



# **Faithless Father Abraham:**

*A Brief Study of Abraham Lincoln*

**By Dick Jones**

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## Preface

In *Webster's Deluxe Unabridged Dictionary*, the word "faithless" is defined as:

"without faith, especially religious faith; without belief in the revealed truths of religion; unbelieving...not adhering to allegiance or duty; dishonest; disloyal; perfidious; treacherous...unreliable...deceptive..."

Abraham Lincoln personified the meaning of the word "faithless" in virtually every area of his life. Today, faithlessness would be viewed as unremarkable for almost any political figure on the national scene. This is largely because Abraham Lincoln has provided the American prototype for "faithless" politicians. In terms of fidelity to the Constitution of the United States, to the Christian faith which he used so cynically and to the ideals upon which the early American Republic was established, he was indeed "faithless."

Honest Abe the Great Emancipator was neither honest nor particularly interested in emancipation of the Negro slave. He would use his considerable intellect and gift of communication

to establish himself as the Father of the new American Empire. The Republican Party would be his mechanism, political patronage and demagoguery would be the means, and the most devastating and destructive War in American history would be the occasion.

## **Introduction**

At a recent auction at Christi's, a four-page "handwritten manuscript" of Abraham Lincoln's victory speech following the election of 1864 brought 3.44 million dollars.<sup>1</sup> This extraordinary purchase price reflects a continuing fascination in America regarding Lincoln. The sixteenth president of the United States has the "most prominent monument in Washington, D.C.," bearing witness to the mystical reverence in which he is held.<sup>2</sup> Over the last 144 years, Lincoln has reached mythical status as his worshipers have cast him as the greatest president in American history. He is seen as the exemplar of all the virtues and characteristics toward which Americans strive and which, it is believed, have made America great among nations. Criticizing or debunking the Lincoln myth is political suicide for office-seekers and a career-killer in academia. This phenomenon was aptly explained by the late Illinois Senator

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<sup>1</sup> "The Year of Lincoln." *The History Channel Magazine*. May/June 2009:48.

<sup>2</sup> Eland, Ivan. *Recarving Rushmore*. Oakland, California: The Independent Institute, 2009:16.

Everett Dierkson as he “observed fifty years ago, ‘The first task of every politician is to get right with Lincoln.’”<sup>3</sup>

Abraham Lincoln was an agnostic secularist and a cynically pragmatic politician who used religious imagery to great effect in both public and private speech. He was well-read in the Bible, albeit superficially, and he could marshal New Testament parables and characters evocatively in his anecdotes. Notwithstanding this, he “never became a Christian, never joined a church” and remained dubious about the veracity of orthodox Christian teaching throughout his life. When he ran for president in 1860, “almost every one of the ministers in Springfield, Illinois opposed him.”<sup>4</sup>

Lincoln’s presidency was filled with dramatic contradictions in character and behavior. He was known for his willingness to grant clemency or pardon to young Union soldiers guilty of desertion or other serious military infractions. In contrast to this, in 1862 on the day after Christmas, he ordered the largest mass execution in American history in which thirty-nine Sioux Indians and “half-breeds” (his term) were hanged.<sup>5</sup> He cruelly refused to exchange prisoners-of-war with the South for most of the War or even provide medical and food supplies

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<sup>3</sup> “Lincoln’s Memo to Obama.” *The Wilson Quarterly*. Winter 2009:18.

<sup>4</sup> DiLorenzo, Thomas J. *Lincoln Unmasked*. New York: Three Rivers Press, 2006:33.

<sup>5</sup> Emison, John Avery. *Lincoln Uber Alles*. Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, Inc., 2009:21-22.

for imprisoned Northern soldiers. Further, he stubbornly rejected several offers to work out a compromise with the South prior to Sumter, the refusal of which resulted in the deaths of over 640 thousand American soldiers, uncounted Southern civilians, and the destruction of billions of dollars worth of Southern property.<sup>6</sup>

### **A Brief Biography**

Abraham Lincoln was born in Kentucky on February 12, 1809 to Thomas Lincoln and his wife, Nancy Hanks. Specious rumors have circulated in the years following the War Between the States regarding his supposed illegitimacy. One particularly ludicrous rumor named John C. Calhoun as Lincoln's biological father. Another named a North Carolina planter as his father. The origin of such stories lay in the difficulty Lincoln worshipers have with the fact that a man like Lincoln could be the son of such a mediocre fellow such as Thomas Lincoln.<sup>7</sup>

Abraham Lincoln's mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, died when he was nine years old. He spoke very little about her during his life. Nancy Hanks Lincoln would remain in a grave without either headstone or monument until well past Abraham Lincoln's death. This is especially odd since Lincoln's net

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<sup>6</sup> Masters, Edgar Lee. *Lincoln the Man*. originally published: New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1931; reprinted Columbia, South Carolina: The Foundation for American Education, 1997: 470.

