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Shackling the Great Emancipator: How the Nineteenth Century Press in South Carolina Helped to Shape the American National Memory of Abraham Lincoln's Racial Beliefs and Policies

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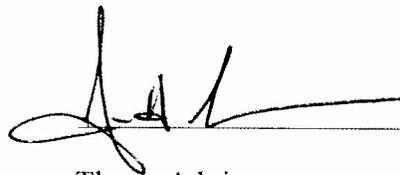
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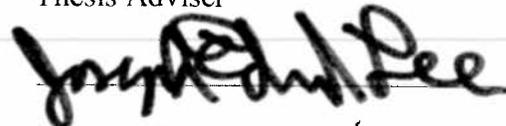
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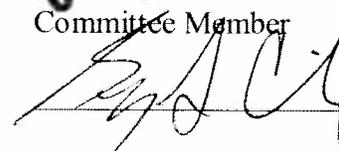
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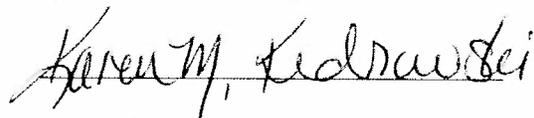
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SHACKLING THE GREAT EMANCIPATOR: HOW THE NINETEENTH-
CENTURY PRESS IN SOUTH CAROLINA HELPED TO SHAPE THE
AMERICAN NATIONAL MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S RACIAL
BELIEFS AND POLICIES

A Thesis

Presented to the Faculty

Of the

College of Arts and Sciences

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Of

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By

Elizabeth D. Oswald-Sease

Abstract

Abraham Lincoln is perhaps the most popular president in American history to date. American collective memory centers on his legacy as the Great Emancipator, a man who was beyond his time in terms of social equality and paved the way for later advancements in civil rights for African Americans in the United States. This caricature of Lincoln is fundamentally inaccurate, however. Lincoln himself repeatedly stated his devotion to the restoration of the Union, which at its fundamental core was a political entity that only encapsulated white Americans. In fact, Lincoln's eventual issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation was intended to be followed by his plan to colonize blacks out of the country in order to make the nation more economically beneficial for the white population. Lincoln, who held racial views which corresponded with the times in which he lived, was not influenced by any humanitarian motives to end the system of slavery in the South, but instead was encouraged to do so because of the Hamiltonian economic beliefs that he inherited from his idol Henry Clay. Despite these facts, Lincoln is still remembered as an early champion of African American civil rights in the popular American collective memory. This work seeks to understand that fact by examining what role the southern media, particularly that of South Carolina, played in initially perpetuating the image of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator and how the resulting caricature of Lincoln that was rooted in these sensational newspaper articles became cemented in the American public conscious immediately following his assassination.

Preface

Of all of the men who have held the title of President of the United States of America, there are few who could rival the reverence and adoration that Abraham Lincoln has inspired in American society. Lincoln is more than a historical figure for Americans. He is an idea, a testimony to the greatness that we can aspire to not only as individuals, but as a people, as a nation. Americans worship the god-like idealization of “Honest Abe” the self-made man who was born relatively poor with limited formal education, yet managed to rise, through self-determination and hard work, to the highest office in the nation. They respect him for his wisdom and courage as he navigated a tumultuous presidency bookended by war. In these ways, Abraham Lincoln has become more than a revered historical figure, but instead the embodiment of the American dream. A historical reminder to Americans that despite their lot in life, they too can achieve greatness. Above all else, however, Lincoln is cherished as the Great Emancipator; the man who freed the slaves. In the popular collective national American memory, Lincoln was a man who did not succumb to the venomous racial injustices of his time. In this caricature, Lincoln is portrayed as an enlightened man trying to spread ideas about racial equality to an unrelentingly prejudice southern Confederacy. Ultimately, he paid the price for his attempts at being an early prophet of civil rights and his status as a martyr was cemented almost immediately after he exhaled his last breath on April 15, 1865. Indeed, the

day after Lincoln's death, April 16, was Easter Sunday, a day which came to be known as Black Sunday, with many sermons throughout the northern United States holding Lincoln up as a Christ-like figure. Indeed, on the Easter Sunday, Reverend C.B. Crane of South Baptist Church in Hartford, Connecticut, was just one of many preachers who lamented Lincoln's assassination, stating, "The terrible tragedy is consummated, its heartrending denouement has transpired, there can be no revision of it, it stands the blackest page save one in the history of the world. It is the after-type of the tragedy which was accomplished on the first Good Friday, more than eighteen centuries ago, upon the eminence of Calvary in Judea."¹ Very rarely in history have politicians, or any other notable public figure, been compared to Christ, especially by religious leaders like Crane; however, Crane does not shy away from the comparison. In fact, he justifies comparing Lincoln to Christ, arguing, "Yes, it was meet that the martyrdom should occur on Good Friday. It is no blasphemy against the Son of God and the Savior of men that we declare the fitness of the slaying of the Second Father of our Republic on the anniversary of the day on which he was slain. Jesus Christ died for the world; Abraham Lincoln died for his country."² Crane was not alone in his testimony as both Black Sunday and many other Sundays for months after Lincoln's

¹ Rev. C.B. Crane, "Sermon on the Occasion of the Death of President Lincoln," *The Martyred President: Sermons Given on the Occasion of the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*, Beck Center Emory University, <http://beck.library.emory.edu/lincoln/sermon.php?id=crane.001>.

² Ibid.

assassination were marked by politically charged sermons that held Lincoln and his work as president, particularly the Emancipation Proclamation, up to the life and works of Jesus Christ.

Such an immediate martyrdom of Lincoln is not surprising given the circumstances surrounding his death. The American people were in shock at the news of his assassination and in trying to balance the competing emotions of anger and grief that tugged on the nation's collective psyche in 1865, society struggled to make sense of such a tragedy. They needed Lincoln's death to have a purpose and for there to be a higher reason for such a cruel ending to befall their leader. Lincoln's death on Good Friday, while not the root cause of his martyrdom, certainly lent an extra sense of poetic justice to his immediate elevation to martyrdom. As time progressed, the martyr theme only played an increasing role in the American memory of Lincoln and began to be a filter of sorts through which everything about his life and his administration was interpreted.

To some extent, this continues to be the truth today. Lincoln is consistently ranked as one of the most popular presidents in American history and historians have a very difficult time it seems leveling any type of criticism on the Lincoln administration. Lincoln is held up as the ideal human being and often hailed as the greatest president that has ever held the Oval Office. Indeed, in 2001 and again in 2009, Lincoln was bestowed the honor of being ranked as the

preeminent man to hold the presidential office according to the sixty-five historians and professionals who were surveyed by C-SPAN during those years.³ Time and historical study have led historians to view Lincoln in a much more positive light than he was subjected to by his contemporaries. Lincoln came to be president with a mere 39.8 percent of the popular vote, the lowest of any person to hold the oval office.⁴ As Larry Tagg notes, “Lincoln received a smaller percentage of the popular vote than nearly all the losers of two-party presidential elections,” in American history.⁵ The criticism did not stop at the ballot box for Lincoln. In fact, the man who today is represented as a beloved historical, political, and even moral icon of heroic stature was embattled throughout his entire presidency by various groups including abolitionists, slaveholders, the Confederacy, Democrats, and even his own Republican party. This is an important fact to bring to the forefront of any conversation revolving around Lincoln’s presidency, which was, in no uncertain terms, formed by the countless significant political pressures that he was forced to juggle as he tried to manage a nation that was fractured in multiple ways that were always threatening to splinter even further. Given the tense sociopolitical landscape that Lincoln had to

³ “List of Presidential Rankings,” *The Associated Press*, February 16, 2009, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/29216774/ns/politics-white_house/t/list-presidential-rankings/#.VIDZzzHF98E

⁴ Larry Tagg, “Evidence for the Unpopular Mr. Lincoln,” *Hallowed Ground Magazine*, Summer 2009, <http://www.civilwar.org/hallowed-ground-magazine/unpopular-mr-lincoln.html>. See also: Larry Tagg, *The Unpopular Mr. Lincoln: The Story of America’s Most Reviled President* (El Dorado Hills, California: Savas Beatie Press, 2009).

⁵ *Ibid.*

navigate at president, there were times when he had to act independently in order to accomplish anything at all. The series of executive orders that Lincoln issued while president led to criticism from his contemporaries and has been a point of debate amongst historians for decades. Generally, both in 1860s America and today, Lincoln's actions are regarded as either necessary, and legally rooted within the rights bestowed upon him by the Constitution, or tyrannical and unconstitutional. While many may find it quite easy to understand this debate when it comes to issues such as the blockade of the Confederate states or the suspension of the writ of Habeas Corpus, others might find it surprising that the issue of constitutionality was, and continues to be, one that was intensely debated in relation to the validity of the Emancipation Proclamation.

This is important because it proves that Lincoln was not unanimously adored by his constituents during his presidency.⁶ His presidency was marked with sociopolitical turmoil and many people felt uneasy with him at the helm of the government during such a divisive time in American history. He was, many argued, relatively inexperienced in terms of politics, and his attitude toward the south and slavery left many northerners dissatisfied. They either felt that he was not being harsh enough on the south and was not being hasty enough to end slavery or they wanted to see the Union restored and did not want the war to turn

⁶ See: John Mckee Barr, *Loathing Lincoln: An American Tradition from the Civil War to the Present* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2014).

into one aimed at securing sociopolitical equality for blacks. One must stop to consider then how Lincoln and his memory came to apotheosis in the collective American memory. This work will show that the southern press played a large role in shaping Lincoln's memory as the Great Emancipator. Indeed, it was the criticism and sensationalized accusations that the southern press ran in their newspapers from 1860-1865 that eventually become conceptualized in the American memory as the legend of Lincoln's life and presidency. It was the southern press that accused Lincoln of being the black Republican president who was determined to bring the dawn of racial equality to America during his presidency. However, time and time again Lincoln vehemently denied that this is what he aimed to do. In fact, in his First Inaugural Address, Lincoln promised to support a proposed thirteenth amendment to the United States Constitution, which, if it would have been passed, would have protected slavery in the south in perpetuity. This proposed amendment, known as the Corwin Amendment, is not something that most people would imagine that the Great Emancipator would have supported, yet the fact is that he did so publicly and fastidiously. Lincoln's primary objective during his presidency was restoring the Union for the white man. It is true that Lincoln objected to slavery, but this had more to do with his economic beliefs as a proponent of the Whig Party and Henry Clay's American

System than it ever had to do with sociopolitical equality for African Americans.⁷ Those most ardent believers in Lincoln as the Great Emancipator often point to his issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation as his saving grace in terms of his racial beliefs. The southern media of the 1860s also saw an opportunity to seize upon the proclamation as evidence of what they deemed as Lincoln's true racial deviance. In reality, however, Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation had absolutely nothing to do with obtaining civil liberties for African Americans. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that even as he drafted the Emancipation Proclamation, for which he is most revered to this day, Lincoln was working on strategies to deport black Americans to another continent in order to quell the racial discontent that had come to define the United States of America. Lincoln's intentions in the pursuit of colonization have been a hotbed of debate among historians. While some historians such as George Fredrickson, have argued that Lincoln's pursuit of colonization was a "lullaby" that he told the south in order to slowly acclimate them to the idea of emancipation and ultimately was a plan that he never intended to follow through with, others have argued that Lincoln's colonization efforts were rooted in his desire for blacks to live a peaceful life which he did not think would be possible in racialized America. While his reasons for exploring the idea of colonization may be contested, there is

⁷ See: Gabor S. Boritt, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (Champaign, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

one fact that is undeniable in regards to Lincoln and colonization, which is that Lincoln was involved, at times heavily, in the movement to colonize African Americans to another part of the world, away from the United States of America. Fredrickson's "lullaby" theory is nothing more than proof of the intellectual acrobatics that historians have initiated in order to cleanse Lincoln's record of any questionable actions that might lead one to question his racial beliefs. Lincoln's serious pursuit of colonization, as evidenced by the historical record, proves that his primary concern was the restoration of white America. He was not so concerned with black civil rights that he was willing to see a fractured America continue and he subsequently became a strong supporter of a fringe movement that had very limited support in popular American society. All of this historical evidence directly conflicts with the image of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator that has been, and continues to be, popular since his assassination.⁸

In attempting to reconcile modern memory of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator with the actual historical record of his life and administration, it is necessary to first understand collective memory and how memory shapes historical interpretation. In *Memory and History*, Joan Tumblety and several other authors seek to understand what role memory plays in historical inquiry, noting that memory has become a prevalent theme in historical studies spanning

⁸ See: Richard Barksdale Harwell, "Confederate Anti-Lincoln Literature," *Lincoln Herald* 53, no. 3 (1951): 1-7.

the last two decades. Indeed, in examining the powerful force that the context of memory has taken in recent historical work, Tumblety notes, “that historians do not approach memory just as a source but as a subject. That is, they seek evidence not only *of* memory (what is remembered), but evidence *about* memory (how and why the past is remembered in one way and not another).”⁹ Memory has the power to shape, or perhaps re-shape, history in important ways and is potentially a vital source to be considered and examined when conducting historical research. As has been noted, today Lincoln is popularly remembered as the Great Emancipator, a champion of racial equality, and is subsequently commonly revered as the most popular president in American history.

Lincoln has not always enjoyed such firm popularity, however. Indeed, although official approval ratings did not exist during his presidency, modern historians and political scientists estimate that Lincoln’s approval rating was approximately 25 percent by the time he was officially inaugurated in 1861.¹⁰ Lincoln’s approval ratings did not tick upwards throughout his first term and although he won re-election it was by a slim margin. In fact, if a mere 38,000

⁹ Joan Tumblety, ed., *Memory and History: Understanding Memory as Source and Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 2. Emphasis present in original text.

¹⁰ Tagg, *Evidence for the Unpopular Mr. Lincoln*. Historians estimate Lincoln’s approval rating, “by examining wintertime Republican losses in local elections in Brooklyn, Cincinnati, Cleveland, and St. Louis, and state elections in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island; by observations of Henry Adams that “not a third of the House” supported him; and by published reckoning of the *New York Herald* that only 1 million of the 4.7 million who voted in November were still with him. All these indications put his support in the nation at about 25 percent – roughly equivalent to the lowest approval ratings recorded by modern-day polling.”

voting Americans in select states would have voted differently, Lincoln's Democratic rival, George McClellan, would have been elected the seventeenth president of the United States in 1864.¹¹ Despite these facts, Lincoln is still revered as a man of integrity, honesty, and bravery who helped to stitch the country back together after it had been severed in half by a bloody Civil War. This leaves us with an important question to answer: how did a man whose presidential career was marked by a plague of unpopularity become the pinnacle of presidential success? Drawing upon Tumblety's idea, why do Americans collectively remember Lincoln as a martyr who died for the freedom of African Americans, a memory which arguably directly conflicts with aspects of the historical record, instead of a historically unpopular president who arguably took more liberty with the powers granted to him by the Constitution than any president who had come before him and is credited as the Great Emancipator yet had questionable beliefs about the equality of the races? This is not to argue that Lincoln, or any other historical figure, must be designated wholly to one camp or another, indeed, it would be folly to think that human nature could be so clean-cut and divisive. Yet that is exactly what society tries to superimpose onto history via the creation of collective memory. By critically examining how collective memory shapes popular history, one not only understands the power of memory

¹¹ Ibid.

and its role in history, but by looking at certain individuals, such as Lincoln, who have come to hold firm places in history via the context of collective memory, we are more able to clearly distinguish who they were and what they believed as opposed to how they and their beliefs were perceived.

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Chapter 1

The Mask of the Great Emancipator: Abraham Lincoln's Complicated Views on Race

This chapter will trace the metamorphosis of Abraham Lincoln's reputation in South Carolina through an examination of the state's newspapers. South Carolina is at once an interesting and critical state to examine because as the first state to secede from the union, a drastic measure that was directly linked to Lincoln's election in 1860, the state was perhaps the most critical of any other in regards to Lincoln's presidency. Indeed, 1860s-era South Carolinians formulated strong opinions about Lincoln, though he never stepped one foot in the state and, therefore, most South Carolinians never physically laid eyes on or heard him speak directly. Everything the people of South Carolina knew about Lincoln, they learned through the state and local newspapers to which they had access. This makes these sources crucial in understanding how the people in South Carolina perceived, understood, and characterized Lincoln.

Virtually all the way up until the week before his assassination, the newspapers in South Carolina vehemently attacked Lincoln as the "black president" who sought to destroy not only the South, but the North as well primarily through supporting what they termed amalgamation, or more plainly put, the mixing of the white and black races. In the minds of southerners, emancipation of the blacks and the establishment of civil liberties for this

community would inevitably lead not only to the end of the supremacy of white society, but to the destruction of white society as a whole. However, after Lincoln's assassination on Good Friday in 1865, his reputation undergoes a dramatic transformation in South Carolina newspapers, which, along with other newspapers across the nation, participated in and perpetuated the immediate martyrdom of Lincoln after his shockingly violent murder. Politics aside, such a shocking act of violence against an unsuspecting and unarmed man was enough to shake the foundations of even the strongest Confederate supporter. Even so, given the tones of the newspaper articles that were published in South Carolina prior to Lincoln's death, one would theorize that southern newspapers and those in South Carolina in particular, would be glorifying his assassin and praising God that the man that they saw as a tyrant had finally been removed from power. However, interestingly enough that is not what happened. For the most part, southern journalists were just as shocked and horrified by Lincoln's assassination as those in the North and the tones of the articles printed immediately following Lincoln's death echo that statement.

