THE ANTISLAVERY THOUGHT OF LINCOLN*

by

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In July, 1856, the *Illinois State Register* reported of Lincoln that "his niggerism has as dark a hue as Garrison or Fred Douglass."[1] Some other contemporaries also regarded him as an abolitionist.[2] About eighty years later, Dwight Lowell Dumond emphatically announced that "if Weld and Birney were abolitionists, Lincoln was one; if they had a plan, he had a better one," and that "his Washington Birthday address stamps him as almost a pioneer abolitionist."[3] Both these contemporaries of Lincoln and the later-day historian believed that he was not different in his antislavery thought from such leading abolitionists as Garrison and Weld and the black abolitionist Frederick Douglass. But their intentions to do so were not the same. While his contemporaries likened him to the abolitionists for the purpose to smear his image, Dumond's insistence on the radicalism of his antislavery thought was to praise his contribution to the final emancipation of slaves. Whatever their intentions might have been, all of them were wrong in labeling Lincoln as an abolitionist. They either exaggerated the radicalism of his thought or confused the term "antislavery" with the term "abolitionist."

"Antislavery" and "abolitionist" have sometimes been used synonymously. But Lary Gara pointed out that during the 1840's and definitely after 1854, the term "abolitionism" and "antislavery" had

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1. Quoted in Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York, 1962), p. 19.
2. Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1953), II, 323. Hereafter cited as *Collected Works*.
3. Dwight Lowell Dumond, *Antislavery Origins of the Civil War in the United States* (Ann Arbor, Mich., 1939), p. 107, 113.

different connotations for most westerners. He cited an example in which a negro writer described abolitionism as including, besides freedom for slaves, the "collateral issues connected with human enfranchisement, independent of race [or] complexion."[4] Historians generally agree that the abolitionists agitated for immediate, unconditional and universal emancipation of all slaves and political and social equality for the freed negroes. By the criterion of either immediate emancipation or equality, Lincoln can not be classified as an abolitionist. Indeed, Lincoln himself had never claimed to be one. Although he was not opposed to the cooperation between abolitionists and Whigs or Republicans to win elections, he several times denied that he was an abolitionist.[5] However, this is not to say that he acquiesced in slavery. He hated that peculiar institution of the ante-bellum South probably as strongly and wished its abolition as urgently as any abolitionist. The only difference between them is that his antislavery advocacy was more moderate in both means and end.

Although it was after the controversy over slavery extension became heightened by the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act that Lincoln plunged himself wholeheartedly into the antislavery cause, the basic tenets of his antislavery thought had been set down long before that time. In as early as 1837, "in language completely courteous but quietly unmistakable in meaning,"[6] he with his colleague Dan Stone declared openly for the first time his dislike of the institution of human bondage in a protest against the resolutions disaproving the formation of abolitionist societies in Illinois adopted by the state legislature of which Lincoln had been a member from 1834 to 1841:

> They believe that the institution of slavery is founded on injustice and bad policy; that the promulgation of abolition doctrine tends rather to increase than to abate its evils.
>
> They believe that the Congress of the United States has no power, under the constitution, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different states.

4. Lary Gara, "Who Was an Abolitionist?" in Martin Duberman, ed., *The Antislavery Vanguard: New Essays on the Abolitionists* (Princeton, N. J., 1965), pp. 32-51.
5. For example, see *Collected Works*, I, 347, 458; II, 323, 366.
6. Carl Sandbury, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years and the War Years* (New York, 1936), I, 99.

> They believe that the Congress of the United States has the power, under the constitution, to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia; but that power ought not to be exercised unless at the request of the people of said District.[7]

Here he registered his dislike of both slavery and abolitionism, as well as his denial of congressional power to interfere with slavery which already existed in the states. However, he said nothing about the extension of slavery into territories, the opposition to which was to become the central part of his antislavery doctrine. His anti-extensionism was first mentioned in a letter written in 1845 to William Durley. He wrote:

> I hold it to be a paramount duty of us in the free states, due to the Union of the states, and perhaps to liberty itself ... to let the slavery of the states alone; while on the other hand, I hold it to be equally clear, that we should never knowingly lend ourselves directly or indirectly, to prevent that slavery from dying a natural death — to find new places for it to live in, when it can no longer exist in the old.[8]

Although cautious in wording and tone, the message is quite clear. Believing that slavery would be doomed if confined to where it was, he proposed to stop the spread of slavery into free states and territories. Hence, the two kernels of his antislavery doctrine: non-interference in slave states and non-extension to territories. This was the doctrine which "he was to maintain until elected president," according to Roy P. Basler.[9]

Precisely because he was convinced that slavery should not be allowed to expand further, so when the territories were opened up to slavery by the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854 and the Dred Scott Decision of the Federal Supreme Court in 1857, the hitherto largely indifferent Lincoln was finally aroused to fight against the spread of the hated institution. In 1858, he said to his listeners, "I have always

7. *Collected Works*, I, 75.
8. *Ibid.*, I, 348.
9. Editor's comment to "Letter to Williamson Durley, October 3, 1845," in Roy P. Basler, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings* (New York, 1969), p. 171.

