



On Lincoln's Birthday, Tell the Truth

Guest: Thomas DiLorenzo

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Thomas DiLorenzo is a professor of economics at Loyola University in Maryland, and the author of The Real Lincoln, How Capitalism Saved America, and Hamilton's Curse, among many other books.

WOODS: There's nobody on earth I would rather have to talk to on Lincoln's birthday than Tom DiLorenzo, scourge of p.c. professors everywhere. *The Real Lincoln* sold a great many copies. It hit number two overall on Amazon—not in nonfiction, but overall. That includes fiction books, it includes books promoted by Oprah, it includes cookbooks, and you hit number two with it's book. That's unbelievable, given that it's the opposite of what people are told to believe about Lincoln. Why do you think a book like this has made you into such a lightning rod?

DILORENZO: One reason is that people don't like to admit that they've been made fools of their entire lives by the educational system, and rather than confront reality they strike out at the messenger. I think it's basic human nature on the part of some people. Although I've had hundreds of emails, maybe thousands, over the years from people who told me yeah, I originally felt like that, but I've come to think that thank goodness I learned these things before it was too late, before I'm dead, and I can pass these on to my children and grandchildren.

So I think that is the main reason: a lot of people won't admit to being made fools of. Then of course all the political parties have deified Lincoln for 150 years, and so he really is the face of the American state. It's what gives the American state moral authority in the eyes especially of the neocons. Any criticism of any kind, whatsoever, no matter how minor, is always met with an organized barrage of letters to the editor, and scurrilous charges against the author of the criticisms and so forth. So I think those are the two main reasons.

WOODS: So this gets to the heart of it, then: why is Lincoln in particular deified by the political parties, and somebody considered to be off-limits? What does he represent for the regime that they want to preserve and they don't want an iconoclast like Tom DiLorenzo tearing down?

DILORENZO: As you know, Tom, at the beginning of the American republic, the big political debate was over a centralized or consolidated monopoly state, which the Hamiltonians wanted, or the Federalists, versus the decentralized, limited government of Jefferson. That battle was played out for many decades, and the Hamiltonians finally won with Lincoln. We got a highly centralized state, the rights to secession and nullification were effectively destroyed, we had the first income tax, the first military draft during the so-called Civil War, and an explosion of government compared to what it had been before the Civil War.

There is even a liberal law professor named Fletcher, who wrote a book on Lincoln and the Constitution, where he praises to the treetops the fact that Lincoln provided a road map of how a president can just plain ignore the Constitution and essentially declare himself dictator, and use the military to intimidate judges and members of Congress.

As you know, Lincoln had his biggest critic in Congress, Clement Vallandigham, a congressman from Dayton, Ohio, deported, and he also intimidated federal judges, even the chief justice, by threatening to have him arrested after he wrote an opinion that Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus was unconstitutional. He attacked the separation of powers, he ignored the Constitution and I think statist of all kinds whether they're the neocons today or the Obommunists as I call them, I think that's why they love the idea of idolizing Lincoln, because he was our dictator.

WOODS: Tom, I want to pretend that there is a formal debate going on over Lincoln, and you have your opening statement. In that opening statement, give me the 30-second version of the traditional, schoolboy version of Lincoln, and then take another minute and a half to just, in the most basic terms, chip away at it.

DILORENZO: The traditional schoolboy interpretation of Lincoln that I was taught growing up in the Pennsylvania public schools, was that he suffered his entire life thinking about the poor slaves in the South, and essentially God sent him to Earth, is sort of the modern rendition, to do something about this. He finally got a chance to do something about it by becoming president, and he did.

The reality is that Lincoln admitted that he never said a word about slavery until the mid-1850s, when it became politically opportunistic to say something about slavery. He never opposed southern slavery; he opposed the extension of slavery into the territories. The reason he gave for that was that they wanted to preserve the territories for "free white labor"—those are his exact words—so it was political protectionism. He was going to promise the white male workers that they would not allow any black people to compete with them for jobs, free or slaves. His own state, for example, amended the constitution to prohibit the immigration of black people into the state, and Lincoln supported that.

When he became president—anybody can just read his first inaugural address to find out why he decided he needed to go to war—he bent over backwards in defending slavery in the first inaugural address. I call it his "slavery forever" speech. He even pledged his support of a constitutional amendment that would have prohibited the government from ever interfering with slavery.

