



# Myths of the Late Unpleasantness

Fact, Fiction, and Misrepresentation Concerning Secession and the War for Southern Independence



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## What is a Myth?

A story that is not literally true:

---Flying horses, dragons, fables

A story that while not literally true may convey a moral message:

---George Washington and the Cherry Tree

To call a story or explanation a myth, in today's parlance, is to call it FALSE, whatever else it is or may be

It is important to remember that while falsehood is an essential part of myth, myth also *must* embody *some* truths or half truths to be credible



## What is a Myth?

In this presentation I will focus on *historical myths*, which are *interpretations* and *explanations* of past events that are, in at least some significant aspects, FALSE

*Historical* myths differ from ordinary falsehoods in that they attempt to interpret or explain *historical* events using incorrect, inadequate, incomplete and/or misleading presentations of historical data

Historical mythmaking may be deliberate or inadvertent but *almost always* reflects a political bias

History (like life in general) is enormously complex and confusing:  
Mythmaking makes it easier to understand, even if that understanding is wrong

***In life, simple explanations are often wrong or misleading. In History they almost always are***



*“The Late Unpleasantness,” War Between the States, Civil War, War of the Rebellion, War of Northern Aggression, War for Southern Independence, War to Prevent Southern Independence* is a rich storehouse of historical myths

In this presentation I will examine twelve principle myths of the War History generally and this War in particular are storehouses of myths. I will try in this presentation to show how the false aspects of some particular myths can be identified and corrected

The overall goal is to try to get behind the myths and determine, as far as possible, what is true and what is false in our understanding of the history of Secession and the War

So let’s look at twelve common myths (the *Dirty Dozen*):



## 1. The Southern States seceded in order to protect slavery, a great evil inconsistent with the basic principles of America

It is *true* that protection of slavery was *the major reason* behind Southern secession, *but that is not the whole story* as it is generally assumed to be

First, slavery was *already* “protected” by the **U.S. Constitution, Federal laws, and Supreme Court decisions**. It was *perfectly legal* in the States where it existed and was threatened only by the fiery rhetoric of abolitionists

It is *true* that seceding states cited threats to slavery (specifically, failure to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act and aiding and abetting servile insurrection such as John Brown’s raid) as the principle reasons for secession, but these threats were framed as ***violations of the Constitution*** and comity between states, not as philosophical justifications of slavery



## 1. The Southern States seceded in order to protect slavery, a great evil inconsistent with the basic principles of America

Southerners felt that *if the Constitution could be disregarded* when it came to slavery, *or amended to abolish it by Northern majority* **nothing was safe in the South**

“...a great evil...”: Many Southerners *agreed* that slavery was a blight on America (positive defenses of slavery were of limited popularity).

The ***Big Question*** which kept discontent about slavery from developing into a program of emancipation was *what to do with the slaves if and when they were freed*. The major alternatives discussed at the time were:

- *Colonization* to Africa or elsewhere in the Americas. This was a popular answer, especially before 1850. Lincoln supported it to his dying day, even though most blacks strongly rejected it and most Northerners came to realize it was impossible logistically



## 1. The Southern States seceded in order to protect slavery, a great evil inconsistent with the basic principles of America

• *Give the blacks equal rights with whites:* Only a handful of Northerners supported this idea. Very many, if not most *abolitionists* accepted the racial inferiority of non-whites, a view shared by almost everyone at the time. Lincoln expressed his support of white supremacy and limited civil rights for blacks in numerous speeches before the war.

Almost *no one* in the North even *tried* to address the issue of what the South should do with its (by 1860) four million slaves if they were set free. The main concern of Northerners on this question was

***“Don’t you dare send them up here to live with us!”***



## 1. The Southern States seceded in order to protect slavery, a great evil inconsistent with the basic principles of America

A notable exception to the almost universal practice of ignoring this question was Abraham Lincoln, who envisaged a managed program of colonization or gradual conversion of slave to free labor, a process he thought *could take up to a century*.