This notable change in tone in South Carolina newspapers is important because it points to the larger, more historical trend of the creation of the Lincoln myth, more commonly referred to as his apotheosis, in the American collective memory, which began almost immediately after he died. Simply put, Lincoln's assassination is critical in any study of him because of the major influence that it

had on the construction of his memory in the American public conscious from 1865 to the present. Had John Wilkes Booth never entered Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865, then perhaps Lincoln would be remembered as a wavering president who often changed his politics to suit the conversation or debate in which he presently found himself. Perhaps he would not then be remembered as the Great Emancipator or as the mythological president of upstanding moral virtue. However, those questions leave only room for speculation. This chapter seeks, in part, to understand what role Lincoln assassination has played in shaping collective memory of him and his presidency, which subsequently provided the basis for the historical record of Lincoln and his presidency and served as the impetus for the African American Civil Rights Movement which occurred during the Reconstruction Era.

Even before Lincoln's nomination to the presidency, the Republican Party was under fire in South Carolina. Though the official National Republican Platform would not be declared until the National Republican Convention in Chicago on May 17, 1860, southerners saw the writing on the wall when it came to the Republican Party's stance on slavery. Early on, Lincoln himself had argued against the expansion of slavery early on in his career, but his support of a protest which he and fellow state representative, Dan Stone, submitted to the Illinois State House of Representatives on March 3, 1837, as representatives from Sangamon County argued that, "the Congress of the United States has no power,

under the constitution, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different states.”¹ Despite his belief that the federal government could not interfere with slavery in states where the institution already existed, it is important to note that Lincoln firmly believed that slavery was an inherently flawed economic institution, which was ultimately impeding the economic progress and development of the South. He did not believe, and never would come to believe, that the institution of slavery should be abolished because African Americans were the social and political equals of whites. Perhaps the most important examination of this part of Lincoln’s life has been completed by Dr. Thomas J. DiLorenzo, professor of Economics at Loyola University, who notes in *The Real Lincoln*, “...to understand the real Lincoln one must realize that during his twenty-eight years in politics before becoming president, he was almost single-mindedly devoted to an economic agenda that Henry Clay labeled, ‘the American system.’”² Lincoln’s devotion to Clay’s ideas is an essential component to understanding Lincoln’s motivations and intentions as president. Similarly, historian Michael Lind demonstrates in his work *What Lincoln Believed* that in order to understand the ways in which Lincoln’s devotion to Clay impacted his political beliefs, one must first understand what Clay himself believed. As Lind

¹ Abraham Lincoln and Dan Stone, *Protest in Illinois Legislature on Slavery*. March 3, 1837. Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): VI, 75-76.

² Thomas J. DiLorenzo, *The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda and an Unnecessary War* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2003): 2.

writes, “While Clay is often thought of as a Hamiltonian, this expresses only half the truth. There was more to Henry Clay’s program for the United States than his Hamiltonian American System. The other half of Clay’s unique synthesis was a grandiose program of social engineering, which he inherited from Thomas Jefferson: a plan to create an all-white America by means of the removal of all blacks from the United States.”³ Clay’s goal was to advance America by phasing out the agrarian based southern economy in preference for the northern based industrialization. In doing so, he also aimed to eliminate the entire black population from the country in order to elevate the society by preventing further amalgamation and to stabilize the American economy for white labor.

These economic, political, and social ideals of Clay heavily influenced Lincoln in ways that run directly parallel with his image as Great Emancipator. In fact, in *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom*, Hanes Walton, Jr. and Robert C. Smith echo George Fredrickson’s argument that Lincoln was a, “pragmatic white supremacist,” noting that despite the fact that Lincoln despised slavery, he did so on the grounds of its economic absurdity, not his belief that the enslavement of African Americans was morally reprehensible.⁴ In fact, Lincoln said that he believed that blacks were, “inferior in

³ Michael Lind, *What Lincoln Believed: The Values and Convictions of America’s Greatest President* (New York: Knopf Double Day Publishing Group, 2006): 84.

⁴ Hanes Walton, Jr., and Robert C. Smith, *American Politics and the African American Quest for Universal Freedom* (New Jersey: Pearson Longman, 2011): 227.

color and perhaps moral and intellectual endowment.”⁵ Moreover, Lincoln’s belief in the inequality of the races was expressed many times throughout his career. At a speech in Springfield, Illinois on July 17, 1858, Lincoln plainly stated, “What I would most desire would be the separation of the white and black races.”⁶ These are not words that one commonly associates with the Great Emancipator. Lincoln himself unabashedly repeated phrases similar to this throughout his life and presidency. Both his actions and words make it clear that he was not concerned with securing civil liberties for African Americans and, furthermore, he was initially only concerned with slavery as it related to the territories.

Although it is clear that Lincoln’s political agenda was not focused on securing civil liberties for African Americans, southerners immediately jumped to this conclusion at the mere mention of the abolishment of slavery. Lincoln commented on this situation himself in a letter to James N. Brown dated October 15, 1858, in which he remarked, “...I have expressly disclaimed all intention to bring about social and political equality between the white and black races, and, in all the rest, I have done the same thing by clear implication. I have made it equally plain that I think the negro is included in the word ‘men’ used in the

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Abraham Lincoln, “Speech at Springfield, Illinois.”(speech, Springfield, Illinois, July 17, 1858), Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1952): VII, 521.

Declaration of Independence...But it does not follow that social and political equality between whites and blacks, *must* be incorporated, because slavery must *not*. The declaration does not so require.”⁷ In Lincoln’s mind, there was a clear distinction between natural rights, which were guaranteed by the Declaration of Independence, and civil rights, which were granted through the Constitution. For him, African Americans were entitled to natural rights as human beings, but that did not therefore mean that they also were entitled to the civil rights enumerated in the Constitution and Declaration of Independence. Plainly put, they had a right to be free from bondage, but that was the limit of the freedom guaranteed for blacks in Lincoln’s eyes. They did not have a right to vote or maintain an equal level in any sociopolitical setting with their white counterparts.

Despite these deeply held beliefs, southern journalists continue to paint Lincoln as a civil rights champion much to his exasperation. Lincoln’s frustration at being portrayed as the savior of the enslaved was not without merit, but it should be noted that it was not necessarily a personal grievance with him that led the media to pursue this route of action. Before Lincoln was named as a contender for the presidency, southern newspapers were disparaging the entire Republican Party for espousing an abolitionist agenda. South Carolina newspapers were no exception to this trend. Tellingly, an article published in the

⁷ Abraham Lincoln to James N. Brown, 15 October 1857, Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): VIII, 328 (emphasis present in original text).

Keowee Courier on January 21, 1860, that Republicans were inherently unpatriotic and chiefly to blame for trying to dismantle the union, stated, that Republicans could, “resolve and speak in favor of the Union and then go and vote the Republican ticket, they can expect nothing else but to be treated as hypocrites and false pretenders to a patriotism they do not possess...The Union cannot be saved if the Republican party is not put down. And that great work is to be done by votes. The ballot box is now and, was may say, at all times, and only, the preserver of the Union.”⁸ For southerners, if you were Republican then you were not only anti-Union, but anti-southern, as well. Southerners believed that the Republican Party was fundamentally anti-American because of the way in which the party attacked southern liberty. From early on, long before Lincoln was even a contender for the Republican nomination, southerners deeply believed that the election of a Republican president would end life as they knew it. At this point in history for the South, it did not matter which Republican candidate was to become the official nominee as the region had clearly drawn a line in the sand early in 1860 and made it clear that they would not accept any Republican candidate as their president.

This theme of sectional struggle continued at full-steam upon Lincoln’s official nomination as the Republican candidate for president. Although it is fair

⁸ Editorial, *Keowee Courier*, (Pickens, South Carolina), January 21, 1860.

to postulate that the South and the southern media would have attacked any Republican candidate based on the party's platform, the research that southern journalists performed into Lincoln's past only perpetuated their anti-Republican crusade. Eventually, the emphasis shifted, at least in part, away from the Republican Party as a whole and became more centralized towards Lincoln as the attacks focused on his personal character or, perhaps more better described, perceived lack thereof. The August 11, 1860, edition of the *Keowee Courier* noted that, "There are now two great sectional partisan organizations in the United States – the one a southern party, supporting Mr. Breckinridge (sic), and the other the northern abolition faction, represented by Mr. Lincoln...The line has been drawn between the two sections of the country, and the struggle for political supremacy on the part of the North, and political equality on the part of the South, has already commenced."⁹ Although the South had made up its mind that it was going to staunchly oppose any Republican candidate in the election of 1860, Lincoln had been particularly vocal about the need for slavery's containment within the South and believed that the economic inefficiency inherent within the institution would eventually lead it to its own demise. Lincoln's well-publicized comments that he made during the infamous Lincoln-Douglas debates became a point of particular contention between him and the southern media. More

⁹ Editorial, *Keowee Courier*, (Pickens, South Carolina), August 11, 1860.

specifically, southern journalists seized upon the accusations levied upon Lincoln by Douglas during these debates, which often put Lincoln on the defensive. Lincoln had to repeatedly clarify his stance on slavery and race when attacked by Douglas, who directly accused him of being not only an abolitionist, but also a supporter of equal rights and liberties for the black American population. In the same debates, Douglas recurrently assailed Lincoln as wavering in his beliefs regarding the issues of social and political equality for African Americans. For instance, in their fifth debate at Galesburg on October 7, 1858, Douglas remarked, "...Mr. Lincoln said if the Declaration of Independence declaring all men to be born equal did not include the negro and make him equal to the white man, then he says, 'let us take the Statute book and tear it out.' He then took the ground that the negro race was included in the Declaration of Independence as the equal of the white race – that there could be no such thing as distinction in races, making one superior and the other inferior."¹⁰ Despite the fact that Lincoln poignantly rebutted these accusations, Douglas' inflammatory indictments armed southern journalists with an arsenal of criticisms and accusations that they waged against Lincoln on the pages of their publications through sensational articles.

Although Lincoln repeatedly clarified his views about race to clearly outline the fact that he was indeed a white supremacist, white southerners sank

¹⁰ Stephen Douglas, "Fifth Joint Debate with Abraham Lincoln." (speech, Galesburg, Illinois, October 7, 1858), in *The Lincoln Douglas Debates*, ed. Harold Holzer (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993): 244.

their teeth into the idea that Lincoln was anti-southern because he was pro-black. For instance, in the same article that noted the tense sectionalism that defined the country after Lincoln's official nomination, the *Keowee Courier* called southerners to political arms warning that, "if the black republican candidate [Lincoln] should be elected, we can expect nothing but renewed and more bitter agitation, ending finally in the disruption of the confederacy and consequent downfall of the republic. Men and brethren ponder upon these things!"¹¹ Similarly, an article published in the same newspaper on November 17, 1860, refused to give credit to Lincoln's repeated public statements of his moderate political views and belief in white supremacy stating, "It would be altogether unwise for the South to trust either to the presumed moderation of Abraham Lincoln, or to the presumption of his 'infidelity to his own party.' We must stare the truth full in the face. The idea of submission to Black Republican rule, under any pretext, is as dangerous as it is degrading. The only question to be decided at this moment, is that which concerns the most effectual mode of repelling aggression."¹² Lincoln's consistent refutation of these accusations fell on deaf ears in the South. The idea that the Republican Party was established for the abolishment of slavery and sought to create social and political equality for blacks had long since taken root in the collective southern mind and was only further

¹¹ Editorial, *Keowee Courier*, August 11, 1860. This article uses the term confederacy to mean the Union, not the confederate government of the South.

¹² Editorial, *Keowee Courier*, (Pickens, South Carolina), November 17, 1860.

inflamed once the media sensationalized Douglas' earlier accusations of Lincoln upon Lincoln's presidential nomination. There was virtually nothing that Lincoln could do or say to reverse this fact. Therefore, from early on, Lincoln was unable to fight the media's portrayal of him as a "black president" whose only concern was the liberation of the enslaved and the subsequent destruction of not only the southern economy, but of its social and political foundation, its way of life.

Despite all of his previous efforts at easing the minds of the southern population about his intentions as President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln was forced to use his First Inaugural Address to inform the entire nation what his intentions were in regards to the South and the issue of slavery. Lincoln wasted no time dealing with the issue at hand and instead chose to confront the controversial issue of slavery from the moment he began to speak, stating, "Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the southern states that, by the accession of a Republican Administration, their property and peace and personal security are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed, and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all of the public speeches of him who now addresses you. I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere

with the institution of slavery in States where it now exists...”¹³ Looking back upon those words, it is quite clear that Lincoln was not concerned with abolishing slavery in the South and therefore certainly did not intend to grant civil liberties to blacks. He believed that the institution of slavery would eventually die a natural death in the southern region and because that was a fact in his mind, he did not need to further inflame the tense political landscape by meddling with southern slavery. Furthermore, he did not believe he had the constitutional authority to abolish slavery in the South at the beginning of his administration. Initially, his desire to limit slavery only extended to the new territories in the West. He simply did not believe that slavery should be incorporated into the new territories as the American nation expanded across the North American continent, an opinion that was rooted in his belief that the slave system was economically inefficient. Moreover, to allow slavery to spread into those areas would perpetuate not only the South’s reliance on the institution, but might strengthen the financial foundations of the institution, thus prolonging its inevitable demise. This fact is important not only in examining the bias and sensationalism of the southern media in regards to the Lincoln Administration and the Republican Party, but also for understanding Lincoln’s true intentions as a proponent for the *eventual*,

¹³ *The Anderson Intelligencer*, (Anderson, South Carolina), March 7, 1861.

strategic abolition of slavery, a plan which was based on economic, and not humanitarian grounds.

Though we remember Lincoln as the Great Emancipator today, the fact that he was unconcerned and unwilling to confront the issue of slavery in the South proves that he was not concerned with promoting equal rights for the enslaved. Lincoln's stance on slavery had very little to do with any humanitarian concerns that southern newspapers tried to argue that he harbored and everything to do with the fact that he thought that slavery was an unsound economic foundation for the southern region of the United States. Indeed, Lincoln's beliefs in the rights that enslaved African Americans held did not extend beyond their right to be free of enslavement, a fact that he made clear during a speech that he delivered in Springfield, Illinois on July 17, 1858, in which he said, "Certainly the negro is not our equal in color – perhaps not in many other respects; still, in the right to put into his mouth the bread that his own hands have earned, he is the equal of every other man, white or black."¹⁴ The man that we remember as the Great Emancipator clearly did not believe that blacks were equal to whites. He did, however, believe that blacks were human beings and as such they had been endowed with the same natural rights as whites had, which meant that they should be allowed to live their lives free from the chains of bondage. In fact, in the first

¹⁴ Abraham Lincoln, "Speech at Springfield, Illinois." (speech, Springfield, Illinois, July 17, 1858), Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): VII, 520.

joint debate between Lincoln and Douglas which occurred in Ottawa on August 21, 1858, Lincoln clearly stated, “I have no disposition to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together on terms of respect, social, and political equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a superiority somewhere, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position...”¹⁵

These public statements from Lincoln himself give us great insight into his views on slavery and equality between the races and allow one to see that while he did acknowledge the fact that blacks had natural rights that were equal to those of whites, they were, in his mind, in no way the intellectual, social, or political equals of their white counterparts. Despite this fact, southern newspapers continued to portray him as a man focused solely on bringing about a social reformation that would establish equality between the races. Even though Lincoln used his First Inaugural Address to once again clearly outline his intentions, newspapers in South Carolina twisted every word he spoke to fit the preconceived notions that they held about him and his intentions and to further the agenda of the newly established Confederate States of America. An article which was

¹⁵ Abraham Lincoln, “First Joint Debate with Stephen Douglas.” (speech, Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858) in *The Lincoln Douglas Debates*, Holzer., ed., 63.

published in the *Keowee Courier* on March 9, 1861, summarized Lincoln's address by stating, "After reaffirming his faith in one of the least objectionable principles upon which he was elected, (interference with slavery in the states) he proceeds with an argument to show how the union is not dissolved! And must be perpetual...The inaugural taken as a whole is a specious document. Serpent like, Lincoln, veiled under the subtlety (sic) of Republican logic, greets the South at the threshold with words of apology adorned with the thorn...Spurn him as you would as he is the enemy of mankind and liberty!"¹⁶ Though Lincoln meant to calm the nerves of anxious southerners reports such as this of his inaugural address only fanned the flames of secession throughout the country. Indeed, the *Edgefield Advertiser* reported March 13, 1861, that following Lincoln's inaugural address, "the rage of secession [was] beyond all expectation. The inaugural of Lincoln has crushed completely the Union sentiment...everyone in Richmond seems to be for secession."¹⁷ The foundation had been laid for secession before Lincoln's official nomination, it could be argued, and he was unable to reverse the tide of anti-northern, anti-Republican, and ultimately anti-Lincoln opinion that enamored the South in the early 1860s.

Lincoln continued to experience this frustrating relationship with the southern media throughout his entire presidency. As Merrill D. Peterson has noted

¹⁶ Editorial, *Keowee Courier*, (Pickens, South Carolina), March 9, 1861.

¹⁷ *The Edgefield Advertiser*, (Edgefield, South Carolina), March 13, 1861.

in *Lincoln in American Memory*, Lincoln was relentlessly scrutinized and mimicked in southern newspapers. Peterson argues that, “the confederate image of Lincoln took form in the election of 1860 and developed in the early years of the war. In it he was not only a ‘Black Republican,’ but a figure of vulgar satire, half-buffoon and half-gorilla. He was mercilessly caricatured as a harem-dancer lifting the veil to reveal the Negro face, as a Don Quixote astride a wear horse in pursuit of racial equality...”¹⁸ Despite the fact that every word that Lincoln uttered was a stark comparison to the caricature of him that southern newspapers propagated, Lincoln’s word and actions, as powerful as they were and are now remembered, were not enough to override the image of him that was perpetuated by the southern media of the time.