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hated slavery ... but I have always been quiet about it until this new era of the introduction of the Nebraska bill began."[10] Even his re-entering into politics was due to his aroused antislavery feelings. In an autobiography prepared by himself in 1860 for campaign use, he wrote, "in 1854, his profession had almost supperseded the thought of politics in his mind, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused him as he had never been before."[11] From then on, in the election compaigns of 1856 and 1860, in the great Douglass-Lincoln debates of 1858, in speeches and letters, the aroused Lincoln explained, expounded, persuaded, argued, sometimes briefly and sometimes elaborately, the theme of leaving slavery alone where it already existed and stopping its spread to territories by restoring the Missouri Compromise line. "The Missouri Compromise ought to be restored," he cried once. "For the sake of the Union, it ought to be restored."[12] His stand on non-interference and non-extension was so determined that even when the Union itself was threatened by southern secession, he refused to budge.[13]

But, then, what factors determined his non-interference and non-extension position on the slavery question? His deep hatred of slavery was undoubtedly one of the factors. Lincoln disliked slavery because it degraded the negro's humanity by holding him as properties; because it injured the white free workers by forcing them to compete with unpaid laborers; because it undermined the very foundation of democracy by destroying the fundamental principle of all forms of self-government that the ruling power was derived from the consent of the governed; and because it violated all the moral teachings of Chritianity. But above all, he hated slavery because it contradicted the sacred principle proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal." Lincoln believed that the word "men" here included the blacks. To him, there was no reason "why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence: the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I hold that he is as much entitled to these as

10. *Collected Works*, II, 492.
11. *Ibid.*, IV, 67.
12. *Ibid.*, II, 272.
13. See particularly his "Address at Cooper Institute, New York City," and "First Inaugural Address—Final Text," in *Collected Works*, III, 522-550; IV, 262-271.

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the white man."[14] Yet, slavery cruelly and arbitrarily deprived the negro of all his "inalienable" rights. Slavery was indeed "a moral, social, and political wrong ... an unqualified evil to the negro, to the white man, to the soil, and to the state."[15] Slavery was harmful to almost every man and every thing having even the least contact with it. Lincoln thus concluded that neither color, nor intelligence, nor interest — nothing at all could justify the monstrous injustice and evil of slavery.[16] Given all these reasons, it is natural for Lincoln to declare in 1858, "I have always hated slavery, I think as much as any abolitionist."[17]

In spite of this enduring hatred of slavery, Lincoln's interest in the slavery problem before 1854 had not been very pronounced; and he seemed to pay only occasional attention to it. As a result, it is difficult to pinpoint exactly when and why he began to hate slavery. Benjamine Quarles suggested that the roots of his antislavery sentiments might be traced back to his childhood experience in Kentucky. Lincoln's parents owned no slaves; and men living in a slave country without possessing any slaves were often looked down upon by their neighbors. Anyway, the Baptist Church his parents attended was decidedly antislavery. It was suggested that to escape the odor of slavery was probably one of the reasons for his father to decide on moving his family to Indiana in 1861.[18] In fact, Lincoln himself recalled years later that the migration to Indiana was "partly on account of slavery."[19] But whether this kind of social setting really affected Lincoln the child of no older than seven years old is very doubtful.[20]

Then William Herndon told another story according to which Lincoln made up his mind to destroy slavery as early as 1831. On his second trip to New Orleans in that year, when he and two friends rambled over the city one morning, he eyewitnessed the horrors of human bondage. One of the friends recalled that "slavery ran the

14. The description of the reasons of Lincoln's hating slavery is largely based on Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro*, pp. 35-36. The quotation is on p. 36.
15. *Collected Works*, III, 92.
16. *Ibid.*, II, 222-223.
17. *Ibid.*, II, 492.
18. Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro*, p. 16.
19. *Collected Works*, IV, 62.
20. For example, William H. Herndon & Jesse W. Weik, *Herndon's Life of Lincoln* (New York, A Premier Book edition, 1930), p. 60, doubted the reliability of this opinion.

iron into him there and then." Later on, when they saw the disgusting scene of auctioning a beautiful mulatto girl, the outrageous Lincoln, full of "unconquerable hate," vowed to his friends, "If I ever get a chance to hit that thing [meaning slavery], I'll hit hard."[21] But the truth of this story has been questioned because Herndon's source was John Hanke who, according to Lincoln's own account, went no further than St. Louis on this trip.[22] He was not in New Orleans at all.

