

What Your Teacher *Probably* Won't Tell You About Abraham Lincoln



His face is on every penny and every five-dollar bill. You have heard the name since you were small. He was a lawyer; then he was President of the United States during a “civil war.” They called him “Honest Abe.” He is credited with “freeing the slaves.” Some States erect statues to him. A State capital is named after him. Three States claim him as a resident. One State’s motto is “Land of Lincoln.” Washington, D.C. has erected an enormous memorial to his honor. Was he really worthy of this status of virtual secular sainthood?

He was an Illinois lawyer known as “Honest Abe”. You probably haven’t heard of too many lawyers and politicians that are known for their honesty. Your teachers probably have presented Lincoln in the best possible light, even though they may have told you a nasty tale or two about one of the Founding Fathers and a few about more recent historical figures. The news media regularly presents the misdeeds of current politicians, but Lincoln seems to stand out as a public figure who could do no wrong.

Wasn't Lincoln an Honest Lawyer?

Have you ever heard of an individual with the nickname “Honest” who actually is honest? You think of a used car salesman with the name “Honest John” as one who will say anything to sell you a worn out car at a price much higher than it is worth. Things weren’t that much different in the 19th Century. A nick-name with the word “honest” would have had an element of sarcasm.

There is nothing in the historical record that would indicate that Lincoln was any more or less honest than any lawyer of his era. He was most noted for his work with the railroads. The verb “railroad” came into being as a result of the dishonest practices of railroads during the 19th Century. Can you image such organizations seeking out a particularly honest lawyer?

Wasn't Lincoln a Republican?

Yes, but the Republican Party of the mid-19th Century wasn’t much like the modern Republican Party. Modern Democrats and Republicans argue about which one has the best tax policies and the most frugal spending policies. But Lincoln’s Republican Party had an open policy of “tax and spend.” It was a new idea.

Unfortunately, Lincoln’s policy was tax-in-the-South and spend-in-the-North. It was so draconian that seven States opted out of the United States before Lincoln even took office. His ill-fated policies drove another four States away shortly after he took office. At least three other States were also ready to leave, but were stopped by drastic, unconstitutional measures by Lincoln. Lincoln and his Republican party were that far out of step with the States.

Wasn't Lincoln a Great Humanitarian?

There is considerable propaganda to that effect. But the historical record tells a considerably different tale. Over thirty Indians were hanged from the same gallows. The charges were bogus and to this day the Lakota people mourn their loss every year on the anniversary of the execution. Lincoln took credit for not hanging more Indians for the same bogus crime so he could call himself a “humanitarian.”

You hear a lot of bad stuff about the Andersonville prison camp where Union prisoners were kept. However, there were several Northern prison camps where Confederate prisoners were kept. The prisoners were half-starved and many died because they were denied medical treatment. The conditions at Andersonville were also rough, but those prisoners were given the same rations as their Confederate jailers and the best medical help that was available. Union doctors were invited to treat Andersonville prisoners, but the North refused to help. In the prosperous North, there was plenty for everyone—except the Confederate prisoners. That is an example of Lincoln’s justice.

Before Lincoln came to power, warring armies would routinely call truces to exchange prisoners. Lincoln began to refuse prisoner exchanges. This practice developed into a lasting policy where armies stopped exchanging prisoners. As a result, numerous soldiers suffered and many died in prisons in Lincoln’s war and in many wars to follow.

Wasn’t Lincoln a Champion of Justice?

Of course, he was not. Lincoln was an enemy of individual rights. He suspended one of the most basic rights that we enjoyed under Anglo-American law, the right of *habeas corpus*. While there is not room to fully explain that important Constitutionally guaranteed right in this short pamphlet, suffice it to say that *habeas corpus* allows anyone arrested the right to see a judge to explain why he should be kept in custody.

Only the vilest of dictators would even think of suspending such a right. Lincoln was such a dictator. His action was not only vile, but illegal, as the Constitution allows only Congress to suspend *habeas corpus* and only under the most urgent of circumstances.

