
The Great Centralizer

Abraham Lincoln

and the War between the States

— ♦ —

THOMAS J. DiLORENZO

By the 1850s the authority of all government in America was at a low point; government to the American was, at most, merely an institution with a negative role, a guardian of fair play.

David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered*

The war . . . has tended, more than any other event in the history of the country to militate against the Jeffersonian idea, that “the best government is that which governs least.”

Illinois Governor Richard Yates, January 2, 1865

Many historians consider President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s New Deal a point of demarcation with respect to the role of government in America, whereby the political economy was transformed from a limited, constitutional government to a highly centralized welfare-warfare state. Others go farther back to the so-called Progressive Era of the early twentieth century. But a clearer breaking point in the relationship between American citizens and the state was the South’s defeat in its war for independence.

Lincoln’s election in 1860 effectively signaled the long-fought-for victory of the (by then defunct) Whig Party, the political descendants of the Federalists. Lincoln

Thomas J. DiLorenzo is a professor of economics in the Sellinger School of Business and Management at Loyola College in Baltimore, Maryland.

The Independent Review, v.III, n.2, Fall 1998, ISSN 1086-1653, Copyright © 1998, pp. 243-271.

considered himself the political heir of Henry Clay, the leader of the Whigs, who for forty years championed the building of an American empire through protectionist tariffs, corporate welfare (euphemistically called “internal improvements”), a central bank, and a highly centralized state. Clay called that policy combination the “American System.” Commenting on Lincoln’s July 16, 1852, eulogy for Clay, Roy Basler, the editor of Lincoln’s collected works, observed that “one could hardly read any paragraph in [the eulogy] without feeling that Lincoln was, consciously or unconsciously, inviting comparison and contrast of himself with [Clay]” (1946, 18).

Before his election as president, Lincoln spent virtually his entire twenty-eight-year political career promoting the so-called American System. Basler writes that as of 1857 Lincoln “had no solution to the problem of slavery except the colonization idea which he had inherited from Henry Clay . . . when he spoke . . . of respecting the Negro as a human being, his words lacked effectiveness” (23). The American System, not slavery, preoccupied Lincoln’s political mind.

Lincoln will forever be remembered as the Great Emancipator. But he was also the Great Centralizer, whose policies did much to undermine the decentralized, federal system established by the Founders.

Slavery’s Role in Precipitating and Sustaining the War

Historical research on the causes of the War between the States ranges from claims that slavery was the predominant cause (Foner 1974) to the view of James Ford Rhodes that “of the American Civil War it may safely be asserted that there was a single cause, slavery” (Stampp 1974, 118). Slavery was certainly an important element, but its importance seems to have been exaggerated as much as other causes—particularly economic motivations—have been overlooked or ignored.

For well over a century, objective analyses of Lincoln have been all but censored by the history profession through the tactic of insinuating that anyone who criticizes Lincoln must secretly approve of antebellum slavery. So, for the record, I affirm that slavery is an evil institution—as are all government-enforced racial policies, including forced segregation, coerced integration, and mandatory racial quotas. Such policies have no place in a free society because they rest on the collectivist idea that people should be judged as members of racial or ethnic groups, not as individuals. But a free society must be based on the idea of the equality of *individual* rights under the law, with the role of government restricted to protecting those individual rights and removing barriers to their enjoyment. In this sense the abolition of slavery was a giant step forward for the cause of human freedom everywhere.

In that light, open-minded Americans should consider that many of Lincoln’s personal views on race relations can be described only as the views of a white supremacist. Indeed, he even used the words “superior and inferior” to define the “proper”

places of the two races in American society. In the September 18, 1858, debate with Senator Stephen Douglas, he stated:

I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races—that I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will for ever forbid the two races from living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race. (Basler 1953, 145–46)

When asked what should be done if the slaves were ever freed, Lincoln's initial response was to suggest sending them all back to Africa: "Send them to Liberia, to their own native land. But free them and make them politically and socially our equals? My own feelings will not admit this" (Basler 1953, 255–56). As president, Lincoln held a meeting in the White House with freed black leaders, whom he encouraged to lead a colonization effort back to Africa by example. He developed plans to send freed blacks to Haiti and Central America—anywhere but the United States (370–75).

Lincoln's idol, Henry Clay, was a lifelong member of the American Colonization Society and was its president when he died. In his 1852 eulogy, Lincoln approvingly quoted Clay's statement that "there is a moral fitness in the idea of returning to Africa her children" (Basler 1946, 266). Clay's colonization proposal "was made twenty-five years ago," Lincoln observed, but "every succeeding year has added strength to the hope of its realization.— May it indeed be realized!" (277).

Some ten years later, in his December 1, 1862, message to Congress, Lincoln reiterated that "I cannot make it better known than it already is, that I strongly favor colonization" (685).

Lincoln frequently castigated the abolitionists as zealots who "would shiver into fragments the Union of these States; tear to tatters its now venerated constitution; and even burn the last copy of the Bible, rather than slavery should continue a single hour" (Basler 1946, 274). But being the master politician, he adopted the position of his political role model, slave owner Henry Clay. As described by Robert Johannsen, that position was "opposition to slavery in principle, toleration of it in practice, and a vigorous hostility toward the abolition movement" (1991, 22).

Lincoln had no intention to disturb Southern slavery in 1860. In his First Inaugural Address he announced that "I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere

with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so” (Basler 1946, 580). He also promised in the same address to uphold and strengthen the fugitive slave clause of the Constitution, even though lax or nonenforcement of that clause would have quickened slavery’s demise.

Interestingly, none of the four political parties that fielded candidates in the 1860 election even mentioned the abolition of Southern slavery in its platform (Louisiana State University Civil War Institute 1998). When the issue of slavery was brought up, it was in the context of its prohibition in the territories, not in the South. Even then, the reason for objecting to the extension of slavery was not always a moral one. Although undoubtedly some sincere abolitionists believed that disallowing slavery in the territories would contribute to its eventual demise everywhere, a prominent concern was that freed slaves would then compete with white laborers in the territories. As William Seward explained, “the motive of those who protested against the extension of slavery had always really been concern for the welfare of the white man, and not an unnatural sympathy for the Negro” (McPherson 1966, 24).

Horace Greeley explained the Republican Party’s position on the extension of slavery in the new territories: “All the unoccupied territory . . . shall be reserved for the benefit of the white Caucasian race—a thing which cannot be except by the exclusion of slavery” (Berwanger 1967, 130). Illinois senator and Lincoln confidant Lyman Trumbull announced in 1859 that “we, the Republican party, are the white man’s party. We are for the free white man, and for making white labor acceptable and honorable, which it can never be when Negro slave labor is brought into competition with it” (133).

When Representative David Wilmot of Pennsylvania introduced his historic proviso to exclude slavery from the territories acquired after the Mexican War, he carefully explained that he had “no morbid sympathy for the slave,” but “plead the cause and the rights of white freemen. I would preserve to free white labor a fair country, a rich inheritance, where the sons of toil, of my own race and color, can live without the disgrace which association with Negro slavery brings upon free labor” (Litwack 1961, 47).

Lincoln’s actions were consistent with his words with regard to the slavery issue. In the summer of 1861 he was presented with an opportunity to liberate thousands of slaves, but he refused to do so. General John Frémont, the Republican candidate for president in 1856, was the Union army’s military commander in Missouri. Frémont drew a line across the state from east to west separating the pro-Confederacy side from the pro-Union side and issued an order stating that any individual on the Confederate side caught carrying a firearm would be shot and that anyone aiding the secessionists would have his slaves emancipated. Slave-owning Unionists would be left undisturbed (Nevins 1959, 337; Foote 1986, vol. 1, 95–97; Randall and Donald 1961, 371–72).

When Frémont sent his order to Lincoln for approval, Lincoln not only disapproved it; he stripped Frémont of his command. For Lincoln's stated objective was to "save the Union" and to preserve federal power, not to free the slaves. As he stated in his famous August 22, 1862, public letter to *New York Daily Tribune* editor Horace Greeley:

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union. (Basler 1946, 652)

Some Northern opinion makers and politicians excoriated Lincoln for his treatment of Frémont. Senator Ben Wade of Ohio wrote "in bitter execration" that "the President don't object to General Frémont's taking the life of the owners of slaves, when found in rebellion, but to confiscate their property and emancipate their slaves he thinks monstrous" (Nevins 1959, 340).

