

# Abraham Lincoln's Transformative Presidency

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The purpose of this paper is to define Abraham Lincoln's Public Philosophy, based on American Political Development methodology for political scientists of the ideas in a rigorous and systematic way (Ricci, 1984) of that shaper. What is a Public Philosophy? To explain both American Development methodology and define a public philosophy, James W. Caesar asked "What is the Public Philosophy?", in *Public Philosophy and Political Science: Crisis and Reflection* (Stratham, Jr., 2002). Public Philosophy, was a term, initially used by Walter Lippman, in 1955 and discussed by Samuel Beer, who defined the concept as an ideology, to give definition to a core of ideas that shapes public philosophy for a full era. As the concept deals ideas and philosophy, public philosophy correlates with Ricci's understanding of the "Tragedy of Political Science" leading to a new methodology.

**Keywords:** Abraham Lincoln, Public Philosophy, methodology

## Introduction

As a preliminary to analyze the Cooper Union address it is necessary to understand Lincoln's anti-slavery reasoning. Biographies about why Lincoln was opposed begin with his early life with his father, I use a current one: *Abe: Abraham Lincoln in his Times* (Reynolds, 2020), which explains the Lincoln family with father, Thomas Lincoln and mother, Lucy Hanks, the daughter of a plantation overseer, who was born out of wedlock, who Lincoln believed was an aristocrat that might have explained his mental capacities. During his childhood in Kentucky, his father, according to *Abe*, "was a shiftless, impecunious rube, who kept young Abe from his books and hired him out so regularly that, as Lincoln later said, 'I used to be a slave'" (Reynolds, 2020, p. 22). Obviously, there is much more to explain Lincoln's antislavery beliefs. Later, in politics, he explained his life, as a poor boy on the frontier. Lincoln repeated the words Thomas Gray's phrase, "The short and simple annals of the poor" (Reynolds, 2020, p. 21). Moving from one frontier farm in Kentucky, Thomas Lincoln moved his family across the Ohio (on a farm in Indiana, purchased from the federal government at the land office in Vincennes Indiana, purchasing the land on the installment plan). Soon after, Thomas moved to a new farm in the west. Nancy Lincoln's aunt and uncle Betsy and Thomas Sparrow joined Thomas, Abe, and Nancy Lincoln on their frontier home.

Soon after the Sparrows moved in, Nancy suffered from the debilitating effects of the milk disease, caused by drinking milk from cows that eat the white poisonous white snakeroot. Nancy Hanks Lincoln died in October 1853 at thirty-four. After his Nancy's death, Thomas remarried Sarah Bush Johnston, a thirty-year-old widow with two daughters and a son, ranging in age from eight to thirteen. Thomas returned to Indiana with Sarah and her children. Slavery is explained as "the blacks were being torn from loved ones and sent 'into perpetual slavery' in the Deep South".

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Lincoln's continued development of his anti-slavery mentality: memory of his flat board trip to New Orleans and saw firsthand the horrors of slave families being auctioned in New Orleans. He described what he had seen in a letter to Kentucky friend, Joshua Speed, a slave holder himself, the inhumanity of slavery (Reynolds, 2020, p. 323). Further explained to Speed, that the northern people were now opposed to slavery, "A number of interrelated factors-political, social, and cultural caused the sea change in the North's attitude". (Reynolds, 2020, p. 324).

Very early in his life, Lincoln's political life developed. This article about Lincoln's transformative presidency could be devoted to accomplishments, particularly to changing the constitution and preserving the Union with the Civil War. Instead, I am intent to describe his Republican Party philosophy that guided his transformative policies. In a few words, Lincoln's charismatic personality assured that all who knew him believed in his leadership capacities. Rather than describing the many offices and political roles he played, this paper is to describe his ideas and not discuss the many political parties and leaders which influenced his philosophy and politics. Prior to being a Republican, Lincoln was a Whig in the tradition of Daniel Webster and especially his Kentucky hero, who had chosen to leave Virginia and the Jeffersonian politics through the Cumberland Gap to Kentucky.