But Wasn’t Lincoln a Civil Rights Activist?

No he was not. In fact, he was an out-and-out racist. He considered African-Americans to be inferior and not deserving of the full spectrum of rights that Americans enjoy. His 1858 debates with Stephen Douglas exposed his true feeling about other races. Don’t let anyone tell you that these are “quotes out of context.” In open forums all over Illinois, Lincoln exposed his real bigoted racial views.

Didn’t the Emancipation Proclamation Free the Slaves?

Have you ever wondered why you hear a lot about this proclamation, but have probably never been required to read it? Ask your teacher to read the actual words of that infamous document in class. It freed no one. All bonded servants in areas that the Union controlled were not to be freed. Only those in areas not controlled by the Union were “freed.” That would be like the U.S. President declaring that all the wives in China were divorced from their husbands.

The Emancipation Proclamation was merely a propaganda tool and a failed attempt to create servile insurrections in the South. It allowed Lincoln to recast his aggressive war against the South as a crusade against slavery. It made the South’s European allies a little uneasy. It solidified the radical abolitionists’ support for Lincoln, but it freed no slaves.

Didn’t Lincoln Fight the “Civil War” to End Slavery?

No. Lincoln even said that he did not care whether slaves were freed or not. He once said he would free all of them if it would bring the South back into the union. He also said that he would see that none of them would be free if that would bring the South back. He also said that he would free some and leave other in bondage if that would help him conquer the South. He even offered to propose a constitutional amendment guaranteeing the continuance of slavery if the South would return to the union.

Slavery did not matter to Lincoln. He and the radical abolitionists used one another for their own political advantage. Keeping the South and the tax revenue that it provided was all that mattered to him.

Wasn't Lincoln's "Civil War" Necessary to Save the Union?

Save it from what? All of the States that seceded were free and independent States. (See our publication *What Your Teacher Probably Won't Tell You About the Declaration of Independence*.) All that Lincoln's invasion of the South did was to create a union by force.

To this day, many Southerners feel that they are not part of the Lincoln's union by force. The federal government completely ignores their views, as it has for over 140 years. (See our publication *What Your Teacher Probably Won't Tell You About the League of the South*.) Lincoln's war was nothing more than a war of aggression against the South.

What Is a War of Aggression?

After World War II, the victorious Allied powers put Axis powers leaders on trial for "war crimes." (See our publication *What Your Teacher Probably Won't Tell You About the Nuremburg Trials*.) While the wisdom of this action may be debatable, it is interesting to know what the charges against the Nazis and Japanese were.

One of the initial charges advanced against the Nazi defendants was "fighting an aggressive war." Most of these men were convicted of "war crimes" and most of those convicted of "war crimes" were hanged. So apparently the world thinks that levying an aggressive war is a pretty serious offense. The union army committed thousands of sanctioned atrocities against Southern civilians and their private property. Why weren't these criminals brought to justice after the war?

Was the "Civil War" an Aggressive War?

The term "civil war" does not accurately describe the War Between the States fought between 1861 and 1865. By definition, a civil war is a war to determine who will control the government. The South had no interest in controlling the United States government. It merely wanted to be independent of the U.S. government and to be "let alone". (See our publication *What Your Teacher Probably Won't Tell You About the "Civil War."*) Lincoln sent his armies to invade the South. The Southern States merely left the Union, just as they had once joined the Union. They left because it no longer served their best interests.

So Who Was Abraham Lincoln?

If there was a dictator in a foreign country who unfairly over-taxed its citizens, suspended the basic rights of citizens, imprisoned those who disagreed with him, executed innocent prisoners primarily because they were of a different race, used deceptive propaganda to promote his party's nefarious goals, invaded a peaceful neighboring nation, violating the rules of war in the process and causing the prisoners of war to suffer unnecessarily, what would we call him? Whatever name comes to mind, that is who Abe Lincoln was.

-By **T.V. Weber**, author of *The Crumbling Wall Against Tyranny*

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