Unlike Frémont's order, which would have liberated some slaves, Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation did not free a single slave. The proclamation applied only to rebel territory, even though at the time the North controlled large parts of the South, including much of Tennessee and Virginia, where it would have been possible to emancipate thousands of slaves.

Indeed, many slaves who ended up in the hands of the Union army were not set free but were put to work doing some of the most unpleasant tasks in and around army encampments. Others were sent back to their owners by federal troops.

Congress passed several "confiscation acts," which permitted Union soldiers to confiscate the slaves (and other property) in conquered rebel territory. The slaves were then enslaved by the Union army. As one Illinois lieutenant reported, "I have 11 Negroes in my company now. They do every particle of the dirty work. Two women among them do the washing for the company" (McPherson 1997, 119).

Specifically exempted from the Emancipation Proclamation were the Louisiana parishes of "St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James, Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans" (Eliot 1910, 324). Also exempted by name were the federally controlled areas of West Virginia, large parts of Virginia, and all the Union-controlled border states, such as Maryland and Kentucky.

The *New York World* newspaper sharply criticized Lincoln's action by editorializing, "The President has purposely made the proclamation inoperative in all places where we have gained a military footing which makes the slaves accessible. He has proclaimed emancipation only where he has notoriously no power to execute it" (Foote 1986, vol. 1, 708). The *London Spectator* (October 11, 1862) agreed completely,

writing that “the principle is not that a human being cannot justly own another, but that he cannot own him unless he is loyal to the United States” government (Foote 1986, 707–8).

A case can be made that the Emancipation Proclamation was primarily a public relations strategy employed out of desperation because of the utter failure of the federal armies to subdue the rebels during the first eighteen months of the war. Most likely it was designed to encourage the European powers—especially England—to cease trading with the South.

After the Confederates scored smashing victories over Union armies in the battles of First Manassas (July 1861), Seven Days (June 1862), Second Manassas (August 1862), and Fredericksburg (December 1862), “the nadir of Northern depression seems to have been reached” (Randall and Donald 1966, 225). In this military context, Lincoln decided on the Emancipation Proclamation, which he considered to be more or less a last-ditch effort after the Union had reached “the end of our rope on the [military] plan of operation” (Angle 1947, 407).

But if the objective of the Emancipation Proclamation was to encourage England to stop assisting the secessionists by trading with them, it was a failure. Most British opinion makers criticized the proclamation as a transparent ruse. In his survey of British attitudes toward the war, the historian Sheldon Vanauken observed that by January of 1863,

The Confederate States were winning the war. Only a few days before, Lee had smashed Burnside at Fredericksburg. The Proclamation freed all the slaves *within* the Confederate lines, that is, the slaves which the Federal armies were manifestly unable to reach. These slaves were grouped on the isolated plantations, controlled for the most part by women since their gentlemen were off to the wars. The only possible effect of the Proclamation would be the dreaded servile insurrection. . . . Either a slave rising or nothing. So Englishmen saw it. Lincoln’s insincerity was regarded as proven by two things: his earlier denial of any lawful right or wish to free the slaves; and, especially, his not freeing the slaves in “loyal” Kentucky and other United States areas or even in Confederate areas occupied by the United States troops, such as New Orleans. (1989, 302)

Most Northerners in 1863 were shocked and surprised by the Emancipation Proclamation because they had not previously been told by their government that the reason they were fighting and dying by the tens of thousands was to emancipate black strangers in faraway states where most Northerners had never been. In July 1863, draft riots occurred in New York City, where between 300 and 1,000 civilians were shot dead (there are no hard data on the number of deaths) by federal troops called in from the recently concluded Battle of Gettysburg.

The draft was the main object of the protest, but there was also seething resentment at the idea of being drafted for the ostensible purpose of emancipating the slaves—and over the application of the draft to whites only (Bernstein 1990). Consequently, the rioters went on a racist rampage, hunting down and murdering dozens of innocent black people. An eyewitness account of the riots was given by Colonel Arthur Fremantle, the British emissary to the Confederacy during the spring and summer of 1863, who happened to be departing the country from the Port of New York at the time. In his widely read diary, first published in 1864 under the title *Three Months in the Southern States: April–June 1863*, Fremantle wrote:

The reports of outrages, hangings, and murder [of blacks] were now most alarming, the terror and anxiety were universal. All shops were shut: all carriages and omnibuses had ceased running. No colored man or woman was visible or safe in the streets, or even in his own dwelling. Telegraphs were cut, and railroad tracks were torn up. The draft was suspended, and the mob evidently had the upper hand. (Fremantle 1991, 302)

When Fremantle “inquired of a bystander what the Negroes had done that they should want to kill them,” the bystander replied, “Oh sir, they hate them here; they are the innocent cause of all these troubles” (300).

The Emancipation Proclamation caused a desertion crisis in the United States Army. At least 200,000 Northern soldiers deserted; another 120,000 evaded conscription; and at least 90,000 Northern men fled to Canada to evade the draft, while thousands more hid in the mountains of central Pennsylvania “where they lay beyond the easy reach of enrolling officers” (Gallagher 1998, 31). Enlistment rates plummeted, as did subscriptions to Union war bonds. In the words of the historian James McPherson, “Plenty of soldiers believed that the proclamation had changed the purpose of the war. They professed to feel betrayed. They were willing to risk their lives for the Union, they said, but not for black freedom. . . . Desertion rates rose alarmingly. Many soldiers blamed the Emancipation Proclamation” (1994, 63).

McPherson writes of a “backlash of anti-emancipation sentiment” and quotes various Union officers expressing sentiments such as this: “If emancipation is to be the policy of this war . . . I do not care how quick the country goes to pot” (1997, 120). Many Northern soldiers felt the way a Massachusetts sergeant from the famed Irish Brigade did, according to McPherson. In July 1862 the sergeant wrote in a letter that “if anyone thinks that this army is fighting to free the Negro . . . they are terribly mistaken” (1997, 121). Among the other statements McPherson reports being made by Union officers: “I don’t want to fire another shot for the negroes and I wish that all the abolitionists were in hell”; “I dont want the negro freed . . . I say the Democrats ougt [*sic*] to go in with the south and kill all the Abolitionists of the north and that will

end this war”; and “I am sick of the war. . . . I do not fight or want to fight for Lincoln’s Negro proclamation one day longer” (1997, 122–24).

The historian Iver Bernstein makes the case that the New York City draft riots occurred when they did—in July 1863, six months after the Emancipation Proclamation was formally issued and some three months after the federal conscription act was passed by Congress—because not until then “did New Yorkers fully realize that Democratic officials [who dominated New York politics] would fail to shelter them from the draft” (1990, 13).

There were virtually no federal troops in the city on July 1—they had all been sent to Gettysburg—and hence federal authorities had no means of enforcing the draft, which was just then being implemented for the first time. The rioters clearly made a connection between the hated draft and the Emancipation Proclamation in venting their violent anger on hapless blacks and white abolitionists. At one point a mob led by men on horseback waving swords approached the home of prominent abolitionist James Sloan Gibbons, where Horace Greeley was also said to be residing at the time. Shouting “Greeley! Gibbons! Greeley! Gibbons!” the mob ransacked the house, whose residents fortunately escaped (Bernstein 1990, 25).

White Northerners’ Attitudes toward Blacks

Northerners discriminated against blacks in cruel and inhumane ways during the 1850s and 1860s. As Alexis de Tocqueville remarked in *Democracy in America*, “The prejudice of race appears to be stronger in the states that have abolished slavery than in those where it still exists” (1945, 359).

The *Revised Code of Indiana*, for example, stated in 1862 that “Negroes and mulattos are not allowed to come into the state”; “all contracts with such Negroes and mulattos are declared to be void”; “any person encouraging them to come, or giving them employment, is to be fined from \$10 to \$500”; “Negroes and mulattos are not to be allowed to vote”; “No Negro, or mulatto having even one-eighth part of Negro blood, shall marry a white person” [with punishment of up to ten years in prison]; and “Negroes and mulattos are not allowed to testify against white persons” (Bensel 1990, 62). This last regulation was an open invitation to the criminal abuse of blacks.

