Zach Moeller

6/13/13

The Peace Platform: How Democrats Lost the 1864 Election

As the Civil War dragged on, Abraham Lincoln’s election hopes in 1864 continued to become smaller and smaller. As late as August 23, 1864, Lincoln wrote, “This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration.”[[1]](#footnote-1) However, President Lincoln ended up crushing General George B. McClellan on November 8, 1864 in the general election by an electoral margin of 212 to 21. He won 55% of the popular vote, and carried every state except Kentucky, Delaware, and New Jersey.[[2]](#footnote-2) How did Lincoln go from writing about his probable defeat to carrying all but three states in the election? The conventional argument is that late Union military victories swung public opinion and morale in Lincoln’s favor and gave him a second term.

Upon further primary and secondary literature research, however, there is evidence to support an unconventional argument as to why Lincoln won reelection. Both the Democratic and Republican Party were both divided throughout the Civil War, but the Republican Party was able to unite against the Democrats. On the opposing side, Democrats were split between the War and Peace factions of the party and never developed unity. Lincoln commented to Noah Brooks, a journalist who covered his presidency, that “They (Democrats) must nominate a Peace Democrat on a war platform, or a War Democrat on a peace platform” right before the Chicago Convention.[[3]](#footnote-3) President Lincoln knew that Democrats would be put in an extremely difficult position due to their platform regarding the war.

Democrats were hopelessly divided from the start. Clement Vallandigham, a staunch anti-war Democrat from Ohio, was left to write and articulate a peace platform at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago on August 28-31, 1864. Also, George H. Pendleton, Representative from Ohio, was put on the ticket at McClellan’s running mate to balance out the ticket with one Peace Democrat and one War Democrat. If a pro-war Army general was running as the presidential candidate, then a staunch anti-war vice presidential candidate was seen as a balance for the ticket from the Democratic perspective. However, McClellan personally opposed the platform and knew it would cause problems for his campaign. A number of factors went into Abraham Lincoln winning reelection, not just late military successes alone. What the election came down to was the peace platform articulated at the Chicago Convention that, finally, gave the Republican Party something to run against. The Democratic peace platform, the unpopularity of Democratic candidates, and public opposition to Democratic plans to end the war were just as important as military successes (if not more so) in the election of 1864.

The vision for this research project is to examine existing secondary literature that has already established the main arguments. From there, the paper will explain the context and circumstances that led up to the fateful Democratic National Convention. Furthermore, what led the Democrats to convey the peace plank and how Clement Vallndigham had a large influence over the convention. Plus, the consequences and problems of the convention and platform that War Democrats and McClellan knew it would cause for the party. All of these elements are meant to highlight all the problems the peace platform caused and how it was just as big a factor as military successes in McClellan’s defeat.

**Literature Review**

Further examination of the secondary literature on the 1864 election reinforces how deeply divided both the Democratic and Republican parties were on the eve of the event. For the most part, the selected books had focused on the Republican Party, Abraham Lincoln, and his failures that led up to the election. In addition, closer reading confirms the main arguments historians used were military successes were the biggest factor in the reelection of Lincoln. However, many of the historical articles found highlight a major division within the Democratic Party, too. Also, the main scholarly journals dealt with how controversial the peace platform was. There is much more of a Democratic analysis and point of view to the new historical articles I found, with a specific focus on Clement Vallandigham, a Peace Democrat from Ohio who formed the peace platform at the Chicago Convention.

