

devise the means of alleviating the evil consequences to both races. I think, therefore, we must decide whether slavery shall be extinguished by our enemies and the slaves be used against us, or use them ourselves at the risk of the effects which may be produced upon our social institutions. . . .

The reasons that induce me to recommend the employment of negro troops at all render the effect of the measures . . . upon slavery immaterial, and in my opinion the best means of securing the efficiency and fidelity of this auxiliary force would be to accompany the measure with a well-digested plan of gradual and general emancipation. As that will be the result of the continuance of the war, and will certainly occur if the enemy succeed, it seems to me most advisable to adopt it at once, and thereby obtain all the benefits that will accrue to our cause. . . .

I can only say in conclusion, that whatever measures are to be adopted should be adopted at once. Every day's delay increases the difficulty. Much time will be required to organize and discipline the men, and action may be deferred until it is too late.

Lee wrote these words on January 11, 1865. At that time a fresh wave of despondency had gone over the South because of Hood's rout at Nashville; Congress was debating intermittently the possible arming of the slaves; and the newspapers were prophesying that the Administration would presently force the issue. It is to be observed that Lee did not advise Virginia to wait for Confederate