Illinois and Oregon added similar provisions to their state constitutions in 1848 and 1857, respectively (Litwack 1961, 70). The referendum to amend the Illinois constitution to prohibit the immigration of blacks passed by a margin of more than two to one; the margin was eight to one in Oregon (71).

Most Northern states that did permit immigration by blacks required them to post a bond of up to \$1,000 that would be confiscated by the state if they acted “improperly.” To the extent that this provision was enforced, it served as a deterrent to black immigration.

Although New York state helped to elect Lincoln, it overwhelmingly rejected a proposal to allow Negro suffrage. As late as 1869, New York voters defeated equal-suffrage referenda (Litwack 1961, 91). Between 1849 and 1857, Michigan, Iowa, and Wisconsin overwhelmingly rejected equal-suffrage referenda.

Four Northern states—Illinois, Ohio, Indiana, and Iowa—prohibited Negro testimony in cases where a white person was a party, and Oregon forbade Negroes to own real estate, enter into contracts, or maintain lawsuits (Litwack 1961, 93).

Restaurants, hotels, libraries, and theaters excluded blacks in the North; black children were excluded from public schools or placed in inferior ones, even though their parents were taxpayers; and most Northern states had established their own state colonization societies for blacks. The public schools in Washington, D.C., were not desegregated until the 1950s—nearly a century after the end of the war.

Lyman Trumbull, a U.S. Senator from Illinois and a close friend of Lincoln's, announced that "there is a very great aversion in the West—I know it to be so in my State—against having free Negroes come among us. Our people want nothing to do with the Negro" (Curry 1968, 79).

In 1861 Illinois was considered to be part of "the west." Similar anti-black attitudes were apparently pervasive in the "far west"—Iowa, California, Oregon, and Kansas—as well. In *The Frontier against Slavery* (1967), Eugene H. Berwanger documents how "state legislatures, overwhelmed by the fear of being inundated by manumitted slaves or free Negroes from the south, were enacting laws to deprive the Negro immigrants of any semblance of citizenship, to exclude them from the states, and to encourage them to colonize in Africa." "Prejudice against the Negro found special acceptance" in these Northern states (1).

Racist attitudes toward blacks were pervasive among Northern opinion makers as well as politicians. The *Philadelphia Daily News* editorialized on November 22, 1860, that "it is neither for the good of the colored race nor of our own that they should continue to dwell among us to any considerable extent. The two races can never exist in conjunction except as superior and inferior. . . . The African is naturally the inferior race" (Perkins 1964, 425). The *Niles (Mich.) Republican* wrote on March 30, 1861, that "this government was made for the benefit of the white race . . . and not for Negroes" (499). The *Daily Chicago Times* remarked on December 7, 1860, that "evil, and nothing but evil, has ever followed in the track of this hideous monster, Abolition. . . . Let [the slave] alone—send him back to his master where he belongs" (431).

On January 22, 1861, the *New York Times* announced that it opposed the abolition of slavery. Instead, it proposed that slaves should be allowed to legally marry, to be taught to read, and to invest their money in savings accounts. Those actions should be taken "to ameliorate, rather than to abolish, the Slavery of the Southern States" and would permit slavery to become "a very tolerable system" (Perkins 1964, 438).

“We have no more right to meddle with slavery in Georgia, than we have to meddle with monarchy in Europe,” declared the *Providence Daily Post* on February 2, 1861 (441). The *Columbus (Ohio) Crisis* added five days later that “we are not Abolitionists nor in favor of Negro equality” (44). The *New York Herald*, the newspaper with the largest circulation in the country at the time, actually sang the praises of slavery on March 7, 1861, when it wrote of how “the immense increase of numbers [of slaves] within so short a time speaks for the good treatment and happy, contented lot of the slaves. They are comfortably fed, housed and clothed, and seldom or never overworked” (455).

The *Philadelphia Inquirer* endorsed Lincoln’s colonization ideas on March 11, 1861, when it pointed out that “Hayti lies in the torrid zone, the proper residence of the Negro” (456). “The proposition that the Negro is equal by nature, physically and mentally, to the white man, seems to be so absurd and preposterous, that we cannot conceive how it can be entertained by any intelligent and rational white man,” the *Concord (N.H.) Democratic Standard* declared on September 8, 1860 (469). The *Boston Daily Courier* added on September 24, 1860, that “we believe the mulatto to be inferior in capacity, character, and organization to the full-blooded black, and still farther below the standard of the white races” (472).

The foregoing discussion demonstrates that the idea that racially enlightened Northerners marched south and died by the hundreds of thousands for the benefit of black strangers in Alabama and Mississippi, and then marched happily back singing the Battle Hymn of the Republic—as has been taught in the public schools and portrayed in books, films, and the popular culture in general for more than a century—is simply not credible.

It is conceivable that many white racists in the North nevertheless abhorred the institution of slavery. However, given the attitudes of most Northerners regarding blacks, it is doubtful that their abhorrence of slavery was sufficient motivation for most (not all) of them *to give their lives* on bloody battlefields. It is one thing to proclaim one’s opposition to slavery, but quite another to die for it.

I do not deny that slavery was a cause of the war, but I maintain that it was one cause among many and that its importance may have been exaggerated.

Why Not Peaceful Emancipation?

By 1861 there was a long history of *peaceful* abolition of slavery throughout the world, including the northern United States. That abolition usually involved “the freeing, not of adults, but of children born on some date after the emancipation was enacted. Moreover, the freeing of slave children was delayed until their eighteenth, twenty-first, or in some cases, twenty-eighth birthday” (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 35). That method served as a means of “compensated emancipation,” whereby slave owners

were partially “compensated” for losing their slaves by being able to keep—and exploit—the slaves’ children until they reached adulthood.

England had ended slavery in the West Indies a mere twenty years earlier; and gradual emancipation had occurred since the turn of the century in the countries listed in the table. During and after the War between the States, peaceful emancipation was also accomplished in the Dutch colonies (1863), Brazil (1871–88), Puerto Rico (1873), and Cuba (1886) (Fogel and Engerman 1974, 33–34). Thus, from the turn of the century to 1860, slavery had been eliminated peacefully in dozens of countries, and not a single country had resorted to warfare in the process (earlier, the 1794 revolution in Haiti led to a violent overthrow of the slavocracy there).

Table 1: Peaceful Emancipation, 1813–1854

Country/Region	Year of Peaceful Emancipation
Argentina	1813
Colombia	1814
Chile	1823
Central America	1824
Mexico	1829
Bolivia	1831
Uruguay	1842
French and Danish colonies	1848
Ecuador	1851
Peru	1854
Venezuela	1854

Source: Fogel and Engerman 1974, 33–34.

Given the enormous costs of the War between the States (including more than 620,000 deaths, many thousands more crippled for life, the near destruction of some 40 percent of the nation’s economy), many Americans, North and South, in retrospect might have chosen compensated emancipation—the route much of the rest of the world had previously taken.

Lincoln did propose a compensated emancipation bill in 1862, albeit one com-

bined with his colonization plan (Basler 1946, 676). But the man whom historians would later consider to be perhaps the nation's preeminent "master politician" of all time apparently failed to utilize his legendary political skills to persuade Congress to pass the bill. Nor did he simply spend the funds to do so on a trial basis in just a few states. He did not hesitate to spend money without congressional approval for other purposes, such as sending 75,000 troops to invade South Carolina.

Nor did Lincoln demonstrate much concern for the plight of the freedmen near the end of the war. When asked by Confederate Vice President Alexander Stephens at the 1865 Hampton Roads, Virginia, "peace" conference what would become of the freedmen without property or education, Lincoln sarcastically recited the words to a popular minstrel song, "root, hog or die" (Stephens 1870, 615).

In an April 16, 1863, letter to the War Department regarding the fate of ex-slaves should emancipation become a reality, Lincoln wrote: "They had better be set to digging their subsistence out of the ground" (Berlin 1987, 306). And although the Homestead Act was passed during the war, very little land was later offered to the freedmen: 80 percent of the land went to railroad and mining companies, and much of the remainder went to new European immigrants, many of whom were recruited into the Union army with the promise of free land (Johnson 1978, 110–20).

