



## Abraham Lincoln, Political Tyrant

I don't know what they teach in United States history classes today, but back in the middle of the last century, when I was in elementary school, there was absolutely no question about how we were to regard Abraham Lincoln. We were taught to feel a reverence bordering on awe for Honest Abe, the eloquent martyr who saved the Union.

We were required to memorize the Gettysburg Address. And if we were lucky enough to join a field trip to our nation's capital, one of the most significant events was our visit to the Lincoln Memorial. (A few of us rascallions spoiled the solemnity of the moment by sliding down the sides of the monument.)



That was what we were taught in the grade schools of Cleveland. And I suspect it wasn't any different in any other school in the North. Some of you sons and daughters of the South will have to tell me what your teachers and history books said.

It wasn't until I became an adult and started reading history on my own that I began to doubt the version of events I was taught several decades earlier. For example, did you know that Lincoln suspended civil liberties in the North, including the writ of habeas corpus? That he filled the jails with more than 13,000 political prisoners, all incarcerated without due process? The Supreme Court protested Lincoln's disregard for our Constitutional protections, but the President replied he had a war to fight. Since he commanded the army, Lincoln won that argument.

And speaking of the war, guess who uttered these words:

Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off the existing government and form a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable — a most sacred right — a right, which we hope and believe, is to liberate the world. Nor is this right confined to cases in which the whole people of an existing government may choose to exercise it. Any portion of such people that can, may revolutionize, and make their own, of so much of their territory as they inhabit.

I'll admit this is a trick question. The speaker was Lincoln. But he was not talking about the Southern states that tried to secede from the Union. No, these remarks were made in 1847, when Lincoln was defending the right of Texans to demand their independence from Mexico. A dozen years later, when six Southern states tried to declare their independence, Lincoln's response was to smash them to bits.

As a child, I never questioned the assertion that the South was wrong to secede. And that Lincoln was right to use as much force as necessary to preserve the Union. Later, as I grew to understand the strength and uniqueness of our Constitutional Republic, I began to question both assumptions.

The U.S. Constitution, I came to believe, was a contract — a contract between the various states and



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the federal government they created. Note that the Constitution had to be approved by the states, not a majority of the citizens. There was no "majority rule" here, no popular vote taken.

But this raises the question: If it was necessary for the states to adopt the Constitution, why wouldn't it be legal for some of those states to rescind that vote, especially if they felt the contract had been broken? More and more, I found myself thinking that the South was legally and morally right in declaring its independence. And the North, by invading those states and waging war on them, was wrong.

And what a terrible war it was. By the time it was over, nearly 625,000 soldiers (and another 75,000 or so women, children and elderly civilians) were dead — more American servicemen than were killed in World War I, World War II, the Korean War and the Vietnam War combined. Fully one-fourth of the draft-age white population of the South was dead.

The devastation in the former States of the Confederacy is hard to imagine. Sherman's march from Atlanta to Savannah is notorious for its savagery. But he was far from the only Northern officer who ordered his troops to lay waste to Southern farms, fields, and plantations. Union troops routinely destroyed crops, sacked homes, and even stabled their horses in Southern churches.

As H.W. Crocker III puts it in *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Civil War* (Regnery Publishing, 2008), "If abiding by the law of a free republic and fighting a defensive war solely against armed combatants be flaws, the South had them and the North did not. Lincoln ignored the law, the Constitution, and the Supreme Court when it suited him. His armies waged war on the farms, livelihoods and people of the South, not just against their armies."

Of all the big lies about the War Between the States, the biggest of all may be that it was necessary to end slavery. The truth is that many illustrious Southerners, including Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, recognized that slavery had to come to an end. But it should not come by force of arms, they felt; not at the point of a gun, but rather through the free consent of the owners, with the proper preparation of the slaves. To get them ready for their own freedom, for example, Lee's wife insisted the family's slaves be taught to read and write, and the women how to sew.

Despite what most of us have been taught, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did not free the slaves. It wasn't a law, but an edict. It specifically exempted the Border States and any parts of the South that were already under the control of Union forces. It applied only to areas that were still in rebellion. So the Proclamation, of and by itself, did not free a single slave.

What it did, however, was change the nature of the conflict. Now the war was no longer about restoring the Union or preventing Southern independence. Now it was about the morality, and the legality, of slavery. The Emancipation Proclamation did not make the war more popular in the North, but it did end the possibility of other countries, especially France and Britain, from coming to the aid of the South. They might have been willing to assist Southern independence — but support a war in favor of slavery? Never.

As Crocker notes, "In Southern eyes, the Emancipation Proclamation was the ultimate in Yankee perfidy — an attempt to incite slave uprisings against Confederate women and children." Then he notes, "Happily, while the proclamation did encourage slaves to seek their freedom, there were no slave uprisings, no murders of women and children — which might say something good about Southerners too, both white and black."

Lincoln, more than any other President who came before him, changed the very nature of our



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government. There would never again be as many limitations on the powers of the federal government. And just as tragic, the concept of states' rights suffered a blow from which it has never recovered.

I'm told that more than 14,000 books have been written about Lincoln. Most, of course, are incredibly adulatory. The few that attempt to balance the scales are virtually ignored. While it may not be true that might makes right, it is definitely true that the winners write the history books.

If you're open-minded enough to consider another point of view, let me recommend two books by Thomas J. DiLorenzo to you: *The Real Lincoln* and *Lincoln Unmasked*. In these two books he presents a vastly different view of Abraham Lincoln than you've heard before. I promise.

Both are available at Amazon.com. (What isn't?) Also, do yourself a favor and go to the website of the Ludwig von Mises Institute, where DiLorenzo serves as a senior fellow. You'll find an extensive selection of articles, essays, and yes, books you can order that are way out of the academic mainstream.

So there you have this contrarian's view of Abraham Lincoln. I'm eager to hear what some of you think — especially the sons and daughters of the South, whom I suspect, were raised with a somewhat different slant than I.

Until next time, keep some powder dry.

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