A third story about the beginning of his dislike of slavery was related by Lincoln himself. In the late summer of 1841, Lincoln spent several weeks on the plantation of his friend Joshua Speed in Kentucky. On their return trip, they saw on the steam boat they took twelve slaves fastened to a main chain like many fish strung to a trot-line. Fourteen years later, Lincoln reminded his friend of this scene in a letter and wrote "that this sight was a continual torment to me; and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio, or any other slave-border."[23] However, Lincoln described the same scene quite differently on another occasion. Immediately after returning home, he wrote a letter on September 27, 1841, to Speed's sister Mary. Although he mentioned the slaves' miserable conditions of being taken away from the familiar scenes of childhood and from relatives and friends, and brought to the deep South where the treatment of slaves was more harsh, he also told Mary Speed their joys on the boat. "They were the most cheerful and apparently happy creatures on board. One ... played the fiddle almost continually; and the others danced, sang, cracked jokes, and played various games with cards from day to day." He did not mention in this letter "tormenting" feelings. Instead, his on-the-spot reaction was a philosophical pondering of the "effect of conditions upon human happiness."[24] It is possible that Lincoln, considerate of the sensitivities of Mary, a young lady of a slave-holding family, concealed his real feelings.[25] But it is equally possible that his remembrance and feelings underwent changes with the political climate over the years.

21. Herndon & Weik, *Herndon's Life of Lincoln*, pp. 98-99.
22. See Charles B. Strozier, *Lincoln's Quest for Union: Public and Private Meanings* (New York, 1982), Note 17 on p. 254.
23. *Collected Works*, II, 320.
24. *Ibid.*, I, 260.
25. Strozier, *Lincoln's Quest for Union*, p. 154.

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Separately, the effects of these episodes on Lincoln might not have been as keen as later claimed. But put together, these and other like experiences must have contributed accumulatively to the awakening and growth of Lincoln's hatred of slavery, all the scenes of slaves chained, whipped, examined and exhibited like horses at auctions, or kept "like droves of horses in stable," which he saw whether on the plantation of Speed or of his father-in-law, or on the streets of New Orleans, or on the Mississippi, or in Washington, D.C., could not have vanished without leaving any impressions on his tender heart. Quarles is probably right when he pointed out that Lincoln's hatred of slavery was no sudden conversion. "It was, rather, a slow growth, as difficult to pinpoint as the merging of one season into another."[26] However, before 1854, his dislike of slavery seemed to be latent because he seldom openly expressed it. Then, the controversy over slavery expansion heightened by the Kansas-Nebraska Act fanned his latent hatred of slavery into open fire.

Whatever might have have been the sources of his hating slavery, and no matter when his hatred might have begun, there is no doubt that Lincoln entertained a profound hatred of slavery and that this feeling underlay his antislavery attitude. But why the dislike of slavery did not urge him all the way to abolitionism? In other words, what forces tampered with his feelings, moderated his opposition to slavery, and made him satisfied with the position of "'toleration[']' by *necessity* where it exists, with unyielding hostility" to its further expansion?[27]

One of the forces was his deep respect for the constitution and the laws enacted under it. Lincoln was essentially a man of law and order. In an address delivered before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, on January 27, 1838, Lincoln vehemently and eloquently pleaded for reverence and obedience to the constitution and laws:

> Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of

26. Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro*, p. 31.
27. *Collected Works*, III, 334.