Due to his contentious relationship with the southern media, Lincoln was forced to restate his political positions repeatedly throughout his presidency; however, his attempts were in vain as the southern media continually found new ways to skew his agenda through their biased lens. This pattern continued all the way up to his assassination in 1865. However, interestingly, the assassination of President Lincoln in 1865 offers a unique and critical turning point in the analysis of the portrayal of Lincoln in South Carolina newspapers. Take for instance the fact that on April 21, 1865, five days after Lincoln’s assassination, *The Columbia*

¹⁸ Merril D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 45.

Phoenix re-printed an article that was originally published in the London *Standard*, which when covering Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address stated, "Mr. Lincoln in 1861 could claim with some show of reason, to be President of the whole thirty four states; for, though fifteen had unanimously and peremptorily rejected him, they had taken part in the election which led to his triumph. Mr. Lincoln in 1865 is manifestly the President of only the North. Not only have the eleven Confederate States taken no part whatever in the election, but they have been excluded from it by formal and express legislation...To treat Mr. Lincoln as President over the southern states...is to commit ourselves to a whole tissue of absurdities..."¹⁹ Though this article was written in London, the fact that *The Columbia Phoenix* chose to reprint it shows that they identified with the beliefs expressed in this article. It also more than likely gave them some vague hope that at the eleventh hour Great Britain might recognize them as an independent state and help in their effort even though Lee had already surrendered at Appomattox Court House by this time. It could be argued that South Carolina press hoped that Lincoln's assassination, though it is not mentioned directly in this particular article, would revitalize their war effort. This, however, was the desperate hope of a badly beaten, war-torn region; hopes that were irrefutably illogical. Lincoln's

¹⁹ *The Columbia Phoenix*, (Columbia, South Carolina), April 21, 1865.

death did not breathe new life into the Confederacy, much to the dismay of John Wilkes Booth and his Confederate counterparts.

Articles of this nature are not surprising given the southern media's proclivity to skew Lincoln's words and images to fit their cause. What is peculiar is the fact that after running this re-printed article right after Lincoln's death, the same newspaper, *The Columbia Phoenix*, ran a memorial article honoring President Lincoln on June 14, 1865. In this article, the *Phoenix* gave a biographical sketch of Lincoln's life, highlighting his humble origins and hard-working nature. After spending years painstakingly combing through every word and action of Lincoln looking for anything to expose him as the "black president" they knew him to be, suddenly southern journalists, even those that were hotbeds of secessionist sentiment such as South Carolina, began to give Lincoln credit for his humanity and honesty, at least in their printed media. The *Phoenix* article, for instance, remembered Lincoln's presidential legacy in the following way:

"Abraham Lincoln enjoyed no striking natural advantages of person or intellect. He was neither beautiful in feature, nor graceful in manner; he was not even eloquent. He was an admirable debater, mainly because he took care to thoroughly master and comprehend any subject before he attempted to discuss it; and his speeches were transparently *honest* and *candid*. *No bearer failed to realize that he fully believed what he uttered, and had undoubting faith in the views he maintained and commended...* Unyielding tenacity of purpose and

resolution was a marked characteristic of our lost chief.”²⁰ It is quite telling and interesting that the same newspaper had such a marked change in its reporting on Lincoln in such a relatively short amount of time. One wonders if this could be attributed to some conscious or subconscious fear that now that Lincoln was gone there would be no moderation from the North as it approached the subject of the South’s reconstruction.

This interesting reversal in Lincoln’s portrayal was not limited to South Carolina media alone. In fact, as Michael Davis points out in *The Image of Lincoln in the South*, although there were large outbursts of joy at the news of Lincoln’s death and a brief reinvigoration on the part of southern belief that their cause was not entirely lost, “...there is ample record that many southerners truly were appalled by Lincoln’s murder.”²¹ The motive behind this emotion was varied with some southerners truly disgusted by the idea of such a cowardly murder while others feared that the South would be punished even more severely as retribution not only for the war, but now also for Lincoln’s gut-wrenching murder. As Davis notes, “More mundane southerners feared the immediate wrath of the Yankees. The ascension to power of Andrew Johnson – ‘that vulgar renegade’ – filled southern hearts with fear and disgust.”²² Upon Lincoln’s death,

²⁰ *The Columbia Phoenix*, (Columbia, South Carolina), June 14, 1865. (italics added for emphasis by author).

²¹ Michael Davis. *The Image of Lincoln in the South* (Knoxville, Tennessee: University of Tennessee Press, 1971): 101.

²² *Ibid.*

many southerners began to see that he had been their best hope for an easy and peaceful period of reconstruction. They now feared that without Lincoln to control the tide, the fury of the Radical Republicans and all those in the North who were outraged over Lincoln's assassination, would wash over the South with unrelenting ferocity. It is possible that once the southern media realized that the Civil War had inarguable come to an end they began to run memorial articles remembering Lincoln in a positive light as a way to convince their northern counterparts that they did not support this act with the hopes of possible quelling the tide of northern aggression that was mounting over his murder.

Though self-preservation undoubtedly played at least some role in motivating the southern media to reexamine Lincoln, Davis notes that one must not altogether discredit the humanity of southerners in regards to their reaction to Lincoln's assassination. Davis points out that, "the shock of the Confederacy's collapse and the President's assassination forced many southerners to see Lincoln in a new light...the conjecture that had Lincoln lived he would not have permitted Radical Reconstruction grew into an article of southern faith. Many ex-rebels, and their children, never would forgive nor forget. But a new image of Lincoln was taking shape in the South, one which was to become an instrument for eroding old sectional hatreds and for rebuilding a new American national consciousness."²³

²³Ibid., 104.

Though Lincoln faced historical levels of unpopularity during his presidency, his assassination on Good Friday elevated him to martyrdom and his memory quickly became gilded into the Christ-like, Great Emancipator figure that we remember today; the truest American hero.

The sudden change that Lincoln's assassination brought to American consciousness both in the North and the South leaves one to ponder what his legacy may have been had he lived. In referencing the aforementioned ideas espoused by Tumblety, we must ponder at least two important questions: How has our collective memory of Abraham Lincoln been shaped by his untimely death?; and to what extent was his memory as the Great Emancipator constructed from sensationalized newspaper articles that were printed by the southern media? It is true that Abraham Lincoln did more to help the enslaved African American community than any other president before him, yet that was not his true intention, at least not in the beginning. In a telling letter dated August 22, 1862 to Horace Greeley Lincoln stated, "My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save 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. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do

because I believe it helps to save the Union..."²⁴ These words were physically written by Lincoln himself, yet, despite evidence to the contrary, collectively he is remembered as the savior of the enslaved African Americans, a champion of equality, a man before his time. Indeed, he is most fondly remembered for beliefs that southerners blaringly accused him of, beliefs which he vehemently denied. In re-examining the historical record, we see that it is not quite so easy to attribute these modern heroic descriptions to Lincoln. Ultimately, the truth of Lincoln has become masked in the caricature of him as the Great Emancipator, which has its roots, arguably, in southern newspapers such as those of South Carolina, who sought from early on to portray him as a man intent on liberating the black race.

Lincoln was first and foremost a politician who rose to the executive office at a time during which the nation was strikingly divided along both geographic and ideological sectional lines. On a most fundamental level, Lincoln would counter any accusations that he was a champion of civil rights with the argument that he simply could not be concerned with saving the enslaved because as President of the United States he was charged to hold the restoration of the Union as his highest priority and foremost responsibility. Lincoln could not simultaneously be the Great Emancipator and the savior of the Union during the time in which he lived because the two were not compatible. The South was not

²⁴ Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, 22 August 1862, Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): VV, 389.

going to willingly be a part of a Union that outlawed slavery, at least not early on, and Lincoln understood that initially. For this reason, he tried boldly to preserve the system of slavery in the southern states. In fact, had Lincoln unflinchingly extended his argument by proclaiming that because blacks were included in the phrase “all men are created equal” in the Declaration of Independence, then they too were rightfully protected under the United States Constitution, the Border States, and even the northern states, would not have supported him. Lincoln, being the consummate politician that he was, knew this and therefore would not have made such a claim. Racism against blacks was not simply an epidemic confined within southern borders. It was pervasive throughout 1860s America and subsequently impacted Lincoln’s policies as president.

However, we must also remember that Lincoln was not simply towing the political line. Lincoln *was* a man of his time, who held at least some racist tendencies that are not only recorded in the historical record, but directly conflict with the image of the Great Emancipator that he is associated with today. Despite this evidence, however, the fact remains that the Great Emancipator did issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which many people, incorrectly, attributed to the end of slavery. If Lincoln did not believe in racial equality, what motivations would have led him to issue the Emancipation Proclamation and what did he plan to do with blacks post emancipation? These are complex questions that will be examined more completely in chapter three. First, one must consider whether or

not Lincoln had the constitutional authority to issue the proclamation in the first place, which will be the focus of chapter two.

Chapter 2

Why the Emancipation Proclamation Does Not Emancipate the Great Emancipator's Problematic Racial Record

Although it is clear that Lincoln's record on racial equality is not as pristine as revisionist history would have society believe, this fact only further complicates Lincoln's decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, which is arguably one of the most notable achievements associated with his presidency, and the root source of his title as Great Emancipator. There are two major issues that must be considered when one analyzes Lincoln's issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation in light of his racial beliefs. First of all, one must wade into the deep debate revolving around whether or not Lincoln had the constitutional authority to issue the proclamation in the first place. This is important because if Lincoln, a man of unmistakable intelligence with a supreme understanding of the nuances of constitutional law, issued the proclamation with the knowledge that he did not have the constitutional authority to do so, then that has possible consequences for the historical analysis. However, if, as this chapter intends to prove, Lincoln was within his constitutional realm of authority to issue the proclamation, then one must secondly consider why he would choose to do so if he was not devoted to guaranteeing civil liberties and rights for African Americans. The answer to this question is more complicated and will be

subsequently be explored in chapter three, which delves into Lincoln's participation in the movement to deport black Americans.

The idea of emancipation was intensely debated by Americans when the preliminary proclamation was released in 1862. For abolitionists, the proclamation did not go far enough as it only freed slaves in areas that were in rebellion, the Confederacy, and, perhaps even more infuriating to the abolitionists, only insured freedom for those slaves who resided in areas under rebellion that had been returned to federal control. Some Republicans felt that the proclamation was ill-timed and ran the risk of forcing the Border States to join the Confederate cause. Specifically, in his article, "A Bill of Lading Delivers the Goods: The Constitutionality and Effect of the Emancipation Proclamation", James A. Dueholm notes that Benjamin Curtis, a former associate Supreme Court justice that was perhaps best known for his dissent in the Dred Scott decision, argued that the Constitution did not enable the president the power to declare laws and even though, "the president could confiscate slaves that came into union lines...[he] could not constitutionally deprive slave owners of their property beyond those lines."²⁵ Indeed, once Lincoln announced the proclamation, the intent of the war changed drastically for some in the North. Many Irish citizens burned their draft

²⁵ James A. Dueholm, "A Bill of Lading Delivers the Goods: The Constitutionality and Effect of the Emancipation Proclamation," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 31, no. 1 (2010): 22-38. Accessed December 5, 2014: <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/j/jala/2629860.0031.104/--bill-of-lading-delivers-the-goods-the-constitutionality?rgn=main;view=fulltext>

notices to protest the proclamation. These individuals, and others like them, were supportive of fighting a war for the sake of restoring the Union; however, they were not willing to go to battle for black freedom, which they felt the proclamation represented. Still others, namely southern Democrats and Confederates, but also some congressional Republicans in the Union, felt that Lincoln outright lacked the constitutional authority to make such a proclamation in the first place. Yet still others, most notably the Radical Republicans, argued that President Lincoln's proclamation was constitutionally grounded in the war powers that were granted to him by the Constitution.

The debate over the constitutionality of the Emancipation Proclamation was not confined to 1860s America. In fact, whether or not Lincoln was enabled by the Constitution to issue such a declaration is a point that continues to be hotly contested by historians. However, before an examination of the overall constitutionality of the Emancipation Proclamation can begin, it is important to note the radical transformation that this document has undergone within the public purview since its inception in 1862-1863. While many Americans in 1860s would have undoubtedly argued that there was a sound argument to be made against the legality of the Emancipation Proclamation, one would be hard pressed to find a contemporary counterpart that would make this argument. Somehow, this document has gone from being characterized as one which, according to an article published in *The Holt County Sentinel* in Oregon, Missouri

on February 21, 1868, “not only violated [the Constitution but left it], broken, bent, destroyed, demolished, broke all to flinders, knocked into pi (sic)...utterly and forever gone up and done for – [so much so that] no vestige of it remained,” to one of the most revered documents in American history that encompasses the very essence of what most modern Americans believe that the Constitution stands for.²⁶ The answer can be found in the study of how public memory impacts how the average citizen perceives history, despite what is actually found in the examination of the historical record.

As Tumblety has demonstrated, the concept of collective memory is essential in understanding how public perception of historical people or events influences how history is recollected by society as a whole.²⁷ In sum, while historians continue to debate the legality of the proclamation, it is not unfair to argue that this debate has become virtually relegated to the academy. In the current court of public opinion, both the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln have been vindicated due, in large part, to the gains made by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the subsequently ever-expanding idea since then of who the clause “freedom and equality for all,” encompassed, especially in light of the passage of the 13th Amendment. It could also be argued that the public’s perception of Lincoln and his presidency has also been positively influenced by

²⁶ “Another Smash-Up,” *The Holt County Sentinel* (Oregon, Missouri), February 21, 1868.

²⁷ Joan Tumblety, *Memory and History*, 2.

the recent surge in public interest in his life and times, which has led to the making of several blockbuster films and many books about him making their way on to bestseller lists.

Despite the fact that the modern American collective memory seems to have cleared Lincoln of any tyrannical motivations for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, the issue continues to be influential in continuing historical study of Lincoln. Diluted to its most basic foundation, the argument centers around Article 1, Section 8, Clause 11 of the Constitution, commonly referred to as the War Powers Clause, which grants Congress the power, “to declare war, grant letters of marque and reprisal, and make rules concerning captures on land and water.” Furthermore, the Constitution reserves for Congress the right, “to provide and maintain a navy” (Clause 13), and, “to provide for calling forth the militia to execute the laws of the union, suppress insurrections and repel invasions,” (Clause 15). Meanwhile, the President of the United States is granted some war power in Article 2, Section 2 of the Constitution, which states, “The President shall be commander in chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the militia of the several states, when called into the actual service of the United States.” In sum, Congress has the power to declare war, which subsequently grants the president power to act as commander in chief, from which he derives his war powers. The intent of the framers in organizing the government in this manner was that the Legislative and Executive branches would have to work in

concert with one another in order to enter in to a declaration of war and to pursue military actions. When reading these excerpts from the Constitution, it seems quite clear that the President is unable to execute military action without seeking the consent and approval of Congress beforehand; however, this has been repeatedly proven to not be the case throughout American military history. Indeed, the United States has only declared war five times throughout its more than 200-year history, however, the country has found itself in the midst of long-term, armed conflict countless times over this same span. The Legal Information Institute hosted by Cornell University Law School explains that, “While some scholars believe the Commander-in-Chief Clause confers special powers on the President, others argue that, if the President does have these powers, the Constitution does not provide how far the President may go. These scholars wish to construe the Clause narrowly, claiming that the Founders gave the President the title to preserve civilian supremacy over the military, not to provide additional powers outside of a Congressional authorization or declaration of war.”²⁸ As the Legal Information Institute also notes, there is some ambiguity around whether or not the president is imbued with specific “emergency powers” that although not exclusively granted to the Executive Branch in the Constitution the framers wrote the document in a way that allowed the office to operate more quickly and

²⁸ “War Powers,” http://www.law.cornell.edu/wex/war_powers.

efficiently in times of crisis as opposed to the capabilities, or lack thereof, for the Legislative Branch to do so.²⁹ It should be noted, however, that in times when it has had to weigh in on this issue, the Supreme Court has ruled that the President only has the power to act in times of crisis only if he first received permission from Congress.³⁰

Given these facts, one must therefore consider how the heavy and complicated legalistic language of the Constitution applies to the Civil War, specifically to Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. Interestingly, the Civil War was not one of the five times that Congress has declared war in the history of the United States. Lincoln never viewed the turmoil as a legitimate war because in his mind secession was not a legal reality because it was not outlined in the Constitution and therefore the southern states never had a right to pursue it in the first place. He made this view clear in his First Inaugural Address in which he declared, "Plainly the central idea of secession is the essence of anarchy."³¹ The Confederates, on the other hand, pointed to the Declaration of Independence's opening preamble which declared, "When in the Course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address." (speech, Washington, DC, March 4, 1861), Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): *VIV*, 269.

separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation,” as the basis for their right to secede. While it initially appears to be a nominal difference that could be chalked up to semantics, figuring out whether or not the states had the legal right to secede and whether or not the Union should have subsequently declared war on the Confederacy is important in attempting to understand the Constitutional questions surrounding the Emancipation Proclamation.

Lincoln viewed the Civil War as an insurrection and not a formal war, so he therefore did not feel the need for Congress to formally ask for a declaration of war against the Confederacy. In his eyes, it was not a war, but a long-term effort to subdue a rebellion, which ultimately required military force. Lincoln was not alone in this view of the secession of the southern states. Indeed, in its examination of Lincoln’s view on secession, The Lincoln Institute highlights the argument made by historian Herman Belz, who stated, “A consensus existed that no right of secession existed. Much as theorists of state sovereignty might speculate otherwise, political men understood that secession, if actually undertaken, would require violation of national law and present itself as an unlawful rebellion. The Union was...the sovereign government of the nation, constitutionally authorized to legislate for individuals, compel obedience,

command loyalty, and punish the crime of treason.”³² This leads one to reasonably conclude that Lincoln was not alone in his opinion that the South had no constitutional right to secede. There was an entire school of political thought that firmly rooted the theory in which he made the basis for his argument against southern secession even in light of the phraseology from the Declaration of Independence commonly referred to by the Confederates.

