

## Chapter 15

### Abraham Lincoln: Great or Reluctant Emancipator

**A**braham Lincoln is known as the “Great Emancipator.” He has been portrayed as a man who, from early childhood, had but one goal, and that was to free the slaves. He is known among historians as a superb politician and master consensus builder. In analyzing Lincoln's speeches and actions, it is difficult to pinpoint where the politician stops and the Emancipator begins. This chapter provides the materials to help the reader make that judgment and to understand the social and political climate which shaped the man.

#### Lincoln as Candidate for Office

Lincoln's Speeches	Social and Political Background
<p>1. 1854: First Public anti-slavery speech</p> <p>Slavery is unquestionably a wrong. The great mass of mankind consider slavery a great moral wrong. [This feeling] lies at the very foundation of their sense of justice, and cannot be trifled with. No statesman can safely disregard it.<sup>67</sup></p>	<p>During Lincoln's boyhood, slaves were unknown. But people in the Northwest held hostile attitudes toward Negroes.</p> <p>-----</p>
<p>2. 1856: On Slavery</p> <p>Let us draw a cordon so to speak, around the slave states and the hateful institution, like a reptile poisoning itself, will perish by its own infamy.<sup>68</sup></p>	<p>Lincoln's wife, born and raised in Kentucky, came from a prominent slave-holding family.</p> <p>----- .....</p>
<p>3. 1858: House Divided Speech</p> <p>A house divide against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half-slave and half-free. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect it will cease to be divide. It will become all one thing or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike in all the states, old as well as new, North as well as South.<sup>69</sup></p> <p>Have we no tendency to the latter condition?</p>	<p>In Illinois, runaway slaves were often caught and returned to slavery.</p> <p>Free blacks did not have the right to vote, were required to pay high taxes, and were thus forced to move out of the state</p> <p>-----.</p>

<sup>67</sup> Quoted in Richard Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition*, Random House, New York, 1948, p. 111.

## Lincoln as Candidate for Office (continued)

Lincoln's Speeches	Social and Political Background
<p>4. 1858: On the Territories</p> <p>The whole nation is interested that the best use shall be made of these territories. We want them for homes of free white people. This they cannot be, to any considerable extent, if slavery be planted within them. Slave states are places for poor white people to move from, not to move to. New free states are the places for poor people to go to, to better their condition.</p>	<p>Workers were worried that slaves could compete with whites for jobs. Settlers feared slavery would hurt their chances in the territories.</p> <p>-----</p>
<p>5. 1858: On racial equality in Chicago</p> <p>Let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man, this race and that race and the other race being inferior, and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position. Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout this land, until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal.</p>	<p>Chicago was a hotbed of abolitionist sentiment.</p> <p>-----</p>
<p>6. On racial equality in Charleston, Illinois</p> <p>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 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.</p>	<p>Most Americans who opposed slavery did not believe in Negro equality, or thought of African-Americans as their social, moral or intellectual equals. . Many who opposed slavery merely did not want black people, either free or slave, living amongst them in the North or in the territories.</p> <p>-----</p>
<p>7. 1858: The Difference with Douglas</p> <p>The real issue in this controversy is the sentiment on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery as a wrong and another class that does not look upon the institution of slavery as a wrong. The sentiment that contemplates the institution of slavery as a wrong is the sentiment of the Republican party. They insist that it should as far as possible be treated as a wrong; and one of those methods of treating it as a wrong is to make provision that it should grow no larger. They also look to a peaceful end of slavery at sometime, as being wrong.</p>	<p>In his senatorial contest with Stephen Douglas, Lincoln was involved in a series of debates (see chapter 13) and had to make a distinction between his and Douglas' position on the dispute over slavery in the territories.</p>

<sup>68</sup> Quoted in Dwight Dumond, *Anti-Slavery Origins of the Civil War in the United States*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1959, p. 108

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Paul Angle, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

## Lincoln as President

Lincoln's Speeches and Actions	Social Political Background
<p>1. 1861: Repeats previous promises not to interfere with slavery where it already exists. Refuses to compromise on issue of extension of slavery. Would not accept Crittenden proposal of extending Missouri Compromise line to California.</p>	<p>Confederacy formed from 7 states out of the Union. 8 more states considered secession. 4 slaves states remain in the Union after the war started.</p>
<p>2. 1861: Although Confederate states are out of the Union, Congress organizes Colorado and other territories on the basis of popular sovereignty.</p>	<p>Many in North would support a war to save the Union, but would not support a war to free the slaves.</p>
<p>3. 1861: Reverses General Fremont's order to free the slaves of men who are fighting against the Union in Missouri.</p>	<p>Pressure from abolitionists to do something about slavery increased. Many in North were unhappy with Lincoln's policies on slavery.</p>
<p>4. 1862: Proposes compensated emancipation for slaves in loyal states and in Washington, D.C. Lincoln proposes deporting all slaves thus freed to Africa.</p>	<p>Criticism against Lincoln's slave policy increased. England was about to recognize the Confederacy as a separate nation. The British would not recognize the it if the Civil War became an anti-slave crusade.</p>
<p>5. 1862: Issues following explanation for his wartime policies regarding slavery:</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and it is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave, I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all of 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.<sup>70</sup></p>	<p>War still raged. Some states, were conquered and could be readmitted into the Union.</p>
<p>7. 1863: Lincoln offers to re-admit to the Union all Southern states that abolish slavery. He does not require that slaves be guaranteed Constitutional rights such as speech, trial by jury, vote, etc. Lincoln still considers deportation of freed slaves to Africa or South America.</p>	<p>Lee surrendered at Appomatox April 9, 1865. Lincoln assassinated April 14<sup>th</sup>.</p>
<p>8. 1864: Lincoln uses his influence to convince reluctant Congressmen to pass Amendment 13 (abolishing slavery) and sends it to be ratified by the states. Still has no plan to help freed slaves except for deportation</p>	<p>War is over, and Lincoln must decide on reuniting the country.</p>

<sup>70</sup>Quoted in Charles G. Sellars, et. al., *op. cit.*, p. 399.

**Suggested Student Exercises:**

1. Contrast the two speeches Lincoln gives, while still a candidate – the first in Chicago, and the second in Charleston, Illinois. Which do you think represented Lincoln's ideas on slavery? Base your argument on what he said in his other speeches, and/or what he did about slavery. Always consider the social-political background at the time of his speeches.
2. Can you support the argument that Lincoln carried out what he said he would do in his 1862 speech (Number 5).
3. How, if at all, has your attitude about Lincoln been changed as a result of this exercise?