> the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others. As the patriots of seventy-six did to the support of the Declaration of Independence, so to the support of the Constitution and laws, let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor; — let every man remember that to violate the law, is to trample on the blood of his father, and to tear the character [charter?] of his own, and his children's liberty. ...And, in short, let it become the *political religion* of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars.[28]

Lincoln's reverence for the law was so great that he asserted that even bad laws should also be "religiously observed" before they were revised or repealed.[29] Probably because such assertions sound a little too unusual, several writers came to regard this address as revealing Lincoln's own ambitions and devil genius rather than his respect for the constitution.[30]

His passionate obedience to the constitution and laws did not change with the passage of time. Since 1854, he had repeatedly denounced the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the Dred Scott Decision; but he never urged American people to disobey them. Instead, he proposed to work for the repeal of the law and the reversal of the majority decision of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case.[31] Lincoln obviously could never have dreamed of doing such things as burning publicly, like William L. Garrison, a copy of the constitution and denouncing it as "a covenant with death and an agreement with hell," or appealing, like William H. Seward, to a higher law to justify his more radical opposition to slavery, or leading mobs, like some abolitionists, to rescue apprehended runaway slaves. Obedience to the constitution and law was really second nature to him.

The unwavering reverence for the fundamental law of his country determined in a large part Lincoln's approach to the slavery problem.

28. *Ibid.*, I, 112.
29. *Ibid.*
30. For example, see Edmund Wilson, *Patriotic Gore* (New York, 1960); and Dwight G. Anderson, *Abraham Lincoln: The Quest for Immortality* (New York, 1982).
31. He asserted that the Nebraska Act was not a law but violence; and that the Dred Scott Decision was erroneous. See *Collected Works*, I, 321, 401-402, 495-496.

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What he favored or disfavored was actually decided by his considering it legal or illegal. This is clearly indicated in the following statement which he made in an address at Springfield, Illinois, in 1858:

> Through all, I have neither assailed, nor wrestled with any part of the constitution. The legal right of the Southern people to reclaim their fugitives I have constantly admitted. The legal right of Congress to interfere with their institution in the states, I have constantly denied. In resisting the spread of slavery to new ter[r]itory and with that, what appears to me to be a tendency to subvert the first principle of free government itself my whole effort has consisted.[32]

So, his position of non-interference and non-extension was determined at least in part by his understanding of and respect for the constitution. However, this is not the whole story. His antislavery thought was also influenced by his attitude toward negro equality. There is no question that Lincoln was in favor of negro freedom. But on the issue of equality, he was more reserved. Like most people in the old Northwest,[33] his opposition to the spread of slavery was colored by his aversion to the negro and his equality.[34] There is evidence in Lincoln's own writings and speeches to show that though he regarded the negro as man, he nevertheless hesitated to give him social and political equality. Lincoln readily admitted that the negro was included in the word "men" in the assertion that "all men are created equal" in the Declaration of Independence. He also insisted that the negro should enjoy the equal rights to life, liberty and the

32. *Collected Works*, III, 334.

33. According to Eugene H. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery: Western Anti-Negro Prejudice and the Slavery Extension Controversy* (Urbana, Illinois, 1967), most people of the Middle West opposed the extension of slavery because of their anti-negro racism.

34. The question whether Lincoln was a white supremist has been hotly debated among scholars. For a brief introduction to this debate, see Strozier, *Lincoln's Quest for Union*, Note 85 of Chapter 7, on p. 256. However, all the works I consulted in writing this paper, such as Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro*; Leon Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago, 1961); Martin Duberman, ed., *The Antislavery Vanguard*; Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery*; Strozier, *Lincoln's Quest for Union*; and James M. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton, N. J., 1964) agreed on Lincorn's reluctance to grant the negro political and social equality. And there are several uterances by Lincoln himself lent support to this view. Whether this reluctance means racism is a moot question.

pursuit of happiness.[35] However, he maintained, on the other hand, that the authors of the Declaration "did not intend to declare all men equal in *all respects* [italics his]. They did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral development, or social capacities."[36] This differentiating interpretation of the intention of the Founding Fathers enabled Lincoln to contend that the negro was entitled to enjoy the same natural rights as the white man while at the same time assigned him a political and social position inferior to that of the white people.

During the 1850's, Lincoln repeatedly denied that he was working for negro equality. In 1854, he confessed to his listeners at Peoria, Illinois, that his own feeling would not admit of freeing all the slaves and then making them socially and politically the equal of whites and denied that he was contending for the establishment of political and social equality between the whites and blacks.[37] And then in his debate with Douglass at Ottowa, Illinois, he told his audience that there was a physical difference between the two races which would forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality.[38] However, his most unequivocal and clear opinion on the race question was expressed in the fourth debate with Douglass at Charleston, Illinois:

> I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races, [applause] — that I am not [,] nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people; and I will say in addition to this that there is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality. And inasmuch as they can not so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.[39]

35. *Collected Works*, II, 405-406.
36. *Ibid.*, II, 405.
37. *Ibid.*, II, 256, 266.
38. *Ibid.*, III, 16, 19.
39. *Ibid.*, III, 145-146.