Abraham Lincoln's Cooper Union Speech made him President, on February 27, in 1860, in New York; Lincoln accepted an invitation to Henry Ward Beecher church in Brooklyn to discuss his debates with Illinois Senator Stephen F. Douglas for the Senate election, in 1858, the debates started out on August 21 in the upper middle of Illinois in Ottawa and then proceeded to the northwest of the state in Freeport. The debates continued for two months discussing the issue of Popular Sovereignty over the extension of slavery throughout United States territories.

During the debates, Douglas had at first opposed the extension of slavery, that alienated southerners. Then he changed his position, saying that he supported the extension of slavery, supported by the biased administrations of Franklin Pierce and James Buchanan (Reynolds, 2020, p. 418).

When Lincoln arrived from his home, Springfield, ILL, the Young Men's Republican Union, who had assumed sponsorship for his address moved its location to the Cooper institute. The Union's board included members such as Horace Greeley and William Cullen Bryant, who opposed New York Senator William Seward for the Republican Presidential nomination. Lincoln, as an unannounced presidential aspirant, attracted a capacity crowd of 1,500 curious New Yorkers (*The New York Times*, Cooper Union Address, February 27, 1860).

Earlier, John Brown's raid had occurred at Harper's Ferry, and he had been executed. Southern political leaders, assuming the raid was associated with the Republican Party, vilified Senator Seward. Seward's vilification in turn put Lincoln in an unexpectedly strong position to win the Republican nomination. "Lincoln's friend, Jessie Fell had previously brought up the idea of Lincoln's casting his hat in the presidential ring" (Reynolds, 2020, p. 465). But Lincoln did not believe that he was prominent enough to run, saying,

Oh, Fell. . . What's the use of talking me for the presidency, whilst we have such men as Seward, Chase, and others known to the people and whose names are so intimately associated with the principles of the Republican Party. (Reynolds, 2020, pp. 464-466)

According to Lincoln's law office partner, William Herndon, reported to the *New York Times*, Lincoln had worked laboriously in researching the material for his speech, examining the views of the thirty-nine signers of the Constitution. Lincoln discovered that at least 21 of them—a majority believed that Congress should control slavery in the territories not allow it to expand.

According to the *New York Times*, the Republican Stance was not revolutionary, but like the Founding Fathers, and should not alarm Southerners (radicals had threatened to secede if a Republican was elected President). Herndon who knew the speech, but was not present, explained to the *New York Times*, details of how the speech was constructed as a lawyer's brief.

I have analyzed Abraham Lincoln's Cooper Union Address, on February 27, 1860, in New York, New York, transcribed by the *New York Times*. The address is included in Sean Wilentz's *No Property in Man: Slavery and Antislavery at the Nation's Founding* (2018), including the lectures, Wilentz delivered at Harvard, and analyzed the Cooper Union address that explained the significant details of his debates with Illinois Senator Stephen Douglas. Lincoln's address to the Young Men's Republican Union expressed much about why slavery should not be extended in the territories, all of which Lincoln exemplified with the historical details how each had been acquired.

Lincoln exposed the roots of the sectional strife and the "inconsistent positions capitulate of Senator Stephen Douglas and Chief Justice Roger Taney, urging his fellow Republicans not to capitulate to Southern demands to recognize slavery as being right, but to stand by our duty fearlessly and effectively." (*New York Times*).

As reported by the *Times*, Senator Douglas replied, "our fathers, when they framed the Government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now." Back and forth, Senator Douglas and Lincoln discussed the differences between the sections regarding the extension of slavery into the territories and most importantly whether the government as framed by the "Thirty-Nine Founders" had agreed on slavery. Douglas asked "What was the frame of government under which we live?" Douglas answered, "The Constitution consists of the original framed in 1787".

