

The Deification of Lincoln

(and of the American State)

By Thomas DiLorenzo

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“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: America's Most Reviled President*

In his book, *The Unpopular Mr. Lincoln*, historian Larry Tagg, a native of Lincoln, Illinois, constructs a powerful case that **Abraham Lincoln was by far the most hated and reviled of all American presidents, North and South, during his lifetime.** For example, in May of 1864 the New York Times labeled Lincoln “a perjurer, a usurper, a tyrant, a subverter of the Constitution, a destroyer of the liberties of this country, a reckless desperado, a heartless trifler . . . there is no circle in Dante’s Inferno full enough of torment to expiate his iniquities.”

The Lacrosse, Wisconsin Democrat newspaper warned in November of 1864 that should Lincoln be reelected, “we hope that a bold hand will be found to plunge the dagger into the tyrant’s heart . . .” Such views were commonplace in the North.

This all changed after Lincoln’s death, as the Republican Party recruited (and probably paid quite handsomely) the New England clergy to capitalize on the assassination for

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political propaganda purposes. Professor Tagg explains this in a chapter entitled “**The Sudden Saint.**” After viciously vilifying him for four years as an infidel, and worse, “pastors across America rewrote their Easter sermons” after Lincoln’s death on Good Friday, “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.”

The Republican Party, with the help of a highly-politicized clergy, saw that “all their political enemies would fall before the sword that Lincoln. Such were the origins of the Lincoln Myth, a much bigger rewriting of history than anything the Soviets or any other totalitarian regime ever attempted, for it has been going on now for more than 150 years. An important part of this story is told in a 1943 book that I recently discovered entitled *The Deification of Lincoln* by Ira D. Cardiff. It is for sale on Amazon.com, and is also online. It was recently reprinted by the Christopher Publishing House of Boston and is dedicated to “those lovers of truth who are unafraid of special interests, public opinion or popular superstitions.”

The book starts out stating that, by 1943 most Americans were already “not at all interested in the truth about Lincoln” thanks to nearly eighty years of lies, myths, and superstitions about him in thousands of books. “They are not interested, in other words, in the real Lincoln,” wrote Cardiff. “They desire a supernatural Lincoln, a Lincoln with none of the faults or frailties of the common man, a Lincoln who is a savior, leading us to democracy and liberty – though most of said readers are not interested in democracy or liberty . . .” Moreover, “a biography of Lincoln which told the truth about

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him would probably have great difficulty in finding a publisher.” That was nearly seventy-five years ago. Nearly three quarters of a century before Larry Tagg’s book was published, Ira Cardiff wrote of the widespread hatred and revulsion of Lincoln by Northerners, especially the Northern clergy, and how that all changed after his death for purely political reasons, based on an ever-growing mountain of lies. Cardiff focuses on perhaps the biggest lie told by the hyper-political New England clergy, the zealots who instigated the war in the name of eradicating America - and then the world - of sin in order to create a Kingdom of God on Earth that would pave the way for the Second Coming of Christ. That is what motivated the “abolitionist” movement much more than concern for the slaves. (See Murray Rothbard’s essay, “Just War”).

All of a sudden, the atheist Abraham Lincoln was portrayed by the lying New England clergy, in cahoots with the Republican Party, as the holiest and most saintly man in America, if not on the entire planet. His father, who he hated so much that he did not attend his funeral, suddenly was said to have possessed “sterling mental and moral qualities.” Lincoln the atheist was said to have spent most of his time on his knees in prayer in the White House. “His mother became second only to the Virgin Mary in her chastity.” “Thousands of sermons were preached to prove him devoutly religious . . .” There was of course never any evidence or proof of any of this. In fact, there is voluminous evidence that exactly the opposite was true, as Cardiff explains in great detail. The first biographies of Lincoln, of which there are now over ten thousand, were filled with statements like “He [Lincoln] believed in his inmost soul that he was an instrument in the hands of God for the accomplishment of a

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great purpose.” It is of course absurd to assert that you know what is in a man’s “innermost soul.” Yours truly has found that contemporary Lincoln biographies are polluted with similarly silly statements about what was supposedly in Lincoln’s heart, his soul, his mind, etc. Bill O’Reilly’s *Killing Lincoln* is especially ridiculous in this regard. There are statements on nearly every page about what was “in his mind” or “in his heart.”

Another hallmark of contemporary Lincoln “scholarship” is the repetition of statements just like this one from one of the very first Lincoln biographies: “He was in the White House as God’s instrument.” The assumption here is that the biographer knows what is in the mind of God. Such nonsense set the template for almost all future Lincoln biographies, with very few exceptions.

Cardiff devoted much of his book citing primary sources describing how atheistic and anti-religious the “saintly” Lincoln really was. For example, **“previous to his nomination for the presidency, he was roundly condemned by the clergy as an infidel, while after his martyrdom, the same clerics were loud in the claim of his piety (emphasis added).”** Larry Tagg says the exact same thing.