When it came time for tax collection, he said that there would need to be no bloodshed or invasion of any state. He used the words "bloodshed" and "invasion" to describe what would happen if any state seceded and failed to continue paying federal taxes. He literally threatened waging war on his own people over tax collection in the same speech where he gave the strongest defense of slavery ever made by an American politician, because it came from the president.

He commenced the waging of total war against the civilian populations of the South in reversing decades-long traditions in the world, of condemning that very practice of waging war against civilians intentionally. He really opened the doors to the horrors of total war in the twentieth century.

WOODS: I want to review just generally what some of the critics said to you when your book came out. And I'm going to leave out of the picture what I'm increasingly calling the '*New York Times* libertarians,' libertarians who think we can't say or do anything that might make *New York Times* readers not immediately flock to libertarianism. These people are not our natural audience to start with, but we're supposed to cater to them obsessively. I'm going to leave them out of the picture because I don't care about those people. But I am interested in some of the response among some historians, because it seems like they couldn't decide whether the correct way to respond to you DiLorenzo was to say, DiLorenzo isn't saying anything new about Lincoln. He's just saying things that all historians already know about Lincoln.

And then on the other hand, you had people saying the completely contradictory thing, that all DiLorenzo does is distort Lincoln. Well, which is it? Is he telling us things that all professional historians already know? Or is he distorting the Lincoln legacy? Did you notice that the complaints fell into these two mutually contradictory categories?

DILORENZO: Yeah. I have read quite a lot of the so-called Lincoln literature, and the historians all know these facts. The references in my book, the 550 footnotes, are almost exclusively scholarly publications, university press books, there are dozens and dozens of those, journal articles, things like that.

The historians know these things, but they spent 150 years putting the proper politically correct spin on all these facts. So I come along, and with my background in Austrian economics, libertarianism, Public Choice and political economy, make some obvious statements about what a bunch of b.s. a lot of these interpretations are about Lincoln, and they don't like that.

A week after the book came out, I had an email from Paul Craig Roberts, the syndicated columnist at the time, and he said, you have destroyed their human capital. That's why they are attacking you. What he meant by that is that I had a different interpretation of the same facts.

I'll give one example: Doris Kearns Goodwin, who's established herself as the high priestess of the Lincoln cult, in her book *Team of Rivals* she talks about how Lincoln was actually the author of the Corwin Amendment that would have prohibited the federal government from ever interfering with southern slavery. It was named after a Ohio congressman named Corwin. She uses primary sources to document that this came from Lincoln, who then instructed William Seward—this was after he was elected but before he was inaugurated—to get this amendment through the Senate, which he did, and the House.

Her spin is not that oh, my goodness, we have been misinformed about Lincoln and he was not such a champion of emancipation after all. Why, look what he did: he was willing to ingrain slavery explicitly in the Constitution. That's the interpretation I get, and that I gave in my book.

What she said in her book is that we should praise Lincoln for this, because it helped keep the Republican Party together. And that was very important, to keep the Republican Party together.

You have thousands of spins like this of these same facts that are the official doctrine of the history profession and most of them are totally misinformed or uninformed by any kind of economic understanding. And so when I talk about Lincoln, tariffs, taxes, and protectionism, the historians get especially angry with me over that. Because all they have said, really, is that he was a good-hearted man and he wanted everyone to prosper like he had prospered. And that is the basis of their economic analysis of Lincoln's policies.

WOODS: The most common argument that the man on the street might come back at you with would be: I agree with you, Lincoln had various motivations for the things he did, and he was by no means an abolitionist, and he was willing to accept slavery in some circumstances if he could get other things that he wanted. I'll accept all that, and I'll even accept that a year and a half into the war, he wasn't interested in getting rid of slavery even then. He would have taken the southern states back and not said a word about slavery. I am willing to go with you on all that.

But the fact is that the war gave an extra push to the abolition of slavery, and in the absence of that there is no indication whatsoever at all in the economy of the South that the slave system was in any way dying out or not prospering. Therefore, yes, it's true: we can talk all day long about the problems with Lincoln, but the fact is the slaves were freed and there does not appear to have been any serious prospect of their emancipation in the absence of the war. What would you say to that?

DILORENZO: First of all, anybody who is interested in this question should read Jim Powell's book, *Greatest Emancipations*, describing how all the other countries of the world ended slavery peacefully during the nineteenth century without a war.