<sup>7</sup> Griffin, John Chandler. *Mr. Lincoln and His War*. Gretna, Louisiana: Pelican Publishing Company, 2009:17, 18.

worth at his death was around \$100,000.00, a considerable sum in the middle of the nineteenth century. It would have been a small matter for him to purchase a gravestone of some kind for his mother.<sup>8</sup> Following his first wife's death, Thomas Lincoln subsequently married Sarah Bush Johnston, who would rear Abraham Lincoln as though he were her own, insisting that he gain whatever educational opportunities to which he might have access.<sup>9</sup>

He held his father in contempt throughout his adult life. When informed by his stepbrother that his father was so ill he was likely to die, he refused to visit him and would not attend his father's funeral. He wrote his stepbrother, "My business is such that I could hardly leave home...." He seldom spoke of his father after that.<sup>10</sup>

Lincoln was licensed to practice law on March 1, 1837. It was at that time that he moved to Springfield, Illinois from New Salem. He had entered Illinois politics five years earlier, barely making a living as a storekeeper and by whatever other marginal opportunities came his way. In one of his first political speeches he declared, "My politics are short and sweet, like the old woman's dance. I am in favor of the internal improvement

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<sup>8</sup> Op. cit., Masters, p. 13.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., pp. 140-141.

system and a high protective tariff.” His idol throughout his political career was the Kentucky Whig, Henry Clay. By the time he began his career as an attorney, he was well entrenched in Illinois politics and in particular his state’s Whig Party. He had already become his party’s leader by 1838 while serving in the Illinois legislature.<sup>11</sup>

The Whig Party was known as “the party of the moneyed elite” during the early to middle 1800’s. Lincoln would eventually become a successful and “wealthy trial lawyer.” He often worked as “what today would be called a lobbyist for the railroad industry.” His commitment to the Whig Party platform was without reservation, which included protectionism, high tariffs, internal improvements for favored regions of the country, and inflationary monetary policies. His Whig convictions, or what became known as The American System, were the most consistent aspect of his political life. When he moved to the newly formed Republican Party, he took his Whigism with him.<sup>12</sup>

Abraham Lincoln made perhaps his most astute political move when he married Mary Todd. She was the daughter of “an affluent, slave-owning Kentucky family.” She was nine years

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32, 38.

<sup>12</sup> Op. cit., DiLorenzo, pp. 108, 123.

younger than Lincoln and “descended from Revolutionary stock.” Her father, Robert S. Todd, had served Kentucky as both a senator and representative. Mary was reared in a family that lived and breathed politics, and she had grand aspirations for her husband’s future political career. In that regard, theirs was a good match, since Lincoln was politically ambitious as well. But in virtually all other respects, except for their devotion to their children, they were opposites. One biographer wrote, “These two persons were not made for each other; she was quick; he was slow; she was passionate; he was cold; she was intuitive; he was reasoned; she had a taste for well-bred living; he had none; she was impulsive; he was deliberate.”<sup>13</sup>

The Lincolns would have four sons. The first, Robert Todd, was born in August of 1843. Edward was born soon after but died at four years of age. Two more sons would be born subsequently, Willie and Tad. Willie would die during the War Between the States.<sup>14</sup> The Lincolns were loving and doting parents, perhaps too much so. They were known to spoil their children. The death of little Willie would drive Mary Lincoln to the verge of insanity, and many friends and acquaintances thought she did not have very far to go even before Willie’s

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<sup>13</sup> Op. cit., Masters, pp. 61-62.

<sup>14</sup> Donald, David. *Lincoln Reconsidered*. New York: Vintage Books-Random House, 1961: 49, 51.

death. Abraham Lincoln would spend sleepless nights walking the hallways of the White House after this tragic event. In an effort to find comfort in the midst of her grief, Mary Lincoln hired a medium that would hold eight séances in the White House. Her husband attended at least one of these bizarre events. Both were known to believe in “spirits” or ghosts even before their son’s death.<sup>15</sup>

At the time Lincoln was elected President, he had already enjoyed a “long career in Illinois politics.” Notwithstanding this, he had never been elected to “a major office by the people of his state.” He had been a state representative and a U.S. Congressman for a single term. He was never elected to the United States Senate or to the governorship of Illinois. Consequently, it is all the more impressive that Lincoln was able to adroitly maneuver himself into a place in Republican politics in which he would gain the nomination to run as the Republican Presidential candidate in 1860.<sup>16</sup>

Lincoln was elected as President in 1860. He arrived in Washington in early 1861, prepared to be sworn in to office. He would take the oath, as all presidents had:

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<sup>15</sup> Op. cit., Griffin, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Op. cit., Donald, p. 66.

“I do solemnly swear that I will faithfully exercise the Office of President of the United States, and will, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States.”

This would prove to be a difficult oath to keep, if indeed that had ever been his intent. At the time he took the oath of office, Lincoln was already in the pocket of mercantile interests of the New England and the North and committed to raising the protective tariff to the benefit of Northern industry and to the detriment of Southern agricultural interests. Further, he was absolutely committed to doing whatever was necessary to strengthen the position of the Republican Party; his success in this is attested to by the fact that Republicans did indeed control the government of the nation for twenty-four years, until Grover Cleveland, a Democrat, was elected as President.<sup>17</sup> The issue for which Lincoln is most revered, emancipation, was never a part of his political agenda until the Emancipation Proclamation of January 1, 1863. While he was no friend of slavery, his convictions against it were limited to obstructing its spread to the new territories. This was motivated by his desire to protect

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<sup>17</sup> Johnson, Ludwell H. *North Against South: The American Iliad 1848-1877*. Columbia, South Carolina, 1993: 109-110.

both the Republican majority in Congress and the onerous protective tariff they had levied.<sup>18</sup>

### **Lack of Religious Convictions**

Lincoln's stepmother, Sarah, recounted how, as a young child, he "would return from a church service on Sunday, gather several children around him, and then mount a stump and repeat the minister's sermon verbatim." His father viewed this childish impertinence as a sacrilege and at each instance would whip Abraham Lincoln.<sup>19</sup> One can only wonder how this may have affected his attitude toward genuine religion. Perhaps Lincoln had these whippings in mind when he responded to the circumstances of his sick father in the letter mentioned above written to his stepbrother. He wrote:

"I sincerely hope father may recover his health, but at all events, tell him to remember to call upon and confide in our great and good and merciful Maker who will not turn away from him in any extremity..."<sup>20</sup>

To be sure, nothing said above is offensive and may indeed be helpful encouragement and comforting words. Yet coming from Lincoln, whose wife wrote after his assassination that he "had

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., pp. 104, 109.