Collectively, some historians provide key interpretations and insights on McClellan and how he dealt with the peace platform put before him. Essentially, historian Harold Dudley details how McClellan dealt with his nomination acceptance speech, while also providing other letters McClellan wrote to his closest friends.[[4]](#footnote-4) In addition, Dudley illuminates another aspect of McClellan’s election effort that I will further explore in this paper. Not only was McClellan placed on a platform that a staunch anti-war Democrat crafted, but his running mate was also a Peace Democrat from Ohio. Regardless of any attempt McClellan made to persuade the public about his campaign, the public perception was set in stone at the Chicago Convention in late August. Furthermore, opposition to Lincoln came from his own party and from Democrats. Eventually, it came to a point when Lincoln was so unpopular that members of his own cabinet and Democrats alike opposed anything associated with him. With the Chicago Convention and the peace platform presented to the nation, Lincoln and the Republicans had something concrete to discredit the Democrats. Dudley intertwines the late military victories, the Chicago Convention, and the issue of state elections in September as the main factors in Lincoln’s victory.[[5]](#footnote-5) Dudley’s work accomplished what other secondary literature has failed to do. However, historians’ collective work have not explored Clement Vallandigham’s creation of the peace platform and just how controversial it was to War Democrats, Republicans, and the general public.

Next, peace negotiations were a subject of heated debate for both Democrats and Republicans. Ludwell Johnson illustrates how peace negotiations were a controversial topic during the Civil War. As the war dragged on and the North kept piling up losses, along with dead soldiers, there was a huge amount of pressure to engage in peace negotiations to reunite the two sides and allow the South to keep the institution of slavery.[[6]](#footnote-6) Johnson examined the peace negotiations from Lincoln’s point of view. Johnson stated, “As for peace negotiations, he saw nothing to be gained in approaching President Jefferson Davis.”[[7]](#footnote-7) It is clear that Lincoln had no inclination to explore peace negotiations throughout the duration of the conflict. However, the opposing side of the presidential contest was, essentially, the peace platform that McClellan had run on. In addition, Lincoln would not budge on abolition of slavery to keep the South in the Union.

Alternately, it is clear that McClellan would have ended hostilities as quickly as possible upon entering office. Johnson’s major point is that Lincoln held strong to his beliefs and his convictions about the army and slavery.[[8]](#footnote-8) However, the same could not be said for McClellan and his supporters. During the entire presidential campaign, McClellan was not retired, but he was an active military general who was not on active duty. Therefore, by running on a peace platform that was undermined by military victories, it looked as though he was a traitor and unpatriotic. Johnson adds an interesting conclusion and insight into the peace negotiations for Lincoln. Furthermore, his article can be used to frame the peace negotiations in terms of how Democrats viewed it and show the viciousness of both campaigns.

The economic argument for why some Democrats favored peace is extremely fascinating. Plus, the economic argument helps provide context and reasoning for Clement Vallandigham’s and other Peace Democrat’s support of peace negotiations. Frank Klement analyzes how economics were a major factor in “Middle Western Copperheadism,” and can explain the divide of war and peace Democrats in the North.[[9]](#footnote-9) The basis of Klement’s analysis is on how deeply economically affected the Western states, such as Ohio, Illinois, and Wisconsin, compared to the New England states due to the War.[[10]](#footnote-10) The argument is that people in the western states had to pay higher freight rates, greater indebtedness from railroad stock, and rising farm prices because of the War.[[11]](#footnote-11) Since Vallandigham hailed from Ohio, Klement illuminates how invested he was in the economic debate of the Civil War. Vallandigham came from a part of the Union that had an entirely different set of economic needs and dependencies from New England. New England had the industry to support the war effort, but Midwestern farmers were struggling to sell their crops or land. Therefore, Klement’s work adds even more context to the peace platform at the Chicago convention and shows how economics played a role for Peace Democrats.

Along with the disappointment, anger, and resentment of the war and how badly it was going, there was a heated economic and legal debate about aspects of the war, too. Vallandigham and McClellan appeared to be polar opposites if one believes in Klement’s argument. As established earlier, McClellan was an active general running on a peace platform. Now there appears to have been an economic conflict that led Vallandigham to such an extreme position that, once again, contradicted McClellan, according to Klement. Those divisions were the result of a more industrialized society in the East versus an agricultural based economy in the West.