What They Fought For

Very few of the men who fought in the War between the States believed they were fighting for or against slavery. In his book *What They Fought For, 1861–1865* (1994), James McPherson reported on his reading of hundreds of letters and diaries written by soldiers on both sides of the war on the question of what they believed they were fighting for. These men belonged to the most literate armies in history up to that point, writes McPherson; they came from the world's most politicized and democratic society; they were "preeminent" newspaper readers.

McPherson concluded that nearly all Confederate soldiers—only a small fraction of whom were slave owners—believed they "fought for liberty and independence from what they regarded as a tyrannical government." Most Unionists "fought to preserve the nation created by the founders" (McPherson 1994, 7). As one Illinois officer explained, "We are fighting for the Union . . . a high and noble sentiment, but after all a sentiment. They are fighting for independence, and are animated by passion and hatred against invaders" (19).

Fighting for the same principles the American revolutionaries of 1776 fought for was a recurring theme in almost all the letters and diaries of the Confederates in McPherson's sample. "The letters and diaries of many Confederate soldiers bristled with the rhetoric of liberty and self-government and with expressions of a willingness to die for the cause" (9).

Some Union soldiers believed they were fighting to end slavery, especially dur-

ing the final two years of the war. Many of these men were sincere abolitionists, but according to McPherson, others simply understood that taking slaves away from Southern slave owners would harm the Southern economy and therefore likely shorten the war (121–24).

Lincoln's Real Agenda: The "American System"

Lincoln had been a politician for some twenty-eight years when he was elected president in 1860 (with 34 percent of the popular vote). As previously noted, he scarcely even mentioned the topic of slavery until 1854. The political topic that *did* draw most of his attention was the economic policy platform of the Whig Party, which from 1820 until the early 1850s was literally defined by Lincoln's political idol, Henry Clay. As Johannsen (1991) has written, "From the moment Lincoln first entered political life as a candidate for the state legislature during the decisive 1832 presidential election, he had demonstrated an unswerving fidelity to the party of Henry Clay and to Clay's American System, the program of internal improvements, protective tariff, and centralized banking" (14).

During the Lincoln–Douglas debates, notes Johannsen, "the two men reflected the divergent points of view in the political culture of nineteenth-century America—Lincoln the latitudinarian concepts of national centralization and authority, Douglas the strict constructionist emphasis on local self government and states' rights" (9).

Lincoln took his political cues from Clay, whom he eulogized on July 16, 1852, as "the beau ideal of a statesman," the "great parent of Whig Principles" (Basler 1946, 264), and the "fount from which [Lincoln's] own political views flowed" (Johannsen 1991, 20). "During my whole political life," Lincoln said, "I have loved and revered [Clay] as a teacher and leader" (Basler 1946, 264).

As soon as the Whig Party began to crumble, however, Lincoln quickly abandoned it and joined the new Republican Party, all the while assuring Illinoisans that there was no difference between the principles of the Whig Party as expounded by its great leader Clay and those of the Republican Party. For "Lincoln had labored for twenty-five years in behalf of Henry Clay's American System, the program that tied economic development to strong centralized national authority, and he was not prepared to give up that investment" (Johannsen 1991, 45).

When Lincoln was warned by a political adviser that the new Republican Party included a small number of abolitionists from whom he should dissociate himself, he responded by saying, "What care we how many may feel disposed to labor for our cause?" He "would accept support from wherever he could get it, so long as he himself was not tarred with the abolitionist brush" (Basler 1946, 344).

Stephen Douglas characterized Lincoln's political intentions as wanting to "impose on the nation a uniformity of local laws and institutions and a moral homogeneity dictated by the central government," which "placed at defiance the intentions of the

republic's founders" (Johannsen 1991, 81). The rhetorical contest between Lincoln and Douglas, writes Johannsen, "was the contest all over again between the 'one consolidated empire' of the Federalists and Whigs, and the 'confederacy of sovereign and equal states' of Jefferson and Jackson" (81). "Lincoln goes for consolidation and uniformity in our government," Douglas charged, "while I go for maintaining the confederation of the sovereign states" (92).

"During the Civil War," writes Clay biographer Maurice Baxter, "Lincoln and the Republican party implemented much of the American System" that Clay had fought for during his entire career (1995, 209). The three main elements of Clay's American System were federally funded "internal improvements," considered by many to be nothing but corporate welfare for steamship, canal, and railroad businesses; high protective tariffs, leading to economic autarky; and central banking and fiat money. In short, the Clay–Lincoln American System consisted of mercantilism, protectionism, the centralization of governmental power, and inflationism.

A brief overview of some of the high points of Clay's political career reveals just what attracted Lincoln to the Whig Party from the time he was a young man.

When Clay entered national politics in 1811 as a member of Congress, one of his first actions was to help convince his colleagues to invade Canada, which they did, three times. He waged a thirty-year political battle with James Madison, James Monroe, John C. Calhoun, John Randolph, Andrew Jackson, and other defenders of the Jeffersonian philosophy of limited, decentralized, and constitutional government. Presidents Madison and Monroe both vetoed "internal improvements" bills sponsored by Clay, judging them unconstitutional (Remini 1991, 226).

Clay was unequivocally the fiercest proponent of protectionism in Congress from 1811 until his death in 1852. That advocacy brought him into lifelong conflict with Southern politicians. The majority of U.S. exports came out of the South. Because the South's economy was almost exclusively an agrarian one, high tariffs meant that Southerners would have to pay higher prices for manufactured goods, whether they purchased them from Europe or from Northern manufacturers. Since the 1820s, Southern politicians such as John C. Calhoun had ritually condemned the tariff as an unconstitutional tool of political plunder whereby Southerners were burdened by the lion's share of the cost of the tariff while most of the expenditures financed by tariff revenue took place in the North.

Thus, when Clay proposed a sharp tariff increase in 1824 (which became law), Southern members of Congress attacked it. Undeterred by the attacks, Clay then became the chief proponent of the 1828 "Tariff of Abominations," which raised tariffs even higher. The higher rates were necessary, Clay explained, because the lower 1824 tariff rates "fell short of what many of my friends wished" (Remini 1991, 232).

The Tariff of Abominations almost precipitated a secession crisis as a South Caro-

lina political convention voted to nullify the tariff. That resistance eventually forced the federal government to compromise, reducing the rates in 1833. Clay was apparently infuriated by the compromise and promised on the floor of the House of Representatives that he would someday “defy the South, the President, and the devil” himself, if necessary, to raise tariff rates once again (Baxter 1995, 75).

Clay was also a lifelong proponent of central banking. He fought a pitched political battle with Andrew Jackson (which Jackson won) over the rechartering of the Bank of the United States. Neither Clay nor any of the other Whigs ever made much of a principled argument in favor of a central bank. They merely saw it as an essential tool for the financing of all the political patronage they hoped to ladle out if the “American System” were ever realized.

As Speaker of the House of Representatives, Clay personally demonstrated the usefulness of the Bank of the United States to ambitious politicians such as himself. He used his political position to place his political cronies on the bank’s board of directors, enabling them to reward their political supporters with cheap credit. Having incurred \$40,000 in personal debt, Clay left Congress for two years in 1822 to earn money as general counsel of the Bank of the United States. As Clay biographer Maurice Baxter explains,

His income from this business apparently amounted to what he needed [to pay off the \$40,000 debt]: three thousand dollars a year from the bank as chief counsel; more for appearing in specific cases; and a sizable amount of real estate in Ohio and Kentucky in addition to the cash. . . . When he resigned to become Secretary of State in 1825, he was pleased with his compensation. (1995, 75)

One of the first things Clay did as secretary of state was to effectively endorse a policy of ethnic genocide toward the American Indians. At a cabinet meeting he announced: “There never was a full-blooded Indian who took to civilization,” for “it was not in their nature.” He “did not think them, as a race, worth preserving”; they were “inferior” to Anglo-Saxons; and their “breed could not be improved.” “Their disappearance from the human family will be no great loss to the world” (Remini 1991, 314).

Lincoln in Office: Mercantilism, Protectionism, Inflation, Dictatorship, and Total War

Upon taking office, Lincoln bent over backward to assure everyone that he had no intention to disturb Southern slavery and that, even if he wished to, it would be unconstitutional to do so. He favored strengthening the fugitive slave clause and was always willing to compromise on the issue, something which earned him the wrath of

Northern abolitionists.