<sup>19</sup> Op. cit., Griffin, p. 39.

<sup>20</sup> Op. cit., Masters, p. 141.

no faith and no hope in the usual acceptation of those words...he was never a technical Christian,”<sup>21</sup> and who despised his father, this sermonizing was disingenuous and most certainly would have been offensive to his stepbrother and dying father.

Lincoln was no orthodox Christian but rather an agnostic with a Unitarian’s view of God and the world. His mechanistic view of the universe was twisted in a perverse way by occultic superstition, spiritism, and a morbid fatalism. According to those who knew him best, “he saw apparitions from time to time during his life.”<sup>22</sup> As mentioned above, he and his wife solicited spirits during séances in an attempt to assuage their grief after the loss of their son. If these séances were exceptional for them, perhaps they could be attributed to the acute mental anguish they were undoubtedly experiencing.<sup>23</sup> But spiritism was not necessarily an aberrant event to them; rather it was indicative of a proclivity toward the strange and dark world of the occult.

Abraham Lincoln rarely attended church, even while President. Despite this, he was masterful at employing “religious rhetoric in political speeches.” In one denunciation of the Independent Treasury System (Lincoln was an advocate for a nationalized banking system), he said:

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., p. 150.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 148.

<sup>23</sup> Op. cit., Griffin, p. 124.

“The Savior of the world chose twelve disciples and even one of that small number, directed by superhuman wisdom, turned out a traitor and a devil. And, it may not be improper here to add, that Judas carried the bag — was the Sub-Treasurer of the Savior and his disciples.”

According to Thomas DiLorenzo, Lincoln saw the Independent Treasury System and its Sub-Treasure as traitors to the American people just as Judas was to Christ.<sup>24</sup> Another writer commented that Lincoln was “the first president to introduce the hypocrisy of Christianity into American politics.”<sup>25</sup> More correctly stated, Lincoln was the first President to use the Christian faith, which he did not believe, as only a hypocrite could, for his own political aggrandizement.

Lincoln used the office of President effectively to promote what may be termed civil religion in order to build support for his policies. He made the cause of the Northern armies in their war on the South God’s cause. Quoting DiLorenzo again, Lincoln “devised a new civil religion so that young people will (or would) think of themselves as religious crusaders as they

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<sup>24</sup> Op. cit., DiLorenzo, p. 134.

<sup>25</sup> Op. cit., Masters, p. 156.

marched off to war. Not genuine religion, but a religion that worships the state...”<sup>26</sup>

President Lincoln had the support of hymn writers as he sought to establish an American civil religion. Chief among them was Julia Ward Howe, wife of an abolitionist leader, who wrote the anthem of Lincoln’s civil religion — *The Battle Hymn of the Republic*. In an essay commenting on Howe’s work, Charles A. Jennings explained, “The message of this song, shrouded in religious terms, was intended to convince the people of the North that they were involved in a holy war for a righteous cause.” The first stanza and chorus of the *Battle Hymn of the Republic* is:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:  
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath  
are stored;

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift  
sword:

His truth is marching on.

**(Chorus)**

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

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<sup>26</sup> Op. cit., DiLorenzo, p. 144.

Glory, glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on.

He goes on to write, "...since Mrs. Howe wrote the words to the song in December 1861, many sincere, well-meaning Christians have unknowingly sung this song with religious zeal and fervor without understanding its original intent and message."<sup>27</sup>

A notorious nineteenth century atheist or agnostic (depending on his mood), Robert Ingersoll, claimed that Lincoln was like him, "a free thinker or infidel." He may or may not have been correct, but it is clear that Lincoln was a skeptic throughout his life. In fact, he expressed his skepticism often in writing until he found it politically imprudent later in his political career. While busy in New Salem, Illinois, he "wrote an essay against the bible in which he attacked its inspiration as God's revelation and in which he strove to prove that Jesus was not the son of God..." T. Stuart, Lincoln's first law partner, said that "he was an open infidel." Another associate referred to him as "an avowed atheist." Still another associate commented that Lincoln "repelled the role of innate depravity of men, the possibility of morals; the nature and design of future rewards and punishments, and other orthodox tenets of the church." He

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<sup>27</sup> Jennings, Charles A. "Historical Heresy: Julia Ward Howe's Battle Hymn of the Republic." (unpublished)

believed Lincoln to be in agreement with the notorious Unitarian heretic, Theodore Parker.<sup>28</sup>

All of the above makes utter foolishness out of the efforts of contemporary Christian writers to claim Lincoln as an evangelical Christian. This tendency simply attests to how effectively Lincoln used Christian imagery and religious rhetoric to establish an American civil religion. The American civil religion provided support to his efforts to establish the new American Empire. From Lincoln's day forward, Presidents are expected to pay homage to American civil religion and as Dierkson said, "get right with Lincoln."

### **Lincoln Wages War**

"On 12 April, 1861 at 4:30 a.m., the first gun of the Civil War was fired against Fort Sumter...", thus the renowned historian Samuel Elliot Morrison described the outbreak of military conflict in the South.<sup>29</sup> Lincoln had used the efforts of the Secretary of State William H. Seward, negotiating with a Southern peace commission, to allow him time and opportunity to maneuver the South into firing the first shot. He had ordered a relief expedition, knowing that this would force the Southern president, Jefferson Davis, to take military action, all the while

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<sup>28</sup> Op. cit., Masters, p. 149.