If indeed secession was not a viable option for the southern states to pursue in the first place, then it seems clear that the Union would not necessarily need to declare war in order to subdue the internal rebellion that the Civil War itself then represented; however, without an official declaration of war, could Lincoln still assume the powers of Commander-in-Chief? This question is important to consider because, in issuing the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September of 1862, Lincoln argued within the proclamation’s very text that he as, “President of the United States of America, and Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy,” had the right to “proclaim and declare...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 then, thence forward and forever, free.”³³ This argument put forth by Lincoln seems to

³² Eliot Abrahams, editor, *Democracy: How Direct? Views from the Founding Era and the Polling Era*, p. 50 (Herman Belz, “Lincoln’s View of Direct Democracy and Public Opinion”). Quoted in <http://abrahamlincolnsclassroom.org/abraham-lincoln-in-depth/abraham-lincoln-and-secession/>

³³ Abraham Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation, January 1, 1863; Presidential Proclamations, 1791-1991; General Records of the United States Government; National Archives.

imply that he has the inherent right in his duties as Commander in Chief to issue this executive order, yet the Constitution is setup in such a way that it could be argued that Lincoln, as president, would need to have secured a declaration of war before he could pursue military actions, such as that represented by the Emancipation Proclamation, before he could pursue such military action. Lincoln, however, did not see it this way. In the official Emancipation Proclamation released on January 1, 1863, Lincoln eloquently stated, “And, upon this – sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution – upon military necessity – I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind and the gracious favor of Almighty God.”³⁴ So, Lincoln firmly believed that the Constitution granted him the right to issue the Emancipation Proclamation because of the need to issue such an order as a means of “military necessity” in order to bring about the complete restoration of the Union.

Lincoln was a legal mastermind and it is clear from the thick legal style of the Emancipation Proclamation that he wrote the document with the thought that it might be challenged in the Supreme Court. This was quite savvy of Lincoln, who had been facing off with Chief Justice Roger Taney since before he was even officially elected President of the United States. Dueholm addresses the coarse legalistic language of the Emancipation Proclamation, which is quite an anomaly

³⁴ Ibid.

when compared to the more eloquent speeches and writings that Lincoln produced, by noting that, "...this style was intentional. The critical audience for the Proclamation was the judiciary, and [Lincoln] did not want its attention diverted or his motives questioned by a display of eloquence or seeming emotion."³⁵ Knowing this about Lincoln, it would be folly to assume that he did not have a sound legal basis for pursuing the Emancipation Proclamation. Though the Constitution does state a clear division of power between the Legislative and Executive branches in terms of war power, there are some concurrent powers present that enable both branches to act without one another. For instance, Congress has the ability to pass a law that would limit presidential power in terms of war, and Congress did act upon that power when it passed the War Powers Resolution in 1973; however, in absence of congressional action to the contrary, the President does have a great deal of freedom to act in pursuance of their own accord. These concurrent powers have been, and continue to be, the method in which the United States can enter into armed conflict without a formal declaration of war from Congress.

It would be unfair to state that Lincoln did not carefully weigh the idea of emancipation and whether or not he had the constitutional authority to issue the proclamation quite carefully before he formally announced the document. Indeed,

³⁵ Dueholm, "A Bill of Lading Delivers the Goods," 22-38.

evidence exists to the contrary to prove that Lincoln weighed the proposition quite carefully before he decided to act. Had the southern states decided not to secede and to instead negotiate a compromise of sorts with Lincoln, who knows what modern America would like today? It is quite possible that slavery would have existed in the nation in some form far beyond the end date of the Civil War. Lincoln's ideas on race and slavery are not the focus of this chapter and remain yet another point of contention in regards to historical analysis of him and his presidency and will be more fully addressed in chapter three; however, it is important at this moment to understand that Lincoln's primary objective was not to conclusively end the institution of slavery during his tenure as president, but to instead curtail its growth in the hopes that it would die a natural death due to its economic inefficiency. Yet still, his primary focus upon his election to the office of president was to maintain the union and he made it clear that he would have done whatever was necessary to ensure that the Union survived. This is evidenced by a letter that Lincoln wrote to Horace Greeley on August 22, 1862, which stated, "My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or destroy slavery...What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union..."³⁶

³⁶Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, 22 August 1862, Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): VV, 389.

While Lincoln's primary concern may have been saving the Union, the Union as it was defined at that time was specifically the dominion of the white man. The Union as it stood, in other words, held no meaning or benefit for the black race. So, Lincoln's full commitment to its restoration is a telling indicator of his racial motives in and of itself. The issue of emancipation was not one that Lincoln alone was forced to consider, however. Abolitionists had, of course, pushed the idea of emancipation to the forefront of national discussions around the institution itself and race in general, but it was not just fervent abolitionists who cried out for emancipation. In fact, in a letter to the editor that was published in *The New York Times* on August 9, 1861, well before Lincoln issued the proclamation, a reader wrote in support of emancipation in order to avoid war and the associated economic and physical costs that it would inherently bring upon the nation. "The plan is to do all we can toward crushing the rebellion," the reader wrote, "without harming the peculiar institution; and if, after an immense outlay of money and life, we find that either the Republic or slavery must die, then slavery must take the death. It is assumed, and with reason, that a decree of emancipation by the war power would make short work with the rebellion...why not adopt this conclusive measure at the outset?...Here we are, proposing to sacrifice great commercial and manufacturing interests, hundreds of millions of

ready money in the shape of taxes, and tens of thousands of precious lives in an experiment to get along without harming the institution of slavery by this war.”³⁷

Like the author of the letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts also had a change of heart when it came to emancipation. On October 1, 1861, Sumner brought the idea of emancipation to the forefront of the national political stage yet again when he gave a speech at the Massachusetts Republican Convention entitled *Emancipation is our Best Weapon*, in which he argued that emancipation was necessary to end the Civil War. Although Sumner was seemingly ahead of his time when it came to his thoughts on emancipation, the reception of his ideas make it clear why Lincoln decided to hold off on emancipation for some time. As Walter Gaston Shotwell writes in his book *The Life of Charles Sumner*, “The charge persistently made against [Sumner] was, that he was too extreme, in his advocacy of the rights of the colored people, that he was aggravating the situation of the nation and prolonging the war, by goading the slave-owners into more desperate efforts to destroy the Union. It was charged that he was second only to Jefferson Davis, in the work of destruction of the Union...”³⁸

³⁷ Harold Holzer and Craig L. Symonds, eds. *The New York Times Complete Civil War, 1861-1865*, (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publishers, 2010): 102.

³⁸ Walter Gaston Shotwell, *The Life of Charles Sumner* (California: University of California Libraries, 1910): 446. See also: David Donald, *Charles Sumner* (Jackson, Tennessee: Da Capo Press, 1996).

Although Lincoln was hesitant to issue the proclamation, it is clear that by August of 1863 Lincoln had had enough time to think over the issue of emancipation and had subsequently decided that he did indeed have the right to pursue it. Dueholm points to a letter written to James Conkling during that same month, which was to be read to the public in Lincoln's hometown of Springfield, Illinois, which clearly states Lincoln's argument for the constitutionality of the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln wrote, "I think the constitution vests its commander-in-chief, with the law of war, in time of war. The most that can be said, if so much, is, that slaves are property. Is there – has there ever been – any question that by the law of war, property...may be taken when needed? And is it not needed whenever taking it, helps us, or hurts the enemy? Armies, the world over, destroy enemies' property when they cannot use it...Civilized belligerents do all in their power to help themselves, or hurt the enemy, except a few things regarded as barbarous or cruel."³⁹ Lincoln made a sound argument in this letter, but it does leave one to wonder whether or not a formal declaration of war would have needed to have been issued in order for this to have been a constitutionally sound argument. Even if one were to say that there are implied concurrent powers that enable a president to act independently during a time of war and for emergency purposes, how far does that argument actually reach? Again, the Civil

³⁹ Dueholm, "A Bill of Lading Delivers the Goods," 22-38.

War was never actually an officially declared war, which is, in some ways at least, problematic when you consider the argument that Lincoln makes in the Conkling letter. In the letter, Lincoln cites the, “law of war” which enables him to seize property to do with what he chooses as long as it helps the Union cause and/or hurts that of the Confederates. One must stop to ponder, though, whether or not the law of war applies when war itself has not been officially declared. One could argue that Lincoln used semantics to justify whatever route he chose to pursue. He did not want to declare war on the Confederacy because he did not believe that the southern states had the constitutional right to secession, yet he wanted to justify the Emancipation Proclamation a military necessity that was essential to helping to bring about the restoration of the Union and the subsequent cessation of the Civil War and he used war law in order to base his argument. So, it does seem that whether or not the Civil War was an actual war, in Lincoln’s eyes at least, depended on the arguments that he was making to support his actions at a given time.

Perhaps the most important work written to date that deals with this issue is John Fabian Witt’s *Lincoln’s Code: The Laws of War in American History*. In this monograph, Witt argues that, “The law of war Lincoln approved in early 1863 was not merely a constraint on the tactics of the Union. It was also a weapon for the achievement of Union war aims...It is not just a humanitarian shield...It was also a sword of justice, a way of advancing the Emancipation

Proclamation...a tool for vindicating the destiny of a nation.”⁴⁰ As Witt documents, Lincoln used the law of war in unprecedented ways, thus forever changing the way nations pursue war by using it as means to justify the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation. However, because Lincoln was the first to use the law of war in this manner, one could therefore reasonably call into doubt his constitutional authority to do so as President of the United States. At the end of the day, the President of the United States is, after all, bound by the powers that are listed within that document.

Even Dueholm, who argues fervently that Lincoln was within his constitutional right when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, acknowledges that the issue of the executive war powers during a civil war is a valid argument that could be mounted against the proclamation. Dueholm brings up an interesting perspective here that relates to the question of whether or not a formal declaration of war would be required to necessitate Lincoln’s use of any war powers during the Union’s conflict with the Confederacy. Not only is it an issue of whether or not Lincoln needed to declare war against the Confederacy in order to legitimize his actions as Commander in Chief, but it is also interesting to consider whether or not Lincoln could indeed declare war against the Confederacy at all, even if he had desired to do so. If it was unconstitutional for

⁴⁰ John Fabian Witt, *Lincoln’s Code: The Laws of War in American History* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2013): 4.

the southern states to secede, then would not it have also been unconstitutional for Lincoln to declare war on the Confederacy? In other words, could war be constitutionally declared on the southern states when they had no constitutional authority to ever declare themselves as independent? When one considers that perspective, then Lincoln was in quite the predicament because he would have run the risk of being at odds with the Constitution no matter which route he chose. It could therefore be argued that Lincoln simply chose the path of least resistance in regards to the Constitution because otherwise his hands would have been tied to a point where he could not have acted in any way whatsoever that would have been forceful enough to restore the Union.

While the supposition that Lincoln may have been at odds with the Constitution in some way irrespective of what path he chose is well-grounded, Dueholm does point out that the decision of the Supreme Court in regards to *The Prize Cases* would have given Lincoln the judicial precedence that he needed to justify the proclamation as being within the scope of his war powers. *The Prize Cases* were a series of cases that were eventually tried as a cohort in front of the Supreme Court. In these cases, the Supreme Court considered whether or not the United States had the right to intercept ships en route to and from Confederate ports despite the fact that no formal declaration of war had been issued. Ultimately, the Supreme Court decided that, “A state of actual war may exist without any formal declaration of it by either party, and this is true of both a civil

and a foreign war. A civil war exists, and may be prosecuted on the same footing as if those opposing the Government were foreign invaders, whenever the regular course of justice is interrupted by revolt, rebellion, or insurrection, so that the Courts cannot be kept open. The present civil war between the United States and the so-called Confederate States has such character and magnitude as to give the United States the same rights and powers which they might exercise in the case of a national or foreign war, and they have, therefore, the right *jure bello* to institute a blockade of any ports in possession of the rebellious states.”⁴¹ In sum, the precedent set by the Civil War in *The Prize Cases*, would have inevitably been cited in any ruling that the Supreme Court would have issued had the Emancipation Proclamation ever been tried in that court of law. It is fair to assume, then, that the Supreme Court would have ultimately supported the proclamation as a valid military exercise.

Though not without its pitfalls, Lincoln had a sound constitutional basis for the Emancipation Proclamation as a part of his concurrent war power with Congress if one bases their analysis on the precedent set forth by the Supreme Court in *The Prize Cases*. Indeed, it is fair to argue that had the Emancipation Proclamation been challenged in the Supreme Court, even Justice Taney would have had to initiate some complicated judicial footwork to find it unconstitutional,

⁴¹ *The Prize Cases*, 67 U.S. 635, (1863). <http://www.law.cornell.edu/supremecourt/text/67/635> (accessed December 5, 2014).

though he would have undoubtedly given it his best shot. As Witt points out, the precedent for *The Prize Cases* had been set in the *Talbot v. Seeman* case of 1801, a fact which would have made it all the more difficult to find the Emancipation Proclamation unconstitutional.⁴²

Despite the fact that the proclamation's constitutionality could be firmly argued, it is important to note that Lincoln did not always believe that he had the constitutional authority to seek the abolition of slavery. In fact, as stated in the previous chapter, in the very beginning of his First Inaugural Address, Lincoln clearly stated, "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."⁴³ Lincoln was aware that after issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, he might be criticized for a perceived reversal of the statement that he had made in his First Inaugural Address, in which he said that he did not have the power to alter the institution of slavery in the states. The difference was the armed conflict that the United States found itself in in 1862-1863. When he was first elected, Lincoln maintained that he did not have the right to encroach upon slavery where it already existed; however, after the

⁴² Witt, *Lincoln's Code*, 56. The *Talbot v. Seeman* decision of 1801 was used by Chief Justice John Marshall to guarantee the "neutrality of the high seas" during warfare. It is important here because it is largely seen as the precedent for *The Prize Cases*, which are in turn, argued to give Lincoln his constitutional authority to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.

⁴³ Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address." (speech, Washington, DC, March 4, 1861), Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): *VIV*, 264.

firing on Fort Sumter, Lincoln felt that he had not only the right to pursue emancipation as a military necessity, but also an obligation to the Union to do so, eventually. Dueholm acknowledges this evolution in Lincoln's mind regarding the legality of emancipation when he cites a letter that Lincoln wrote to Albert Hodges on April 4, 1864, in which, as Dueholm summarizes, Lincoln explained that he felt that he was, "constitutionally required [by his] oath to preserve the Constitution...imposed a duty to preserve the Union," by any means necessary.⁴⁴

Lincoln was right to be concerned about how the public might receive his proclamation. Although there was plenty of positive reception throughout the Union, such as an article that appeared September 23, 1862, edition of the *New York Times*, which stated, "The wisdom of the step taken...is unquestionable; it is a necessity, indisputable. It has been declared time and gain by President Lincoln that as soon as this step became a necessity, he should adopt it. Its adoption now is not a confession that the military means of suppressing the great rebellion have proved a failure: but simply that there is a point at which any other legitimate appliances that can be call in, shall also be availed of."⁴⁵ Similarly, a year later an article in the January 3, 1863, edition of the *New York Times* spoke very highly of the official proclamation and Lincoln stating, "President Lincoln takes great care, by great precision in his language, to define the basis on which this action

⁴⁴ Dueholm, "A Bill of Lading Delivers the Goods," 22-38.

⁴⁵ Holzer and Symonds, *The New York Times Complete Civil War*, 188.

rests...he issues it upon 'military necessity.' In our judgment it is only upon that ground and for that purpose that he has any right to issue it at all. In his civil capacity as President, he has not the faintest shadow of authority to decree the emancipation of a single slave, either as an 'act of justice' or for any other purpose whatever. As Commander-in-Chief of the army he has undoubtedly the right to deprive the rebels of the aid of their slaves – just as he has the right to take their horses...- 'as a war measure.'"⁴⁶ As these articles show, there was a significant amount of contention that revolved around the debate over whether or not Lincoln had the constitutional authority to issue the Emancipation Proclamation, however, ultimately his fundamental argument that he was entitled to do so as a war measure was believable for many media outlets and journalists.

Not all media coverage of the Emancipation Proclamation was glowing, however. Indeed, the October 10, 1862, edition of *The Athens Post* of Athens, Tennessee featured an excerpt from an article that originally appeared in the *Chicago Times*, which lambasted Lincoln and the proclamation by arguing that Lincoln, "...now announces his purpose to save [the Union] by overriding the Constitution...For he has no constitutional power to issue the proclamation of emancipation...The Constitution forbids it by its spirit from beginning to end. And the President has no authority not derived from the Constitution...He is

⁴⁶ Ibid., 207.

himself the creature of the Constitution.”⁴⁷ As this paper has noted, Lincoln’s argument, and the argument of many historians since then, was that the proclamation’s legality was based in Lincoln’s war powers as Commander in Chief. That fact did not escape the author of the article, who went on to state, “Military law does not destroy the fundamental civil law. In war as in peace, the Constitution is ‘the supreme law of the land.’ The Government, then, by the act of the President, is in rebellion, and the war is reduced to a contest for subjugation.”⁴⁸

One of the most vehement attacks against Lincoln’s proclamation on the grounds of its constitutionality was featured in the *Edgefield Advertiser* (SC), on February 4, 1863. This article detailed, “The Great Anti-Lincoln Meeting at Springfield, Illinois,” which, “resolved that the emancipation proclamation of the President of the united States is as unwarranted in military as in civil law – a gigantic usurpation at once converting the war, professedly commenced by the administration for the vindication of the authority of the Constitution, into a crusade for the sudden, unconstitutional and violent emancipation of three million negro slaves; a result of which would not only be a total subversion of the Federal Union; but a revolution in the social organization of the southern states...the proclamation invites servile insurrection as an element in this emancipation

⁴⁷ “The Chicago, Illinois Times on Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation,” *The Athens Post* (Athens, Tennessee), October 10, 1862.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

crusade and means to of warfare, the inhumanity and diabolism of which are without example in civilized warfare and which the civilized world will denounce as an ineffaceable disgrace to the American name.”⁴⁹ In an examination of these articles and others like them, one can clearly detect the southern fears over how the end of slavery will totally upend the sociopolitical system that provided the foundation for their way of life.