Not so when it came to the tariff. With respect to the tariff, Lincoln was completely unwilling to compromise. He even promised in his First Inaugural Address to launch a military invasion of any state that failed to collect its share of tariffs. “The power confided in me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property, and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion—no using force against, or among the people anywhere” (Basler 1946, 583). To Lincoln, Southern slavery was tolerable; failure to collect tariff revenues was not.

The Morrill tariff of 1861 was passed by the House of Representatives in the congressional session preceding the election of Lincoln; the Senate passed the bill in early 1861, after Lincoln had been elected. Thus, Lincoln had little to do *formally* with the Morrill tariff in any *official* capacity. But as the Republican Party’s presidential nominee in 1860, he was the leader of the party. Given that one of the party’s top policy priorities was the Morrill tariff, it is most unlikely that Lincoln the master politician had little (or nothing) to do with it.

By 1857, wrote Frank Taussig, the maximum duty on imports had been reduced to 24 percent; many raw materials were duty free; and “the level of duties on the whole line of manufactured articles was brought down to the lowest point which has been reached in this country since 1815. It is not likely we shall see, for a great many years to come, a nearer approach to the free-trade ideal” (1931, 157).

Once the Southern Democrats had left Congress, however, the Republicans did what they (and before them the Whigs) had dreamed of doing all along: they flew into a protectionist frenzy that lasted for decades beyond the war. As Taussig explained: “In the next regular [congressional] session, in December 1861, a still further increase of duties was made. From that time until 1865 no session, indeed, hardly a month of any session, passed in which some increase of duties on imports was not made” (1931, 160). By 1862 the average tariff rate had crept up to 47.06 percent, which “established protective duties more extreme than had been ventured on in any previous tariff act in our country’s history” (167). Lincoln and the Republicans explained that the sharp tariff increases would serve to compensate Northern manufacturers, who had been heavily taxed to support the war, for their sacrifices.

Great sacrifices were being made throughout the North during the war, but not by the Northern manufacturers who bankrolled the Republican Party. For them, “great fortunes were made by changes in legislation urged and brought about by those who were benefited by them.” Congress enacted tariff legislation “whose chief effect was to bring money into the pockets of private individuals” (Taussig 1931, 167). Long after the war, “almost any increase of duties demanded by domestic producers was readily made” (166).

Most scholars either ignore or denigrate the idea that economic aims were an important cause of the War between the States, even though throughout history many

wars have been fought over economic aims. But even a casual reading of the history of the period shows that the tariff was indeed a paramount issue. Southerners, who had been protesting, nullifying acts of Congress, and threatening secession over the tariff issue since 1824, were such ardent proponents of free trade that the Confederate Constitution outlawed protectionist tariffs altogether (it did permit a revenue tariff).

The Confederate Constitution was essentially a carbon copy of the U.S. Constitution, except for the following provisions, all of which dilute the power of the central government (DeRosa 1992): protectionist tariffs were unconstitutional; government subsidies to private businesses were outlawed; no government funds could be spent on “internal improvements” except for dredging rivers and harbors; all congressional appropriations required a two-thirds majority vote, although a majority vote could be held if requested by the president; the president was given a line-item veto and limited to one six-year term; states could initiate constitutional amendments but Congress could not; central government officials could be impeached by the state legislatures as well as by the House of Representatives; and the general welfare clause of the U.S. Constitution was eliminated.

Elimination of the general welfare clause was a momentous change. For years the Whigs had attempted to manipulate the clause to justify various corporate-welfare schemes, some of which were vetoed by President Madison, the acknowledged “father” of the U.S. Constitution.

The constitutional outlawing of protective tariffs by the Southern states was regarded by Northerners as potentially devastating to their economy, especially inasmuch as England had abolished all tariffs in 1850 and France was sharply reducing its tariff rates as well. Lincoln and the Republicans simply could not tolerate a reduction in tariff rates, for as Richard Bense observed, “The tariff was the centerpiece of the Republican program” (1995, 73). Free trade in the South would have brought about a substitution of shipping from New York, Boston, and Baltimore to Charleston, Savannah, and New Orleans. This fear was widely expressed in Northern newspapers just prior to the war.

It is important to recall that in the nineteenth century most newspapers were openly associated with a political party. Therefore, newspaper editorials often expressed a party line.

The *Daily Chicago Times* candidly admitted on December 10, 1860, that the tariff was indeed a tool used by Northern manufacturers for the purpose of plundering the South, and the editor warned that that valuable mechanism for political plunder was threatened by the existence of free-trade ports in the Southern states:

The South has furnished near three-fourths of the entire exports of the country. Last year she furnished seventy-two percent of the whole . . . we have a tariff that protects our manufacturers from thirty to fifty percent, and enables us to consume large quantities of Southern cotton, and to compete in

our whole home market with the skilled labor of Europe. This operates to compel the South to pay an indirect bounty to our skilled labor, of millions annually. (Perkins 1964, 573)

“Let the South adopt the free-trade system,” the Chicago paper ominously warned, and the North’s “commerce must be reduced to less than half what it now is.” “Our labor could not compete . . . with the labor of Europe,” a “large portion of our shipping interest would pass into the hands of the South,” and “these revulsions will bring in their train very general bankruptcy and ruin” (574).

On March 12, 1861, the *New York Evening Post*, another Republican paper, advocated that the U.S. Navy “abolish all ports of entry” into the Southern states, because sending hordes of customs inspectors there to enforce the Morrill tariff would be too expensive. After all, protectionism requires “a collector, with his army of appraisers, clerks, examiners, inspectors, weighers, gaugers, measurers, and so forth” (Perkins 1964, 600).

Another Republican Party mouthpiece, the *Newark (N.J.) Daily Advertiser*, was clearly aware that the free-trade economics of Adam Smith had taken a strong hold in Britain, France, and the Southern states. The paper warned on April 2, 1861, that Southerners had apparently “taken to their bosoms the liberal and popular doctrine of free trade” and that they “might be willing to go . . . toward free trade with the European Powers,” which “must operate to the serious disadvantage of the North,” as “commerce will be largely diverted to the Southern Cities” (Perkins 1964, 601). “We apprehend,” the Republican editorial writers announced, that “the chief instigator of the present troubles—South Carolina—have all along for years been preparing the way for the adoption of free trade” and must be stopped by “the closing of the ports” in the South by military force (602).

These editors understood an economic doctrine that would be “discovered” some ninety years later by economist Jacob Viner (1950) as the trade-diversion effect of customs unions or free-trade blocks. Free trade among England, France, other European countries, and the Confederate States of America would have diverted a great deal of commerce away from the (remaining) United States unless the Union, too, reduced its tariff rates. That reduction, however, was unacceptable to Lincoln and the Republicans, who considered the tariff the “centerpiece” of their ambitious program for a greatly expanded central government.

Some Northern newspapers dissented from the protectionist zealotry of the Republican Party propaganda organs. The *New Haven Daily Register*, which supported Stephen Douglas in 1860, editorialized on February 11, 1861, that “there was never a more ill-timed, injudicious and destructive measure proposed, than the Morrill tariff bill,” because “while Congress is raising the duties for the Northern ports, the Southern [Constitutional] Convention is doing away with all import duties for the Southern ports, leaving more than three-fifths of the seafront of the Atlantic States . . . beyond the reach

of our . . . tariff” (Perkins 1964, 589–90). The Southern ports would then “invite the free trade of the world,” which would be economically damaging to the North. Leave the South alone, the Connecticut paper advised, and repeal the Morrill tariff.

That advice was not to be taken, of course, for as Bensel has astutely observed, Lincoln’s decision to wage war was just what was needed to break the logjam behind which the Whig agenda had languished for decades. The war would provide the ideal occasion for “the implementation of the political economic agenda of the groups allied within the Republican party that had been proposed and debated in the prewar period” (Bensel 1995, 2).

The Demolition of Civil Liberties

Although Lincoln is credited with “saving” the Union, he saved it only in a geographic sense. What was really saved, if not invented out of whole cloth, was the notion of federal supremacy over the states and the citizens. The existence of the Union as a *voluntary* association of states was destroyed when the South was compelled at gunpoint to remain a part of it.