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Because Lincoln here showed his view on the inequality between the whites and blacks so definite and clear that Kenneth M. Stampp believed this speech represented Lincoln's "fullest and most explicit declaration of belief in white supremacy."[40]

Given his unwillingness to bring about equality between the white and black, it seems very natural that he was also opposed to racial amalgamation. Lincoln found a "natural disgust" among almost all the white people to the idea of "an indiscriminate amalgamation of the white and black races."[41] Apparently catering to this popular feeling, Lincoln urged in 1857 the Illinois legislature to appropriate funds for colonization in order to remove the free negroes from the state and to prevent miscegenation.[42] He protested against Douglass' charge that in their insistence on the inclusion of blacks in the Declaration of Independence the Republicans attempted "to vote, and eat, and sleep, and marry with negroes," while on the other hand, he readily agreed with Douglass on non-intermarriage between the two races. He said, he was even willing to adopt Douglass' policy and drop his own, if Douglass could show that "his policy is better adopted to prevent amalgamation than ours." But, alas, statistics showed that the greatest source of amalgamation was slavery and next to it, the degeneration of free blacks. Lincoln therefore charged that the popular sovereignty of Douglass, instead of preventing, increased amalgamation by allowing slavery to spread to free territories. Unlike his rival, Lincoln thought that one way of preventing the mixing blood of the two races was "to keep *them* [italics his] apart *where* [italics his] they are not already together. If white and black people never get together in Kansas, they will never mix blood in Kansas." To be sure, "a few colored persons may get into the free states ... but their number is too insignificant to amount much in the way of mixing blood."[43]

Effective this measure might be, but Lincoln considered it only "the next best thing" to do. To him, "the only perfect preventive of amalgamation" was "a separation of the races;" and he believed that such a separation, "if ever effected at all, must be effected by coloni-

40. Kenneth M. Stampp, *The Imperiled Union: Essays on the Background of the Civil War* (New York, 1980), p. 128.
41. *Collected Works*, II, 405.
42. Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery*, pp. 4-5.
43. *Collected Works*, II, 405, 408.

zation."[44] Lincoln apparently thought that the once-for-all solution of the whole slavery and racial problem was to emancipate the slaves and then deport the freed blacks to somewhere outside the United States, because it would rid by one stroke the South of its slavery institution and the nation of its nightmare of racial amalgamation.

This is probably the reason why he had toyed with the idea of colonization for some time. In an eulogy on Henry Clay in 1852, he praised the leading colonizationist in moving terms. He ardently wished that "may it [colonization] indeed be realized!...May like disaster [those which befell the Pharaoh of Egypt] never befall us! If as the friends of colonization hope, the present and coming generations of our countrymen shall by any means, succeed in freeing our land from the dangerous presence of slavery; and, at the same time, in restoring a captive people to their long-lost father-land, with bright prospects for the future; and this too, so gradually, that neither races nor individuals shall have suffered by the change, it will indeed be a glorious consummation."[45] Because he was confident in the effectiveness of colonization in solving the slavery problem, it is not surprising that when he had to consider seriously the proper way to deal with it, his "first impulse would be to free all slaves and send them to Liberia — to their own native land."[46] Although he realized the tremendous difficulties involved in the execution of large-scale colonization, he was nevertheless hopeful. "What colonization needs most is a hearty will," he said in 1857. "Will springs from the two elements of moral sense and self-interest. Let us be brought to believe it is morally right, and, at the same time, favorable to, or, at least, not against, our interest, to transfer the African to his native clime, and we shall find a way to do it, however great the task may be."[47] But reality was far less sanguine than he hoped. When he was elected President of the United States and the Civil War broke out, he finally got an opportunity to put colonization into practice. In his first annual message to Congress, he proposed to free and colonize those slaves owned by rebel masters as well as thoe free blacks who desired to leave the country voluntarily.

44. *Ibid.*, II, 409.
45. *Ibid.*, II, 132.
46. *Ibid.*, II, 255.
47. *Ibid.*, II, 409.

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Congress reacted favorably. It not only freed slaves in the District of Columbia but also put funds at the President's disposal to carry out the colonization of the freed blacks of the District of Columbia and those slaves to be made free by the coming confiscation act. Lincoln now had both Congressional authorization and money. But unfortunately, his several tries all ended in failure.[48] And Lincoln finally abandoned the whole colonization scheme in favor of a more direct way to do away with the institution he hated so much — freeing by presidential order all the slaves in the rebel states.