Philip Shaw Paludan focuses his analysis on Lincoln and the legal arguments of the Civil War.[[12]](#footnote-12) In addition, Paludan’s work illustrates the divide within the Republican Party and just how unpopular Lincoln was leading up to his last few months before the election.[[13]](#footnote-13) He highlights how Lincoln’s unrelenting nature and how he would not pursue peace negotiations with the Confederacy. But Paludan also puts great emphasis on how legal debates about whether to “uphold…or transform the Constitution,” was the correct course of action for Lincoln to pursue.[[14]](#footnote-14) Both of Paludan’s books represent the main interpretative argument that military victories were the main factor in Lincoln being reelected. There is not an extensive explanation or examination of how the Chicago Convention, peace platform, and Clement Vallandigham put the Democratic Party in an awful position in late August of 1864. Both works by Pauldan mainly illuminate how the legal debate played out and the different perspectives each party held.

With the extensive reading of additional secondary literature, a paper that unifies Clement Vallandigham and his motivations, the formation of the peace platform, and public perception of McClellan and his proposed peace negotiations would further recognize the importance of the peace platform in the 1864 election. Drawing on the transcript of the Chicago convention, McClellan’s correspondence, and various other primary sources, this paper argues that the Chicago convention’s peace platform was the downfall of the Democrats in the 1864 election. Regardless of military victories or failures, the peace platform caused various problems because of the Democrat’s nominated candidates. The peace platform, the Chicago convention, and the nomination and perception of General McClellan can be more deeply explored as to how Democrats lost the presidency, not military victories securing Lincoln a second term. My paper is an attempt to explain what factors and influences led to the formation of the peace platform, how the Chicago Convention hindered Democrats’ election hopes, and how the public perception of General McClellan and Democrats quickly changed in response to the peace platform. The peace platform gave Republicans something to push back on since the military victories came shortly after the Chicago Convention. As a result, the peace platform and perception that McClellan was willing to negotiate with the Confederacy cost the active military general his opportunity at becoming President of the United States.

**Build up to the Chicago convention**

Widespread discontent and uneasiness were prevalent throughout the North as the Civil War progressed. As Lincoln entered office, questions arose from within his own cabinet about his leadership. Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase, complained and questioned Lincoln and said he “lacked the energy and focus to bring about radical goals.”[[15]](#footnote-15) However, with “Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Chattanooga and the promising new leadership of Grant and Sherman suggested the administration was going well,” there was not much public desire for Lincoln to be replaced early in 1864.[[16]](#footnote-16) The pro-Republican newspaper, the *New York Times,* echoed the notion that Lincoln’s administration was doing well. On April 1, 1864 an article appears that stated “The reelection of President Lincoln by the unanimous vote of all the vast loyal majority of the North, would do more than anything else to shut off the last hope of the rebels.”[[17]](#footnote-17) There was a sense of optimism among the public that Lincoln had handled the war well due to the military success in Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Chattanooga. As the Civil War progressed many abolitionists called for Chase to replace Lincoln as the candidate for the presidency in 1864.[[18]](#footnote-18) Regardless of military victories, there was still discontent that came from leaders within the Republican Party and Lincoln’s cabinet.

Abolitionists criticized Lincoln for not taking emancipation far enough. Other Republicans criticized him for even touching emancipation at all. Another source of discontent within the Republican Party was Lincoln’s plan for reconstruction. Radicals within the Republican Party attempted to unite against Lincoln and support Secretary Chase, or John C. Fremont, a radical Senator from California. However, as the Republican Convention in Baltimore drew closer Republicans were able to get behind Lincoln and support him. Even though “there was some intraparty bickering…most Republicans still believed that the president welcomed their input and would compromise.”[[19]](#footnote-19) Republicans were able to support Lincoln and the platform of no peace negotiations even as the military scene began to deteriorate into the summer of 1864.