Scholars may argue forever over the legality of secession, but the fact is that before the war the vast majority of Americans believed in the dictum set forth in the Declaration of Independence, that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, and that forcing the South to remain in the Union was therefore tyrannical and immoral.

Jefferson himself, the principal author of the declaration, stated in his First Inaugural Address, “If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it” (Peterson 1993, 140). Jefferson believed strongly in a state’s right of secession, although he did not necessarily think that exercising the right would be wise. If a state (or states) wanted to secede, “God bless them both and keep them in the union if it be for their good, but separate them if it be better,” he said while president (610).

The Revolution of 1776 was, after all, a war of secession. The Founding Fathers could hardly have been opposed to the principle of secession after creating their new government by that very means.

Such was the understanding of the New England Federalists who, from the time Jefferson took office in 1801 until 1814, plotted to secede. The attempted secession failed at the Hartford Secession Convention of 1814 (Banner 1970), but none of the Federalist Party leaders ever questioned the *right* of secession—only its practical wisdom.

The leader of that failed secessionist movement was the Massachusetts senator Timothy Pickering, who had previously served as adjutant general of the Revolutionary army, as a member of Congress, and as secretary of war and secretary of state in the

Washington administrations. Pickering was so upset with Jefferson that he concluded in 1803 that “the principles of our Revolution [of 1776] point to a remedy—a separation” (Adams 1877, 338). “I will rather anticipate a new confederacy, exempt from the corrupt and corrupting influence and oppression of the aristocratic Democrats of the South,” Pickering said (Adams 1877, 338).

Before the war, most American opinion makers still believed in a state’s inherent right of secession. Evidence of this belief is that the overwhelming majority of *North-ern* newspaper editors favored peaceful secession prior to the onset of the war. On February 21, 1861, Horace Greeley, the abolitionist editor of the *New York Daily Tribune*, began an editorial by saying,

The great principle embodied by Jefferson in the Declaration of American independence, that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, is sound and just; and that, if the Slave States, the Cotton States, or the Gulf States only, choose to form an independent nation, they have a clear moral right to do so. (Perkins 1964, 359)

The *New York Times* added on March 21, 1861, that “it cannot be denied that there is a growing sentiment throughout the North in favor of *letting the Gulf States go*” (Perkins 1964, 365). “Shall we, by such a policy [of invading the South], change our government from a voluntary one, in which the people are sovereigns,” the *New York Journal of Commerce* asked on January 12, 1861, “to a despotism where one part of the people are slaves? Such is the logical deduction from the policy of the advocates of force” (342).

Those sentiments were expressed far and wide throughout the North, and were perhaps best stated by the Kenosha, Wisconsin, *Democrat* on January 11, 1861:

The very freedom claimed by every individual citizen, precludes the idea of compulsory association, as individuals, as communities, or as States. The very germ of liberty is the right of forming our own governments, enacting our own laws, and choosing our own political associates. . . . The right of secession inheres to the people of every sovereign state. (335)

So widely held was the belief that the right of secession was a prerequisite to a free country that Mayor Fernando Woods of New York City proposed having the city secede from both the state and federal governments. Serious attempts were made to create a Central Confederacy in the Middle Atlantic states (Wright 1973). Secessionist sentiment was especially strong in New Jersey. The one thing all these secessionist movements seemed to have in common was a desire to form a government that did not include the New England Yankees.

The right of secession was destroyed by Lincoln’s execution of the war. Moreover, so many other civil liberties were crushed that the historians Samuel Morison and Henry Steele Commager described Lincoln as “a dictator from the standpoint of

American Constitutional law and practice" (1942, 699–700). Likewise, the political scientist Clinton Rossiter made the "Lincoln dictatorship" a major case study in his book *Constitutional Dictatorship* (1948, 223–39). As long ago as 1897 the historian William Archibald Dunning (1897) referred to the Lincoln administration as a "temporary dictatorship."

Even Lincoln's early defenders and idolaters, such as James Ford Rhodes (1900, 441), called him a dictator, but added that "never had the power of dictator fallen into safer and nobler hands." "If Lincoln was a dictator, it must be admitted that he was a benevolent dictator," claimed James G. Randall (1951, 30). The civilian victims of Lincoln's tyrannical behavior undoubtedly would have disagreed.

Among the unconstitutional and dictatorial acts performed by Lincoln were initiating and conducting a war by decree for months without the consent or advice of Congress; declaring martial law; confiscating private property; suspending habeas corpus; conscripting the railroads and censoring telegraph lines; imprisoning as many as 30,000 *Northern* citizens without trial; deporting a member of Congress, Clement L. Vallandigham of Ohio, after Vallandigham—a fierce opponent of the Morrill tariff—protested the imposition of an income tax at a Democratic Party meeting in Ohio; and shutting down hundreds of Northern newspapers (Randall 1951). Lincoln's Republican Party associates in Congress created three new states—Kansas, West Virginia, and Nevada—which helped them rig the 1864 election (Donald 1956, 79).

Voters were routinely intimidated and compelled to vote Republican by federal soldiers. "Under the protection of Federal bayonets, New York went Republican by seven thousand votes" in 1864 (Donald 1961, 81).

In Maryland, federal troops arrested and imprisoned without trial thirty-one state legislators, the mayor of Baltimore, a congressman, and dozens of newspaper editors who opposed the war. Even the grandson of Francis Scott Key was thrown into prison at Fort McHenry (Talbert 1995; Hummel 1996). All these actions were taken in the name of *preserving* constitutional government.

Centralization through Taxation

The federal government was greatly enlarged and centralized during the war. Tariff rates were raised and excise taxes were imposed on virtually all manufactured goods. Occupational licensing taxes, stamp taxes, and inheritance taxes were imposed. The first income tax in U.S. history was adopted with a top rate of 10 percent on incomes over \$10,000 (Randall and Donald 1966, 344). The income tax was eliminated in 1872, but other wartime taxes, such as the excises on tobacco products and liquor, were retained, providing a new, permanent revenue source for the federal government. A federal internal revenue bureaucracy was created for the first time, and it has grown steadily since then.

In 1860 the only contact the average citizen had with the federal government

was through mailing a letter at the post office. But by 1865 “every citizen now had direct contact with, and felt the direct influence of, the federal government. A great centralizing force had been set into motion. . . . The needs of the government had resulted in a drastic redrawing of the federal tax base. Never again would it be contracted to its prewar scope” (Curry 1968, 179).

The government went deep into debt to finance the war (thereby disguising part of its cost to the public). That enormous borrowing gave the Republicans a further excuse to enact another plank of Clay’s vaunted American System, central banking.

The National Currency Acts of 1863 and 1864 created a network of nationally chartered banks that issued national bank notes supplied to them by the comptroller of the currency. The national banks were required to hold federal government bonds as backing for their note issues—thus did the Treasury artificially increase the demand for its bonds. State banks were driven out of the business of making loans via note issue by a prohibitive 10 percent federal tax on the issuance of their bank notes. The historian Heather Cox Richardson writes approvingly of how Lincoln and fellow Republicans’ “willingness to introduce government control of the nation’s money” led inevitably to expanding “permanently the national government’s economic role in the nation” (1997, 90).

Congressman Lazarus Powell of Kentucky was not quite as enthusiastic at the time. The establishment of central banking, he ominously forecast, “would enable the national Congress to destroy every institution of the States and cause all power to be consolidated and concentrated here [in Washington, D.C.]” (Richardson 1997, 87).

But that outcome was exactly what the sponsor of the bank legislation, Senator John Sherman of Ohio, wanted. Sherman favored “the permanently increased government power embodied in the bill,” claiming it would foster “a sentiment of nationality” (87).

Opening the Floodgates of Corporate Welfare

The American military-industrial-congressional complex was born during the war as hundreds of Northern businesses developed “partnerships” with the government. Corruption became rampant and continued for decades, especially during the notorious Grant administrations (1869–1877).

With the Southern Democrats no longer a political factor, the Republicans were able to distort the general welfare clause to justify funding for pork-barrel programs that benefited narrow special interests—especially the banks and railroads that bankrolled the Republican Party—not the general public. The fifty-year constitutional debate over the permissibility of using tax dollars for corporate welfare was ended once and for all by force of arms.

