



The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and an Unnecessary War

Thomas J. DiLorenzo

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Most Americans consider Abraham Lincoln to be the greatest president in history. His legend as the Great Emancipator has grown to mythic proportions as hundreds of books, a national holiday, and a monument in Washington, D.C., extol his heroism and martyrdom. But what if most everything you knew about Lincoln were false? What if, instead of an American hero who sought to free the slaves, Lincoln were in fact a calculating politician who waged the bloodiest war in American history in order to build an empire that rivaled Great Britain's? In *The Real Lincoln*, author Thomas J. DiLorenzo uncovers a side of Lincoln not told in many history books and overshadowed by the immense Lincoln legend.

Through extensive research and meticulous documentation, DiLorenzo portrays the sixteenth president as a man who devoted his political career to revolutionizing the American form of government from one that was very limited in scope and highly decentralized—as the Founding Fathers intended—to a highly centralized, activist state. Standing in his way, however, was the South, with its independent states, its resistance to the national government, and its reliance on unfettered free trade. To accomplish his goals, Lincoln subverted the Constitution, trampled states' rights, and launched a devastating Civil War, whose wounds haunt us still. According to this provocative book, 600,000 American soldiers did not die for the honorable cause of ending slavery but for the dubious agenda of sacrificing the independence of the states to the supremacy of the federal government, which has been tightening its vise grip on our republic to this very day.

You will discover a side of Lincoln that you were probably never taught in school—a side that calls into question the very myths that surround him and helps explain the true origins of a bloody, and perhaps, unnecessary war.

"A devastating critique of America's most famous president."

—**Joseph Sobran**, commentator and nationally syndicated columnist

"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*."

—**Walter E. Williams**, from the foreword

"A peacefully negotiated secession was the best way to handle all the problems facing Americans in 1860. A war of coercion was Lincoln's creation. It sometimes takes a century or more to bring an important historical event into perspective. This study does just that and leaves the reader asking, 'Why didn't we know this before?'"

—**Donald Livingston**, professor of philosophy, Emory University

"Professor DiLorenzo has penetrated to the very heart and core of American history with a laser beam of fact and analysis."

—**Clyde Wilson**, professor of history, University of South Carolina, and editor, *The John C. Calhoun Papers*

From the Hardcover edition.

The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and an Unnecessary War Details

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DJ says

Author Thomas DiLorenzo is a scholar at the League of the South Institute. He is also listed as an ideologue to watch out for on the Southern Poverty Law Center website. It seems to me the book is part of a body of "scholarship" whose ultimate goal is for the South to secede again, and possibly to return to its antebellum social structure. Although no author should be wholly disregarded based on ad hominem attack alone, these facts likely influence my view of the book.

It is not entirely worthless. Between suspiciously selective quotes and questionable logic you will find a few interesting, relevant, and often glossed-over bits of American history. Examples would include the suspension of habeas corpus under Lincoln, war crimes committed by Union generals, and wartime violations of the First Amendment. However, the book's merits are grossly overshadowed by the author's blatant bias and thinly supported arguments, which are present throughout the text.

G.M. Burrow says

I've been critical of Lincoln for years, but this book shows (with meticulous research from the 18th and 19th centuries) just how much this man is to be condemned for his lies, his powermongering, and his tyranny. Historians have been stopping their ears to the truth for the past 150 years and more, and it's time to quit. It's time to remember our history, to know our Constitution, and to quit worshipping this beast of big government.

Jim says

Eleven chapters of, how shall I put this mildly, bovine waste.

This book was urged upon me by one who found it compelling. Finally, after a century and a half of myth-based pseudo-history propping up the image of "King Lincoln", he told me, comes Thomas J. DiLorenzo, an economist with a book exposing the "truth" about not-so-honest Abe.

I'll admit to skepticism. And I'll even admit that I had no real desire to read The Real Lincoln. Whenever I'm faced with a conflict between mainstream and fringe, the burden of proof is on fringe to convince me that the mainstream is incorrect. It can be done. But when common sense and logic side with the mainstream, it is difficult - as I think that it should be - to convince me that the mainstream is wrong. I felt it was highly unlikely that DiLorenzo could shift my viewpoint.

Time passed but the comments kept coming. You might be surprised how often our sixteenth president can make it into everyday conversation. The comments traced the roots of America's generally bad state of nearly everything to Abraham Lincoln. And the source backing the comments was Thomas DiLorenzo.