Then, it is clear that Lincoln was moderate on the question of slavery. He was determined neither to interfere with slavery in the states nor to let it expand into territories. He believed that if so confined, slavery would somehow end by itself. However, impatient in waiting for its natural death, Lincoln was not averse to lend a little help to its earlier destruction by compensed voluntary emancipation followed by colonization. His antislavery position was thus characterized by non-interference and non-extension supplemented by colonization. This moderate stand of Lincoln was largely due to the interplay of his fundamental dislike of slavery, his deep respect for the constitution and the laws enacted under it, and his ambiguous attitude toward the blacks.

His constitutionalism and racial ambiguity, though not necessarily casting doubt on the sincerity of his sympathy towards the slaves and his insistence on securing for the blacks the minimal rights as men under the constitution, did hold him back from seeing the whole problem of slavery and race as an abstract moral issue as the abolitionists did. He recognized the gross injustice, evils, wrong, and the great dangers to democracy in the peculiar institution of ante-bellum South, and hoped for its earliest ending as eagerly as any abolitionist. But unlike the abolitionist, his devotion to the constitution and his aversion to racial equality made him more cautious in approach. The abolitionist might agitate for immediate and universal emancipation and leave the working out of actual plans to others. Lincoln, being an aspirant politician, could obviously not do so. He had to consider all the possible results of different ways. And in his weighing of all

48. Quarles, in *Lincoln and the Negro*, pp. 108-123, gives a brief account of Lincoln's colonization activities.

possibilities, his constitutionalism and racial ambiguity convinced him that the best policy was to let slavery die a natural death by limiting it to where it already existed. But in order to quicken the coming of its final day, and to solve the racial problem, Lincoln was willing to support voluntary emancipation and colonization.

On the spectrum of antislavery opinions during the ante-bellum period, Lincoln stood somewhere in the center, far to the right of the abolitionists. It is therefore no wonder that he drew violent denunciation from the radical antislavery crusaders, particularly in the first couple of years of the Civil War.[49] The abolitionist attack on Lincoln sounded to David Donald so unreasonable that it led him to suspect the sincerity of the motivation of the abolitionists in crusading for the freedom and equality of the negro.[50] But, on the other hand, Lincoln was not in complete accordance with the prevailing opinion of his homeland either. Several studies have shown beyond doubt that during the 1850's, the movement to exclude and colonize the negroes, slave and free alike, reached its peak in the Middle West, and that the movement was dominated by anti-negro racism.[51] Unlike most mid-western anti-extensionists, Lincoln was antislavery, but not anti-negro, because he at least recognized the negro as man, admitted that the negro, being man, was in some respects the equal of all other human beings, and insisted on granting him some of the rights guaranteed by the Constitution.[52] According to one historian, Lincoln took such a position at some political risk.[53] However, such differences, if there indeed were, between the opinions of Lincoln and his fellow mid-westerners were either overlooked by his contemporaries or lost in the heated controversy over slavery expansion in the 1850's, for Lincoln gradually became the spokesman of the West. Thus, Joshua Giddings wrote, "Indeed, Lincoln was selected ... because he was supposed to be able to carry [Illinois] and Indiana and [was] acceptable

49. McPherson, *The Struggle for Equality*, pp. 11-20, 26-27, 67-74.
50. David Donald, "Toward a Reconsideration of Abolitionists," in his *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era* (New York, 1947), pp. 19-36.
51. For example, see Berwanger, *The Frontier Against Slavery*, pp. 4-6, 134-140; and V. Jacque Voegeli, *Free but not Equal: The Mid-West and the Negro During the Civil War* (Chicago, 1967), pp. 1-9.
52. Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro*, p. 36.
53. Strozier, *Lincoln's Quest for Union*, p. 175.

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to Pennsylvania[.]"[54]

In conclusion, it may be said that basically Lincoln approached the slavery issue with a tender heart. In 1854, after meditating on the subject for a while, he wrote that in opposing slavery, "we proposed to give all a chance, and we expected the weak to grow stronger, the ignorant, wiser; and all better, and happier together."[55] But this genuine concern for the happiness of slaves and free negroes was suppressed for a time by the practical consideration of the difficulties involved in dealing with the slavery problem. And Lincoln hesitated to take any drastic measure to remove the most frightening nightmare troubling the ante-bellum Americans. However, once the circumstances became favorable, he boldly emancipated all the slaves by proclamation. For that, he has gone down history as "the Great Emancipator." He certainly deserved that title.

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