<sup>29</sup> Morrison, Samuel Eliot. *The Oxford History of the American People*, vol. 2. New York: Oxford University Press, 1972: 384.

allowing Seward to assure the Southern commissioners that no such relief attempt would be made.<sup>30</sup>

Prior to Sumter, there had been significant attempts to reach agreement between the North and the South and thereby avoid war. One significant effort, known as the Crittenden Compromise, failed due to Lincoln's intransigence. He had written on December 10 to an Illinois Senator:

“Let there be no compromise on the question of extending slavery. If there be, all our labor is lost, and ere long, must be done again. Have none of it. Stand firm. The time has to come and better now, than any time hereafter.”<sup>31</sup>

Wielding his political muscle on his fellow Republicans to force them to resist compromise and thus precipitate a War would change the country forever.

While Lincoln's motives were largely political and pragmatic by design rather than ideological and though he was not particularly anti-Southern, a significant part of the Northern populace was virulently anti-Southern. Much of Northern

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<sup>30</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, pp. 77-78.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

animus toward the South was ideological and even revolutionary. One historian writes:

“...most of the destruction was born of a quite different philosophy; one that sprang from a generation of anti-Southern polemic with a strong religious tincture. There was widespread, although by no means universal, conviction among Union troops that Southerners were a wicked people who had deliberately started the war and therefore had no rights that the righteous were bound to respect...”<sup>32</sup>

Southern Presbyterian theologian James Henley Thornwell captured the revolutionary spirit of the Northern war effort when he declared:

“The parties in this conflict are not merely abolitionist and slaveholders — they are atheists, socialists, communists, red republicans, Jacobins, on the one side, and the friends of order and regulated freedom on the other. In other words, the world is a battleground —

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 187.

Christianity and atheism are the combatants and the progress of humanity is at stake.”<sup>33</sup>

Lincoln’s personal political ambition, his political obligation to promote The American System to the benefit of Northern industry, and radical, even revolutionary red Republican zealots combined to wage war on Southern civilization.

Following the fall of Fort Sumter on April 15, Abraham Lincoln “called for 75,000 volunteers to put down combinations ‘too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceeding.’” Two days later, Virginia joined the Cotton states in seceding, to be followed by the other Border States.<sup>34</sup> Within a week of Sumter, Lincoln added a naval blockade. Both the call for 75,000 volunteers and the naval blockade were done without authorization by the United States Congress.<sup>35</sup>

In short order Lincoln progressively “assumed dictatorial power.” He refused to call Congress into session for almost three months after his call for troops.<sup>36</sup> He justified his actions by the supposed state of emergency the country faced, a circumstance which he himself had largely created through skullduggery and the stubborn refusal to seek peaceful

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<sup>33</sup> Genovese, Eugene D. *The Southern Front*. Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 1995:37.

<sup>34</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, p. 79.

<sup>35</sup> Adams, Charles. *When in the Course of Human Events: Arguing the Case for Southern Secession*. Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2000:39.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 38.

compromise or simply to allow the Southern states their independence.

Lincoln's performance as Commander-in-Chief is still much in debate today. While he typically is credited with doing a good job developing an overall military strategy for the Northern army, many question his military competence and the wisdom of his micromanagement of the war.<sup>37</sup> What is undeniable is that the North had at least three times the manpower from which to draw soldiers and overwhelming industrial and munitions capacity when compared to the South. Consequently, Lincoln could make a great many mistakes and still win the war. The South could not afford to make mistakes.<sup>38</sup>

The brutal manner in which Lincoln waged war against the South opened the door to the total wars of the twentieth century. One author writes, "In the American Civil War, wanton cruelty was policy for the generals and all the way up to the Commander-in-Chief." Ironically, as Generals Sherman and Sheridan were "undertaking the devastation of civilian life and property, sixteen European nations met in Geneva, Switzerland

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<sup>37</sup> Op. cit., Eland, p. 122.

<sup>38</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, p. 89.

to codify the laws of war in what we call the first Geneva Convention on War.”<sup>39</sup>

As the Northern war effort slowed in 1864, Lincoln encouraged Sherman in his destruction of Georgia during his March to the Sea and Sheridan’s devastation of the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. Their armies used artillery to bomb Southern towns and cities, burned homes and allowed soldiers to loot, rape, and pillage the Southern nation. Sherman wrote to his wife that he intended to “exterminate, not soldiers alone, that is the least part of the trouble, but the people.”<sup>40</sup> In turn, Sherman’s wife, Ellen, wrote him, “I hope this may not be only a war of emancipation but (also) of extermination and that all under the influence of the foul fiend may be driven like swine into the sea. May we carry fire and sword into their states till not one habitation is left standing.”<sup>41</sup>

Following General Sheridan’s destructive march through the Shenandoah Valley, President Lincoln sent him “the thanks of the Nation and my own personal admiration and gratitude.”<sup>42</sup> General Grant was also responsible for the cruel manner in which his subordinates waged war. He issued an order to

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<sup>39</sup> Op. cit., Adams, p. 117.

<sup>40</sup> Op. cit., Eland, p. 122.

<sup>41</sup> Marszalek, John F. *Sherman’s March to the Sea*. Abilene, Texas: McWhiney Foundation Press, 2005: 23, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Op. cit., Adams, p. 116.

