

How the Lincoln Myth Was Hatched By Thomas J. DiLorenzo

The violence of the criticism aimed at Lincoln by the great men of his time on both sides of the Mason-Dixon line is startling. The breadth and depth of the spectacular prejudice against him is often shocking for its cruelty, intensity, and unrelenting vigor. The plain truth is that Mr. Lincoln was deeply reviled by many who knew him personally, and by hundreds of thousands who only knew of him.

~ Larry Tagg, *The Unpopular Mr. Lincoln: The Story of America's Most Reviled President*

This quotation is the theme of Larry Tagg's 2009 book, *The Unpopular Mr. Lincoln*, which utilizes thousands of primary sources to make the case that no American president was more reviled by his contemporaries – at home and abroad – during his own lifetime than Abraham Lincoln was. Tagg is no Southern apologist: He is a native of Lincoln, Illinois, and profusely thanks Harold Holzer, one of the high priests of the Lincoln cult, in his acknowledgements. This book establishes Mr. Tagg as a card-carrying member of the cult.

Anyone who has read *The Real Lincoln* (or scanned the "King Lincoln Archive" at LewRockwell.com) would not be surprised at all to hear that Lincoln was hated and reviled by most of the "great men" (and the Northern masses) of his time. As Tagg hesitantly admits in his *Introduction*, Lincoln was widely criticized in the North as a "bloody tyrant" and a "dictator" for his "arbitrary arrests, the suspension of habeas corpus, and the suppression of newspapers . . ." More specifically, imprisoning tens of thousands of Northern civilians without due process for verbally opposing his policies; shutting down over 300 opposition newspapers; deporting an opposing member of Congress; confiscating firearms and other forms of private property; intimidating and threatening to imprison federal judges; invoking military conscription, income taxation, an internal revenue bureaucracy, and huge public debt; and ordering the murder of hundreds of draft protesters in the streets of New York City in July of 1863 are all good reasons why Lincoln was so widely despised.

Tagg quotes the abolitionist Wendell Phillips as saying that Lincoln was "a first-rate second-rate man." Historian George Bankroft called him "ignorant, self-willed, and is surrounded by men some of whom are almost as ignorant as himself." The Lacrosse, Wisconsin *Democrat* newspaper editorialized in November of 1864 that "If Abraham Lincoln should be reelected for another term of four years of such wretched administration, we hope that a bold hand will be found to plunge the dagger into the tyrant's heart for the public welfare." In May of 1864 the *New York Times* said this of Lincoln:

No living man was ever charged with political crimes of such multiplicity and such enormity as Abraham Lincoln. He has been denounced without end as a perjurer, a usurper, a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of his country, a reckless desperado, a heartless trifler over the last agonies of an expiring nation. Had that which has been said of him been true there is no circle in Dante's Inferno full enough of torment to expiate his iniquities.

The inside cover of *The Unpopular Mr. Lincoln* claims that it is the first book ever written on how unpopular Lincoln really was. Well, not really. "Mainstream" Lincoln scholar David Donald remarked in *Lincoln Reconsidered* that Lincoln was wildly unpopular in his own time. Edgar Lee Masters wrote of the near universal hatred of Lincoln by his contemporaries in *Lincoln the Man*. *Lincoln's Critics: The Copperheads of the North*, spent a career researching and writing about Lincoln's Northern critics. *Freedom Under Lincoln* by Dean Sprague and *Constitutional Problems Under Lincoln* by James Randall also discuss the critics of Lincoln's tyrannical and dictatorial behavior, although these authors do their best to whitewash it all.

The most interesting chapter of *The Unpopular Mr. Lincoln* is the final Epilogue entitled "The Sudden Saint." Here Mr. Tagg explains how the Republican Party, with the aid of the Northern Yankee or neo-Puritan clergy, created out of thin air the myth of the "sainted" and "beloved" Abraham Lincoln. In order to understand why the role of the neo-Puritan, New England clergy was so important, one must understand that it was their neo-Puritanical religious fanaticism that fueled the war-making ideology of the North during the war. In his essay, "America's Two Just Wars: 1775 and 1861," Murray Rothbard accurately described

it as "a fanatical and emotional neo-Puritanism driven by a fervent 'postmillennialism' which held that, as a precondition for the Second Advent of Jesus Christ, man must set up a thousand-year Kingdom of God on Earth." Moreover, this "kingdom" is "to be a perfect society . . . free of sin," especially slavery, alcohol, and Catholicism.

Thus, the Northern "war against slavery" was not so much motivated by the injustice of slavery and the plight of the slaves, but the desire to use the military force of government to create a perfect society, a Kingdom of God on Earth. That's why peaceful emancipation, which is what occurred in all the Northern states that ended slavery, was out of the question. (There were still slaves in New York City as late as 1853, and in parts of New England into the early 1860s). Instead, explains Rothbard:

The Northern war against slavery partook of fanatical millennialist fervor, of a cheerful willingness to uproot institutions, to commit mayhem and mass murder, to plunder and loot and destroy, all in the name of high moral principle and the birth of a perfect world.

