search, investigate what these tactics involved. Write a brief diary entry from the perspective of a Savannah resident. In your entry, give clues to this resident’s profile (e.g., who you and your family are, how you make your living, etc.) and include how you think this individual felt about the war by 1864.

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