Sheridan, in which he said, “If the war is to last another year, we want the Shenandoah Valley to remain a barren waste.”<sup>43</sup>

Sherman began his March to the Sea with Lincoln’s approval. Sherman had presented him Atlanta as a gift and now set out “to make George howl.” After turning north from Savannah, Georgia toward South Carolina, he wrote General Halleck, “The whole army is burning with an insatiable desire to uncork vengeance upon South Carolina...I almost tremble for her fate, but feel that she deserves all that is in store for her...”<sup>44</sup> Of all of the actions of his three generals — Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan — Lincoln heartily approved.

President Lincoln struggled in the final years of the War to find a general who would be willing to “face the arithmetic.” He had been frustrated with Generals Scott, McDowell, Pope, McClellan, Burnside, and Hooker. Noted author Shelby Foote wrote:

“None of these was the killer he was seeking...Lincoln threaded his way...a biding of time until, the unknown killer could be found. Somewhere he existed, and somewhere he would find him, the unidentified general

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 116.

<sup>44</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, p. 187.

who could face the grim arithmetic being scrawled in blood...”

Foote continues, until he found him, he would continue to “act as his own general-in-chief.” Finally, he found his man, Ulysses S. Grant. Grant would make the difference in the final years of the War. He wasn’t the general that Robert E. Lee was, but he had more bodies to offer up than Lee had bullets.<sup>45</sup>

The people of the North were aghast at the casualty lists posted by Grant’s armies. One historian described how “old Edward Bates...remarked...that the demoralizing effect of this civil war is plenty visible in every department of life.” He was especially concerned about the graft and corruption that became rampant in the North during the War.<sup>46</sup> But Lincoln was determined to finish what he had started, and Grant was happy to cooperate, regardless of how many northern soldiers were killed or maimed in the process.

Great pressure was brought to bear on Lincoln to end the War during the last year. Both Northern newspapers and the European press reflected anger and frustration as they wondered why Lincoln “rejected all offers and attempts at settlement and compromise.” Europeans felt continuing a war resulting in such

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<sup>45</sup> Foote, Shelby. *The Civil War: A Narrative, Vol. II*. New York: Random House, Inc., 1963:119.

<sup>46</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, p. 120.

death and destruction was immoral and irresponsible. Many noted that the war was illegal to begin with and “against the law of nations.” That “law” held that it was wrong for a country to wage war except in self-defense. In the War Between the States, it was clearly the South that was defending itself.<sup>47</sup>

During the first part of 1865, Lincoln met personally with the Vice-President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, at what is known as the Hampton Roads Conference. Stephens, who knew Lincoln from before the War asked, “Well, Mr. President, is there no way of putting an end to the present trouble, and bringing about a return of the general good feeling and harmony?” Lincoln replied that the only way to “end the war and bring about harmony was for those resisting the law of the Union to cease that resistance...against the national authority.” Lincoln essentially required unconditional surrender of the Confederacy.<sup>48</sup> The refusal to compromise on Lincoln’s part forced the hostilities to continue until the Confederate armies were exhausted physically and materially. Thousands more soldiers would die before the end.

Throughout the War, Lincoln’s objectives were consistent. He was determined to defeat the Confederacy. He intended to

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<sup>47</sup> Op. cit., Adams, p. 73.

<sup>48</sup> Op. cit., Masters, p. 467.

expand the power and the influence of his own Republican Party and he was determined to retain leadership in his party.<sup>49</sup>

### **Lincoln and Slavery**

The most difficult aspect of Lincoln's character for the contemporary egalitarian to comprehend is his attitude toward slavery and the black man. While there is no denying that the consequence of the Confederacy's defeat by the North was the emancipation of the slaves, it is also undeniable that this was not Lincoln's objective in the War. In a letter to *New York Tribune* publisher Horace Greeley dated 22 March, 1862, Lincoln wrote:

“My paramount objective in this struggle is to save the Union, and it is not either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slaves, I would do it; and if I could do it by freeing all the slaves, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that.”<sup>50</sup>

Lincoln's objective in the War was to save the Union, but the purpose beneath that objective was to preserve the tariff, which subsidized Northern industry.

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<sup>49</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, p. 104.

<sup>50</sup> Crocker, H.W. *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Civil War*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery Publishing, Inc., 2008:6-7.

During the well-known Lincoln-Douglas debates, which were part of the Illinois senate race of 1858, Lincoln explained his position toward slavery clearly. He said that “he had no inclination to interfere with slavery in the Southern states, and he thought the Fugitive Slave Act should be enforced.”<sup>51</sup> This was not a position the radicals of his party were pleased with, but they were less happy with Democrat Stephen Douglas’ advocacy of popular sovereignty in the territories.

Lincoln was a white supremacist who opposed interracial marriage, “social equality,” for the blacks and allowing blacks to vote. Further, he did not believe blacks ought to “hold office” or “serve on juries.”<sup>52</sup> This attitude was common to Northern folks. Both Indiana and Ohio had laws prohibiting free blacks from entering the states or “owning property.” Illinois would allow free blacks to migrate there if they “posted a \$1,000. bond.” Oregon’s constitution barred free blacks from entering the state, property ownership, entering into contracts, and suing white folks.<sup>53</sup>

Lincoln invited a small group of prominent free blacks to meet with him in the White House in 1862. The purpose of the meeting was to encourage the men to take their families and

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<sup>51</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, p. 54.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>53</sup> Op. cit., Adams, p. 130.

move or emigrate to another country. He suggested that their example would motivate other blacks do the same. He went on to say that while they would probably not survive the move, some of their descendants undoubtedly would. He explained:

“You and we are different races; we have between us a broad difference than exists between almost any other two races...This physical difference is a great disadvantage to us both and offers a reason at least why we should be separated...It is better for us both, therefore, to be separate.”<sup>54</sup>

None of the above should cause us to infer that Lincoln had any affection for slavery. He consistently stated that he did not like slavery, and he was steadfast in his insistence that it should not be allowed in Western territories of the United States. But neither did Lincoln have any great affection for the black race. Racial prejudice was common to both North and South, and Lincoln was no different in that regard from most other Americans.