However, on the Democratic side during this time there was uproar, as the Union army appeared to be getting slaughtered, along with the Constitution. From the beginning of May to June 15, 1864, there were 52,500 Union casualties in Virginia alone.[[20]](#footnote-20) By mid-summer the administration could not provide a positive outlook on the war. The events of the summer can be described as “Confederate victories, Union reverses, draft problems, and the like tended to weaken the support of the administration throughout the country”[[21]](#footnote-21) Military optimism had faded, and the previous Union successes at Vicksburg, Gettysburg, and Chattanooga no longer gave the administration hope. General Sherman was stalled outside of Atlanta and the Confederacy still stood while the North was quickly turning on Lincoln.[[22]](#footnote-22) On August 10 the *New York Times* reported that “The Democrats everywhere are very confident of victory in the pending President canvas…And upon this concurrence of disappointed and underrated malignants, the Democrats base their hopes of party success.”[[23]](#footnote-23) That is not to say that all Democrats were on the same page. There was much debate about the Presidential nomination and party platform regarding the war.

Clement Vallandigham, a fierce anti-war Democrat from Ohio, led the peace wing of the Democratic Party. Vallandigham was opposed to Lincoln so much that he was arrested in May of 1863 for speaking out against and protesting the war. His arrest and the outrage that ensued spoke to his popularity within the Democratic Party. “The day after Vallandigham was taken, a mob of enraged Democrats stormed the office of the Republican newspaper in Dayton and burned it down.”[[24]](#footnote-24) He was passionate in sticking up for civil liberties and opposed what he saw as the administration’s expansion of power. Vallandigham was deported to the South shortly after being arrested, then he fled to Canada, and was nominated for governor of Ohio while in exile. Vallandigham was extremely outspoken in his opposition to the War for many reasons ranging from legal injustices to economic injustices that people in the Midwest suffered.

Peace men from the Midwest had a unique economic motivation to end all hostilities with the South. Many Midwestern peace seekers argued that New England men had caused and benefitted from the war while the Midwest had paid for the war with men and money.[[25]](#footnote-25) Also, Vallandigham firmly believed that the Midwest was alienated from the New England states that were perceived to have profited from the war. Wealth was associated with the Republican Party and was only concerned with eastern capital and not the rural, farming economic concerns that were much more prevalent in the Midwest.[[26]](#footnote-26) Vallandigham embraced that sentiment and blamed the Republican Party and Lincoln for causing so much heartache and economic turmoil. He spoke several times about the cost to the people in the Midwest and argued that it was too high to continue on with the unjustifiable war.[[27]](#footnote-27) There is significant evidence that Vallandigham was influenced by the economic consequences of the war. Therefore, the reasoning for his staunch anti-war stance consisted of both legal and economic factors. It appeared as though Vallandigham was not opposed to slavery and it did not play a significant factor in his opposition to the war.

As the Democratic National Convention drew closer, the national chairman August Belmont had a growing concern about Vallandigham and his politics. A result of Vallandigham’s return from exile was that his popularity soared.[[28]](#footnote-28) Therefore, that gave Vallandigham time to shape and influence the national convention and party platform to his viewpoints. Since 1862 there was little doubt that McClellan would be the nominee he had always been the obvious choice for the Democratic nomination.[[29]](#footnote-29) Vallandigham could not change that active Union general George B. McClellan was going to be the party nominee. Belmont knew that the nomination could not be changed, but Vallandigham could shape the party platform to his way of thinking.[[30]](#footnote-30) The War Democrats were able to put up their candidate, and Vallandigham was left to craft a platform for the Peace Democrats.

