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	abstract	For any compact Lie group G and closed, smooth Riemannian manifold (X,g) of dimension $d \neq 2$, we extend a result due to Uhlenbeck (1985) that gives existence of a flat connection on a principal G -bundle over X supporting a connection with L^p -small curvature, when $p > d/2$, to the case of a connection with $L^{d/2}$ -small curvature. We prove an optimal Łojasiewicz-Simon gradient inequality for abstract Morse-Bott functions on Banach manifolds, generalizing an earlier result due to the author and Maridakis in arXiv:1510.03817. We apply this result to prove the optimal Łojasiewicz-Simon gradient inequality for the self-dual Yang-Mills energy function near regular anti-self-dual connections over closed Riemannian four-manifolds and for the full Yang-Mills energy function over closed Riemannian manifolds of dimension $d \neq 2$, when known to be Morse-Bott at a given Yang-Mills connection. We also prove the optimal Łojasiewicz-Simon gradient inequality by direct analysis near a given flat connection that is a regular point of the curvature map. We also prove the Morse-Bott property for irreducible Yang-Mills $U(n)$ connections over Riemann surfaces and hence a new proof of the optimal Łojasiewicz-Simon gradient inequality for such critical points.	abstract	For any compact Lie group G , we prove that the Yang-Mills energy function obeys an optimal gradient inequality of Łojasiewicz-Simon type (exponent $1/2$) near the critical set of flat connections on a principal G -bundle over a closed Riemannian manifold of dimension $d \neq 2$ and so its gradient flow converges at an exponential rate to that critical set. We establish this optimal Łojasiewicz-Simon gradient inequality by three different methods. Our first proof gives the most general result by direct analysis and relies on our extension of a theorem due to Uhlenbeck [86] that gives existence of a flat connection on a principal G -bundle supporting a connection with $L^{d/2}$ -small curvature, existence of a Coulomb gauge transformation, and $W^{1,p}$ Sobolev distance estimates for $p > 1$. Our second proof proceeds by first establishing an optimal Łojasiewicz-Simon gradient inequality for abstract Morse-Bott functions on Banach manifolds, generalizing an earlier result due to the author and Maridakis [31, Theorem 4]. Our third proof establishes the optimal Łojasiewicz-Simon gradient inequality by direct analysis near a given flat connection that is a regular point of the curvature map. We prove similar results for the self-dual Yang-Mills energy function near regular anti-self-dual connections over closed Riemannian four-manifolds and for the full Yang-Mills energy function over closed Riemannian manifolds of dimension $d \neq 2$, when known to be Morse-Bott at a given Yang-Mills connection		
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