Lincoln was an early advocate of the colonization of blacks in other countries. He was infatuated with the poetry of the

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<sup>54</sup> Op. cit., DiLorenzo, p. 48.

Declaration of Independence in which Jefferson wrote, “All men are created equal” and, while he did not necessarily embrace that concept wholeheartedly, he did feel that blacks ought to have an opportunity to work out their own circumstance to their own benefit. But he would rather that be accomplished some place far away from the United States.<sup>55</sup>

Lincoln’s challenge throughout the War was to balance his lukewarm animosity toward slavery with his need to retain the radical Republicans’ support. This refusal to commit himself early in the War to emancipate the slaves created tension between him and the most dogmatic of the abolitionists. Wendell Phillips, a radical abolitionist, called Lincoln “a slavehound of Illinois;” a “group of Iowa abolitionists” voiced their concern that “Lincoln...(was) a Kentuckian by birth, and his brother-in-law being in the rebel army, is evidently, by his sympathies with the owners of slaves”...reluctant in “...crushing the rebellion by severe measure against slaveholders.”<sup>56</sup> Abolitionists were suspicious of Lincoln’s true motives, understanding instinctively that Lincoln’s purpose for the war was not identical to theirs.

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<sup>55</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, pp. 132-133.

<sup>56</sup> Op. cit., Donald, p. 20.

The identification of Lincoln with the emancipation of the slaves is largely the result of the Emancipation Proclamation. This is indeed ironic, since the act did not actually emancipate or free slaves in any state in which the United States government had the power to enforce it. States such as Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri were exempt, as well as those parts of Virginia and Louisiana that were controlled by Union troops.

It states:

I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy thereof, do hereby proclaim and declare that hereafter, as heretofore, the war will be prosecuted for the object of practically restoring the constitutional relation between the United States and the people thereof, in which States that relation is, or may be, suspended or disturbed; and that, with this object, “on the 1<sup>st</sup> day of January, 1863, all persons held as slaves within any State, or any designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be the, thenceforward, and for ever, free.”

The Emancipation Proclamation proved to be a deft political maneuver with more public relations value than substance.<sup>57</sup>

### **Lincoln, Secession, and the Constitution**

Abraham Lincoln was intellectually dishonest and opportunistic when it came to his position regarding the right of a people to choose their own form of government. During the Mexican War he expressed his support for the right of revolution in a speech he delivered to Congress:

“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 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 the territory as they inhabit.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Op. cit., Adams, pp. 140-141.

<sup>58</sup> Op. cit., Griffin, p. 6.

It is incredible that Lincoln would attack and terrorize the Southern people for doing what he declared before Congress to be their right.

Lincoln's opposition to Southern independence was hypocritical. He claimed that he believed in the right of any people to change their form of government. He said on numerous occasions that the right to revolt was a "social right." He saw the Declaration of Independence as a "charter of freedom" and used Jefferson's ideas to justify the "right of any people" to "throw off, to revolutionize, their existing form of government, and to establish such other in its stead as they may choose." Evidently, in Lincoln's view, this "sacred right" did not apply to the Southern states.<sup>59</sup>

The effect of Lincoln's War against Southern rights was to "overthrow...the principle of 'consent of the governed.'" One historian explains:

"Secession was the acid test of the American Revolution, and the Confederacy was the true defender of the natural rights of men that were asserted by the colonies and the people in the Declaration of Independence and codified

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., p. 6.

(for the most part) in the Bill of Rights to the Constitution.”

He continues in citing the War Between the States as the end of the ideals advocated by the Founding Fathers of the early American Republic.<sup>60</sup>

The manner in which Lincoln approached the Constitution of the United States was, according to one writer, “rather cavalier”...and he viewed the document as subordinate “to the Declaration of Independence.” Historian Mark E. Neely, who has written very positively about Lincoln, remarks, “he played fast and loose with the Constitution after the firing on Ft. Sumter; it was never the most important document in his thought.” Another historian remarked that Lincoln “got all of his political ideas from the Declaration of Independence and from Thomas Jefferson.”<sup>61</sup> While it is true that Lincoln was enamored with the poetry of Jefferson’s Declaration, his politics were distinctly Hamiltonian. Alexander Hamilton advocated the “so-called implied powers of the Constitution,” which Jefferson had ably “refuted.”<sup>62</sup> The “implied powers” doctrine was Lincoln’s justification for many of his unconstitutional acts.

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<sup>60</sup> Op. cit., Emison, pp. 14, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Klement, Frank L. *Lincoln’s Critics: The Copperheads of the North*. Shippensburg, Pennsylvania: White Mane Publishing Company, Inc., 1999:24, 25.

<sup>62</sup> Op. cit., Masters, p. 81.

The Vice-President of the Confederacy, Alexander Stephens, a constitutional scholar in his own right, wrote regarding Lincoln:

“I do not think that he intended to overthrow the institutions of country. I do not think he understood them or the tendencies of his acts upon them. The Union with him in sentiment rose to the sublimity of a religious mysticism...”