When Lincoln was a candidate for president, Cardiff points out, only three of the twenty-three ministers in Springfield, Illinois supported him. Moreover, early biographers who actually knew Lincoln had a very different take on his views on religion than writers who never had any personal contact with him, or anyone else who did. Colonel Ward Lamon, a close friend and confidant of Lincoln’s, wrote a biography in which he called Lincoln “an infidel.” His personal White House secretary, John G. Nicolay, wrote that “Mr. Lincoln did

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not, to my knowledge, in any way, change his religious ideas, opinions of beliefs from the time he left Springfield till the day of his death." Those "religious ideas" were the ideas of a non-believer. Nicolay made this comment to counter the absurd lie pedaled by the Republican Party, the New England clergy, and court historians after the war that Lincoln experienced some kind of religious conversion late in life.

This lie is still repeated to this day in myriad Lincoln biographies.

Judge David Davis, who managed Lincoln's presidential campaign and who was subsequently appointed to the Supreme Court, wrote that Lincoln "had no faith, in the Christian sense of the term . . ." Lincoln's wife, Mary Todd, said that "Mr. Lincoln had no hope, and no faith, in the usual acceptance of those words."

All of this is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to The Lincoln Myth, as I discuss in *The Real Lincoln and Lincoln Unmasked*. Mountains of lies, myths and superstitions envelope almost every fact of Lincoln's life, thanks to generations of "Lincoln scholars." To be a card-carrying "Lincoln scholar" one must demonstrate the ability to come up with at least a half dozen excuses or rationales for every tyrannical or immoral act or words of Lincoln's. His lifelong racist, white-supremacist speeches were not his sincere beliefs but a ploy to win over white racist voters, we are told. He objected "to making voters or jurors of Negroes," he said in a Lincoln-Douglas debate, so that Negroes could eventually become voters and jurors, Harry Jaffa informed us in his last book on "Father Abraham." He proposed the 'Corwin Amendment', Doris Kearns-Goodwin informs us, to "save the Republican Party" so that it could, someday, maybe in fifty

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years, end slavery. When he advocated the deportation or “colonization” of black people, “this is how honest people lie,” Gabor Boritt tells us. And on and on. As Cardiff wrote: “The unfortunate and defenseless public . . . is almost powerless to protect itself from Lincoln hysteria. If it attempts to get the truth about Lincoln, it is confronted with a mountain of fable and froth, foolishness and fancy Of the thousands of books published on Lincoln [as of 1943], one can almost count on his fingers those of any value as critical, scientific productions.”

Cardiff believed that the U.S. could have ended slavery peacefully, as all the rest of the world did in the nineteenth century (including the British, French, Dutch, Danes, Swedes, Spaniards, the northern states in the U.S.). That would have taken a real statesman, however, and not a small-time Illinois railroad lobbyist who once stated his life’s aspiration as being the political party boss of Illinois. Without the war, wrote Cardiff:

“[T]here would have been saved several million valuable lives and several billions of money But the secondary effects [of the war] were even more disastrous the enmity and sectional hatred which arose, the political oligarchy of ex soldiers with their disgusting pension raids upon the public treasury and a monopoly by them of political offices, a false and distorted idea of patriotism, the retardation to the material development of the South, the racial hatred between southern whites and blacks greatly exaggerated”

To all of this “is now added the debasing moral effect of presenting to the innocent youth of the land the account of a prominent national character of this period in an utterly false light.” Even worse, as Clyde Wilson once remarked, is the fact that the deification of Lincoln led to the deification of the

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presidency in general, and then eventually to the entire government.

Robert Penn Warren wrote about this phenomenon in his book, *The Legacy of the Civil War*, in which he explains how - and myriad other myths about the war in general - were used by the Republican Party to create The Mother of All Political Myths - that thanks to Lincoln, the U.S. government had acquired a "treasury of virtue." This meant that anything the government did from then on - genocide against the Plains Indians, murdering hundreds of thousands of Filipinos, the imperialistic Spanish-American War, entering World War I, dropping atomic bombs on Japan, etc., was virtuous, by definition, because it was the U.S. government that was doing it.

The founding fathers never argued that Americans were so morally exceptional that they therefore had a right to become the bullies of the world and attempt to remake the entire planet in their image. That is the Lincoln legacy. Actually, the idea emanates from the New England "yankees" and their Mid-Western compatriots like Lincoln. See Clyde Wilson's "The Yankee Problem in America." Lincoln's own political rhetoric, which has been faithfully repeated by generations of court historians, is what the late Professor Mel Bradford called "the rhetoric of continuing revolution." Others call it the rhetoric of "American exceptionalism."

The Best of Thomas DiLorenzo

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