His plan included *compensation* to slave holders for the loss of their property. His first proposal along these lines was made when he was in Congress in 1849, where he and a few other Whigs introduced a proposal for gradual, compensated emancipation of slaves in the District of Columbia



## 1. The Southern States seceded in order to protect slavery, a great evil inconsistent with the basic principles of America

Before 1850 the majority view in the North was that slavery was a *state* institution and the Federal government had no authority over it except *perhaps* the right to prohibit it in the territories as proposed in the Missouri statehood discussions of 1819-21, and by the Wilmot Proviso (1846), which after much debate and acrimony *failed* in Congress

In the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 Congress *approved* the principle that only the citizens of a territory (not the Federal government) could permit or prohibit slavery in a territory. This view was endorsed in 1857 by the Dred Scott decision

The prior failure of Federal efforts to restrict slavery led many Unionist Southerners, including Jefferson Davis and Alexander Stephens to feel that slavery was safer *in* the Union than *outside* it



**2. The North refused to allow secession mainly because secession would permit the indefinite existence of slavery, which the majority of Americans (at least in the North) wanted to abolish**

The truth is that only a small minority in the North gave two hoots about slavery: Certainly most Northerners didn't approve of it, but they didn't regard it as a problem they had to do something about

What they *did* care about was obedience to Federal authority which the South was clearly denying wholesale by seceding.

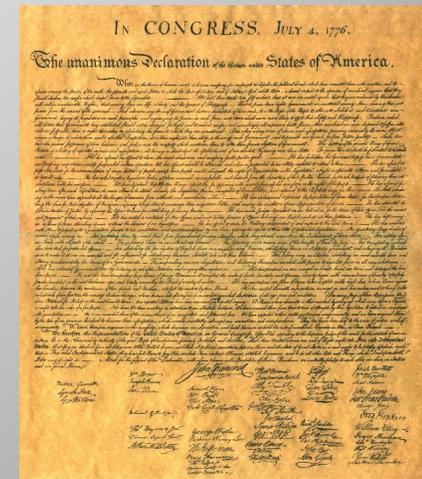
To many in the North this was *revolution* and *anarchy* and the betrayal of the very essence of American democracy. Lincoln always framed it in these terms. *This* not slavery was the real grievance of the North against secession



**2. The North refused to allow secession mainly because secession would permit the indefinite existence of slavery, which the majority of Americans (at least in the North) wanted to abolish**

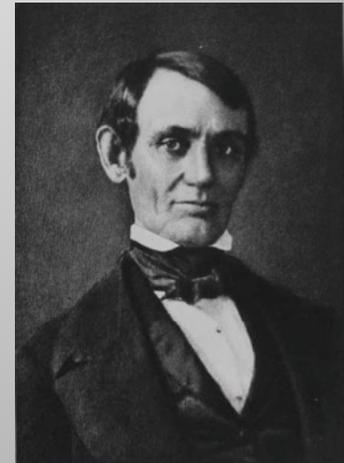
Clearly forgotten by the Northern advocates of compulsory Unionism was the clause in their beloved Declaration of Independence declaring the right of all people to abolish governments destructive of their liberties, *the people concerned being the judge.*

Lincoln was explicit in his support of the principle of self-government when he was in Congress :





*“Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up and shake off the existing government, and form a new one that suits them better... Nor is this right confined to cases in which the whole people of an existing government may choose to exercise it. Any portion of such people that can may revolutionize, and make their own of so much of the territory as they inhabit. More than this, a majority of any portion of such people may revolutionize, putting down a minority, intermingled with, or near about them, who may oppose their movement.”*



*Lincoln in Congress  
(earliest known photo)*

Abraham Lincoln, Speech in the U.S. House of Representatives on the Mexican War, January 12, 1848



**2. The North refused to allow secession mainly because secession would permit the indefinite existence of slavery, which the majority of Americans (at least in the North) wanted to abolish**

Far from seeing slavery as the cause, or even *a* cause for rejecting secession, Lincoln at the very beginning of his first inaugural address went out of his way to strongly argue that the Federal government had *no authority* to interfere with slavery where it existed, and was *Constitutionally obligated* to fully support the fugitive slave laws.

Southerners were *wrong*, he insisted, in thinking he and his party were a threat to slavery. Lincoln's view here was entirely consistent with that of his speeches prior to election

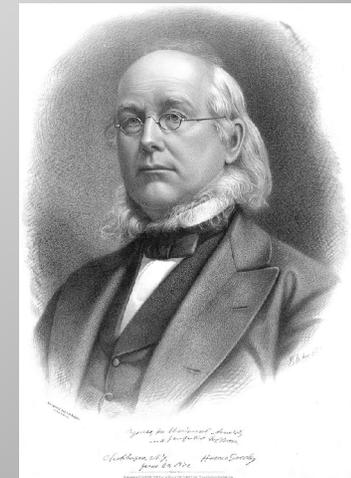
During the secession crisis, Secretary of State Seward strongly advised Lincoln *not to even mention* slavery in justifying his rejection of Secession. Lincoln agreed and fully complied