Stephens had served in Congress with Lincoln and had been on friendly terms with him before the War. He believed that Lincoln had adopted the errors of Webster regarding the Constitution, and the result was a calamity for the whole nation.<sup>63</sup>

During the War, perhaps as many as 20,000 persons in the North were imprisoned for crimes against the government. This description of crimes went from the discouragement of voluntary enlistments, aiding or giving comfort to rebels, to virtually any action deemed disloyal by Lincoln’s government. Approximately 300 newspapers in the North were shut down at various points during the War for expressing “the wrong

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<sup>63</sup> Op. cit., Masters, p. 316.

sentiments.” Martial law was declared just two days after the initial posting of the Emancipation Proclamation in September of 1862.<sup>64</sup>

Lincoln suspended the privilege of the writ of *habeas corpus* soon after the War began. This allowed Northern citizens to be arrested without a warrant and to be jailed or imprisoned indefinitely. The Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Roger Taney, ruled in *Ex parte Merryman* (May, 1861) that the President had no power to suspend the writ without Congressional consent. Lincoln responded by issuing a warrant for the Chief Justice’s arrest, though it was never carried out.<sup>65</sup>

Abraham Lincoln’s War against the Southern Confederacy not only devastated the entire Southern region economically and socially for decades; it altered the very nature of the American Republic forever. So dramatic were the changes to the nation that one historian claims, “no study of American government should begin prior to 1861” since Lincoln essentially established a new form of government. This may be an overstatement, but it is clear that the rule of law was profoundly damaged during the War Between the States, and the constitutional constraints on the federal or national government were largely removed.<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Op. cit., Johnson, p. 125.

<sup>65</sup> Op. cit., DiLorenzo, pp. 92-93.

<sup>66</sup> Op. cit., Griffin, p. 23.

The possibility of secession had provided a means of holding the federal government accountable. Once Lincoln crushed the South militarily, he rendered the constitutional question of secession irrelevant. The growth of the federal government and the trend toward centralization has continued inexorably since the close of the War. The War Between the States destroyed the Southern states' capacity to resist the radical Republicans' quest for political supremacy. Lincoln's effective, albeit despotic, use of the office of President destroyed the vision of the Founding Fathers and ushered in the new American Empire. Abraham Lincoln had fathered a new country.

### **Lincoln the Politician**

Lincoln's relationship with fellow Republicans was complex. The radical wing of his party was rarely satisfied with him. When pressed for a clear statement of his policy on a variety of issues, he would reply, "My policy is to have no policy." Secretary Salmon P. Chase was flabbergasted at such a statement, remarking that it was an "idiotic notion." Lincoln was merely reflecting his political pragmatism.<sup>67</sup>

Any political ideals that Lincoln had were always subordinate to his political ambition. His law partner in

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<sup>67</sup> Op. cit., Donald, p. 131.

Springfield commented that he was “totally swallowed up in his ambitions.”<sup>68</sup> One historian recounted an anecdote that Lincoln often used to explain his reluctance to go public with his policy positions or comment on his subordinates’ actions until he was certain of their success. Lincoln described “an Irishman who had forsworn liquor” ...who...”told the bartender that he was not averse to having a spot added to his lemonade; so long as it’s unbeknownst to him.”<sup>69</sup>

Lincoln ruled his party effectively during the War. He was a committed Republican and expected fellow party members to be equally committed. He used political patronage to hold party members in check. Those who received favors from him were expected to support him politically — and the party financially. Any “who refused were cut off from patronage and promotion.”<sup>70</sup>

During his administration, “Lincoln invented implied presidential war powers,” which allowed him great latitude in the way he governed the country. He was the first President to advocate such a rationale for his disregard for Constitutional constraints. By providing “government subsidies...financed by high tariff and a nationalized banking system that printed

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 66.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., pp. 76, 77.

money,” he was able to buy political support of those capable of opposing his circumvention of the Constitution.<sup>71</sup>

One example of his cynical and cruel use of presidential power involved his unwillingness to exchange prisoners during the last half of the War. Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton reported after the War that 22,576 Union prisoners died in Confederate prisons and 26, 576 Confederate prisoners died in Federal prisons. In the South, food and medical provisions were scarce during the last half of the War. Union prisoners-of-war suffered greatly because of this, yet Lincoln refused to exchange prisoners-of-war and ignored the South’s offer to pass on needed supplies and food to the Union prisoners.<sup>72</sup> Lincoln had decided that, because of the “grim arithmetic” mentioned above by Shelby Foote, the North could afford to sacrifice their soldiers who had been captured while the South could not. Consequently, Lincoln turned a blind eye to the plight of Union soldiers suffering in Southern prisons.

Lincoln was a gifted speaker who understood how to communicate to the common man. He possessed the ability to explain his policies in a meaningful and “intelligible,” even “inspiring manner.” His Southern counterpart, Jefferson Davis,

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<sup>71</sup> Op. cit., Eland, p. 124.

<sup>72</sup> Op. cit., Masters, p. 421.

was better educated and had a much better grasp of American history and the Constitution, but he often spoke over the heads of the people.<sup>73</sup> Lincoln mastered the ability to communicate in sound bites that people could remember and quote to others. In that regard, he anticipated twentieth century politics.

Notwithstanding the above, Lincoln struggled to maintain Northern support throughout the War. The radical Republicans had become disaffected with Lincoln's opposition to their desire to have Congress oversee reconstruction. Louisiana had been re-admitted to the Union under Lincoln's authority. The radicals backed the candidacy of John C. Fremont in 1864, but Lincoln was nominated. On August 23, 1864 he wrote, "This morning, as for some days past, it seems probable that this administration will not be re-elected."<sup>74</sup>

The Northern Democrats chose General George B. McClellan as their candidate. He was popular in the North and would have won the election if news from the front had not created positive feelings toward Lincoln's presidency. Rear Admiral Farragut had captured Mobile Bay and General John

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<sup>73</sup> McPherson, James M. *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*. New York: Oxford University Press: 93.