It was not, however, just the constitutionality of Lincoln’s actions that was called into question. Lincoln also had to contend with being labeled as an abolitionist which was a characterization that did not advance his support in a significant portion of the northern population and only further alienated him from the southern population. In an article featured in the June 24, 1862, edition of the *Juliet (Illinois) Signal*, entitled, “Is the President an Abolitionist?,” argued that Lincoln’s foremost intention was to pursue emancipation, not restore the Union. “The course of the President since his inauguration, his appointment of nullifying Abolitionists to the best offices, the recommendation and support he has given to various emancipation schemes, certainly afford evidence that he is moving on in the same direction as Mr. Lovejoy [a prominent Illinois Abolitionist]...In the view of this state of things, the people of the country – those who believe that the object of the war should be the reestablishment of the Union and nothing else –

⁴⁹ “The Great Anti-Lincoln Meeting at Springfield, Illinois,” *The Edgefield Advertiser* (Edgefield, South Carolina), February 4, 1863.

have a right to expect an avowal of policy on the part of the President on the subject of slavery. The country is anxious to know whether he sympathizes with Sumner, Lovejoy, and company...”⁵⁰ Importantly, articles such as this show that many northerners were also uncomfortable with the idea of emancipation. As has already been stated, racism was prevalent in all regions of 1860s era America and much of the North would not have supported Lincoln’s pursuit of an agenda that was aimed at securing racial equality. Therefore, when the proclamation was issued, Lincoln had to carefully choose his language and layout his constitutional authority in order to prevent a backlash in northern and border state opinion which would have been horrendously devastating to the Union cause.

Lincoln undoubtedly knew that such personal accusations as this and the one featured in the *Edgefield Advertiser* would be launched against him. It goes without saying then, that his decision to proceed with the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation was not one that he made without forethought and complete faith in its constitutional integrity, and perhaps even its moral necessity, although that last point continues to be hotly debated. In the end, perhaps the argument surrounding the constitutionality of the Emancipation Proclamation could have been avoided had Congress issued a formal declaration of war against the Confederacy upon Lincoln’s request; however, it is quite possible that even

⁵⁰ “Is the President an Abolitionist?,” *The Juliet Signal* (Juliet, Illinois), June 24, 1862.

had that happened, the constitutionality of that decision would have been called into question. What is indisputable is the fact that political and social turmoil of the 1860s was and continues perhaps to be unmatched in American history. Lincoln had to make a decision that would bring about the end of the war, which by 1863 was stretching far longer than he had anticipated. Even the issuance of the proclamation did not bring about the end of the war as quickly as individuals like Sumner and the author of the letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in 1861 had hoped. Indeed, it would be another long two years after the formal proclamation was issued in 1863 before the Civil War finally ground to a complete halt. By that point, the devastation, both physical, emotional, and even economic, had been thoroughly wrought on the nation as a whole and the dark days of Reconstruction were still looming ahead. It is difficult for one not to consider the final verdict on the constitutionality of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation without the benefit of hindsight. Although strong arguments can indeed be made on both sides, at the end of the day, Lincoln needed to take an action that was forceful enough to have some hope of bringing the war to an end. He waited until September of 1862 to do so, more than likely with the hope that the war would have concluded naturally by that point. However, when it showed no signs of even slowing down by that point, Lincoln was forced to take action in order to uphold his constitutional duty to protect and serve not only the Constitution itself, but the nation, as well. In the end, had the Emancipation

Proclamation been challenged in the Supreme Court, it is virtually impossible to think that it would have been declared unconstitutional given the precedent set by the Supreme Court itself in its ruling in *The Prize Cases*.

Discussing whether or not issuing the Emancipation Proclamation was within Lincoln's constitutional purview is important because if Lincoln, a man who had an astounding understanding of the nuances of constitutional law, issued the proclamation without having a firm basis for arguing his authority to do so, it could potentially call to question his motive. Those who would cling to the image of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator would argue that Lincoln's decision to proceed with the proclamation despite constitutional authority to do so signaled his devotion and commitment to securing equality for African Americans. In fact, this is exactly what the southern media attempted to do in questioning the constitutionality of Lincoln's proclamation. If Lincoln did not have the constitutional authority to issue the proclamation, the South reasoned, then he they stood justified not only in their portrayal of him as a man intent on bringing about the equality of the races, but also in their secession from the Union.

However, Lincoln firmly believed that he did have the authority to emancipate the slaves being held in captivity in the South as means of military necessity. As his letter to Greeley proves, Lincoln was unwavering not in his commitment to ending slavery but to restoring the Union. One must accept the fact that Lincoln's supreme devotion to the Union's restoration is ultimately the

proof that the ideals and needs of white America were more important to him than those of black America. The restoration of the Union as it was would have only benefitted white Americans. Put another way, it would have left free blacks in the continuing limbo status that they faced as non-citizens, but also non-slaves. Similarly, had the South agreed to his proposition, slavery would have continued with Lincoln's blessing in that section of the country. Lincoln had stated repeatedly that he had no intention to interfere with slavery in the South. He was perfectly content to let slavery die a natural death there and it is quite probable that he would have let the institution remain had the South shown any willingness to compromise. Although the collective American memory looks back on Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation as a landmark moment in African American history, Lincoln's issuance of that proclamation was done out of what he deemed to be a, "military necessity," a strategic move that he felt was crucial in order to secure a Union victory in the Civil War. He was certainly not motivated to do so because of any deep seeded desire to bring about African American civil liberty, as historian Allen Guelzo has attempted to argue.⁵¹ Therefore, it is clear that when Lincoln clearly states his devotion to the restoration of the Union, he is clearly stating his devotion to the restoration of white America. Although this is clear it does not immediately lead one to

⁵¹ Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004): 24.

understand why Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation in the first place. If Lincoln's primary concern was white America and he also held racial views consistent with the times in which he lived, then what did he plan to do with the emancipated blacks living in the South upon the conclusion of the Civil War? To answer that question, one must look at Lincoln's early political influences as a Whig, his economic beliefs, and his participation in a fringe movement, which although it struggled to gain traction with most of American society, was heavily pursued by many of the most influential political leaders of this era – the movement to deport black Americans to another colony.

Chapter 3

Whitewashing America: The Great Emancipator's Involvement in and Devotion to the Colonization Movement

As the Civil War raged on and it subsequently became increasingly clear that the United States was going to have to confront the issue of race, especially in the post emancipation era, American politicians, including Lincoln, began to increasingly look to a movement which had roots in the early nineteenth century to solve America's racial woes. Founded in 1816, the American Colonization Society was a fundamentally white supremacist organization that sought to remove free blacks from the United States and colonize them elsewhere in the world.⁵² Lincoln's political roots as a Whig and a proponent of Henry Clay's American system led him to view the idea of colonization as white America's best hope for a unified future. When Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, he did so with the ardent belief that colonization of blacks would follow, leading to a completely white America. Lincoln's ultimate dream was not to elevate African Americans to sociopolitical equality with whites, which would have conflicted with the racial beliefs that he held, but instead to essentially white-wash America, thus eliminating America's root problem in his eyes, the black race.

⁵² James D. Lockett, "Abraham Lincoln and Colonization: An Episode that Ends in Tragedy at L'Île à Vache, Haiti, 1863-1864," *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 4 (1991): 428.

In order to understand Lincoln's political motivations for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, one must first examine Lincoln's political roots. As DiLorenzo summarizes, "Lincoln thought of himself as the heir to the Hamiltonian political tradition, which sought a much more centralized governmental system, one that would plan economic development with corporate subsidies financed by protectionist tariffs and the printing of money by the central government."⁵³ Similarly, historian Allen Guelzo demonstrates in his work *Abraham Lincoln as a Man of Ideas*, in order to understand Lincoln's views on slavery one must understand and always keep in mind that his views and statements were filtered through the economic views rooted in his political heritage as a Whig. Indeed, Guelzo argues that, "Fundamentally, what set Lincoln apart from the abolitionists was that his definition of slavery was a Whiggish, economic one, rather than an evangelical or moralistic one. When he talked about slavery, what he meant...was any relationship of economic restraint, or any systematic effort to box ambitious and enterprising people like himself into a 'fixed condition of labor, for his whole life.'"⁵⁴ Lincoln's objections to slavery were firmly rooted in his belief that it was an economically unsound institution, one that he truly believed would eventually die out on his own due to its inherent

⁵³ DiLorenzo, *The Real Lincoln*, 3.

⁵⁴ Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln as a Man of Ideas*, (Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 2009): 93.

economic inefficiency. This is why Lincoln had no objection to allowing slavery to remain legal in the South upon his election.

Lincoln repeatedly reminded southerners that he had absolutely no desire to end or restrict southern slavery. However, he held steadfastly to his position that slavery would not extend beyond the states where it already legally existed. As the United States continued to expand, Lincoln wanted to not only limit, but to completely eliminate any expansion of the system of slavery into the new territories that the nation acquired. This was not rooted in any kind of morality, but in an economic belief in the inefficiency of the slave system as one that put poor whites at an economic disadvantage. Lincoln was trying to advance the conditions of white Americans when he attempted to limit slavery beyond the South. His goal was never to ease the plight of the slaves. If that had been his goal, he would have touted emancipation from the beginning and he certainly never would have lent his support to the proposed thirteenth amendment to the Constitution which would have legalized slavery in perpetuity in the states where it already existed. For evidence of this, one need to look no further than Lincoln's First Inaugural Address in which he clearly stated his support for the Corwin Amendment, which, as historian John Stauffer chronicles in his dual biography of

Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln entitled *Giants*, “was an unamendable amendment guaranteeing slavery in the slave states forever.”⁵⁵ ⁵⁶

The fact that the man who is today known as the Great Emancipator would publicly support such an amendment runs parallel to the image of Lincoln that has been constructed in the popular collective memory of American society. Yet, in his First Inaugural Address, it should be noted that Lincoln used this opportunity to attempt to ease the fears of the white southern population, not to dissuade them of the moral atrocities or economic ineffectiveness of the southern slave system. It was in this moment, in fact, that Lincoln himself chose to highlight the proposed Corwin Amendment stating, “I understand a proposed amendment to the Constitution...has passed Congress, to the effect that the Federal Government shall never interfere with the domestic institutions of the States, including that of persons held to service. To avoid misconstruction of what I have said, I depart from my purpose not to speak of particular amendments so far as to say that, holding such a provision to now be implied constitutional law, I have no objection to its being made express and irrevocable.”⁵⁷ Lincoln had a perfect opportunity in

⁵⁵ John Stauffer, *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2009): 217.

⁵⁶ The Corwin Amendment was proposed in Congress after Lincoln’s election, but before his nomination 1860-1861. It had just received the necessary two-thirds majority support needed in both the House and Senate when Lincoln was inaugurated on March 4, 1861. If it had been ratified it would have made slavery legal in the southern states forever. It was originally proposed to be the first thirteenth amendment and would have been unamendable.

⁵⁷ Abraham Lincoln, “First Inaugural Address.” (speech, Washington, DC, March 4, 1861), Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): *VIV*, 271.

his First Inaugural Address to lay out some reasoning why this proposed amendment should not be passed. He also had the perfect opportunity to completely ignore the resolution, which held little chance of ratification given the secession crisis. However, he saw the proposed amendment as an olive branch that might lead to the immediate restoration of the Union. He truly believed that the system of slavery provided an artificial economic crutch for the planter elite in the South while simultaneously preventing the poorer white classes any opportunity in rising up to participate in the market. Lincoln could have made this appeal to the majority of the white southern population who lived in relative poverty especially when compared to the lifestyle of the very few who were classified as the planter elite. Lincoln did not use this opportunity to do that, however. He instead agreed to support the proposed amendment in preference for the belief that in doing so he would appease the white southern population and ultimately reconcile the North and South without war. In doing so, Lincoln earnestly held on to his belief that the laws of economics would lead to the extinction of the southern slave system despite any constitutional protection the system might enjoy from the federal government. Above all else, however, this fact exemplifies his devotion to the Union, and to the white population of America, as opposed to any desire to help the black American race. The restoration of the Union, as defined by the white race, was at the forefront of

Lincoln's decision making process as president, not the realization of full civil liberty for the African American community.

On the surface it may seem ludicrous that the South would pass up an opportunity such as the one Lincoln offered in his public acknowledgement and approval of the Corwin Amendment. However, any proposal that Lincoln and the Republican Party made which encroached upon slavery at all was politically tenuous in regards to the South, and subsequently, the South was not going to be appeased by the Corwin Amendment if slavery was going to be outlawed in the new territories. One must understand that southern society while simply structured in terms of social class and hierarchy was complex in its interaction. The planter elite comprised a very small population of the white southern population yet controlled an overwhelming majority of the South's wealth. Below them were poor white southerners who did not enjoy the sociopolitical influence afforded to the wealthy planter elites by way of economic influence, but did enjoy the benefits of being white in so far as that they were not classified as being black and subsequently as inferior. Finally, there were the black slaves who were not so much a part of the hierarchy as they were outside of it. Although the compromised an ever increasing percentage of the southern population, the color of their skin prevented them from ever being able to interact in the social hierarchy of the South. While one might wonder why poor whites may not have been more critical of the southern slave system, which clearly disadvantaged them

economically, one must consider the fact that poor whites were just as devoted to the social ideologies of this social hierarchy as their wealthy white planter elite counterparts. Though they may be poor at the end of the day they were not black and therefore they felt that they had the opportunity to move up in the social hierarchy, which was a dream, no matter how impossible it might seem in terms of economics, was not out of the realm of possibility for them due to their skin color. Lincoln understood that his economic views of the slave system would fall on deaf ears in the South because of the blind devotion to the social hierarchy that had become rooted in the economic institution of slavery itself. He also understood that he had to be very careful with his words because they would be picked apart by the media, particularly in the South. This is evidenced by the fact that he stated that he wanted to clearly state his support for the Corwin Amendment and, “avoid misconstruction of what [I] have said.”⁵⁸

Lincoln’s assumption that the southern press would castigate everything that he said and find a way to turn his words against him was not without merit. Lincoln had been battling with the southern press since his nomination as the Republican candidate. As was described in chapter one, the southern press, particularly that in South Carolina, had attacked him for being the “black president,” a man determined to bring about the sociopolitical equality of African

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Americans. Indeed, after his inaugural address Lincoln was vilified despite the multiple olive branches that he offered to the South in his speech. The March 15, 1861, issue of the *Abbeville Press* criticized Lincoln's speech as being based on, "coercive policy," and, "regarded [the speech] as incongruous and contradictory relative to constitutional rights."⁵⁹ Similarly, the March 14, 1861, edition of *The Anderson Intelligencer* also berated Lincoln's address and saw it as means of strong arming the South into submission, writing, "And yet we can find nothing foreshadowed in the dime and half defined policy of Mr. Lincoln but coercion, so far as the ambiguous language of his inaugural stands..."⁶⁰ Lincoln was sincerely trying to quell the fears of the apprehensive South, but the region was too afraid that they might be hoodwinked by this man who they honestly believed was fiercely devoted to ending slavery and granting civil liberties to blacks. The tones exhibited in articles such as those referenced above are characteristic of the fear of resulting societal collapse that gripped southern society during this time.

Perhaps the most damning review of Lincoln's inaugural printed in a South Carolina newspaper can be found in the *Keowee Courier* of March 16, 1861, which lambasted Lincoln and his intentions, stating, "The smooth and oily words but poorly mask a positive intent and a persistent purpose to enforce submission to the will of a majority. If any additional proof were required of the

⁵⁹ *The Abbeville Press*, (Abbeville, South Carolina), March 15, 1861.

⁶⁰ *The Anderson Intelligencer*, (Anderson, South Carolina), March 14, 1861.

incompetency of this representative man of Western Black Republicanism, it would be this address, destitute of all statesmanlike views, and deeply impregnated with the intolerance of a partisan. That such a man should have been elevated to the dignity of a headship in a powerful Republic, affords melancholy evidence...[of] the imperfection of human institutions.”⁶¹ This harsh criticism of Lincoln’s address was not confined to South Carolina. As Davis chronicles, a newspaper published in New Orleans, Louisiana, “was convinced that Lincoln’s alleged conservatism was an abolitionist plot to disarm the South, the easier to carry out antislavery schemes.”⁶² Again, articles such as these poignantly demonstrate the palpable fear over societal collapse that clenched the southern conscious at this time.

Despite Lincoln’s offer to unwaveringly support the Corwin Amendment, the southern media was not able to give him the benefit of the doubt when it came to his presidential intentions. Southerners were not going to be placated when it came to the volatile issue of slavery. They did not just want to keep slavery in their states, but wanted to see the institution expand because doing so insured the survival of their society and way of life. One must keep in mind that the political powerhouses of the South had an extremely vested interest in making sure that the institution of slavery was prosperous and permanent. They understood that

⁶¹ *Keowee Courier*, (Pickens, South Carolina), March 18, 1861.