This is why the quintessential Yankee religious fanatic, Julia Ward Howe, referred to all the mass murder, burning and plundering of cities, and destruction of the war as "the glory of the coming of the Lord" in her "Battle Hymn of the Republic." To Julia Ward Howe, the death of more than 600,000 Americans was "glorious."

So it should not be surprising that the Yankee clergy teamed up with the Republican Party after Lincoln's death to deify him. Lincoln's assassination was a miracle of luck as far as they were concerned, for it put in their lap an opportunity to deify their Big Government political agenda along with Lincoln himself. As Larry Tagg explains, the Republican Party "saw that his death was a propaganda windfall – Lincoln could be made to stand for the North, for freedom . . . "

As for the Republican Party, they knew that they were all complicit in war crimes for having intentionally waged war on Southern civilians for four years, and continued Lincoln's political tactic of invoking Scripture to attempt to "justify" their war crimes. (Unlike Lincoln, many other Republicans were actually Christians.) Thus, after Lincoln was assassinated and died on Good Friday, "pastors across America rewrote

their Easter sermons," writes Tagg, "to include a new, exalted view of Lincoln as an American Moses, a leader out of slavery, a national savior who was not allowed to cross over into the Promised Land."

Of course, they all knew that in his first inaugural address Lincoln supported a constitutional amendment that would have explicitly enshrined slavery in the Constitution; that he wrote a public letter to Horace Greeley explaining that his sole objective in the war was "to save the union" and not to disturb slavery; and that his real "last best hope" was "colonization," or the deportation of all black people from America. This all had to be forgotten, and history rewritten. And it was. Senator James Grimes of Iowa immediately recognized that the deification of Lincoln by the Yankee clergy and the Republican Party "has made it impossible to speak the truth of Abraham Lincoln hereafter."

Tagg explains how it was Secretary of War Edwin Stanton who decided to use Lincoln's funeral as a massive propaganda tool as he "made the martyr's corpse a traveling exhibit of Southern wickedness." The funeral procession took a 1600-mile route, and Stanton prohibited anyone to obscure the damage done by the assassin's bullet so that the corpse would appear as gruesome as possible.

The Yankee preachers joined in the political scheme to deify Lincoln, a man many of them had condemned just months earlier. One such hypocrite was Henry Ward Beecher of Brooklyn, New York, the "greatest preacher of the age" according to Tagg. (Presumably, only Northern preachers can compete for such a title). Beecher "had attacked the President through the previous four years," writes Tagg, but now he "heaped only praise on Lincoln." "Beecher and the Radicals [i.e., Republicans] soon saw that all their [political] enemies would fall before the sword that Lincoln's death had put in their hands, and they widened its swath to wound the Democratic press," says Tagg.

It wasn't just the religious rhetoric of the Yankee preachers that intimidated all critics of the Republican Party regime, which would enjoy monopoly rule for the next several generations. The Republican Party supplied the requisite violence and intimidation. "The Democratic papers quickly realized that if they didn't repent their opposition to Lincoln, they risked ruin by mobs like the ones that had gutted their offices in the first summer of the war." Tagg refers here to how the

Lincoln administration organized Republican Party goon squads to roam the country and literally destroy the printing presses of opposition newspapers while soldiers often imprisoned (without due process) the editors and owners of many of the newspapers. This is all described in the above-mentioned books, *Freedom Under Lincoln* and *Constitutional Problems Under Lincoln*.

Mistakenly believing that once the war was over, free speech had been restored in the North, one observer of the Lincoln funeral "sent up a cheer for Jefferson Davis" and "was set upon by mourners and nearly torn to pieces." A Chicago man said of Lincoln's assassination in the lobby of a hotel, "it served him right." He was shot to death in front of dozens of witnesses, but "there was no arrest, no one would have arrested the man," writes Tagg. Americans were imprisoned all over the North for making similar statements. "The doors of local jails rattled shut behind men in every city who were herd exulting the news of Lincoln's death" (emphasis added). The editor of a Maryland newspaper was "killed by a mob after he had published criticism of Lincoln." Such mobs traveled from one paper after another that was supportive of the Democratic Party and "emptied their contents into the street amid the applause of an immense crowd" while warning other Democratic newspapers of similar treatment.

Media opposition to the Republican Party, which was the federal government for the next several generations, was rendered prostrate. The South was under military occupation for twelve years after the war. Consequently, ministers there were ordered to deliver sermons deifying Lincoln while many Southern newspapers were forced to do the same. These editors were "installed by Union armies" in the occupied South, as Tagg explains. Southern journalists were made to understand that the penalty for challenging the newly-invented Lincoln mythology was the "terror of confiscation and imprisonment." Not surprisingly, there were "sudden proclamations of Lincoln's nobility" all throughout the South as well as the North. Thus were born the myths and superstitions about America's most reviled president. July 22, 2010

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