**Chicago convention**

The Democratic National Convention met from August 29-31 in Chicago, Illinois. Throughout the convention Vallandigham had attempted to gain more power and have more influence over the proceedings. He tried to become chairman of the resolutions committee that drafted the platform and would have unquestioned power over the platform.[[31]](#footnote-31) Even though Vallandigham did not become the chairman, he still held considerable power to articulate the platform because of his popularity. The peace platform was stated officially during the afternoon session of the second day of the convention. The peace platform stated “justice, humanity, liberty, and the public welfare demand that immediate efforts be made for a cessation of hostilities.”[[32]](#footnote-32) The chairman read the platform in the afternoon and a note is made on the official proceedings of how well received the resolution was. As the chairman read the second resolution the entire audience was silent, then, in the middle of the articulation of the peace platform the entire audience burst into wild cheers.[[33]](#footnote-33) The crowd cheered so loudly that it interrupted the reading of the platform and a second reading was required.[[34]](#footnote-34) The crowd enthusiasm was so intense that there was cheering a half a dozen times before the next resolution could even be read.[[35]](#footnote-35) As the cheering happened two War Democrats, Samuel Cox and chairman August Belmont, looked distraught and Cox held his head in his hands immediately.[[36]](#footnote-36) The enthusiasm and celebration of the platform helps reinforce how popular Vallandigham and the peace platform was with the Peace Democrats in attendance. However, War Democrats knew as soon as the platform was read that there would be significant problems for the entire party in the elction.

Another aspect that is often overlooked by historians of the 1864 election is the Vice Presidential candidate. George H. Pendleton, Representative from Ohio, ran on McClellan’s ticket. Pendleton was a well-known associate of Vallandigham and a prominent Peace man, too. August Belmont thought the same of Pendleton as he did of Vallandigham and was worried how he might be involved in the convention. With Pendleton placed on the presidential ticket, Belmont repudiated him just as much as the peace platform.[[37]](#footnote-37) Belmont, a War Democrat, was keenly aware of how Pendleton might affect Democrat’s chances in November and he pushed for another War Democrat to pair with McClellan.[[38]](#footnote-38) Pendleton’s nomination as Vice President was another factor that created problems for McClellan.

There were numerous problems with the peace platform and the Chicago convention. First, McClellan ran on the peace platform that called for the end of hostilities and negotiations of a peace. As an active Union general that did not reflect well upon him or his campaign. In part, those elements led to accounts of the 1864 and the heated rhetoric and abusive language.[[39]](#footnote-39) Second, his running mate, George Pendleton, was seen as an equal to Clement Vallandigham and shared the same anti-war stance. Third, and most importantly, was the combination of McClellan, the peace platform, and to a lesser degree Pendleton all resulted in something that Republicans could fight back against. It was not that all Republicans agreed with one another on the War or Reconstruction, but the peace platform caused Republicans and the general public to rally against Democrats.

Former Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, watched the Chicago Convention closely and remarked that the “Democrats had likely shot themselves in the foot with their suicidal resolutions.”[[40]](#footnote-40) In addition, Welles wrote in his diary that the President would now be reelected and “I shall be surprised if he does not have a large majority.”[[41]](#footnote-41) When Chicago Convention concluded there was agreement that the Democrats caused significant harm to their own cause with the peace platform. All of the previous remarks and thoughts on the Chicago Convention, peace platform, and McClellan came before military victories in the South. The peace platform swung the election prospects back into Lincoln’s favor. Furthermore, the military successes for the Union that happened shortly after the Chicago Convention were a factor and only solidified the gains given to Lincoln by Democrat incompetence with the peace platform.

**Consequences of a peace platform**

Shortly after the conclusion of the Chicago Convention, the pivotal military successes for the Union occurred. First, Mobile Bay fell into Union hands in late August. Next, on September 2, Sherman captured Atlanta. Those two victories were symbolic and significantly boosted public morale and brightened Lincoln’s reelection hopes even further.[[42]](#footnote-42) Opposition to Lincoln faded when the war was going well.[[43]](#footnote-43) However, the *New York Evening Post* contained a passage that read, “It is impossible to vote for General McClellan, or any other candidate…on that Chicago platform.”[[44]](#footnote-44) Even before the news of the fall of Atlanta, the peace platform caused a significant obstacle for the public to vote for McClellan. Opposition to Lincoln came from both parties and from both War and Peace men. However, once the peace platform was articulated, it caused people to question whether McClellan was better fit to lead the country through war than Lincoln. The peace platform disaster gave Republicans a powerful and meaningful argument to use throughout the North as to why Lincoln should be reelected. That argument was the Union did not want Peace men in power because they would immediately engage in peace negotiations with the Confederacy. Even if George McClellan was an army general, Republicans painted him as a Peace candidate because of the platform from the Chicago convention.