⁶² Davis, *The Image of Lincoln in the South*, 38.

confining slavery to the South would mean that the new territories would be completely left for northern industrial expansionism and they did not see that as being aligned with their self-interest. Therefore, although Lincoln's offer to support the Corwin Amendment may seem like a very good compromise for the South in hindsight, the southern states saw no reason to remain a part of a union that was seeking to limit their economic expansion in preference for that of the North.⁶³

Lincoln himself could not simply back away from this issue, however. The Corwin Amendment was as much ground as he was willing to relinquish when it came to the institution of slavery in America. Lincoln began to come of age politically just as the debate between Hamiltonians, who favored industrialization, and Jeffersonians, who favored agrarianism, argued about what America's economic future should look like. As a former Whig and an ardent follower of Henry Clay, Lincoln adopted the Hamiltonian belief that industrialization was the key to America's economic future and the only way that the country would surpass Britain as an economic and political superpower. Lind poignantly demonstrates southern fears to this system, and subsequently Lincoln, writing, "An aversion to being taxed, directly or indirectly, to subsidize northern manufacturers was not the only reason that the southern plantocracy opposed

⁶³ See: Alexander Tsesis, *The Thirteenth Amendment and American Freedom: A Legal History* (New York: NYU Press, 2004).

government-sponsored industrial capitalism of the United States...In an industrializing South, the old plantation families might be shoved aside by prosperous, upwardly mobile factory owners, and the rural society of ranks – with the slave owner at the top, the slave at the bottom, and the poor white in between – would disintegrate.”⁶⁴ When the Republican Party chose to incorporate the economic ideals of Hamilton into its party platform by emphasizing an industrial future for America, they immediately set themselves at odds with the southern population of the United States.

Herein lies the issue, the South was petrified of letting go of the system of slavery because it was not just the economic foundation of the region, but also the social basis on which southern society had constructed itself. By the time Lincoln was elected president, the two were so intertwined that the South saw any encroachment upon the institution of slavery as an encroachment upon its existence as a society. However, this was in fact one of the most supreme misunderstandings, or miscommunications perhaps, of the nineteenth-century. Lincoln understood that ending slavery would end the southern way of life, but he did not see that as a negative consequence necessarily. He instead saw it as an exciting opportunity for southern expansion. While southerners feared an influx of blacks into their society, Lincoln, through his colonization schemes, ultimately

⁶⁴ Lind, *What Lincoln Believed*, 77.

planned on ridding not only the South, but the entire country of its black constituents effectively whitewashing the nation. As Lind writes, “Throughout his career in politics, first as a Whig and then as a Republican, Lincoln sought to realize both aspects of Henry Clay’s program – the Hamiltonian plan for industrializing the United States by means of massive infrastructure projects and protectionist import-substitution policies, and the Jeffersonian scheme for eliminating both slavery and the black population from the United States by means of colonization.”⁶⁵ By freeing the South from slavery, Lincoln felt that he was giving the region a chance at a new start. The new South would not be governed by a small plantocracy that controlled most of the wealth, but would instead offer chances for economic and sociopolitical mobility to the majority of the white southern population. Colonization of blacks to other areas played an important role in Lincoln’s vision of the new South, because it would further open the labor market for white laborers by eliminating the cheaper labor source offered by blacks. In *Slavery’s Ghost*, historian Eric Foner urges readers to take Lincoln’s participation in the colonization movement seriously because it is what really drove him towards the path that he finally chose, which ultimately resulted in emancipation, but was not followed by Lincoln’s dreams of colonization.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Ibid., 92.

⁶⁶ Richard Follett, Eric Foner, and Walter Johnson, *Slavery’s Ghost: The Problem of Freedom in the Age of Emancipation* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

Despite Lincoln's well-documented devotion to the colonization movement, southern journalists largely ignored this aspect of his strategic plan. Interestingly, it was the southern media who continued to paint Lincoln as the most extreme of abolitionists, determined to bring about equality for African Americans. Davis perhaps provided the best summary of southern perception of Lincoln when he wrote, "...the image of Lincoln constructed by southern propagandists was hardly benign. He was the archetypal Black Republican, a 'low and vulgar partisan of John Brown,' a believer in Negro equality...[who] championed the party of 'free love, free lands, free negroes,' and [reportedly] flaunted his contempt for the South by accepting a mulatto as running mate."⁶⁷ Although there is nothing in the historical record that justifies these southern concerns, the fear is abundant in the record. In South Carolina, the September 7, 1860, edition of *The Independent Press* condemned, "Mr. Lincoln's abolition proclivities," arguing that he would not rest until slavery was extinct in the United States.⁶⁸ Similarly, an article featured in the October 4, 1860, issue of *The Anderson Intelligencer* aimed to fear monger those southerners who may be on the fence in regard to secession upon Lincoln's election, chiding, "There is no evasion, but a plain directness of expression which must go home to the hearts of those who are timid enough and willing enough to tamely submit to Black

⁶⁷ Davis, *The Image of Lincoln in the South*, 11-14.

⁶⁸ *The Independent Press*, (Abbeville, South Carolina), September 7, 1860.

Republican rule – aye, who are even ready to crush out their last hope, and witness their rights and interests pass quietly one by one from their hands, rather than strike a blow against the Union, perverted and alienated from the original design, as it well be, under Lincoln and his abolition vandals.”⁶⁹ These articles are a testament to the fact that southerners were simply too devoted to their existing sociopolitical structure, which was firmly rooted in the economy of slavery, to even consider Lincoln’s ideas for a new era of southern economy and society. The southern media kept Lincoln’s message from getting through to southerners by diluting or poisoning it to the point that no matter what he said it seemed clear that he was determined to wreak the vengeance of northern abolitionists down on the southern states.

Given this vehement southern reaction to his compromise to support the Corwin Amendment, Lincoln understood that he was going to have to find some other way to loosen the South’s grip on slavery and he hoped that his proposed scheme of emancipated compensation followed by colonization would provide the catalyst needed to do just that. To understand Lincoln’s devotion to the colonization movement, one must take note of the economic hardships that he was exposed to early on in his life. Lincoln was born to a poor white southern farming family who could never quite get ahead financially. Indeed, their financial

⁶⁹ *The Anderson Intelligencer*, (Anderson, South Carolina), October 4, 1860.

hardships kept them on the move for a great deal of Lincoln's childhood. In his work *The Fiery Trial*, Foner provides a detailed account of Lincoln's early years and how those experiences shaped the views he would adopt later in regards to economy as a politician. Foner notes that in his 1860 autobiography Lincoln explains that his family moved to Indiana, "partly on account of slavery," and the fact that the family had encountered issues with land titles in Kentucky resulting in the loss of two of the family's farms, a trend which the state was infamous for during this time.⁷⁰ From Indiana the Lincoln family moved to Illinois and shared a similar frame of mind as the other settlers who moved into the area during this time. As Foner writes, "Many pioneer settlers in Indiana and Illinois, like the Lincoln family, carried with them an aversion to slavery...Such men viewed slavery less as a moral problem than as an institution that degraded white labor, created an unequal distribution of wealth and power, and made it impossible for nonslaveholding farmers to advance."⁷¹

The economic inefficiencies associated with the institution of slavery was more than an abstract idea or concept for Lincoln. He had experienced the negative economic consequences that poor whites were subjected to as his family struggled to gain financial footing on the western frontier. Although Lincoln did not enjoy a particularly close relationship with his father, Thomas, it undoubtedly

⁷⁰ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: WW Norton and Company, 2010): 5.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 6.

disturbed Lincoln that men like his father were not able to thrive in the southern market to the point of being forced to move their families to places where slavery was non-existent in order to try to make a life for themselves. Many historians, like Foner, highlight the fact that Lincoln's parents were anti-slavery, noting that they belonged to a church that did not believe in the institution; however, Foner also notes that the Lincolns believed strongly in predestination and subsequently they did not believe in involving themselves in any type of, "reform movements that aimed at bettering conditions in this world."⁷² It is possible that this also played a large role in the development of Lincoln's beliefs about slavery. Lincoln was not raised to believe that slavery was a moral wrong, but instead raised to understand the negative implications that slavery had on the living conditions of poor whites.

In fact, as Foner demonstrates, Lincoln was undoubtedly exposed to racist thinking while living in Illinois. Although the state prohibited slavery, it was ripe with racial prejudice and had a black code which was infamously harsh.⁷³ Similarly, northern racist thinking was not limited to the era of Lincoln's childhood. As historian Barry Schwartz reveals in his monograph, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, the results of the 1860 election help to substantiate claims that Lincoln was not an advocate of racial equality.

⁷² Ibid., 5.

⁷³ Ibid.

Specifically, Schwartz writes, “That many northerners supported Lincoln’s antislavery position because he opposed integrating blacks into society is evidenced in the 1860 New York City election results,” where although 32,000 votes were cast for Lincoln, only 1,600 were cast for an amendment which would have extended the right to vote to black males.⁷⁴ Scholars and the public alike too often forget, as Schwartz notes that this racist tendency existed in the North as well. Many northerners feared that if the abolition movement was successful, an influx of free blacks would head North and flood the labor market therefore resulting in reduced wages.⁷⁵ Those who would paint Civil War era America as being simply divided between a abolitionist North and a pro-slavery South are boiling down history into far too simplistic terms in much the same way that those who would portray Lincoln as the Great Emancipator and early proponent of civil rights as opposed to viewing him as the complex man that he really was.

After reviewing both Lincoln’s experiences during his childhood and his early political influences, it is clear that there were significant economic and political factors, which were not only in his personal experiences in Illinois but also in ideas that he inherited from his mentor Henry Clay, which influenced his decision to pursue the Emancipation Proclamation followed by his plans for colonization of the freedmen. Indeed, as Stephen B. Oates demonstrates in his

⁷⁴ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000): 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

monograph *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths*, the idea of colonization was one that Lincoln directly adopted from Clay.⁷⁶ Ideas revolving around colonization varied in their specific details, but the overall framework involved removing all blacks, either by force or not, to another area in the country or world. Some proponents argued that the area known as Texas should be colonized for blacks. Others argued that the United States should acquire land in the Caribbean or Central America and create a black American colony there. Still others desired to send blacks back to Africa to the colony of Liberia. As Lockett notes though the different schemes may have varied among colonizationists one thing that they shared in common was, “The rationale on which the colonizationists based their programs rested on their belief that black people [were] inferior to white people, and therefore incapable of adequately adapting to the white man’s civilization....They looked at [the slave] in the same way as the slave masters: as a pest, misfit, and a potential troublemaker.”⁷⁷

While many might find Lockett’s characterization of colonizationists difficult to reconcile with their image of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator, it becomes clear that Lockett is quite correct in his assertion when one reviews Lincoln’s letter to Major General Halleck on November 27, 1862. In this letter Lincoln wrote, “I cannot make it better known than it already is, that I strongly

⁷⁶ Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths* (New York: Harper Collins, 1984): 2.

⁷⁷ Lockett, “Abraham Lincoln and Colonization,” 428.

favor colonization...With deportation, even to a limited extent, enhanced wages to white labor is mathematically certain. Labor is like any other commodity in the market – increase the demand for it, and you increase the price of it. Reduce the supply of black labor, by colonize the black laborer out of the country, and, by precisely so much, you increase the demand for, and wages of, white labor...”⁷⁸

Lincoln would later use these exact words in his presidential address to congress on December 1. Lincoln made it clear repeatedly that his solution to both the economic inequality between the North and South and the racial strife that led to the fracturing of the nation was to purge the nation of the black community.

Lincoln truly believed that if blacks were removed from the country, the South could join the North in its pursuit of the Hamiltonian economic tradition.

Although the idea of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator is a romantic one, it is equally outlandish. As Charles H. Wesley writes in his article “Lincoln’s Plan for Colonizing the Emancipated Negroes”, “...although Lincoln believed in the destruction of slavery, he desired the complete separation of the whites and blacks.”⁷⁹

Lincoln’s pursuit of colonization was not something that he shied away from. As Wesley points out, Lincoln was talking about colonization openly as

⁷⁸ Paul M. Angle and Earl Schenck Miers, eds., *The Living Lincoln: The Man, his Mind, his Times, and the War he Fought, Reconstructed from his own Writings* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1955): 521.

⁷⁹ Charles H. Wesley, “Lincoln’s Plan for Colonizing the Emancipated Negroes,” *The Journal of Negro History* 4, no.1 (1919): 8.

early as the Lincoln-Douglas debates and mentioned it during his first annual address.⁸⁰ Similarly, DiLorenzo notes that Lincoln's Cooper Union speech given on February 27, 1860, "advocated [for] the peaceful 'deportation' of blacks so that 'their places be...filled up by free white laborers.'"⁸¹ Additionally, in his second annual message given on December 1, 1862, Lincoln discussed colonization with his Congress noting that emancipated blacks could freely travel to Liberia and Haiti to live as citizens.⁸² In the same address, he requested that Congress, "appropriate money and otherwise provide for colonizing free colored persons with their own consent at any place or places without the United States."⁸³ DiLorenzo points out that Lincoln's pursuit of colonization was well known, so much so that noted abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison bitterly labeled Lincoln "The President of African Colonization."⁸⁴ One can therefore reasonably conclude that Lincoln's commitment to the colonization movement was not one that was outside the public purview in the 1860s, yet interestingly this cornerstone of his sociopolitical policy remains largely absent from many historical studies of him today.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 10

⁸¹ DiLorenzo, *The Real Lincoln*, 18.

⁸² Abraham Lincoln, "Second Annual Message to Congress," (speech, Washington, DC, December 1, 1862), Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): VV, 521.

⁸³ Ibid., 531.

⁸⁴ DiLorenzo, *The Real Lincoln*, 19.

With such a public devotion to the colonization movement, it is indeed remarkable that this aspect of Lincoln's presidency has not become a larger part of the popular narrative of his views on race and slavery especially as it conflicts directly with the portrayal of him as the Great Emancipator. Lincoln's advance of colonization as a solution to the nation's problem, both economic and sociopolitical, did not go unnoticed by the southern press, particularly that in South Carolina. As one might anticipate, southerners were not taken by the idea of colonization, even when Lincoln offered up compensated emancipation, in which southern slave owners would be paid to emancipate their slaves, who would be in turn deported to a selected colony outside the United States, as a compromise. Again, for southerners, this was disrupting their way of life and forcing them into an uncomfortable position. Lincoln was pressuring southerners to admit that they depended on black laborer in order to survive. While southerners subconsciously knew that to be a fact, they had constructed a psychological and societal framework based on paternalism that put the white plantocracy back at the helm. In this mindset, white southerners were the ones who were giving these inferior black beings a chance at living civilized life which they would not have been capable to achieve on their own. If southerners would have agreed to Lincoln's colonization plan, that would have meant completely abandoning this complex framework that they had constructed over the years. It would mean accepting the fact that they had been dependent on black labor to

succeed in the marketplace and to maintain their standard of living and it would also, perhaps more importantly, mean needing to admit that blacks did have the ability to create live in a civilized manner outside of white control and a white paradigm.

This was not something that the white southern psyche was willing and able to do, as is evident by the coverage in the newspaper media in South Carolina in regard to the topic of colonization during this time. The May 31, 1860, edition of *The Yorkville Enquirer*, scoffed at the idea of sending black laborers out of America while taking in immigrants from Europe, particularly those from Ireland. After noting that many blacks wish to remain in America instead of proceeding with the plans laid out for them by the African Colonization Society the article stated that, “It is a curious and suggestive fact that, while this ban is placed upon the introduction of more southern laborers from without, they are the North never had a stronger tide of European immigration.”⁸⁵ This article does not directly mention Lincoln, who had just been nominated as the Republican candidate for president a few weeks prior to the article’s publication, but its existence proves that the South was already mounting its counterargument to Henry Clay’s antislavery argument represented in his American System. Therefore, before Lincoln even had a chance to bring this perspective to his presidency, the South

⁸⁵ *The Yorkville Enquirer*, (Yorkville, South Carolina), May 31, 1860.

was already making plans to dismantle not only Clay's proposed economic system, but the Republican Party's economic platform.