The rent-seeking corporate lobbyists were so influential that even during the dark days of 1862, when the Confederates were scoring shocking victories and Lin-

coln was admittedly at the end of his rope regarding the military plan, Lincoln and the Congress diverted millions of dollars from the war effort to the building of railroad tracks in Utah, Colorado, and other western areas of the country far removed from the hostilities in the east. Government subsidies were said to be necessary for such railroads to be built. James J. Hill, however, built his own transcontinental railroad, the Great Northern Railroad, without a dime in government subsidies (Folsom 1988).

As the historian Leonard Curry has observed, “Throughout the remainder of the nineteenth century (and beyond), corporate interests—apparently insatiable—returned again and again to demand direct and indirect federal subsidies . . . national legislative and executive officers were corrupted and representative government made a mockery” (1968, 247). In 1862 the U.S. Department of Agriculture was created and quickly began dispensing farm welfare, as it has done ever since. The Clay–Lincoln American System was in full bloom.

War Crimes

Over the centuries, the rules of warfare had evolved to the point that only combatants were considered legitimate targets. The Union army disregarded that rule when it intentionally targeted civilians in an organized campaign of terror and conquest, establishing a precedent that would be followed all too commonly in the twentieth century.

Lincoln is famously known as a micromanager of the war effort. It is therefore inconceivable that he did not know of the atrocities perpetrated against unarmed civilians by federal armies. As the commander in chief, he had the power to stop the atrocities, but he did not do so. His insouciance is all the more remarkable when one considers that the victims of the atrocities were not invading armies but fellow citizens—unarmed women, children, and old men for the most part.

The Confederates were finally forced to evacuate the Shenandoah Valley by the autumn of 1864. All that remained there were small, ragged farms and towns occupied mostly by women, children, and old men. With no army to oppose him, General Ulysses S. Grant told cavalry officer Phillip Sheridan that “we want the Shenandoah Valley to remain a barren waste” and famously ordered him to make sure that even a crow flying over the valley would have to pack its own lunch (Foote 1986, vol. 1, 563). Sheridan and the Union cavalry went on a rampage of pillaging, plundering, burning, and the murdering of civilians that came to be known as “the Burning.” As one Union soldier described the scene, “The atmosphere, from horizon to horizon, has been black with the smoke of a hundred conflagrations and at night a gleam brighter and more lurid than sunset has shot from every verge. . . . The completeness of the devastation is awful. Hundreds of nearly starving people are going north” (Morris 1992, 209).

General William Tecumseh Sherman was the most notorious Union general with respect to targeting innocent civilians. In the fall of 1862 Sherman was annoyed by Confederate sharpshooters who had been targeting Union gunboats on the Mississippi

River near Memphis. He responded by burning to the ground the small town of Randolph, Tennessee. “Small Union units under his command expelled families from river towns and killed others who refused to be evacuated” (Fellman 1995, 141). Declaring that America—especially the South—was “too free and too ungoverned” (Fellman 1995, 147), Sherman waged war on civilians with a vengeance. This action included occasionally ordering his men to pick a civilian at random and kill him. In one notable instance “a Union company attacked the nearest house, that of the White family, beat to death the twenty-three-year-old boy living there, and burned down the home” (141). After the incident Sherman wrote to Grant requesting that Grant “act with magnanimity” toward the White family, who turned out to be Unionists. The following summer Sherman had his troops set fire to Jackson, Mississippi, *after the Confederate army had evacuated*, and boasted to Grant that “the [civilian] inhabitants are subjugated. They cry aloud for mercy. The land is devastated for 30 miles around . . . we have annihilated the city” (145).

Sherman’s chief engineer, O. M. Poe, was deeply disturbed by the killing of women and children during the shelling of Atlanta and expressed concerns to Sherman on several occasions. But Sherman responded only that such deaths were “a beautiful sight” because they would quicken a Union victory (184). At that time it was also Sherman’s policy to require male civilians to either take a loyalty oath or be shot (Vetter 1992, 223).

Sherman boasted of having destroyed at least \$100 million in private property during his march to the sea, and his troops carried off another \$20 million worth. One Illinois private wrote home and told of how the army would run women, children, and old men from their homes, “sometimes kill them at their own doors,” and then “take everything of value and burn the rest” (Fellman 1995, 184). “Never in modern times did soldiers have such fun,” observed a plundering Union officer (Davis 1980, 167).

When Sherman’s army finally arrived in Colombia, South Carolina, the heart of secessionism,

Ladies were hustled from their chambers, their ornaments plucked from their persons. . . . Men and women bearing off their trunks were seized . . . and in a moment the trunk burst asunder with the stroke of an axe or gun butt, the contents laid bare, rifled, and the residue sacrificed to the fire. . . . The soldiers plundered and drank. There were no reports of raped white women, but the black women of the city suffered terribly. (Davis 1980, 167)

Conclusions

All these cries of having “abolished slavery,” of having “saved the country,” of having “preserved the union,” of establishing a “government of consent,” and of “maintaining the national honor” are all gross, shameless, transparent cheats—so transparent that they ought to deceive no one.

Lysander Spooner, *American Issues* (1870)

Lincoln should be remembered as the Great Centralizer as much as the Great Emancipator. He spent nearly his entire political career prior to becoming president working in the trenches of the Whig and Republican parties, promoting centralized governmental power through protectionist tariffs, central banking, and mercantilist corporate-welfare schemes. After taking office, that long-sought centralization is exactly what he (and the Republican Party) accomplished. Lincoln's actions supported his repeated statements that he considered the emancipation policy to be only a means to an end, the end being to "save" the Union or, more accurately, to establish, once and for all, federal supremacy over the states.

Famed Northern abolitionists Charles Sumner, Wendell Phillips, and Ben Wade, who were all prominent and influential Republicans, openly admitted that the abolition of slavery was not so much a humanitarian imperative as a prerequisite to the success of their mercantilist schemes. As long as slavery existed, the three-fifths clause of the Constitution inflated Southern (and Democratic) representation in Congress, which hindered the Republicans' plans. But once freed, the ex-slaves could be easily manipulated into voting Republican—which they were. "The freedmen, loyal to the party that set them free, must have the ballot," Phillips announced (Donald 1961, 106).

By destroying the right of secession, Lincoln and the Republican Party opened the door to the unrestrained, centralized, despotic state the U.S. government has become. The great principle of the Declaration of Independence, that governments derive their just powers from the consent of the governed, was effectively overturned. Lincoln the master politician replaced it with the myth of the "perpetual union," a phrase found not in the Constitution or in the Declaration of Independence but in the "Articles of Confederation of Perpetual Union." In replacing the Articles of Confederation, however, the ratifiers of the Constitution had rendered the notion of "perpetual union" null and void.

Lord Acton, the great historian of liberty and a dominant intellectual force in Victorian England, viewed the South's defeat, conquest, and subsequent military occupation as a severe blow to the cause of liberty throughout the world. Like other British intellectuals and opinion makers, he did not believe that the primary cause of the war was slavery. In a November 4, 1866, letter to Robert E. Lee he wrote:

I saw in States Rights the only availing check upon the absolutism of the sovereign will, and secession filled me with hope, not as the destruction but as the redemption of Democracy. The institutions of your Republic have not exercised on the old world the salutary and liberating influence which ought to have belonged to them, by reason of those defects and abuses of principle which the Confederate Constitution was expressly and wisely calculated to remedy. I believed that the example of that great Reform would have blessed all the races of mankind by establishing true freedom purged of the native dangers and disorders of Republics. Therefore I deemed that you

were fighting the battles of our liberty, our progress, and our civilization; and I mourn for the stake which was lost at Richmond more deeply than I rejoice over that which was saved at Waterloo. (Fears 1985, 363)

Lee responded presciently on December 15, 1866:

While I have considered the preservation of the constitutional power of the General Government to be the foundation of our peace and safety at home and abroad, I yet believe that the maintenance of the rights and authority reserved to the states and to the people, not only are essential to the adjustment and balance of the general system, but the safeguard to the continuance of a free government. I consider it as the chief source of stability to our political system, whereas the consolidation of the states into one vast republic, sure to be aggressive abroad and despotic at home, will be the certain precursor of that ruin which has overwhelmed all those that have preceded it. (Fears 1985, 365)

The South's defeat and subjugation radically changed the very nature of American government from a decentralized, federal system to a consolidated national system and effectively destroyed local sovereignty as an effective check on the centralizing powers of the state.