George B. McClellan did not win any significant battles while he was commander of the Army of the Potomac. However, he was the first Union general to have a few victories.[[45]](#footnote-45) As a result, the North embraced McClellan and the victories as signs of hope and gave him the nickname of “Little Napoleon,” for his small stature and military success.[[46]](#footnote-46) Once he was relieved from duty, he returned to his residence in New Jersey, but shortly after that moved to New York City. His popularity was so high that in New York City, the largest Democratic Party stronghold in the Union, his daily schedule, actions, and movements were published in New York newspapers.[[47]](#footnote-47) However, McClellan was not a Peace candidate and differed greatly from the Copperhead/Peace wing of the Party.[[48]](#footnote-48) Therefore, when he was nominated on Vallandigham’s peace platform, the general public perceived McClellan adopted that same viewpoint over time.

In McClellan’s drafts of his letter accepting the nomination it is clear that he was conflicted with the position he faced. He was so conflicted that he wrote six different drafts before he sent the letter. With the election in mind, McClellan attempted to focus his writing on the War and not the Democratic peace plank to avoid losing states like New York, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Those states were of vital importance not only because of the electoral votes, but because McClellan was from Pennsylvania, resided in New Jersey, and lived briefly in New York and visited Democrats there frequently. In his second draft McClellan stated, “while restoration of the Union in all its integrity is and must continue to be the indispensable condition in any settlement of the questions at issue in this war, we should as soon as it is clear, or seems probable, that our present adversaries are willing to negotiate upon the basis of immediate restoration of the Federal Union of the States…with the Constitutional rights of all the States fully guaranteed for all future time.”[[49]](#footnote-49) First, he spent a great deal of time writing about how to restore the Union. McClellan attempted to embrace the peace plank and how negotiations with the South to restore the Union would have been acceptable and sought out by him. However, the very next sentence he said, “But if an honest frank and full effort to obtain this object results in failure then I am of the opinion that we must continue the resort to the dread arbitrament of war, a war conducted strictly in accordance with those principles which I had so often had occasion to communicate when in command of Armies.”[[50]](#footnote-50) He appeared to have contradicted himself, or attempted to appease both viewpoints of the war. Second, he began to draw on his time as a general and his victories early on in the War. In addition, he gave his own position to continue the war if peace negotiations had failed to restore the Union. From the War and Peace perspective from each political party it would appear that McClellan was changing positions on the War. McClellan appeared to be dissatisfied with each letter and wanted to re-write and start fresh.[[51]](#footnote-51)

By the *sixth* draft McClellan had only changed the structure of his acceptance letter while the language stayed relatively similar. However, he invoked powerful imagery when he said “I could not look in the face of my gallant comrades of the Army and Navy, who have survived so many bloody battles, and tell them that their labors, and the sacrifice of so many of our slain and wounded brethren had been in vain—that we had abandoned that Union for which we have so often periled our lives.”[[52]](#footnote-52) McClellan contradicted the peace platform and was conflicted with his record and the platform. Clearly, McClellan felt a strong tie to his fellow soldiers who fought and were still fighting at the time. Throughout the second and sixth drafts of his acceptance letter it can be seen how he agonized over the writing and the extremely difficult position he was in. The process of how McClellan wrote, revised, and re-structured his acceptance letter is highly symbolic and shows how conflicted he was with his own personal view of continuing the war, but attempted to win the Presidency with the peace plank.

