

INSURGENT HISTORIANS AND THE INDEFATIGABLE SOUTH

Lincoln Unmasked

What You're Not Supposed to Know about Dishonest Abe

Thomas J. DiLorenzo

New York: Crown Forum, 2006

\$22.95

224 pp. (Cloth)

The Politically Incorrect Guide to the South (and Why It Will Rise Again)

Clint Johnson

Washington, DC: Regnery (2006)

\$19.95

262 pp. (Paper)

Reviewed by Peter B. Gemma

"In the end, it is said, every president gets one sentence. Reagan won the Cold War. Washington was our First President. Clinton disgraced his office. And Lincoln saved the Union.

That's good enough for me."

—Jonah Goldberg, "The Abe Debate,"

National Review OnLine, March 19, 1999

That's good enough for me" just ain't good enough for serious students of Southern history and culture, be they armchair historians or dedicated academicians. There is a long and distinguished revisionist tradition among writers and researchers who delve into the reasons for—and the results of—the so-called Civil War. Thankfully, intellectual curiosity and a devotion to historical accuracy still motivate some—Jonah Goldberg be damned.

And please note that all this researching, writing, and revising comes *before* any attempts to counter-balance the politically correct opinions – such as the deification of Abe Lincoln and the disdain of all things Southern – that infect the mundane history books, novels, and punditry.

In recent years, there has emerged a spate of Dixie-defending publications, organizations, and websites ranging from *Southern Mercury* magazine to the League of the South. Add to that chorus the voices of allied and sympathetic writers representing a broad spectrum of interests, including libertarian Lew Rockwell, columnist Walter Williams, and mega movie producer Ron Maxwell, with the result that Americans are presently able to gain a far more comprehensive account of the South's unique contribution to the nation.

Two new resources for devotees of the South's rich heritage come in book form: *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the South*, by Clint Johnson, and Thomas DiLorenzo's *Lincoln Unmasked: What You're Not Supposed to Know about Dishonest Abe*.

I hesitate to describe *The Politically Incorrect Guide* as a "book" (the "PIG book" series is published by the Regnery Company and includes such titles as *The Politically Incorrect Guide to English and American Literature* and *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Islam*): It looks and reads more like a long magazine article or an edition of *USA Today* formatted to a book-like product. *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the South* is obviously designed to be skimmed. It is filled with "factoids," sidebars of trivia, features cute pig faces and other drawings to highlight the text, and reads like it has been dumbed down for mass consumption (assuming there are indeed masses of people who don't read "real books" but are still thirsting for politically incorrect ammunition).

Esthetic criticisms aside, there is still much to be gleaned from such a manual: In the larger culture war of ideas and influence, even firing small caliber rounds is useful.

Beyond promoting Southern tourist attractions, praising the region's gastro-nomic delights, and drawing attention to several eclectically representative books (ranging from Richard Weaver's *The Southern Tradition at Bay* to *The Narrative Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave*), *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the South* offers diverse selections ranging from why "Southerners love contact sports" to how "Southerners are less conscious about race than Northerners." But when this guide gets serious, as in Chapter 11, "Total War Versus Noble War," the reader will find such revelations as:

Northern atrocities were scattered around the South, but most have been neither explained nor even rated an apology...[Union] General John Turchin told his men, "I see nothing for two hours" when they captured the town of Athens [Alabama] essentially giving them a free pass to behave as they wished. Had he cared to look, he would have seen white and black women raped and the town destroyed. In April 1865, with the war's end in sight, the University of Alabama was burned to the ground, including the thousands of books in its library.

There are brief and compelling anecdotes in *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the South* that make it a useful reference point for further studies:

- Northern colonial economies grew strong and profitable on the slave trade: "Records indicate that nearly 1,000 slaving missions were launched from Rhode Island ports and more than 100,000 slaves (20 percent of the slaves imported to America) arrived aboard those ships."
- Harriet Beecher Stowe had never been to the South, had never seen a plantation, and had no idea how they were run.
- Lincoln maneuvered and manufactured the North-South confrontation at Fort Sumter, against the wishes of his military advisors and the recommendations of his cabinet.
- "The two biggest myths about the War are that it was a civil war and that it was simply about slavery," author Clint Johnson writes. "In the South," he explains, "'the War Between the States' has always been the popular description of the war, but a truer description is the War for Independence."

As with other "PIG books," *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the South* is just a primer designed to get readers interested exploring certain sensitive subjects. I can appreciate its value especially if circulated among young people. Educating and motivating Middle Americans, of all ages, on the reasons why the political elite have a venomous scorn for Southern heritage and Confederate history is vital work. As the late pundit Sam Francis explained:

The attack on the Confederate flag and Confederate symbols is merely a prelude, a kind of dress rehearsal, for a larger and even more radical attack on all the symbols of the American heritage and American civilization. The attack on Confederate symbols is coming first simply because, given the demonization of the South and the Confederacy in recent years, they are easier targets. They are associated with slavery and with what is called "racism" and with what is called "rebellion." But make no mistake, these are not the last symbols that will come under attack, and already we can see the attacks beginning as those on the Confederate symbols succeed. (*Shots Fired: Sam Francis on America's Culture War*, Vienna, VA: FGF Books, 2006)

Whether in discussions of the social-economic-political phenomenon that is the South or in the study of American history as a whole, the name Abraham Lincoln comes up regularly. The sixteenth president of the United States embodies a pivotal crossroad in U.S. history. As attorney and activist Sam Dickson has noted, "The leftists are correct in viewing Lincoln and the effect of his career on the course of the United States as moving America away from a semi-aristocratic society founded upon tradition, authority, limited government, and private property and toward a mass democratic society founded upon universal suffrage, equality, and unlimited govern-

ment-mandated social experimentation.” (“Shattering the Icon of Lincoln,” *The Barnes Review*, January-February 2006)

From now on no examination of President Lincoln will be complete without consideration of Thomas DiLorenzo’s important exposé *Lincoln Unmasked*, – which should be read together with the author’s previous blockbuster, *The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and the Unnecessary War* (Prima Publishers, Roseville, CA; 2002).