The only unequivocal good that came of the war was the abolition of slavery. We are left to wonder why peaceful, compensated emancipation—which occurred throughout the Western Hemisphere in the nineteenth century—was never seriously attempted as the means of abolishing slavery in the South.

Lincoln was arguably the most successful president in U.S. history, in that he accomplished exactly what he set out to do—something that American politicians in the Federalist/Whig tradition had failed to achieve during the preceding seventy-five years, namely, turning the United States into one consolidated empire. As the Republican senator John Sherman of Ohio, a powerful figure in the Republican Party, said of Lincoln upon his election as president,

Those who elected Mr. Lincoln expect him . . . to secure to free labor its just right to the Territories of the United States; to protect . . . by wise revenue laws, the labor of our people; to secure the public lands to actual settlers . . . ; to develop the internal resources of the country by opening new means of communication between the Atlantic and Pacific. (Donald 1961, 105–6)

Translated from the politician's idiom into plain English, writes David Donald, this statement meant that Lincoln and the Republicans “intended to enact a high protective tariff that mothered monopoly, to pass a homestead law that invited speculators to loot the public domain, and to subsidize a transcontinental railroad that afforded infinite opportunities for jobbery” (106). In those endeavors, Lincoln succeeded beyond

anything he might have imagined in his wildest dreams.

References

- Adams, Henry. 1877. *Documents Relating to New-England Federalism*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Angle, Paul. 1947. *The American Reader*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
- Banner, James M. 1970. *To the Hartford Convention: The Death Struggle of the Federalists*. New York: Knopf.
- Basler, Roy, ed. 1946. *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*. New York: Da Capo.
- , ed. 1953. *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press.
- Baxter, Maurice. 1995. *Henry Clay and the American System*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky.
- Bensel, Richard. 1990. *Yankee Leviathan*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Berlin, Ira. 1987. *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bernstein, Iver. 1990. *The New York City Draft Riots*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Berwanger, Eugene H. 1967. *The Frontier Against Slavery*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press.
- Curry, Leonard P. 1968. *Blueprint for Modern America: Nonmilitary Legislation of the First Civil War Congress*. Nashville, Tenn.: Vanderbilt University Press.
- Davis, Burke. 1980. *Sherman's March*. New York: Vintage.
- DeRosa, Marshall. 1992. *The Confederate Constitution of 1861: An Inquiry into American Constitutionalism*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press.
- Donald, David. 1961. *Lincoln Reconsidered*. New York: Vintage.
- Dunning, William Archibald. 1897. *Essays on the Civil War and Reconstruction*. New York: Macmillan.
- Eliot, Charles W. 1910. *The Harvard Classics*. Vol. 43, *American Historical Documents*. New York: P. F. Collier.
- Fears, J. Rufus, ed. 1985. *Selected Writings of Lord Acton*. Vol. 1, *Essays in the History of Liberty*. Indianapolis, Ind.: Liberty Classics.
- Fellman, Michael. 1995. *Citizen Sherman*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas.
- Fogel, Robert, and Stanley Engerman. 1974. *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery*. New York: Norton.
- Folsom, Burton. 1988. *Entrepreneurs versus the State*. Herndon, Va.: Young America's Foundation.
- Foner, Eric. 1970. *Free Soil, Free Labor, Free Men: The Ideology of the Republican Party before the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Foote, Shelby. 1986. *The Civil War: A Narrative*, 3 vols. New York: Random House.

- Fremantle, Arthur J. L. 1991. *Three Months in the Southern States: April–June 1863*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press.
- Gallagher, Gary. 1998. *The Confederate War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Hummel, Jeffrey Rogers. 1996. *Emancipating Slaves, Enslaving Free Men*. Chicago: Open Court.
- Johannsen, Robert. 1991. *Lincoln, the South, and Slavery: The Political Dimension*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- Johnson, Ludwell. 1978. *Division and Reunion: America, 1848–1877*. New York: Wiley.
- Litwack, Leon F. 1961. *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790–1860*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Louisiana State University Civil War Institute. 1998. Online database available at <http://www.cwc.lsu.edu>.
- McPherson, James. 1966. *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- . 1994. *What They Fought For, 1861–1865*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.
- . 1997. *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morison, Samuel E., and Henry Steele Commager. 1942. *The Growth of the American Republic*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Morris, Roy. 1992. *Sheridan*. New York: Vintage.
- Nevins, Allan, 1959. *Ordeal of the Union*. Vol. 3, *The Improvised War*. New York: Macmillan.
- Perkins, Howard Cecil, ed. 1964. *Northern Editorials on Secession*. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith.
- Peterson, Merrill D. 1970. *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation: A Biography*. New York: Macmillan.
- , ed. 1993. *The Political Writings of Thomas Jefferson*. Monticello, Va.: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation.
- Randall, James G. 1951. *Constitutional Problems under Lincoln*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- , and David Donald. 1966. *The Civil War and Reconstruction*. Boston: D.C. Heath.
- Remini, Robert V. 1991. *Henry Clay: Statesman for the Union*. New York: Norton.
- Rhodes, James Ford. 1900. *History of the United States from the Compromise of 1850 to the Final Restoration of Home Rule at the South in 1877*. New York: Macmillan.
- Richardson, Heather Cox. 1997. *The Greatest Nation of the Earth: Republican Economic Policies during the Civil War*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Rossiter, Clinton. 1948. *Constitutional Dictatorship: Crisis Government in the Modern Democracies*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
- Stampp, Kenneth M. 1974. *The Causes of the Civil War*. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Spectrum.

-
- . 1980. *The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background of the Civil War*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Stephens, Alexander. 1870. *A Constitutional View of the Late War between the States*. Philadelphia: National Publishing Co.
- Talbert, Bart. 1995. *Maryland: The South's First Casualty*. Berryville, Va.: Rockbridge.
- Taussig, Frank. 1931. *The Tariff History of the United States*. 8th ed. New York: Putnam.
- Tocqueville, Alexis de. [1835/1840] 1945. *Democracy in America*. New York: Macmillan.
- Vanauken, Sheldon. 1989. *The Glittering Illusion: English Sympathy for the Southern Confederacy*. Washington, D.C.: Regnery/Gateway.
- Vetter, Charles Edmond. 1992. *Sherman: Merchant of Terror, Advocate of Peace*. Gretna, La.: Pelican Publishing.
- Viner, Jacob. 1950. *The Customs Union Issue*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Wright, William C. 1973. *The Secession Movement in the Middle Atlantic States*. Rutherford, N.J.: Farleigh Dickinson University Press.

Acknowledgment: This article is based on a paper presented at the Mises Institute's fifteenth anniversary conference in Atlanta, September 25, 1997.

SUBSCRIBE NOW AND RECEIVE A FREE BOOK!



"The Independent Review does not accept pronouncements of government officials nor the conventional wisdom at face value."

—**JOHN R. MACARTHUR**, Publisher, *Harper's*

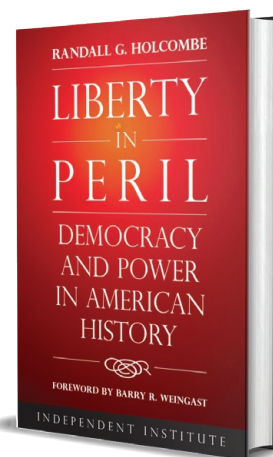
"The Independent Review is excellent."

—**GARY BECKER**, Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences

Subscribe to [*The Independent Review*](#) and receive a free book of your choice such as *Liberty in Peril: Democracy and Power in American History*, by Randall G. Holcombe.

Thought-provoking and educational, [*The Independent Review*](#) is blazing the way toward informed debate. This quarterly journal offers leading-edge insights on today's most critical issues in economics, healthcare, education, the environment, energy, defense, law, history, political science, philosophy, and sociology.

Student? Educator? Journalist? Business or civic leader? Engaged citizen? This journal is for YOU!



Order today for more **FREE** book options

SUBSCRIBE

The Independent Review is now available digitally on mobile devices and tablets via the Apple/Android App Stores and Magzter. Subscriptions and single issues start at \$2.99. [Learn More.](#)