<sup>74</sup> Blum, John M. et al. *The National Experience, Fifth Edition*. New York: Harcourt-Brace Javanovich, Inc., 1981:383.

Bell Hood had been defeated in September as Sherman took Atlanta just before the election.<sup>75</sup>

Lincoln used all of his rhetorical gifts in his Second Inaugural Address. He effectively used religious imagery in ascribing the purposes of God to the War he waged against the South. He said:

“The Almighty has His own purposes! Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offenses come; but woe to that man of whom the offenses cometh.” If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offenses which in the providence of God, must needs come...”

He would continue to attribute to himself and the North benign intent toward the South as he declared they had “malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right...”<sup>76</sup> The hypocrisy of the tone and tenor of Lincoln’s words, given the cruel and inhumane manner he had waged War against the Confederacy, is incredible.

During Lincoln’s presidency, the first income tax in United States history was enacted, tariffs were raised and remained high

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 384.

<sup>76</sup> Op. cit., Adams, pp. 204-205.

well into the twentieth century, provisions for land grant colleges were passed, the Department of Agriculture was created, and the initial plans toward building a transcontinental railroad were concluded. Each of these steps took the country closer to and paved the way “for a Leviathan central state that mandates, manipulates, and regulates virtually every aspect of life in America and seeks unilateral hegemony around the globe.”<sup>77</sup>

### Epilogue

The cult that has elevated Abraham Lincoln to messianic status in contemporary America is deeply entrenched in American culture. It has propagated a myth regarding who and what Abraham Lincoln was because it provides a transcendent basis for a society and a culture that has lost its *raison d’etre*. Abraham Lincoln *must be* if the American Empire *is to be*.

Coterminous with the continuing efforts to exalt and extol the supposed virtues of Lincoln is the inexorable progress of American statism. Good citizens must bow and offer obeisance to the Lincoln myth because it reflects not only the requisite adulation of the Great Emancipator but also their fidelity to and worship of the State. The much touted virtue and good character

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<sup>77</sup> Op. cit., Emison, p. 28.

of Lincoln is intended to be emblematic of present day America. If he is not what the Lincoln cult says he is, then neither is America what it is purported to be.

Notwithstanding this, it is in the best interest of Americans who love the truth to recognize what sort of man and leader Abraham Lincoln was. As a person, he was cold, stubborn, and calculating. He was a strong and engaging leader, adept at manipulating and coercing other strong leaders to bend to his will. He was aggressive — not as a boxer might be, but rather as a wrestler.<sup>78</sup> Like a grappler, he moved slowly and calculatingly, holding onto his foe until he found an advantage, then moving quickly to take his opponent down and forcing submission upon him.

Lincoln was a master at fostering a particular image of himself with the intent of gaining leverage, which he used to achieve political advantage. The self-educated, honest, country lawyer born in a log cabin was a pose, created to help him connect emotionally and then politically with average Americans. Often the image he projected was based on half-truths, just enough truth to give credibility to his public persona. For example, he was indeed largely self-educated, and he did come from humble circumstances. However, he was no more

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<sup>78</sup> Op. cit., Masters, p. 37.

honest than any contemporary trial lawyer or politician might be, and his clients were not common folk but wealthy railroad and mercantile concerns.

Lincoln was religious after a fashion, but his religion was largely of his own making. When he used biblical references and stories to make a point, folks assumed he shared their Christian convictions. In fact, his religious sentiments were very different from the average nineteenth century rural American. His beliefs were anything but orthodox, which accounts for the refusal of virtually all of the ministers in Springfield, Illinois to support his candidacy for president in 1860. He used religion personally and publicly to get what he wanted. He was an idolatrous man, hence it is fitting that he is idolized by so many in a culture largely given over to idolatry.

Lincoln took an oath to “preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States,” not the Union he so often declared he was protecting. At the time the War broke out, it was not at all clear that the Constitution prohibited a state from seceding from that Union. Hence, the manner in which he waged war on the Southern States was itself a violation of his oath of office and a usurpation of the Constitution itself.

Even his stated aim in the War Between the States of protecting the Union was disingenuous and dishonest. He was

clearly more concerned with protecting the tariff revenue collected in Southern ports than he was the sanctity of the Union. His constant opposition to the expansion of slavery in the territories was the result of his concern that the Republicans might lose their recently acquired political advantage — an advantage which enabled him to gain the necessary support of Northern industrial and mercantile interests. The *quid pro quo* was the agreement to divert wealth from the Southern agrarian economy to the northeast.

Abraham Lincoln did wage a War that resulted in the emancipation of slaves. Yet emancipation was never his primary purpose. Emancipation became a tool that he would use to gain political advantage domestically and win the favor of the European governments. It is difficult for most to separate the result of the War from the President who waged the War. Lincoln was very clear that he would do whatever he found necessary to save the Union, and if freeing the slaves helped accomplish that objective, then so be it. If keeping them in bondage would serve his purposes, then all the better.

More Americans were killed in the War Between the States than in any other war in which the American soldier has been involved. Lincoln chose to call 75,000 volunteers and invade the South. During the four years of the War, the South was

devastated, civilian lives and liberties were destroyed, and the early American Republic the Founding Fathers established was repudiated. This is Lincoln's legacy.

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