Then fate intervened. I saw an advertisement alongside an article that I was reading on a news site - I don't

recall ever having paid attention to one before. The advertisement was for a book by Dennis W. Brandt called Shattering the Truth: The Slandering of Abraham Lincoln. I went to Amazon and pulled up a copy of Brandt's book and previewed the Preface. Lo and behold Brandt was talking about DiLorenzo. And his book was a direct reply to DiLorenzo's works, including The Real Lincoln, and seemed to be a document-based, irrefutable, refutation. Brandt, I suspected, had taken the time to do the work necessary to prove the truth of the mainstream in opposition to the fringe. I ordered it immediately.

I knew that I would read The Real Lincoln and Shattering the Truth together but, hoping to keep as open a mind as possible under the circumstances, I decided to read DiLorenzo first and Brandt second, instead of reading them side by side. Even without Brandt's help, I found DiLorenzo unconvincing.

Throughout The Real Lincoln, DiLorenzo discounts any historian who disagrees with him and lauds those who agree. He takes some bits and pieces from original sources and cuts and pastes them out of context. He alternately holds Lincoln to modern racial sensibilities and downplays the evils of slavery as irrelevant to the cause - or even a cause - of the Civil War. And, most glaringly, he writes from an absolutist standpoint. There is no room for nuance and no shades of gray. And there is certainly no room for historical context.

DiLorenzo's logic is often faulty but, at times, his points sound convincing. Many such points, however, rely on assumptions without footnotes or any other proof. But, as Brandt points out, even if the assumptions were footnoted, DiLorenzo's use of sources isn't always (or even often) reliable.

DiLorenzo uses The Real Lincoln as part of his broader effort to trash the image of Lincoln for refusing to allow the Confederacy to secede, for doing so not to save the Union but to consolidate absolute power and riches in the hands of a few and oppress the God-given liberties of all Americans. In a vacuum and unchecked, I fear, DiLorenzo's efforts could succeed. Thankfully, we don't live in a vacuum.

Check DiLorenzo's sources, and check his sources' sources. Or, if you don't have time, as I didn't, feel free to consult Shattering the Truth. Dennis Brandt has done yeoman's work for us all.

If you're interested in a *different* opinion on Abraham Lincoln, The Real Lincoln is right for you. But if you want that *different* view to be honest, accurate, or based in reality - as I think something with the word "real" in its title should be, look elsewhere - almost anywhere elsewhere would be better.

Tim Renshaw says

I'm a conservative that loves the U.S. Constitution. Was it a perfect document? Nope. Its largest failing was on the issue of slavery. Hideous that to get all the original states to sign on that this had to be left to a future generation to fix... and it needed it fixed. There, that should hopefully lay aside the kneejerk reaction to what follows as being because I'm some kind of racist. It is a shame that I need to even add in this caveat, but such are the current state of affairs in our politically correct, racially charged American environment.

As I understand it from many others, I was fortunate to have a history teacher in high school who correctly emphasized that the Civil War was NOT about slavery. So that part of this book didn't shock me. My high school days were back in 1980 just as President Reagan was coming into office and I was confused ever since by the fact that;

1) He rightly emphasized states rights

2) Spoke glowingly, as have all modern presidents, of Lincoln who at the very least, didn't believe the states had the right to secede.

I've been confused by President Obama's glowing praise of Lincoln beyond the obvious slavery angle. Why does an extremely liberal Democrat relate himself so tightly to Lincoln? Lincoln was surely a conservative, small government, minimal regulation, states rights (whoops, strike one) guy?

This issue of Lincoln restricting the states has been allowed to be so tied into the issue of slavery that to even voice this confusion aloud would get you shouted down. I recently asked a historian friend of mine about this confusion on my part and he recommended this book...

... and now I recommend this book!

This is not an ad hominem haranguing against Lincoln. This is a history book with sources cited and a bibliography that would choke a horse. I'm not going to get into the specifics as anything I would quote here, you'll dismiss out of hand. If you value yourself a student of history at all, you at least owe it to yourself to read this book so you can properly attack it if you wish. Be prepared that Lincoln's defenders are on record acquiescing to the facts presented in *The Real Lincoln*.

After reading this book and my belief that Obama is a smart man who knows exactly what he's doing in his policy and practice approaches to governance, I now understand why he loves Lincoln so much and it goes way, way beyond the Emancipation Proclamation (January 1863, Civil War erupts in April 1861 at Fort Sumter).

Jim says

The book is worth reading, but it leaves you wishing that it had been written by an author more intent on fleshing out the scholarship than one interested in bashing Lincoln. What are the actual statistics on how much of U.S. revenue was supplied by tariffs? Maybe a graph to show how this was split between the North and the South would have been useful. Could the author have spent a bit more time fleshing out the background of the 'American System' favored by Lincoln and his sponsors? There are interesting questions that the book raises, but fails to answer in a satisfying (non polemical) way. The Civil War was a disaster, and this book helps explain why... but there are many, many areas where the coverage is too shallow, and too polemical. The same material should be covered again in greater depth by someone without an obvious axe to grind.