Although the southern media had been mounting its campaign against colonization before Lincoln's assumption of the presidency, its vehement opposition to the colonization scheme increased tenfold as Lincoln's pursuit of the endeavor became correspondingly serious. In early 1861, *The Yorkville Enquirer* ran a series of articles entitled *Arguments for Slavery* in which it attempted to justify maintaining the South's current economic and sociopolitical system. The sixth installment of this series, which was featured in the March 14, 1861, edition of the newspaper was solely devoted to dismantling each and every proposition that had been made in regard to ending the system of slavery and dealing with the freedmen thereafter. The article admitted that blacks and whites could not be expected to live in the same community with the same rights because "the superiority of the one [the white race], and the acknowledged imbecility and degradation of the other [the black race], will give the one always an advantage over the other."⁸⁶ The article continued with this paternalistic theme noting that, "The negro is now at home in America, and it is unfair and cruel, to expatriate him against his will."⁸⁷ Furthermore, the article stipulated that African American slaves viewed the plantations as their homes and their masters as their fathers and

⁸⁶ *The Yorkville Enquirer*, (Yorkville, South Carolina), March 14 1861.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

to remove them from their white family would be cruel and unjust. In fact, the article stated, “And there is not one negro in a thousand that would consent either to leave his master or his country...To send them away in their untaught and degraded condition would be unmitigated cruelty for they must perish with starvation before they could have time to relapse into their primitive barbarism...The negro is unfit for self-government, he is not civilized yet, and his propensities for vice, and his known laziness and listlessness, render it impossible to put him under a political government adapted to him.”⁸⁸ In some fantastic fact spinning, the article argues that it is really northern whites who are cruel and unfair as they would rather advance their own economic institutions by ending slavery and deporting African Americans rather than allowing the institution to continue so that the southerners can care for the blacks just as they have always done, out of the kindness of their hearts. As noted earlier, this is the psychological framework that southerners constructed in order to come to terms with the fact that they were completely dependent on race that they had classified as inferior. This argument is made evident by the almost comically eloquent ending to the article, which states, “Rather than overwhelm them with such a fate, reason, philanthropy and religion plead that the negroes be left under the yoke to their masters, who are their best friends in the judgment of Philemon.”⁸⁹

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

The media continued to paint itself in a positive light as it further developed its argument against both the North and proposed plan for colonization. In an article featured in the January 9, 1862, issue of *The Yorkville Enquirer* the media in South Carolina continued its effort to propagandize Lincoln's proposed colonization scheme. This article stated that the Union army was having trouble feeding the slaves that it had confiscated via the Confiscation Act passed in 1861. "They have no idea of feeding a set of operatives that will be useless to them," the article stipulated, "This is not Yankee character – they are very sympathizing on paper, and while they think they can spite us, but the moment their paper philanthropy is to become practical – ah! that is another matter."⁹⁰ Through articles like these, southerners attempted to place themselves as the true philanthropic and moral bastions of the black southern population in the dialogue revolving around slavery. Although they may be enslaved, blacks in the South are fed, housed, and clothed at the white plantation owner's expense, general civilities that they would not be able to procure on their own due to their inferiority, according to southern thought at this time. This is proven by this article when it continued, "[The North] wish to engraft their free labor on us in place of our slaves, and they make a pretence (sic) of love for our operatives as men deserving to be free – yes, free, so that they go somewhere else and not

⁹⁰ *The Yorkville Enquirer*, (Yorkville, South Carolina), January 9, 1862.

interfere with their superfluous population! They delude the poor negroes with the hope of freedom, which is a fallacy; and the moment they can steal them they jar among themselves whether to send them to Africa, to South America or to Arkansas,”⁹¹

The southern media did not give the poor white southern population a chance to consider Lincoln’s argument that ending slavery and potentially colonizing blacks in another area would lead to increased standard of living for the majority of the white southern population. Instead, they painted both him and his plan, as well as the entire northern population, as crooks out to coerce the South with a scheme that was simply too good to be true. Additionally, they seal the deal by throwing morality into play. The southern journalists repeatedly bring up the fact that it was simply wrong for slaves to be freed and then expected to thrive on their own given their inferior genetic traits. One must understand that while the southern media was indeed being sensational in order to sell newspapers and to continue to advance the southern cause, it is impossible to have expected the South to totally abandon its sociopolitical and economic foundation. It was not as simple as abolishing slavery in the South and then sending blacks abroad. Lincoln, for all of what some might deem his racial inadequacies, especially in light of the myth of the Great Emancipator, at least believed that blacks were

⁹¹ Ibid.

human beings and as human beings endowed with certain fundamental human rights. While those rights were not civil rights as we understand them today and as they were understood in Lincoln's era, Lincoln did believe that all men, blacks included, were entitled to freedom, and most importantly, to operate freely in the marketplace without artificial restrictions such as a slave system, which falsely held some at a higher level in society while pushing others down to an inescapable level of poverty. This was not a view that was held in the South virtually at all because of the fact that the South had built not only its economy but also its society on the fundamental idea that blacks were inferior and thus belonged in a place of servitude.

Although it is true that the South held steadfastly on to this idea and to preserving their society and thus remained staunchly opposed to colonization efforts in the early 1860s, as the war began to wind down by 1865, they began to reconsider the idea. As it became glaringly apparent that they would not win the war, southerners began to look for ways that may be able to save some vestiges of their society, particularly in light of Lincoln's proclamation. By 1865 the southern media in South Carolina had made a complete reversal in its portrayal of colonization. The August 4, 1865, edition of *The Weekly Journal* published in Camden, South Carolina, feared that the right to vote would be extended to the black population and would subsequently result in a race war, pleading, "In the name of God, if nothing will answer them but the elective franchise for all 'black

citizens of the United States,' let them have it, but not within the borders of the Southern States. Let them colonize the negroes; let them build up in the North western territories (sic) two or three States for the blacks, and let them have everything there as black as night, from a governor and members of congress down to the boot blacks."⁹² This article showed that, at least to some extent, the southern media in South Carolina had begun to abandon the idea that blacks were incapable of leading themselves in their own government, but this was not a result of an evolving white southern racial opinion of the black community. Indeed, the article referenced above featured an unabashedly racist perspective in regards to what civilization would result within an all-black colony, stating, "Let a new 'Dahomey' and 'Ashanti' rise far in the interior of the American forests. For Heaven's sake let them not blot the fairest portion of our Atlantic coast – an ever-burning shame in the very face of civilization and refinement of the nineteenth century."⁹³ The article concluded by stating that gradual emancipation followed by immediate colonization of groups of blacks one by one would be the best way to move forward and could be completely finished by 1870.

A similar article printed in the September 11, 1865, edition of *The Daily Phoenix*, in Columbia, South Carolina, perhaps most poignantly demonstrated this reversal in southern attitude towards colonization. Whereas the article printed in

⁹² *The Weekly Journal*, (Camden, South Carolina), August 4, 1865.

⁹³ *Ibid.*

The Yorkville Enquirer on March 14, 1861, spoke in paternalistic terms about how cruel it would be to send blacks to live on their own because of their inferior nature and subsequent inability to live in an independent, civilized manner, *The Daily Phoenix* article of 1865, argued that colonization is the only plan by which the white population can, “promote the welfare of our colored brethren and prevent their becoming the besotted, half-civilized creatures that the traveler sees in the West Indies.”⁹⁴ Note the important and drastic differences in the tone of this article when compared to the 1861 article featured in *The Yorkville Enquirer*. Though still paternalistic in a sense, the 1865 article no longer sees the black population as being childlike but instead the “brethren” of the white population. Rather than signaling a drastic change in southern racial attitudes, this language appears to be a ploy by the southern media to paint the South as the victim of the aftermath of the Civil War. They understood that the North was going to be brutal in its punishment, especially in light of Lincoln’s assassination, and the media attempted to lessen this blow by grasping for whatever straws of reconciliation they thought might hold potential. In endeavoring to, “send [their] Christianized and civilized negro population back to the orange groves of Africa,” the South Carolina Press in articles such as the one featured in the September 11, 1865, issue of *The Daily Phoenix*, asserted that they were saving the black

⁹⁴ *The Daily Phoenix*, (Columbia, South Carolina), September 11, 1865.

population from, “languishing out their lives in a useless contest for social and political equality.”⁹⁵ By opening themselves up to the idea of colonization, even at such a late date, the South hoped that they might be able to save the ideological foundation of their society which asserted that whites were the superior race and therefore the group most fit to dominate the sociopolitical sphere of their civilization. Perhaps most surprisingly in regards to the articles produced during this time is the blatant lack, on the part of the southern media, of any acknowledgement of an evolution in their overall position on this sentiment. Indeed, *The Daily Phoenix* article from September 1865, concluded by arguing that, “The South always did favor [colonization]...the North will now.”⁹⁶

As 1865 came to a close, the South’s attempt to revive the colonization scheme only became more desperate. This desperation was palpable in an article featured in the November 10, 1865, issue of *The Daily Phoenix*, which recommended that the United States declare war on Mexico in order to acquire new territory to be used to establish an all-black colony. The article drew heavily upon a speech given at the Cooper Institute by James T. Brady, a New York gubernatorial candidate. Overall, the article agreed with Brady’s overall assessment that the only way to solve the racial woes apparent in the aftermath of a post-Emancipation and post-Civil War era America was to pursue colonization.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

Both Brady and the article urged that the United States go to war with Mexico in spite of the war weariness of the post-Civil War population, pleading, “But it is said we cannot undertake a new war for the sake of the negro...we must for our own sakes.”⁹⁷

While it is obvious that by the time the South had begun to reconsider colonization, Lincoln was no longer alive and therefore unable to work out any sort of compromise. Whether or not Lincoln lost faith in the idea of colonization, and if so, when remains a point of contention among historians. Gates confronts this issue head on, noting that the historical record is ambiguous as to when Lincoln may have last considered colonization seriously.⁹⁸ As historian Jason Silverman asserts, Lincoln ascertained ideas about colonization all the way up until his death in 1865, however, he was forced to stop publicly pursuing these plans because of changing public sentiment beginning around 1864.⁹⁹ It is factual to state that Lincoln probably did pursue colonization schemes most earnestly when he received the \$600,000 in appropriations from Congress in 1862, despite the fact that he had been in pursuit of and continued to pursue colonization schemes both before and after that event.¹⁰⁰ It is also equally important to note

⁹⁷ *The Daily Phoenix*, (Columbia, South Carolina), November 10, 1865.

⁹⁸ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., ed., *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2009): lii.

⁹⁹ Jason Silverman, “ ‘In Isles Beyond the Main:’ Abraham Lincoln’s Philosophy on Black Colonization,” *Lincoln Herald* 80, no. 3 (1978): 115.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

that he never quite gave up on the idea as a whole. Again, one must keep in mind that though he was a Republican, Lincoln was a Whig at heart and was heavily influenced by both Thomas Jefferson and Henry Clay, the latter from whom he directly he inherited the concept of colonization. Lincoln's words and actions as indicated in the historical record support the theory that he devoted to concepts of colonization to some extent all the way until his death in 1865.

Though this is the case, many historians, particularly those who are the most devoted to the idea of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator, try to shrug off Lincoln's association with the colonization movement. As Gates writes, this attitude is prominent in Lincoln scholarship, as some Lincoln scholars are, "...determine to reinvent Lincoln as a race-relations patron saint, outside of his time and place, a man less complicated, flawed, contradictory, and interesting than he, in fact, actually was."¹⁰¹ Ludwell H. Johnson confronts this dichotomy in his research, which deals specifically with the letter that Lincoln wrote to James S. Wadsworth in January of 1864. Despite the fact that it does not deal directly with the subject of colonization, the infamous Wadsworth letter is important because many Lincoln scholars point to it as evidence that Lincoln had indeed abandoned ideas of colonization, which, they argue was made clear when he stated, "The restoration of the Rebel States to the Union must rest upon the

¹⁰¹ Gates, ed., *Lincoln on Race and Slavery*, xxvi.

principle of civil and political equality of both races; and it must be sealed by general amnesty.”¹⁰² Johnson’s research calls into question the authenticity of the Wadsworth letter, arguing that very little of the letter’s contents, but certainly not the last two paragraphs, can be unquestioningly tied to Lincoln.¹⁰³ Indeed, Johnson specifically writes that in regard to the line quoted from the Wadsworth letter above, “No other public or private statement by Lincoln even remotely approximates the substance of that sentence. As is well known, Lincoln was anything but an equalitarian. For years he was a proponent of colonization as the best solution to the race question.”¹⁰⁴ Johnson further substantiates his claim by pointing to the fact that Lincoln did not include any provisions for civil liberties for blacks in the guidelines that he established for the creation of Union-based governments in the South, which was outlined in a proclamation he made in December of 1863.¹⁰⁵ Johnson concludes that although the letter itself may be authentic, the last two paragraphs were most certainly not written by Lincoln, and subsequently cannot be used by historians to argue that Lincoln was completely free of ideas of colonization by 1864.

¹⁰² Abraham Lincoln to James S. Wadsworth, January 1864, Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1953): VII, 101-102.

¹⁰³ Ludwell G. Johnson, “Lincoln and Equal Rights: The Authenticity of the Wadsworth Letter,” *The Journal of Southern History* 32, no. 1 (1966): 85.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 86.

More recent scholarship conducted by Phillip Magness and Sebastian Page also support the idea that Lincoln may have been considering colonization schemes as late as 1865. In their work *Colonization after Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement*, Magness and Page point to the fact that many historians argue that John Hay's 1864 diary entry which describes Lincoln as having "sloughed off" the idea of colonization once and for all as evidence that Lincoln had abandoned the concept before his death.¹⁰⁶ Even if this were the case, it is important to note that Lincoln was still pursuing colonization for a year after he had issued the official Emancipation Proclamation and close to a year and a half after he had issue the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. This provides firm evidence to the theory that Lincoln was very serious in his consideration of colonization and that potentially played a large role in his decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln's pursuit of colonization, however, conflicts directly with the ideal of the Great Emancipator that is so pervasive that it has permeated not only popular American culture, but also the minds of a large division of Lincoln scholars as well. Indeed, as Magness and Page point out, many Lincoln scholars refuse to believe that Lincoln ever seriously pursued colonization, but instead only publicly toyed with the idea in order to try to ease southern fears and warm the region to the idea of

¹⁰⁶ Phillip W. Magness and Sebastian N. Page, *Colonization After Emancipation: Lincoln and the Movement for Black Resettlement*, (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2011): 8.

emancipation, a theory that has been commonly dubbed the “lullaby” theory.¹⁰⁷ However, in their extensive research, Magness and Page uncovered evidence that potentially linked Lincoln to a new colonization scheme with the British government in June 1863, just months after he had issued the official Emancipation Proclamation.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, Magness and Page conclude that the colonization project did not come to fruition because Lincoln experienced a change in ideology, but instead suffered because of, “bitter political infighting between Lincoln’s subordinates within the bureaucracy of the Interior Department, and a related decision of Congress to repeal the colonization budget.”¹⁰⁹ DiLorenzo, among other historians, has noted the tense relationship that developed between Lincoln’s Secretary of the Interior, Caleb Smith, whom he designated to devise plans for colonization efforts, and Senator Samuel Pomeroy, whom he requested to oversee the potential relocation efforts.¹¹⁰

The complex history of Lincoln’s association with the colonization movement is important to understand because it was an essential concept that Lincoln believed was the key to America’s future. He did not believe in racial equity or corresponding civil liberties for blacks, at least not in America. Though some historians have argued that Lincoln’s idea of equality for blacks was

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., vii.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 11

¹¹⁰ DiLorenzo, *The Real Lincoln*, 18.

sending them to a land where they could establish their own civilization and truly live in freedom, something he did not believe would be possible given the racial turmoil abundant both in the North and South during the 1860s, this is an oversimplification not only of Lincoln, but of the complex time during which he lived. There was no cut and dry answer to the question that America faced in the 1860s and though Lincoln was indeed a remarkable human being he was no more racially evolved in his views than the other northern counterparts with which he was surrounded. Even if Lincoln had been motivated to pursue colonization as a means to ensure African American political liberty, the fact that he would choose to do so by deporting them to another land rather than elevating their political status in their home country is telling of his ideological views and prejudice. By the 1860s, the majority of blacks in America had been born there and considered it be their home and the home of their ancestors. The media in South Carolina was not wholly wrong when it conjectured in the early 1860s that slaves would have no desire to relocate their lives abroad, although their overall reasoning was flawed to say the least. Most blacks yearned desperately for their freedom within the place that they called home. In his pursuit of colonization, Lincoln further emphasized his devotion to the restoration of white America and his subsequent allegiance to the white man's cause first and foremost.

Having examined Lincoln's racial views, the constitutionality of the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's motives for issuing the proclamation,

and Lincoln's involvement in the colonization movement, it is clear that the historical record does not support the idea of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator. Yet, today we find that the image of Lincoln is as bound to that idea as slaves were bound to their lowly position in southern society. This leaves one to wonder how Lincoln's reputation became so skewed over time. How has Lincoln come to be remembered as a hallmark leader in the crusade for African American civil rights despite the evidence found in the historical record? The answer hides in plain sight, as historians relentlessly scour Lincoln's words and actions looking for clues about his true beliefs, yet pay too little attention to the foe that he was continuously facing, the southern media. Chapter four provides an examination of the articles that were printed in South Carolina during Lincoln's life and immediately following his death, ultimately resulting in an analysis that allows one to see clearly the correlation between how the southern media portrayed Lincoln and how he ultimately came to be remembered.

Chapter 4

Shackling Lincoln: How the Southern Media Helped to Chain Lincoln's Memory to the Image of the Great Emancipator

The portrayal of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator is perhaps one of the most fascinating masquerades in American history. Indeed, if one looks at the surface of the Great Emancipator caricature of Lincoln, one can see direct correlations with that falsified remembrance of him and his beliefs and the accusations that he perpetually combatted in the southern media. Interestingly enough, when one examines Lincoln's actual words and actions, one can see that he desperately fought against the idea that he was attempting to bring about equality of the races, an accusation that the South levied against him incessantly throughout his national political career and one that his memory has subsequently become shackled to since his assassination. When one juxtaposes Lincoln's words of rebuttal against those accusatory and inflammatory statements made by the southern media in South Carolina, especially in regards to race, the Emancipation Proclamation, and colonization, the roots of the modern day title as the Great Emancipator and early civil rights champion become astoundingly clear.

Perhaps the most important research on Lincoln in American collective memory has been completed by historians Peterson and Schwartz. Schwartz's work in *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* offers quite an interesting critical analysis of Lincoln's apotheosis to that of the Great

Emancipator. Although Schwartz does concede that Lincoln was antislavery because he felt that it was an economically insensible and an inhumane institution, he cautions that scholars and society alike must not make Lincoln out to be more progressive in his racial beliefs than he was in actuality.¹¹¹ In fact, Schwartz clearly writes that one of Lincoln's chief concerns in his infamous debates with Stephen Douglas was that people would misinterpret his desire to see slavery contained within the South as a, "radical view favoring racial equality."¹¹² As noted in chapter three, this would not only damn Lincoln's reputation in the South, but it would also prevent him from gaining any sort of notable support in the North. The northern United States at this time, though popularly depicted in American history today as the land of abolition, had its own complicated racial dynamic that, although different from the South, was also ripe with racial strife and prejudice. Lincoln was not a closeted abolitionist and there is absolutely nothing in the historical record that substantiates such an exaggerated claim. Why then does it make sense to try to transpose these ideas on him in modern times via the idealized image of him as the Great Emancipator?