In an interview with *Southern Partisan* magazine (May 2004), DiLorenzo described the political machinations of what he freely calls the “Lincoln liars,” academicians and politicians alike, who include “self-described conservatives who are the big Lincoln idolaters, like the people at the Claremont Institute. But really, when you look at them, they advocate nationalism and executive power... That’s totally at odds with the Jeffersonian tradition... So, you have this odd mix of liberal and conservative academics, both of whom idolize Lincoln because they really do embrace big government. Big government conservatives don’t mind big government as long as people like themselves are in charge of it. They run the Bush administration at the moment.”

DiLorenzo’s writings on Lincoln, especially in his new offering, are crucial to understanding why

If there is anything that causes the Lincoln cult to become agitated, if not hysterical, it is the suggestion that Abraham Lincoln, like virtually all other politicians in world history, was acutely interested in the accumulation of money and power... For most of his adult life, before jumping to the Republicans, Lincoln was a member of the Whig Party – the party of the moneyed elite in America. He was a wealthy trial lawyer who married into an affluent, slave-owning Kentucky family, the Todds. As a prominent railroad industry attorney he was a consummate political insider in Northern big business circles.

DiLorenzo, a professor of economics at Loyola College, all but gloats when citing passages from Adolf Hitler’s *Mein Kampf* in which the German leader embraced Lincoln’s unconstitutional idea that the states were creatures of the Union rather than the reverse. The Fuehrer takes Lincoln’s logic to its ultimate end: “[The] mischief of individual federated states... must cease and will some day cease... National Socialism as a matter of principle must lay claim to the right to force its principles on the whole German nation without consideration of previous federated state boundaries.”

While this book is explosive in terms of political and historical revisionist dynamite, unfortunately the author, a libertarian zealot, felt the need to spice-up the text with his economic theories and libertarian world view. Some are compelling observations, some confusing, and some unnecessarily provocative in an already controversial book. He throws everything *and* the kitchen sink at the establishment historians, including this observation: “[T]he Pledge [of Allegiance] was authored in 1892 by an avowed socialist named Francis Bellamy who wanted to use it to indoctrinate schoolchildren into the ideology

of big government." Well, that may be true, but after you singe the eyebrows of the uninitiated with the sins of "St. Abe," I just don't see the point of poking them in the eye too.

Whenever I discuss Lincoln with open-minded people (and there are a few roaming the planet), I try to make DiLorenzo's point that, "The Lincoln cult is interested not so much in research and education about Lincoln and the war – about discovering historical truth – but in maintaining a largely false image of the man whom they call 'Father Abraham' and compare to Jesus and Moses."

If that sounds like Professor DiLorenzo is overstating his case, may I present People's Exhibit Number One: *A New Birth of Freedom* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), establishment historian Harry Jaffa's 550-page analysis of the 272-word Gettysburg Address. In it he states categorically: "Never, perhaps, since the drama that began in Bethlehem, had someone risen from so low an estate to play so high a role in deciding the fate of mankind." Jaffa also writes: "Lincoln is perhaps the greatest of all exemplars of Socratic statesmanship," whose life demonstrates that "[n]ever since Socrates has philosophy so certainly descended from the heavens into the affairs of mortal men."

This is what our children read in school, public and (too often) private.

Columnist and author Joe Sobran has observed:

One of the best-kept secrets of American history is that many if not most Northerners thought the Southern states had the right to secede. This is why Lincoln shut down hundreds of newspapers and arrested thousands of critics of his war. He had to wage a propaganda war against the North itself. Were you told this in your history classes? Neither was I. (*Sobran's*, November 2006; www.sobran.com)

Sobran and other truth seekers should be delighted that *Lincoln Unmasked* comes with an added bonus. As DiLorenzo explains, "The nineteenth and final chapter begins with a survey of some recent books by prominent authors who have seriously challenged the Official View of American History that is presented by the Lincoln cult. Among these authors are *New York Times* editorial writer Steven R. Weisman, University of Virginia historian Michael F. Holt, liberal writer Michael Lind, and former U.S. Navy Secretary and novelist [now U.S. Senator] James Webb." This annotated bibliography will enable any amateur sleuth to strike out on a larger quest for the truth, the whole truth, about Abe Lincoln and the South's war for independence.

Insurgent historian Thomas DiLorenzo has thrown the Lincoln cultists, from commonplace pundits like Jonah Goldberg to hysterical historians such as Harry Jaffa, on the defensive. DiLorenzo, and those rare historians like him, are shining exemplars of the revisionist wisdom that history, especially the history of the indefatigable South, should not be written solely by the victors.

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