Mark says

Disturbing book. The states had a right to secede from the union. This was accepted at the time. Constitutional amendments were proposed to prevent the right of secession. The right of secession is in fact a key to controlling the powers of a central government.

Lincoln entered the war without congressional approval, calling it a "rebellion". He blockaded the south, something that could only be done against a country with which we were at war. He suspended the writ of Habeas Corpus without approval from Congress. The Supreme Court said that this was not constitutional, but

Lincoln ignored it. Lincoln then took control of the newspapers, imprisoning without trial on the order of 13,000 people. People who voiced opposition to him.

The emancipation proclamation was not declared until 1863 when the war was not going well for the "Union". The slaves were only freed in states not then occupied by the union.

The Northern armies, as is well documented, plundered the southern countryside: destroying homes, killing innocent women and children, killing livestock and burning crops. All this to save the Union. All this against his own people.

Lincoln was The Great Centralizer. With him began the American Empire. This was continued after the Civil War with Manifest Destiny and the destruction of the Indian Nations.

Christopher Saunders says

History as ignorant rant. DiLorenzo portrays Lincoln as the peer of Hitler and Stalin, gleefully distorting history whether through misquotation, misrepresentation or outright lying. He claims, for instance, the Emancipation Proclamation did not free a single slave: he ignores that the Union controlled large swaths of the Confederacy by the time it was issued. The 13th Amendment, where slavery was permanently ended through legal, constitutional methods? Not mentioned once. He pretends the war isn't about slavery by ignoring the Ordinances of Secession that explicitly identify slavery as the cause. He claims Lincoln ignored chances for "peaceful abolition" without specifying how this was possible. (Surely not through Confederate peace offers, predicated on preserving slavery in the South forever.) Instead he dredges up an 1861 tariff that, even if universally loathed by the South, didn't become law until AFTER Ft. Sumter and affected foreign rather than domestic trade. He claims universal loathing of the Emancipation Proclamation by citing editorials from Democratic newspapers. He claims tariffs unconstitutional because they're not specifically cited in the Constitution, yet he claims secession as a Constitutional right... because it isn't specifically cited in the Constitution. He rants about Reconstruction which, even if his depiction were accurate, happened AFTER Lincoln's death.

Enough. Does Mr. DiLorenzo think we're all fools? If so, is it because he's looking for company?

Nebuchadnezzar says

Not so much a history or biography as an apologetic for the mythos of the Lost Cause of the Confederacy. DiLorenzo is correct in arguing that Lincoln and the North in general were not virtuous and sinless moral crusaders. That cartoon history is the stuff of pop culture and grade-school history textbooks. DiLorenzo, though, uses this as a straw man to bat down as if it were actually representative of real historical scholarship, thus creating a classic false dichotomy in which Lincoln is either a romanticized, mythologized figure or a bloodthirsty and power-hungry dictator.

It would not be quite right to say the sourcing is sloppy -- dishonest is the word for it. From the beginning of the book, DiLorenzo goes about constructing Lincoln the Raving White Supremacist Lunatic. Any

countervailing evidence is omitted. It's easy to spin this straw Lincoln from selective quotation. To be blunt, some of what Lincoln wrote on race would be indistinguishable from a Klan member today. To tear these quotations out of their historical context, though, is a cheap rhetorical sleight-of-hand known in history-speak as "presentism" (or "the historian's fallacy," if you're a fan of David Hackett Fischer). DiLorenzo commits this by using said quotes to effectively deny that Lincoln may have had even a hint of virtuous intent when it came to his position on slavery.

The arc of the book isn't anything new. The evangelists for the Lost Cause have been peddling this propaganda since the end of the Civil War. All the classic chestnuts are here -- states' rights, downplaying of slavery, the North "provoking" the South into war, etc. Nothing anyone familiar with Civil War scholarship hasn't seen before. The book only has value if you're a collector of Civil War memorabilia or Lost Cause pseudoscholarship. Otherwise, don't expect to find something resembling history here, it's the same old Passion Play.

More on the Lost Cause:

<http://www.georgiaencyclopedia.org/ng...>

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/reconstr...>

Lincoln's views on race and slavery in context:

<http://illinoisissues.uis.edu/feature...>

<http://www.theroot.com/views/was-linc...>

zikafus says

Everything you know about Lincoln is wrong... trust me.