At this stage, Douglas and Lincoln went back and forth about who were the Thirty-Nine framers. The question of federal control of slavery in the territories, seems not to have been directly discussed by the framers. Consequently, the "thirty-nine" or any of them recorded anything about slavery in government territories. Lincoln in his address then proceeded to discuss the history of how for example, the "Northwest Ordinances" were acquired and involved with slavery was described, and Louisiana Purchase both territories recognized by the government. The Louisiana purchased by President Jefferson from French Chancellor Napoleon and the Northwest Territories or Ordinances were territories that agreed not to have slavery, that was legalized by President George Washington. Both of these territories were discussed during the Lincoln Douglas debates and the Cooper Union address regarding the extension of slavery.

Lincoln's speech, according to Sean Wilentz, needed to accomplish two things, in order to refute the claim made by both wings of the Democratic Party that Congress was powerless to legislate on slavery in the territories as well as to deny the proslavery argument that the Constitution affirmed an absolute right to property in man (Wilentz, 2018, p. 252). Lincoln said the same thing to fellow citizens of New York: "Our fathers, when they framed the Government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now" (Lincoln, according to the *New York Times*). From this point on, when I am quoting Lincoln according to Stephen Douglas, it is always according to *New York Times* reporters present and recording the Cooper Union speech. Then Lincoln reiterated Douglas comment during the debates, I fully endorse this, and I adopt it as a text for this discourse. I so adopt it because it provides a precise and an agreed starting point for a discussion between Republicans and that wing of the Democracy headed by Senator Douglas. It simply leaves the inquiry: "What was the understanding those fathers had of the question mentioned?" The answer must be: The Constitution of the United States. That Constitution consists of the original, framed in 1787 (and under which the present

government first went into operation (Lincoln). Unquestioned, was the question of “NO Property in Man” included in the Constitution? YES! It is interesting to note that Frederick Douglas agreed that the Constitution stated was explicit in stating that the Constitution was the basis for agreeing with No Property in Man (Reynolds, 2020, p. 350), Horace Greeley, who applauded Lincoln’s speech at Cooper Union had bitterly disputed Frederick Douglas’ assertion that the Constitution denied No Property in Man. Lincoln’s research on whether United States government had ever agreed that slavery would never be denied was demonstrably proven when Lincoln stated that President George Washington had approved and signed the Northwest Ordinances showing that “in his understanding, no line dividing local from federal authority, nor anything in the Constitution, forbade the Federal Government, to control as to slavery in federal territory” (Lincoln), in which slavery in federal territories demonstrated repeatedly that slavery would not be extended:

Where North Carolina ceded its western territories to the United States now constitutes the states of Mississippi and Alabama. In both deeds of cession, it was made condition by the ceding states that the Federal government should not prohibit slavery in the ceded territory.

Continuing, Lincoln repeated similar examples such as states created by the Louisiana Purchase. Federal control over United States territories was clarified when it was shown that President George Washington (another of the “thirty-nine”) had approved and signed bills approving federal control over territories. Lincoln also stated how in 1798, that Congress organized the territory of Mississippi. In the act of organization, they prohibited the bringing of slaves into the territory, from any place without the United States, by fine, and giving freedom of slaves so brought.

Lincoln stated an important provision, concerning slavery in the immense Louisiana territory, that had numerous towns and the large City of New Orleans. However, while slavery was not prohibited by the territorial acts but several provisions concerning slaves were mentioned. First, “no slave should be imported into the territory from foreign parts and second no slave should be carried into it who had been imported into the United States since the first day of May 1798.”

Lincoln now discussed the Missouri compromise that had been settled, in 1819-1820. Many votes had been taken by yeas and nays in both branches of Congress, Rufus King, and Charles Pinkney, both congressional members and two of the “thirty-nine” had voted: King consistently voted for slavery prohibition and against all compromises, showing that, nothing in the Constitution was violated by Congress. But, Pinkney of South Carolina, thought that there was some sufficient reason for opposing such prohibition (Lincoln’s research).

