

**Advanced Institute, Summer 2015**  
**THE POLITICAL THOUGHT OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN**  
**Instructor: Allen Guelzo**  
**New York, New York**

When Americans are asked to rank their presidents, Abraham Lincoln almost always comes out at the top. But why? Sometimes, the reason is that he freed the slaves...or that he saved the Union . . . or that he was a great war president . . . or that he was a master of words . . . or the model American. All of these are true. But these truths don't quite get at the man behind these truths. Although Lincoln had next-to-nothing in the way of formal education, he possessed a natural intellectual curiosity, a voracious appetite for reading, and a passion for ideas, political and otherwise. And although he was not an intellectual, he had a profound grasp of the basic principles of the American Founding, and how they were to be applied in the great clashes of ideas in the 19th century about religion, politics, Romanticism, race, and slavery. In this seminar, we will see how Lincoln was shaped by five important issues in his day:

- **The Legacy of the Founders:** Lincoln considered Washington and Jefferson as the pole stars by which he steered politically. "Washington is the mightiest name of earth—long since mightiest in the cause of civil liberty; still mightiest in moral reformation," Lincoln said in 1842, "To add brightness to the sun, or glory to the name of Washington, is alike impossible." Likewise, he added in 1859, "The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of free society." The question for Lincoln was how these principles were to be preserved in a rapidly changing environment when confidence in the viability of the American experiment was being challenged, both from within (by American slavery) and from without (by the rebirth of aristocracy and empire in Europe).
- **Economic Liberty:** Lincoln considered economic opportunity to be the nuclear core of American liberty. The underlying purpose Lincoln discerned in "the toils that were endured by the officers and soldiers of the army, who achieved . . . Independence" was not "the mere matter of the separation of the colonies from the mother land; but something . . . which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance." That something was the equality of economic opportunity, which encouraged social mobility and self-transformation for everyone. "We stand at once the wonder and admiration of the whole world," Lincoln said in 1856, because in the United States, "every man can make himself." In this way, Lincoln not only linked himself to the American Founding, but to the promoters of classical liberalism in England in the 19th century, especially the so-called 'Manchester School.'
- **The Challenge Posed by Slavery:** Lincoln insisted that he had always hated slavery, and committed himself politically to the extinction of slavery. But this desire to abolish slavery was motivated by more than an abstract empathy for an oppressed racial minority. Lincoln considered as slavery any form of economic arrangement which denied people mobility, self-transformation, and the enjoyment of the fruits of their labor.
- **Religion:** Lincoln was raised in a devout religious environment and carried the stamp of that religious upbringing all through his life. But he was also a rebel against religion, and tried to shape his life according to the 18th-century Enlightenment's model of 'reason.'

Yet, in his great debates with Stephen A. Douglas, he appealed to natural law and natural rights, and in the depths of the Civil War could find no ‘reasonable’ explanations for the course of events. In the end, Lincoln found himself bringing religion and morality to bear on public policy in a way that no president before (or since) has done.

- **The Survival of Constitutional Democracy:** When Lincoln described the Civil War as test of whether “this nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure,” it was not mere rhetoric. By the time Lincoln becomes president, the United States is the only successful, large-scale democracy in the world. Not only does the Civil War make democracy appear unworkable, it challenges the survival of the very Constitution Lincoln was sworn to uphold and defend. He must find a way to wage a principled war against the foes of democracy, yet do it in such a way that does not endanger the constraints the Constitution placed on his office and the national government.

This seminar will be an exploration of Lincoln’s mind—of the great intellectual problems he faced, of the books he read, of the ideas he defended, and of the kind of democracy he thought was worth saving. And at the end, we will come to know Lincoln, not just as the greatest of presidents, but as a man of great ideas as well.

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## Monday, August 3, 2015

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**9:00 a.m. to Noon**

**Does Lincoln Still Belong to the Ages?**

Readings:

- Josiah Gilbert Holland, Eulogy on Abraham Lincoln, 1865
- Frederick Douglass, Oration in the Memory of Abraham Lincoln, 1876
- Lerone Bennett, “Was Lincoln a White Supremacist?”, 1968
- Lerone Bennett, Interview with Brian Lamb, C-SPAN, 2000
- M. E. Bradford, “Against Lincoln,” 1988

**1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.**

**Lincoln as a Man of Ideas**

Readings:

- Correspondence of William H. Herndon concerning Lincoln
- From William H. Herndon and Jesse Weik, *Life of Lincoln*
- Testimony and correspondence with William H. Herndon
- Interviews conducted by James Quay Howard, 1860
- Noah Brooks, “Personal Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” 1865
- Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln*
- Excerpts from the Diary of John Hay
- Abraham Lincoln, Second Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions, 1859
- Abraham Lincoln, Address Before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, 1859
- Abraham Lincoln to James H. Hackett, 1863
- Abraham Lincoln, Memorandum of Instructions for Test of Diller’s [Gun] Powder, 1863