This is another one of those books that takes a look at one of America's "heroes", tears off the mask of patriotic romanticism revealing a scoundrel beneath...

Lincoln was likely the worst President in United States history... sound insane? Read the book... you'll be left with zero complaints...

The Civil War initially had NOTHING to do with slavery (which would have been the only justifiable reason to wage it), it began, and was waged until Gettysburg on Lincoln's agenda to centralize federal power thus rewriting the Constitution. Not until after Gettysburg with the threat of Great Britain and France joining in the confederate cause did Lincoln produce his ingenious (in some sense) emancipation proclamation in hopes of generating a slave rebellion in the South. What they didn't teach us in schools was the North as Tocqueville mentioned was likely more racist than the south, and upon learning that the cause of the Civil War was not about preserving the Union but about freeing the slaves they rioted in Washington. Not to mention that Lincoln had just become the first US President to enlist a draft... this too did not please the racist northerners who opposed the new cause of the north. Considering the fact that the provision for succession was built into the Constitution, and that Lincoln brought armies against Southern civilians, and that the Geneva Convention had just been ratified, Lincoln was the first American President to commit genocide against his own people, on a scale 3% of the population in the South.

While I'm sure some of you will be up in arms upon hearing this new info... after reading the book which presents the evidence, you will have no doubt Lincoln was a scoundrel.

Britton Grier says

The central argument of the text is that Lincoln was acting unconstitutionally in waging war with the South (i.e. that states had the right to secede). For instance, in regards to the Emancipation Proclamation, DiLorenzo states it was a "war measure [...which] in reality, the president had no power to dictate such a thing to a state government." (p.37) If the southern states seceded (which all in the North and South admitted that they had as evidenced by the requirement that they accept amendments 13-15), then we can no longer discuss Abraham Lincoln's relationship with Southerners as a President to citizens. It becomes a matter of a Presidents relationship with enemy combatants in a foreign country.

As far as Habeas Corpus, Article 1 of the Constitutions states that it may be suspended in times of war. What is unclear, and what the Supreme Court has not ruled on, is who is responsible for this suspension. More to the point, Lincoln's initial suspension was in suppression of a rebellion in Maryland that was hindering the war effort. Upon hearing of other Generals' carte blanche interpretation of his suspension, Lincoln orders them to stop using it as such. Context helps.

I'll never argue in favor of a war. World War 2 in particular raises big questions about Just War ideology. But in a study of the blame for the Civil War, we must look at Fort Sumter and ask, would American's have approved or approve now of Lincoln admitting defeat and removing troops? DiLorenzo's argument is just that. In the face of a rebelling state, Lincoln should have done nothing.

So i'll ask: should we analyze the constitutionality of the Civil War by looking at the Southern States as a foreign power or as states within the US that were attempting to nullify the Federal law and thus, the Supremacy Clause? Either way, the author's constitutionality argument makes no sense. The clearer violation of the Constitution would be to wish it away, both the duties and benefits of such an agreement, like the Southern states were attempting.

I was really starting to buy the author's alternative to war until
P.277: "If this had happened [state-imposed, voluntary abolition] race relations in the South would not have been so irreparably poisoned as they were during Reconstruction. If the Republican Party had not used the ex-slaves as political pawns in the South and turned them against the whites, acts of violence against the ex-slaves and the institution of Jim Crow laws might never have happened." This is not just a bending of Reconstruction history, but proof that the author has no understanding of the period. Before, during, and after the Civil War, Southern whites were fearful of black freedom and sought ways to use the power of their state governments to stop it from coming to pass. There isn't a single shred of evidence to suggest that there was a Southern non-racist during the Civil War who becomes an advocate of Jim Crow laws due to the activities of the Freedman's Bureau or those of the Republican party. 200 years of institutional chattel slavery did more damage to race relations than 10 years of Reconstruction.

K says

2.5 Stars.

I find this to be the case with so many non-fiction books. They have a powerful start and then the book fades into repetition. About 170 pages in and I just couldn't go on. The first part of the book was fascinating,

particularly focusing on the political climate and the events leading up to the Civil War. But he did such a good overview that by the time he got to really focusing on Lincoln, I felt like I had read it all before.

I will say that I enjoy seeing Lincoln brought down to a more realistic portrayal. While, as you will note in my review below from a week ago, there are some obvious problems in his some of his arguments, a dissenting opinion can help bring to light some of our unrealistic expectations of our heroes. It is important to see them realistically so that we can realistically learn from them, not just their high points but their low points, too.