Also, it was understood by a lot of people at the time that southern secession provided a huge boost to the downfall of slavery, because it would have made the Fugitive Slave Act inconsequential. The Fugitive Slave

Act was a federal law, which was very strongly supported by Abe Lincoln, which forced northerners to run down runaway slaves and essentially return them to their owners. Magistrates were paid \$10 for returning slaves to their owners, and \$5 if they freed them, and that was the incentive that was given. If the southern states had seceded, that would have been defunct. For example, a slave from Virginia, if he escaped into Pennsylvania, he would be a free man forever. Whereas under the Lincoln regime, and Lincoln supported the Fugitive Slave Act, if that slave escaped into Pennsylvania he had a federal bounty on his head. That's why the Underground Railroad ended up in Canada and not some northern state.

A real statesman would have done what the British did, and the French, and the Danes, and the Dutch, and ended slavery peacefully through some sort of compensated emancipation. All the northern states did it that way; there were slaves in New York City until 1853.

I've never bought the idea that it was absolutely impossible for the southern states to do what all the rest of the world, including the northern states, did and put an end to slavery peacefully.

In fact, in my book, at top of page 275 in *The Real Lincoln*, I wrote, "The one unequivocal good that came from Lincoln's war was the abolition of slavery." Those are my exact words. Then in the next sentence I wrote that he did it in the absolute worst way by antagonizing the South and poisoning race relations forever. And attaching the ending of slavery to a war that killed as many as 850,000 Americans, according to the latest estimates, which is just a mind-boggling number in terms of the amount of deaths that was unnecessary if the objective was just to put an end to slavery.

WOODS: Tom, you and I sometimes have been called "neo-Confederates." I confess I haven't the slightest idea what this is supposed to mean. I don't favor resurrecting any old government, I don't favor the government I live under now, so I don't understand where this comes from. Can you try and shed light—not on what the word means, because it obviously doesn't mean anything; it's just a term of abuse—but what do you think the origin of it is? What are people trying to do by using this label and applying it to people?

DILorenzo: They are trying to address people who have not read anything, hardly, on the topic, and have certainly not read my book, and trying to discourage them from even considering reading my books and articles by using this word neo-Confederate, by which they mean slavery defender and racist. Therefore he is a racist and a slavery defender, so pay no attention to anything he says.

I can recall getting another email about a year after *The Real Lincoln* was published from Morgan Reynolds, an old friend of mine who is a retired professor from Texas A&M, and he was just marveling. He wrote me one email and he said, now they're picking out these picayune things: one guy even criticized me because there was a typo in the index. So these people are even combing through the index of the book looking for typos!

And then a week later, Morgan writes again and says, holy cow, now they're calling you a neo-Confederate. I went through a year of all these criticisms; they first started ignoring me and then they started personal attacks. At one point, a lot of these people were saying: he's making it all up. Lincoln never said these things, never did these things. But then the evidence was so overwhelming they started saying, well, yeah, he did do these things, he did say these things, but DiLorenzo gives the wrong interpretation; it's not the politically correct interpretation. Then they must have thrown up their hands and said, let's just call him a neo-Confederate, a slavery defender.

Now no one to this day, as far as I know, ever pointed out that the great African-American economist Walter E. Williams wrote the foreword to *The Real Lincoln*, and they never quote the statement I made on page 275, which was that the one unequivocal good of the war was the abolition of slavery.

As far as neo-Confederate, if you look at the index to *The Real Lincoln*, there are only four pages where the word is even mentioned, because it's not a book on the Confederacy. It's a book about Lincoln and

contrasting the real Lincoln and the fairytale Lincoln. All I said about the Confederates was that their constitution was almost identical to the U.S. constitution, with the exception of they outlawed protectionist tariffs and they outlawed internal improvement subsidies and they eliminated the General Welfare clause that existed in the U.S. constitution. I also said that their constitution would have rendered impossible of Lincoln's economic agenda of protectionist tariffs and internal improvement subsidies. And that's it, that's all I said about the Confederates.

So somehow that is some sort of great defense of the Confederacy and everything it did and everything it stood for. So it's just nonsense. It's name-calling and just libelous is what it is.

WOODS: You've also written a book on Alexander Hamilton, who's in a very distant way the father of the whole centralizing ideology of which Lincoln is a part. Your book *Hamilton's Curse*, is a great one that I enjoyed very much. Of course, there are more people that you could write biographies of that need to be written. More revisionist biographies. Of course, Henry Clay would be a natural candidate who comes to mind. And in each case, as you say, it's not like you have to go out and find manuscript collections that were never consulted before or sources that have only now come to light. You really can draw a lot of this from the secondary literature; you can draw a lot of this from the professional historians, who do this for a living and just connect dots that are rarely connected, or bring out features that may be in the professional historians' books, but they're not in your fifth-grade class, they're not in your tenth-grade class, they're not on the TV, and that is the service that you are performing here.