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**Tuesday, August 4, 2015**

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**9:00 a.m. to Noon                      Lincoln and Mammon**Readings:

- Abraham Lincoln, Fragment on Government, 1854
- Abraham Lincoln, Fragment on Free Labor, 1859
- Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Cincinnati, Ohio, 1859
- Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Indianapolis, Indiana, 1859
- Abraham Lincoln, Address Before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society, 1859
- Abraham Lincoln, Speech at New Haven, Connecticut, 1860
- Abraham Lincoln, Annual Message to Congress, 1861

**1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.                  Lincoln and God**Readings:

- Observations on Lincoln and Religion
- Correspondence of William H. Herndon concerning Lincoln, 1887
- Amanda Rogers Rankin, Personal Recollection, 1916
- Abraham Lincoln to John F. Wilson, 1862
- Henry Champion Deming, Eulogy of Abraham Lincoln, 1865
- Letters and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln on Religion

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**Wednesday, August 5, 2015**

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**9:00 a.m. to Noon                      Lincoln and the Law**Readings:

- Leonard Swett, from *Herndon's Informants*
- Henry Clay Whitney, *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln*, 1982
- Letters and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln
- Abraham Lincoln to John W. Crisfield, 1862
- Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln*, 1864
- George Tuthill Borrett, *Out West: A Series of Letters*, 1866
- Alexander C. Twining, "President Lincoln's Proclamation of Freedom to the Slaves," 1865

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## Thursday, August 6, 2015

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9:00 a.m. to Noon

Lincoln and the Presidency in Time of War

Readings:

- Abraham Lincoln, Lyceum Address, 1838
- Abraham Lincoln, Letter to William H. Herndon, February 15, 1848
- Abraham Lincoln, Speech in the House of Representatives, 1848
- Abraham Lincoln, Speech at Chicago, 1858
- Abraham Lincoln, Fragment on the Constitution and the Union, 1861
- Abraham Lincoln, Address to the New Jersey State Senate, 1861
- Abraham Lincoln to Winfield Scott, April 27, 1861
- Abraham Lincoln, Message to Congress in Special Session, 1861
- Abraham Lincoln to General John Charles Fremont, September 2, 1861
- Abraham Lincoln, Annual Message to Congress, 1861
- Abraham Lincoln, Opinion of the Admission of West Virginia into the Union, 1862
- Abraham Lincoln to Erastus Corning, and Others, 1863
- Abraham Lincoln to Salmon P. Chase, 1863
- Abraham Lincoln to Albert G. Hodges, 1864
- Abraham Lincoln, Response to a Serenade, 1864

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## Friday, August 7, 2015

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9:00 a.m. to Noon

Lincoln and Emancipation

Readings:

- Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln*, 1864
- Rodney O. Davis & Douglas L. Wilson, *Herndon's Informants*
- Letters and Speeches of Abraham Lincoln
- Abraham Lincoln (1861) in Charles Edwards Lester, *Life and Public Services of Charles Sumner*, 1874
- Abraham Lincoln, Drafts of a Bill for Compensated Emancipation in Delaware, 1861
- Excerpt from *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning*, 1861
- Abraham Lincoln, Message to Congress, 1862
- Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, 1862
- Abraham Lincoln, Message to Congress, 1862
- Excerpt from *Diary of Gideon Welles*, 1862
- Gideon Welles, "The History of Emancipation," 1872
- Abraham Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation, First Draft, 1862
- Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln*
- Abraham Lincoln, Address on Colonization to a Deputation of Negroes, 1862
- Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley, 1862
- Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln*
- George S. Boutwell to Josiah G. Holland, 1865

- Excerpt from *Diary of Gideon Welles*, 1862
- Excerpt from *The Civil War Diaries of Salmon P. Chase*, 1862
- Francis B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln*
- Abraham Lincoln, Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, 1862
- Abraham Lincoln, Emancipation Proclamation, 1863
- Schuyler Colfax, *Life and Principles of Abraham Lincoln*, 1865
- Abraham Lincoln to James S. Wadsworth, 1864
- Abraham Lincoln to Albert G. Hodges, 1864
- Abraham Lincoln, Resolution Submitting the Thirteenth Amendment to the States, 1865
- Abraham Lincoln, Response to a Serenade, 1865
- David Dixon Porter in *Incidents and Anecdotes of the Civil War* (1865)

**1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.      Lincoln at Gettysburg**

Readings:

- Abraham Lincoln, "Response to a Serenade," 1863
- Galusha A. Grow, in *Congressional Globe*, 1861
- Abraham Lincoln, Gettysburg Address, 1863
- Remarks of Hon. Samuel W. Pennypacker, LL.D., Governor of the Commonwealth, Dedication of the Statue of John Burns at Gettysburg, 1903
- Dedication of Monument, 84<sup>th</sup> Regiment Infantry, Address of Captain Thomas Merchant, 1889
- Address of Hon. Charles Devens, 1877
- Michael Zuckert, "De(a)dications: Lincoln, Gettysburg, and the Founders," 2006