I am not finished with it but I wanted to capture some of my thoughts before I forget them. This is a very interesting look into what Lincoln really stands for. It is quite accepted that he was racist, like much of his generation, but I didn't realize he supported mercantilism. It is also widely known that he suspended habeas corpus for the duration of the war but I didn't realize how many political prisoners were arrested without a trial. It is better to have a real understanding of our heroes, their flaws can teach us as much as anyone.

I do have a couple problems with the book, besides its bias (which nearly all books have some bias), he seems myopic. He totally washes over the fact that the problem of slavery began with the Founding Fathers. Preferring to get the Constitution ratified than fight over the issue of slavery, the 3/5s compromise was established. Had Northern states relented and allowed all slaves to be counted, there would have been a precedent for them to be citizens, though obviously Southern states wanted to use slaves to bolster their numbers in a similar way to jerrymandering and other sorts of shenanigans. This compromise set the tone for the next century. Glossing over this makes Lincoln and his generation look like the culprits when really these were long standing problems.

Another issue I have with the book is the contradiction when it comes to the author's stance of slavery vs secession. In one section he talks about the war being unnecessary because other countries ended slavery peacefully. Then he talks about Lincoln not wanting to end slavery. But then he supports the South's right to secession because they were afraid Lincoln would end slavery, and yet he already presented evidence that Lincoln wasn't going to do so. He then says slavery was on its way out (it probably was) based on the fact that other countries were ending it and most Southern citizens were not slave holders. Then he says it was artificially held in place because of the Fugitive Slave Act which he first makes it sound was unsupported in the North and then goes on to state that citizens in the North were as racist as those in the South and supported slavery. So which was it?

Christopher says

Why was the United States the only country in the world to fight a war to end slavery?

Because the war wasn't about slavery. Like all other wars, it was fought over money and power.

Lincoln, the American Hitler, was the man who single-handedly shredded the Constitution and fathered "Big Government."

The "Church of Lincoln" has distorted facts and history to paint a picture of Lincoln in total contradiction of his real self and motives.

Fortunately, this author demolishes these falsehoods with simple logic, contextual arguments with respect to the Constitution, racism, and politics of the time.

Educate yourself on the real story of Lincoln, not a saint-like emancipator but a blood-thirsty, ruthless dictator.

Learn about the avoidable tragedy and the victims of Lincoln's ambition: the slaves, the citizens, and the transformation of the United States from a Republic to an imperialistic tyranny.

As well, this book makes extensive endnotes to the direct reference materials so everything is open to verification by the reader.

This book was a real eye-opener.

Monica Perez says

I give it a three instead of a four because I found it somewhat sensationalistic but it really is a must read. From here you can conduct a more academic investigation but it helps you shake off the brainwashing of the history that was written by the winners.

Kathy Brown says

This book was one that I had to force myself to finish, which isn't usual for me. I have been reading books that give both favorable and critical assessments of historical figures in recent years in an effort to find a balanced view. While I make no claim to being a Civil War authority, I have been reading about this subject for a number of years and have found numerous questionable assertions in "The Real Lincoln", such as Lincoln wanted a war just so he could establish a strong central government, a national bank and subsidize internal improvement projects.

This is a 279 page rant against the evils of a powerful central government. Mr. DiLorenzo seems to be judging Lincoln by 21st century standards, instead of viewing him as a man in the mid 19th century. Mr. DiLorenzo also makes numerous sweeping statements without referencing his sources, and is clearly a Confederate apologist. If you read this book, be sure to read others that discuss the issues that led up to the Civil War.

Nicholas says

Some weeks back I was in an online discussion about good Lincoln biographies. The book that received the most mentions was *The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and an Unnecessary War*, by Thomas DiLorenzo. Some brief internet searching revealed that the book is quite controversial and has been charged with gross distortion of history. Nevertheless, I was morbidly curious enough to read it myself.

DiLorenzo's stated goal is to get past the "myths" of Lincoln that he believes is all too common and reveal

the truth about the man. (p. 1-2) Yet despite his claims, DiLorenzo actually fails to uncover anything particularly novel about our sixteenth president. Instead, he does the opposite, and in so doing becomes the very type of historian he decries. He presents an abridged history, selectively using events, quotes, and supporting scholars to further his thesis driven work. In fact, DiLorenzo identifies nothing about Lincoln's views of race, southern succession, national unity, or methods of emancipation that is not addressed with greater care and context in Doris Kearns Goodwin's much superior *Team of Rivals*. In comparison, *The Real Lincoln* reminds me of a rushed college paper where all facts must be squeezed into the neatly predetermined premise and no argument should be examined too closely.

Read the rest.