As Schwartz notes, Lincoln himself had no desire to be associated with any sort of movement for black equality. However, when he was nominated as the Republican candidate for president in 1860, the South seized upon the

¹¹¹ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 3.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

Republican Party's, and Lincoln's, desire to limit the spread of slavery beyond where it already existed as being equal to that of the abolition movement. This was, of course, in direct contrast to the fact that Lincoln took great pains to make his economic motives, based on the welfare of the white man, clear. In fact, as DiLorenzo notes, Lincoln's speech on October 16, 1854, in Peroria, Illinois, directly dealt with this situation and the way in which Lincoln's position would be later twisted by the southern press. In this speech, Lincoln argued that the new territories were destined to be exclusively, "...the homes of free white people. This they cannot be, to any considerable extent, if slavery shall be planted in them. Slave states are the places for poor white people to move from...New free states are the places for poor people to go and better their condition."¹¹³ This fact, along with the fact that Lincoln did not call for direct abolition and said nothing of emancipation until 1862 is why he did not lose support in the North. Northerners would have never supported Lincoln had he simply planned to abolish slavery and create a society based on civil liberty for all. First of all, the North was not free of racial prejudice itself, but furthermore such a proposition would not have been conducive to the northern industrial economy, which would have been negatively impacted by the influx of cheap labor on the market.

¹¹³ DiLorenzo, *The Real Lincoln*, 22.

Northerners understood this and would have never supported Lincoln's election had this been his motive.

For the South, however, the fact that Lincoln wanted to limit slavery at all, and subsequently limit a state's right to decide whether or not it would have slavery was enough to justify labeling Lincoln as an undercover abolitionist who was intent on destroying civilized white society. Southern media seized on the opportunity of Lincoln's nomination and proceeding election to vilify not only the Republican Party, but Lincoln, as well. Some of the most scathing articles appeared in newspapers in South Carolina, the state that took the lead in the call for secession. The November 15, 1860, edition of *The Yorkville Enquirer*, for example, ran an article that featured an excerpt from the speech of a man identified only as Mr. Boyce which highlighted the "Black Republican party" of the North as being one that was altogether sectional and intent on destroying the South in the same manner as John Brown.¹¹⁴ One must keep in mind that such an inflammatory statement was made in spite of the fact that Lincoln had insisted repeatedly that he had no intention, nor any belief that he had the constitutional authority to abolish slavery in the South. The same issue also featured an equally sensational article that warns South Carolinians that northern men are clamoring to the polls for Lincoln rallying that they must "subdue the slaveholders...because

¹¹⁴ *The Yorkville Enquirer*, (Yorkville, South Carolina), November 15, 1860.

they form a despotism intolerable to every section.”¹¹⁵ The historical record shows that this was quite simply inaccurate. Lincoln did not carry the North by an overwhelming majority and voters were certainly not clamoring to the polls in his name.

Similarly, another article featured in the November 22, 1860, edition of the same newspaper asserted that Lincoln undoubtedly considered, “slavery as a moral, social and political evil and that it should be dealt with as such by the Federal Government.”¹¹⁶ However, the journalists in South Carolina took advantage of the sociopolitical tension in the state to not only sell newspapers but to exert some political influence of their own. Subsequently, southern newspapers were able to alter the southern population’s perception of Lincoln even more negatively therefore opening them up even further to the idea of secession.

Lincoln grew increasingly dismayed at the way in which the southern media portrayed not only his character, but his stands on policy. Virtually everything that was printed directly conflicted with that which he had said on record. As a result, Lincoln took a vow of political silence in the months following his election, refusing to speak on the topics that the southern press continued to sensationalize. Davis makes note of this strategy of silence, writing

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ *The Yorkville Enquirer*, (Yorkville, South Carolina), November 22, 1860.

that, “Lincoln did little to counter his southern image as a straight-out Black Republican. Throughout the campaign, and in the weeks before his inauguration, he refused to speak out on the issues of the day...[and instead simply] pledged ‘justice and fairness to all.’”¹¹⁷ Yet, as Holzer counters, Lincoln was in a politically difficult situation as president-elect. The potential for a lame duck period of presidency as one administration concluded and another began led the, “...public and press invariably [to turn] expectantly to the next leader for reassuring hints of policy and personality, even though the law empowered him to wield absolutely no authority, and political tradition encouraged him to attempt no influence.”¹¹⁸ *The Camden Weekly Journal* published on November 6, 1860, provided a perfect example of Lincoln’s attitude. The article informed readers that when Lincoln was questioned on what he “intended to do,” presumably about the issue of slavery, he simply replied, “that he should adhere to his principles as laid down in his speeches with Douglas, at the same time presenting the gentlemen with a copy of said speeches.”¹¹⁹ Lincoln more than likely felt that he was better off redirecting the press to speeches and statements that he had given previously because no matter what he said it was twisted around on him to such an extent that it became inflammatory and sensationalized news in the South. If

¹¹⁷ Davis, *The Image of Lincoln in the South*, 15.

¹¹⁸ Harold Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect: Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter, 1860-1861* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2008): 2.

¹¹⁹ *The Camden Weekly Journal*, (Camden, South Carolina), November 6, 1860.

he promised fairness and to allow slavery to remain as it was in the states where it already existed, then he was coercive. Interestingly, the southern press did not mention Lincoln's argument that the slave system created a job market that negatively impacted poor whites, a cohort which made up the majority of the southern population. Obviously, the media did not want to emphasize this point too much for fear that poor southern whites might begin to agree with Lincoln. Instead, the media chose to prey upon the sociopolitical prejudices and subsequent associated fears of the white southern population by manufacturing the idea that Lincoln's intention to limit the expansion of slavery was evidence of his imminent intent to grant civil equality to African Americans.

Had southerners actually redirected themselves to the statements that Lincoln made during his debates with Stephen Douglas in the 1850s, they would have had a more clear understanding of his racial beliefs. Similarly, scholars today who want to understand Lincoln's views on race should pay more attention to what he actually said, as opposed to what they want him to have said. Lincoln wanted the people of the United States, including the southern media, to go back and read his words directly, such as those which he uttered in 1858 in his first debate with Douglas in Ottawa, Illinois, in which he said, "I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which, in my judgment, will probably forever forbid their living together upon footing of perfect equality; and inasmuch

as it becomes necessary that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position. I have never said anything to the contrary.”¹²⁰ Lincoln reiterated this sentiment at his fourth debate with Douglas, which was held that same year in Charleston, Illinois. During this debate, Lincoln became more specific, stating plainly, “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 that will forever forbid the two races 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.”¹²¹

Such statements leave little room for interpretation, yet the southern media still managed to equate Lincoln with abolitionism, a behavior which continued throughout his entire administration. Take for instance, an article which appeared in *The Yorkville Enquirer* on April 8, 1863, which claimed to trace, “The True

¹²⁰ Davis, *The Image of Lincoln in the South*, 130.

¹²¹ Abraham Lincoln, “Fourth Joint Debate with Stephen Douglas.” (speech, Charleston, Illinois, September 18, 1858) in *The Lincoln Douglas Debates*, Holzer., ed., 189.

Pedigree and Early History of Abraham Lincoln.”¹²² The article seriously reports that Lincoln’s mother had “from one-eighth to one-sixteenth negro blood in her veins, and [was] always associated with negroes on terms of equality,” and furthermore that Lincoln was an illegitimate child who was raised by his biological mother his entire life.¹²³ Virtually everything in this article was known to be incorrect by 1864, yet articles of this type were frequent in southern media. In fact, articles of this nature became more frequent after Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Despite the fact that, as demonstrated in chapter three, Lincoln’s intention when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation was to follow it up with a colonization scheme, the southern media latched on to the proclamation as evidence that Lincoln was the egalitarian villain that they had pegged him from the beginning. An article featured in the October 21, 1864, edition of *The Camden Daily Journal* exemplified this fact, proclaiming, “...the object of our enemy is to extirpate the inhabitants of the Confederate States, and to settle the country with Yankees and negroes. The whole course of the war, especially since the Emancipation Proclamation of Lincoln, bears incontestable testimony to the design...”¹²⁴ The southern media also levied harsh attacks against the constitutionality of the proclamation, which although unfounded,

¹²² “The True Pedigree and Early History of Abraham Lincoln,” *The Yorkville Enquirer*, (Yorkville, South Carolina), April 8, 1863.

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *The Camden Daily Journal*, (Camden, South Carolina), October 21, 1864.

ultimately were aimed at exposing what the journalists believed to be Lincoln's true beliefs about race. The articles charged that Lincoln lusted for African American freedom and was subsequently willing to undo the Constitution in order to achieve that goal. All of this, of course, gives no concession to the fact that Lincoln had publicly written to Greeley to tell him that he would have restored the Union any way he could, whether or not that meant freeing all of the slaves or none of them. Again, Lincoln's main motive in everything that he did was to prioritize the Union as defined by white society, specifically white male society. The Union as a conceptualization did not have the same meaning for the black population and Lincoln understood that distinction clearly. His southern contemporaries, however, were lacking in their understanding of him and his way of thinking.

Gideon Welles, who served as Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy, wrote a series of articles for *The Galaxy* in the 1870s in response to some of the historical inaccuracies he felt were being recorded about Lincoln and his administration immediately following the assassination. In one such article entitled "Administration of Abraham Lincoln," Welles poignantly stated that, "Persistent efforts have been made to establish as historical truths the representations that the civil war had its origin in a scheme or purpose to abolish slavery in the States where it existed, and that the election of Abraham Lincoln was an abolition triumph – a premeditated, aggressive, sectional war upon the South; whereas the

reverse is the fact...”¹²⁵ Welles, who was directly involved in the Lincoln administration, stated that Lincoln had absolutely no intention to interfere with slavery in the South, but he was committed to preventing the slave system from expanding into the territories. That fact, Welles argued, and the South’s unwillingness to accept it, is what caused the Civil War, not Lincoln’s intention to bring about equality between the races. Furthermore, Welles recounted that Lincoln held, “...a conviction that the white and black races could not abide together on terms of social and political equality, [and] he thought they could not peaceably occupy the same territory...Opposed to the whole system of enslavement, but believing the Africans were mentally an inferior race, he believed that any attempt to make them and the whites one people would tend to the degradation of the whites without materially elevating the blacks.”¹²⁶ Welles goes on to note that Lincoln did indeed become dismayed when his attempts at colonization failed, but that never totally dissuaded him from his pursuit of the venture because to Lincoln there was no other solution to the problem. In fact, Welles specifically writes that Lincoln never, “...abandoned his policy of deportation and emancipation, for the two were in his mind indispensably and indissolubly connected.”¹²⁷ Welles goes to great pains to make sure that readers

¹²⁵ Gideon Welles, “The Administration of Abraham Lincoln,” *The Galaxy* 23, no. 1 (1877): 7.

¹²⁶ Albert Mordell, ed., *Selected Essays by Gideon Welles on Lincoln’s Administration* (New York: Twayne Publishing, 1960): 102.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 104.

understand that Lincoln saw emancipation and colonization as being inextricably linked, “two...parts of one system...that must be carried forward together.”¹²⁸

Welles most poignant portrayal of Lincoln, perhaps, comes when he writes, “Although an anti-slavery man, the President was not a convert to the doctrine of the social and political equality of the races...The President doubted if the Africans as a race were themselves capable of organizing as a community and successfully maintain a government without supervision, or individually susceptible of high intellectual cultivation. There might be exceptional cases, but they were by nature dull, inert, dependent, and of little foresight – an ignorant and inferior race, who needed to be governed, were not as a class able or qualified to participate intelligently in self-government.”¹²⁹ Welles was a trusted confidant of Lincoln who had no reason to want to detract from Lincoln’s memory after his death. As one of Lincoln’s closest political advisers, and someone who was subsequently privy to many of Lincoln’s most important private meetings, Welles offers a vast amount of knowledge and insight into the Lincoln administration, but because his words conflict with what society and historians would like to believe about Lincoln, the idea of the Great Emancipator, Welles’ articles remain largely unexamined and obscure.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 105.

¹²⁹ Ibid.

An examination of Welles diary corroborates much of what Welles writes about Lincoln post-humorously. In a diary entry dated September 26, 1862, Welles chronicles a cabinet meeting in which Lincoln, “brought forward the subject [of colonization] and desired the members of the Cabinet to each take it into serious consideration. He thought a treaty could be made to advantage, and territory secured to which the negroes could be sent. Thought it essential to provide an asylum for a race which we had emancipated, but which could never be recognized or admitted to be our equals.”¹³⁰ The demeanor that Lincoln had in 1862 is the same that Welles describes years later in 1877, proving that his opinion of Lincoln or recollection of the facts has not been tainted by the passage of time. In short, Welles is a firm source for which historians can look to extract information about Lincoln and his views on race. Welles recollection of Lincoln’s racial views remain constant throughout his memoir. Take for instance, a diary entry dated May 9, 1865, which chronicles another meeting of the cabinet in which the topic of black suffrage is raised. The cabinet is divided, with Stanton, Dennison, and Speed voting to extend the right to vote to the black population and McCulloch, Usher, and Welles voting against the proposition. Welles writes that he told his fellow cabinet members, “I was for adhering to the rule prescribed in President Lincoln’s proclamation, which had been fully

¹³⁰ Gideon Welles and Edgar Thaddeus Welles, ed., *Diary of Gideon Welles* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911): VI, 152.

considered and matured...”¹³¹ Welles wanted to make it clear to his colleagues that he was going to continue to tow Lincoln’s line on this issue and not follow the precedence set by others in the cabinet who had become more open to the idea of black suffrage following Lincoln’s assassination.

Welles testimony of Lincoln’s position is dramatic and telling and also serves as important counter to the image of Lincoln that survives in the popular American imagination. Even if one were to discount Welles testimony, Lincoln himself left evidence of his beliefs on race in the historical record and even poignantly directed the reader on where they should go to find his position. Yet the southern media ignored his pleas, setting a trend that has been continued by scholars and the popular collective American mind alike. Despite Lincoln’s clear prose which eloquently demonstrates his beliefs on race during the nineteenth century, he has been, and continues to be, heralded as an early advocate for civil rights. Undoubtedly, Lincoln’s assassination has played an important role in the revision of his history. The unjustifiable manner of his death has left a wound on American society that is still felt to this day. Americans still mourn Abraham Lincoln, not so much the man, but the idea of what he stood for. In Lincoln, Americans see something more than a man who rose to power during a troubled time in America’s history. They see someone more than a president. Lincoln is

¹³¹ Gideon Welles and Edgar Thaddeus Welles, ed., *Diary of Gideon Welles* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1911): VII, 301.

much an idea as he is a historical figure. The Civil War marks a dark period in our nation's history in which the South fought for an institution which literally stripped the right to life away from millions over time. Through various methods of appeasement in order to avoid an internal conflict, the institution very nearly survived. Psychologically, this is a difficult thing for a nation to internalize and accept. In Lincoln, Americans have tried to rewrite history by elevating him to a moral status that was held by relatively few during his time. Perhaps Oates describes this process best when he writes, "...in the days that followed his assassination, the man became obscured...Lincoln went on to legend and martyrdom, inflated by the myth makers into a godly Emancipator who personified America's ideal Everyman...[a] myth [which] carries a special truth of its own...that is different from historical truth."¹³²

Lincoln has in some ways come to be remembered not as the man he actually was, but as the man that the southern media portrayed him to be despite the fact that he fought this depiction of himself vehemently throughout his political life. In many ways, we do remember Lincoln as the Black Republican, a white man who fought for black equality. This memory exists, however, because of the way that the southern media tried to portray him, not because it is rooted in historical truth based on Lincoln's words and actions. Schwartz importantly

¹³² Oates, *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myth*, 3, 16.

highlights the fact that Frederick Douglass was keenly aware and highly sensitive to the fact that Lincoln's memory in regards to his intentions with the black community were being misconstrued almost immediately after his assassination. Indeed, as Schwartz recounts, Douglass made his views clear at an unveiling of a statute, which portrayed Lincoln as unshackling a slave, when he said, "It must be admitted – truth compels me to admit - ... [Lincoln] was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people in order to promote the welfare of the white people of this country... Knowing this I concede to you, my white fellow citizens, a preeminence in this worship at once full and supreme... You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his stepchildren... children by force of circumstances and necessity."¹³³ The truth that Douglass speaks of is that Lincoln was not the Great Emancipator. Although that idea of him is indeed noble in our modern society and we look upon it with reverence today, Lincoln was not a modern man and he did not live in modern times.

This tension between the true Lincoln and the idea of Lincoln that society tries to superimpose onto his memory will continue to be an issue for the

¹³³ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 89.

foreseeable future, as historian David W. Blight notes in, “The Theft of Lincoln in Scholarship, Politics, and Public Memory,” because America’s history with slavery and how it ended will always be an important part of the American story.¹³⁴ Future scholarship, both in the academy and in the public sphere, however, should emphasize, as opposed to attempting to conceal, the fact that Lincoln was in fact a man of the 1860s, with beliefs about race that corresponded to the era in which he lived. In glossing over his true beliefs on race and slavery, we dilute his very essence. While the idea of Lincoln as the Great Emancipator is certainly romantic, Lincoln was so much more than that. He was a complex man, an astute politician, who was constantly evolving and changing, but always maintain an ever-present emphasis on the restoration and maintenance of white America. That emphasis motivated him in every political decision that he made, including his decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation. History is not simply black or white. Lincoln is not simply a hero or a villain. For historians and popular American memory to simply remember him as the Great Emancipator, though a beautiful dream, is nothing more than a dream because it is not founded in historical reality. One must stop to wonder, then, what Lincoln would think if he happened to stumble upon the statue of himself setting the slave free that caused Douglass to react in such a public manner. While some today

¹³⁴ Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and his World* (New York: WW Norton Company, 2008): 275.

might look on this statue as a heartwarming symbol of the end of a traumatic era in American history, those more well-versed in history instead see the image of Abraham Lincoln shackled to an idea that he never meant to champion. An analysis of Lincoln's words and actions, the evidence which he left us in the historical record, some of which was largely in response to the accusations that were levied on him by the southern media in regards to his racial beliefs, proves that the Great Emancipator is more remembered for ideas and beliefs from which he passionately disassociated himself than those which he actually pursued and held. In short, the Lincoln that exists in the American collective memory today is more similar to the construct of the Lincoln archetype that the southern media tried to create and sensationalize in the 1860s as opposed to being a mirror image of the actual man himself.

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