

# FORWARD

**I**n 1831, long before the War between the States, South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun said, "Stripped of all its covering, the naked question is, whether ours is a federal or consolidated government; a constitutional or absolute one; a government resting solidly on the basis of the sovereignty of the States, or on the unrestrained will of a majority; a form of government, as in all other unlimited ones, in which injustice, violence, and force must ultimately prevail." The War between the States answered that question and produced the foundation for the kind of government we have today: consolidated and absolute, based on the unrestrained will of the majority, with force, threats, and intimidation being the order of the day.

Today's federal government is considerably at odds with that envisioned by the framers of the Constitution. Thomas J. DiLorenzo gives an account of how this came about in *The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and an Unnecessary War*.

As DiLorenzo documents—contrary to conventional wisdom, books about Lincoln, and the lessons taught in schools and colleges—the War between the States was not fought to end slavery. Even if it were, a natural question arises: Why was a costly war fought to end it? African slavery existed in many parts of the Western world, but it did not take warfare to end it. Dozens of countries, including the territorial possessions of the British, French, Portuguese, and Spanish, ended slavery peacefully during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Countries such as Venezuela and Colombia experienced conflict because slave emancipation was simply a ruse for revolutionaries who were seeking state power and were not motivated by emancipation per se.

Abraham Lincoln's direct statements indicated his support for slavery. He defended slave owners' right to own their property, saying that "when they remind us of their constitutional rights [to own slaves], I acknowledge them, not grudgingly but fully and fairly; and I would give them any legislation for the claiming of their fugitives" (in indicating support for the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850).

Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation was little more than a political gimmick, and he admitted so in a letter to Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase: "The original proclamation has no...legal justification, except as a military measure." Secretary of State William Seward said, "We show our sympathy with slavery by emancipating slaves where we cannot reach them and holding them in bondage where we can set them free." Seward was acknowledging the fact that the Emancipation Proclamation applied only to slaves in states in rebellion against the United States and not to slaves in states not in rebellion.

The true costs of the War between the States were not the 620,000 battlefield-related deaths, out of a national population of 30 million (were we to control for population growth, that would be equivalent to roughly 5 million battlefield deaths today). The true costs were a change in the character of our government into one feared by the likes of Jefferson, Madison, Monroe, Jackson, and Calhoun—one where states lost most of their sovereignty to the central government. Thomas Jefferson saw as the most important safeguard of the liberties of the people "the support of the state governments in all their rights, as the most competent administrations for our domestic concerns and the surest bulwarks against anti-republican tendencies."

If the federal government makes encroachments on the constitutional rights of the people and the states, what are their options? In a word, their right to secede. Most of today's Americans believe, as did Abraham Lincoln, that states do not have a right to secession, but that is false. DiLorenzo marshals numerous proofs that from the very founding of our nation the right of secession was seen as a natural right of the people and a last check on abuse by the central government. For example, at Virginia's ratification convention, the delegates affirmed "that the powers granted under the Constitution being derived from the People of the United States may be resumed by them whosoever the same shall be perverted to injury or oppression." In Thomas Jefferson's First Inaugural Address (1801), he declared, "If there be any among us who would wish to dissolve this Union or to change its republican form, let them stand undisturbed as monuments of the safety with which error of opinion may be tolerated where reason is left free to combat it." Jefferson was defending the rights of free speech and of secession. Alexis de Tocqueville observed in *Democracy in America*, "The Union was formed by the voluntary agreement of the States; in uniting together they have not forfeited their nationality, nor have they been reduced to the condition of one and the same people. If one of the states chooses to withdraw from the compact, it would be difficult to disapprove its right of doing so, and the Federal Government would have no means of maintaining its claims directly either by force or right." The right to secession was popularly held as well. DiLorenzo lists newspaper after newspaper editorial arguing the right of secession. Most significantly, these were Northern newspapers. In fact, the first secession movement started in the North, long before shots were fired at Fort Sumter. The New England states debated the idea of secession during the Hartford Convention of 1814-1815.

Lincoln's intentions, as well as those of many Northern politicians, were summarized by Stephen Douglas during the senatorial debates. Douglas accused Lincoln of wanting to "impose on the nation a uniformity of local laws and institutions and a moral homogeneity dictated by the central government" that would "place at defiance the intentions of the republic's founders." Douglas was right, and Lincoln's vision for our nation has now been accomplished beyond anything he could have possibly dreamed.

The War between the States settled by force whether states could secede. Once it was established that states cannot secede, the federal government, abetted by a Supreme Court unwilling to hold it to its constitutional restraints, was able to run amok over states' rights, so much so that the protections of the Ninth and Tenth Amendments mean little or nothing today. Not only did the war lay the foundation for eventual nullification or weakening of basic constitutional protections against central government abuses, but it also laid to rest the great principle enunciated in the Declaration of Independence that "Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed."

*The Real Lincoln* contains irrefutable evidence that a more appropriate title for Abraham Lincoln is not the Great Emancipator, but the Great Centralizer.

—*Walter E. Williams (March 31, 1936 – December 2, 2020)*

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