As the election approached, it was evident that the Democratic peace platform became less and less appealing. From a military man’s perspective, they were concerned that a McClellan victory in the election would betray the war effort and initiate peace negotiations that would not do justice for the men who had already lost their lives.[[53]](#footnote-53) By October the *New York Times* was running articles about how the public had turned on McClellan and the Democratic Party. On October 15, an article ran that said “What a rebuke of Major-Gen. McClellan is contained in the soldiers’ vote now sweeping in!”[[54]](#footnote-54) Only a few short paragraphs later it stated “The Major-Gen. stands for office on a platform of cessation to the rebels”[[55]](#footnote-55) Not only did the soldiers feel betrayed by McClellan, but so did the general public.

Only three days later, the Times ran an article ran that reported “the possibility of peace being attained by the election of Gen. McClellan…will amount to an admission of independence.”[[56]](#footnote-56) The first part of the article acknowledged that McClellan would allow for the South to achieve their independence. Later, it stated that “McClellan is surrounded by all the Peace-at-any-price party, all the Secessionists, all who are tired of the war.”[[57]](#footnote-57) This confirmed that the peace platform, Vallandigham, and Pendleton had such a negative effect on the Chicago Convention and McClellan that the election was lost because of them. Not only did the article continue to state how bad the tension was between Democrats and Republicans in the North; but it said “the Administration party jubilant in the highest degree, and confident that in the absence of any great Federal reserve between now and December there is no chance of Lincoln being defeated.”[[58]](#footnote-58) Lincoln stood no chance of being defeated because of the peace plank that the Democrats paired with McClellan. A fantastic political cartoon highlights the difference between Republicans and Democrats (See Illustration).[[59]](#footnote-59) Once the peace platform catastrophe was followed up by two military victories for the Union, McClellan had zero chance of winning the election just months later.

In a span of less than two months, Abraham Lincoln went from writing about his administration not being reelected, to widespread support and little doubt about him winning reelection. Not only did Lincoln win, but he crushed McClellan and won more than 200 electoral votes. The quick turnaround for Lincoln was due to the Democratic peace plank that gave Republicans something to run against. Clement Vallandigham, George Pendleton, and other Peace Democrats were able to craft their own convention and platform to their thinking. Furthermore, prominent Democrats at the convention immediately knew the platform was a disaster waiting to happen for the party. As a result, McClellan was thrust into an incredibly difficult position upon writing his acceptance letter. As noted, he agonized of the writing and revision process in an attempt to satisfy War and Peace factions of the party and general population. The peace platform combined with late military successes caused McClellan to look contradictory and unfit to lead the country. Military victories were not the only reason behind Lincoln’s reelection. A significant factor was the Democratic peace platform that compromised McClellan’s bid to become president. Clement Vallandigham constructed the peace platform due to many factors, but it was shortsighted and incompetent because of who the candidate was clearly going to be.

**Bibliography**

Boller Jr., Paul. *Presidential Campaigns: From George Washington to George W. Bush.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.

Coleman, Charles H. “The Use of the Term ‘Copperhead’ During the Civil War.” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 25, no. 2 (September 1938): 263-264.

Dudley, Harold M. “The Election of 1864.” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 18, no. 4 (March 1932): 500-518.

*Harper’s Weekly: The Two Platforms: Columbia Makes Her Choice.* December 1, 1864.

Hearn, Chester. *Lincoln and McClellan at War.* Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2012.

Johnson, Ludwell H. “Lincoln’s Solution to the Problem of Peace Terms.” *The Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 4 (November 1968): 576-586.

Klement, Frank L. “Middle Western Copperheadism and the Genesis of the Granger Movement.” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no. 4 (March 1952): 679-694.

Manning, Chandra. *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War.* New York:, NY Random House, Inc., 2007.

McClellan, George B. *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan.* New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989.

“Mr. Lincoln’s Re-election and Rebel Discouragement.” *New York Times,* April 1, 1864.

*New York Evening Post,* September 2, 1864.

Paludan, Phillip Shaw. *A People’s Contest: The Union and The Civil War.* Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988.