In conclusion, regarding the Missouri question of prohibiting slavery on the 36 degrees-30 minutes, the majority of the “Framers had agreed that according to the Constitution no government could Control or forbade slavery.” (Lincoln, “Cooper Union”).

Dred Scott Decision: According to the Supreme Court in the case involving a citizen taking African American into the territories, designated by the 1787 Northwest Ordinances, as prohibiting slavery, the Dred Scott’s controversial decision found that Scott remained a slave and being taken into one of the states created in the Northwest territories. The injustice of the Dred Scott decision allowed Lincoln to speak to the falsehoods made by the angry Democrats who called Lincoln’s party members “Black Republicans” (Lincoln).

Lincoln chose to speak to “the Southern People” as a “reasonable and a just people”. You will grant a hearing to pirates or murders, but nothing like it to “Black Republicans”. Bring forward your charges and specifications, and then be patient enough to hear us or justify. You say we are sectional. We deny it..., but this brings us to a discussion of the right or wrong of our principle.

Some of you delight to flaunt in our faces the warning against sectional parties given by Washington in his Farewell Address. Less than eight years before Washington gave that warning, he had, as President of the United States, approved and signed an act of Congress, enforcing the prohibition of slavery in the Northwestern Territory, which act embodied the policy of the Government upon that subject... (Lincoln).

Question of John Brown: You charge that we stir up insurrections among our slaves... John Brown was no Republican; and you have failed to implicate a single Republican in his Harper's Ferry enterprise.

In the language of Mr. Jefferson, "It is still in our power to the direct the process of emancipation, and deportation (meaning colonization as in the case of sending slaves to Liberia). If, on the contrary, it is left to force itself, human nature must shudder at the prospect held up." (Jefferson). Mr. Jefferson did not mean to say that emancipation, by the Federal Government which has the power of restraining the extension of slavery (the institution shall never occur on any American soil which is now free from slavery) (Lincoln)

Secession: Lincoln writes that the southern people have the right "to break up the Union" if we were to deprive you of sole right, plainly written down in the Constitution. But we are proposing no such thing..., you have a specific and well-understood allusion to man assumed Constitutional right of yours, to take slaves into the federal, territories, and to hold them there as property. But no such right is specifically written in the Constitution. Perhaps you will say the Supreme Court has decided the Constitutional question in your favor (as in the Dred Scott decision). An inspection of the Constitution will show that the right of property in a slave is not "distinctly and expressly affirmed" in it.

Under all these circumstances, do you really feel yourselves justified to break up this Government? But you will not abide the election of a Republican president! Will they be satisfied if the territories be unconditionally surrendered to them? (Lincoln, end of the Union Address).

.President Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural Address, on March 4, 1861, followed from his public philosophy that while he was opposed to slavery and its extension into federal territories. I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. He stated: I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so. Those who nominated an elected me did so with clear knowledge that I had made this and many similar declarations, and had never recanted them; and more than this, they placed in the platform for my acceptance and as a law to themselves and to me, the clear and emphatic . resolution which I now read.

Resolved, That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the states, and especially the right of each state to order and control its own domestic institutions; according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to the balance of power on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depends; and we denounce the lawless invasion by armed force, of the soil of any State or territory, no matter under what pretext, as among the gravest of crimes. What follows addressed issues such as the fugitive slave law and with some amends, a free man be not in any case surrendered as a slave.

The most important statement in the inaugural is where Lincoln stated: the Union of these states is perpetual, what follows pertains the conclusion that Lincoln will take with all necessary actions including Civil War to defend the Union.

### **Conclusion**

Is there such a perfect identity of interests among the states to compose a new Union as to produce harmony only and prevent renewed secession? Plainly the central idea of secession is the essence of anarchy.

One section of the country believes that slavery is right and ought to be extended, while the other believes that it is wrong and ought not to be extended.

I understand a proposed amendment to the Constitution—which amendment, however, I have not seen—has passed Congress, to the effect that the Federal Government shall never interfere with the domestic institutions of the States, including that of persons held to service.

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to preserve, protect and defend it.

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

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