DILORENZO: That's the way I see it. Ludwig von Mises once commented in one of his writings that typical historians are just collectors of facts, but without any sort of theory with which to interpret the facts you can really go astray and not get the right story. That's the importance of economic theory. That's where I am coming from it's what a lot of your work is, too, Tom, and that's why we have very different interpretations.

You mentioned Henry Clay, and I am probably going to write a book about Henry Clay. One of the standard lines about him is that he was known as the Great Compromiser. One of the things he compromised on was the so-called Tariff of Abominations that was in the early 1830s. He compromised a lower tariff after the extreme 45 percent average tariff rate that had been put in. But what historians don't mention is that he was the author of the tariff bill in the first place. So they give him credit for being the compromiser for fixing this horrible blunder, but they don't mention that he was the source of the blunder in the first place.

He was also the chief warmonger that got America into the War of 1812, and if you read his latest biography he is praised to the treetops for being on the committee that negotiated a peace settlement with England at the end of the war. But they don't mention that there probably wouldn't have been a war if it weren't for him.

WOODS: One last thing before I let you go: can you tell people about the work of Philip Magness at American University, relating to Lincoln and what was going to happen to the slaves after the war, what he was planning to do with them? What has Philip Magnus dug up that we didn't know about before?

DILORENZO: Philip Magness is the co-author of a book called *Colonization after Emancipation*. It's well known among historians that for much of his adult life, Lincoln favored what was known as colonization or deportation of the black people. He was the manager of the Illinois Colonization Society when he was in state politics and as president, he even funded an office to start the ball rolling in deporting black people to Liberia. He even had a meeting with some free black men in the White House, which was one of the very first times that black people had ever been in the White House, urging them to go to Liberia and set an example, leave the country. And these men all said, no thanks, very wisely.

The standard interpretation by the history profession is that yes, he did these things and he favored colonization—it doesn't get much more of a white supremacist attitude than that, deporting black people.

But in 1863, the story goes, he had some sort of divine transformation of his mind where he gave up all this. They don't give any evidence, there are no quotations, they don't quote Lincoln as saying this or anybody else as saying that. They just make it up: well, in 1863 he didn't talk about it much after that. So for 100 years or more that's been the standard story about Lincoln and colonization.

What Philip Magnus did, and his co-author from Oxford University in England, is they went to the National Archives in Washington, and also the British archives, and they found correspondence between Lincoln, the British government, and other governments, up to three days before his death, working diligently on figuring out some sort of plan for how to deport all the freed slaves out of the United States, to send them to Panama or somewhere else in South America or the West Indies, anywhere but here. William Seward was helping him out on that. They were even counting how many ships we had in the United States to put all the black people on and if it was possible to send them all out of the country.

That also tells you a lot about what Lincoln did with his rhetoric when he talked about equality. Whenever he talked about equality, he of course did not believe in equality, but he always had a qualifier in there: in their native clime, black people could be equal. That is, if they are all back in Africa they can be equal with each other there, but racial equality here, no, that was never his position.

Philip Magness in this great scholarly piece of work, *Colonization after Emancipation*, proves that the entire history profession was full of it.

WOODS: In your book you've estimated how many books have been written on Lincoln over the years, and it's in the tens of thousands.

DILORENZO: I quoted Lerone Bennett Jr., the author of an even more scathing critique of Lincoln—

WOODS: *Abraham Lincoln's White Dream*?

DILORENZO: Yeah. And saying that there had been 16,000 books written about Lincoln.

WOODS: So it's a preposterously large number. And not one of these authors found these documents in the archives— they've had 150 years to look—and not one of them found these documents and had the honesty to report on them? And these are the people who are coming after you. That is a badge of honor then.

DILORENZO: Yeah, I agree. In *The Real Lincoln*, I looked at what some of the real big shots in what I call the Lincoln cult had to say about colonization. One of them is Gabor Boritt, and I think he's the head of the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College, so he's quite a big shot in the Lincoln field. He had to confront this because the historians know this, that Lincoln advocated colonization for most of his life. What Gabor Boritt said is, "This is how honest people lie." Those are his exact words from one of his books on Lincoln. He couldn't admit that Honest Abe was not honest, so he called him honest but he called him an honest liar. Which is another way of saying that the ends justify the means.