Paludan, Phillip Shaw. *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln.* Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994.

Sandburg, Carl. *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings.* New York, NY: Public Affairs, 2008.

Silbey, John. *A Respectable Minority: The Democratic Party in the Civil War Era.* New York, NY: Norton, 1977.

“The Presidential Contest., How Gen. McClellan’s Election May Conduce to Peace. Mr. Lincoln’s Election Certain.” *New York Times,* October 18, 1864.

“The Presidential Election.” *New York Times,* August 10, 1864*.*

“The Soldiers and Gen. McClellan.” *New York Times,* October 15, 1864.

Waugh, John. *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle for the 1864 Presidency.* Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 1997.

Wilson, Charles R. “McClellan’s Changing Views on the Peace Plank of 1864.” *The American Historical Review* 38, no. 3 (April 1933): 498-505.

**Illustration**



1. Chester Hearn, *Lincoln and McClellan at War* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2012), 212. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Paul Boller Jr., *Presidential Campaigns: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2004), 118. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. John Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle for the 1864 Presidency* (Cambridge, MA: De Capo Press, 1997), 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Harold M. Dudley, “The Election of 1864,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 18, no. 4 (March 1932): 513. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Ibid., 515. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ludwell H. Johnson, “Lincoln’s Solution to the Problem of Peace Terms,” *The Journal of Southern History* 34, no. 4 (November 1968): 580. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 580. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Ibid., 584. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Frank L. Klement, “Middle Western Copperheadism and the Genesis of the Granger Movement,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 38, no. 4 (March 1952): 683. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 686. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid., 693. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Phillip Shaw Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1994). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ibid., 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Phillip Shaw Paludan, *A People’s Contest: The Union and The Civil War* (Lawrence, KS: University Press of Kansas, 1988), 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln,* 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid., 267. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. “Mr. Lincoln’s Re-election and Rebel Discouragement.” *New York Times,* April 1, 1864. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham*, 261. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Ibid., 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Paludan, *A People’s Contest: The Union and The Civil,* 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Harold M. Dudley, “The Election of 1864,” *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 18, no. 4 (March 1932): 505. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Paludan, *A People’s Contest: The Union and The Civil War*, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. “The Presidential Election.” *New York Times, August 10, 1864.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Paludan, *A People’s Contest: The Union and The Civil War*, 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Klement, 683. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Ibid., 687. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Ibid., 693. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Waugh, 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Paludan, *A People’s Contest: The Union and The Civil War*, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Waugh, 280. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Ibid., 283. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Official Proceedings of the Democratic National Convention, August 29-31, 1864, 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid., 28. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Waugh, 286. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Ibid., 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Ibid., 291. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Boller Jr., 117. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Waugh, 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Ibid., 293. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln,* 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Ibid., 289. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. *New York Evening Post,* September 2, 1864. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Waugh, 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Ibid., 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid., 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Ibid., 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. George B. McClellan to the Democratic Nomination Committee, 4 September 1864, in *The Civil War Papers of George B. McClellan,* (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1989), 591. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Ibid., 591. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Charles R. Wilson, “McClellan’s Changing Views on the Peace Plank of 1864, ”*The American Historical Review* 38, no. 3 (April 1933), 502. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. George B. McClellan to the Democratic Nomination Committee, 8 September 1864, 596. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Chandra Manning, *What This Cruel War Was Over: Soldiers, Slavery, and the Civil War.* New York:, NY Random House, Inc., 2007, 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. “The Soldiers and Gen. McClellan.” *New York Times,* October 15, 1864. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. “The Presidential Contest., How Gen. McClellan’s Election May Conduce to Peace. Mr. Lincoln’s Election Certain,” *New York Times,* October 18, 1864. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. “*The Two Platforms: Columbia Makes Her Choice,”* in *Harper’s Weekly,* (Harper’s Weekly, Dec. 1, 1864), illustration 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)