- 2. The North refused to allow secession mainly because secession would permit the indefinite existence of slavery, which the majority of Americans (at least in the North) wanted to abolish**

### **The “Go in Peace” period:**

In the first weeks following the secession of South Carolina and other states a number of influential Northerners (most importantly Horace Greeley of the *New -York Daily Tribune*, the North’s most widely circulated newspaper) argued that the North should just let the South go in peace



Horace Greeley (1811-1872)



**2. The North refused to allow secession mainly because secession would permit the indefinite existence of slavery, which the majority of Americans (at least in the North) wanted to abolish**

Unfortunately, the “go in peace” idea soon died as Northerners, including Greeley and other prominent Northern business and political leaders awoke to the *financial disaster* that a Southern Confederacy posed to their interests, namely

- The threat of Southern free trade in direct competition with the North
- The possible loss of a “toll free” Mississippi River as an outlet for Midwestern products
- Serious loss of Federal revenues paid by the South to support import tariffs. These revenues were crucial to financing internal improvement projects, which were mainly in the North.
- Once again, slavery had *nothing to do* with any of these concerns



The bottom line is that the Southern States seceded because it was clear that the Federal government had become the exclusive property of the North, whose majority population gave them the power not only to disregard the Constitution, but to change it

Southerners *did not believe* repeated Republican declarations that slavery was safe with them; what they saw was that the anti-slavery faction of the North had now grown powerful enough to threaten any and all Southern interests, not just slavery (which is exactly what happened)

It made perfect sense under the circumstances for Southerners to look to themselves, not to the sectional Federal government, to secure their future rights

***The South seceded to protect their Constitutional right to hold slaves. The North could not afford to let the South go because of the disastrous economic effects threatened by disunion***



**3. Secession was a clear violation of the Constitution, which made no provision for it, and was in essence only a larger scale version of an *insurrection*...**

This article of Yankee faith had only limited support before the war, even in the North

- The Founding Fathers, both Federalists and Anti-Federalists, frequently expressed their skepticism about the ability of the new Constitution to bind the separate states into a Federal Union that would last more than a few decades, if that
- New York, Rhode Island and Virginia *explicitly* declared in their documents ratifying the Constitution that they reserved the right of secession if it, in their judgment, seemed advisable. *No one* objected to these provisions, which were generally regarded as *obvious*, which is most likely why other states omitted them in their ratifications



**3. Secession was a clear violation of the Constitution, which made no provision for it, and was in essence only a larger scale version of an *insurrection*...**

While Unionism as a sentiment grew in the period before 1840, it did face periodic challenge

- In 1814, at the Hartford Convention, a number of New England states seriously considered setting up their own separate country in protest to the War of 1812 and other grievances. The War however ended before their plans could come to fruition
- In 1819-1821 a number of politicians North and South advocated secession if Congress admitted Missouri *either* as a slave or free state



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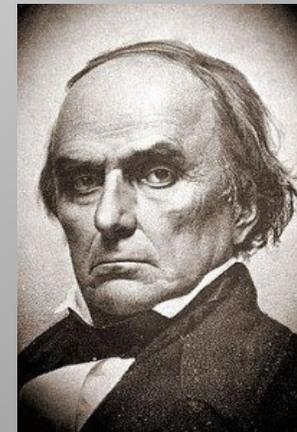
- In 1832 during the Nullification Crisis, South Carolina threatened secession if it was not allowed to nullify what it considered an unfair and oppressive tariff. A compromise on the tariff was reached, although not on the right of Nullification, which the State maintained by nullifying President Jackson's Force Bill authorizing military coercion of South Carolina



**3. Secession was a clear violation of the Constitution, which made no provision for it, and was in essence only a larger scale version of an *insurrection* ...**

- In 1850 delegates from nine slave states met in Nashville to consider possible actions, including secession, against the proposals of the Compromise of 1850. This movement failed to get off the ground

Perhaps the greatest spokesman for the Union before 1850 was Daniel Webster, Senator from Massachusetts. While he argued strongly against the right of a State to *nullify* Federal laws while in the Union, he always maintained that a State had the right to *leave* the Union, a right he called *the right of revolution* which he understood the colonists exercised in 1776





#### 4. Most Southerners were slaveholders, or wanted to be, and saw nothing essentially wrong with the institution

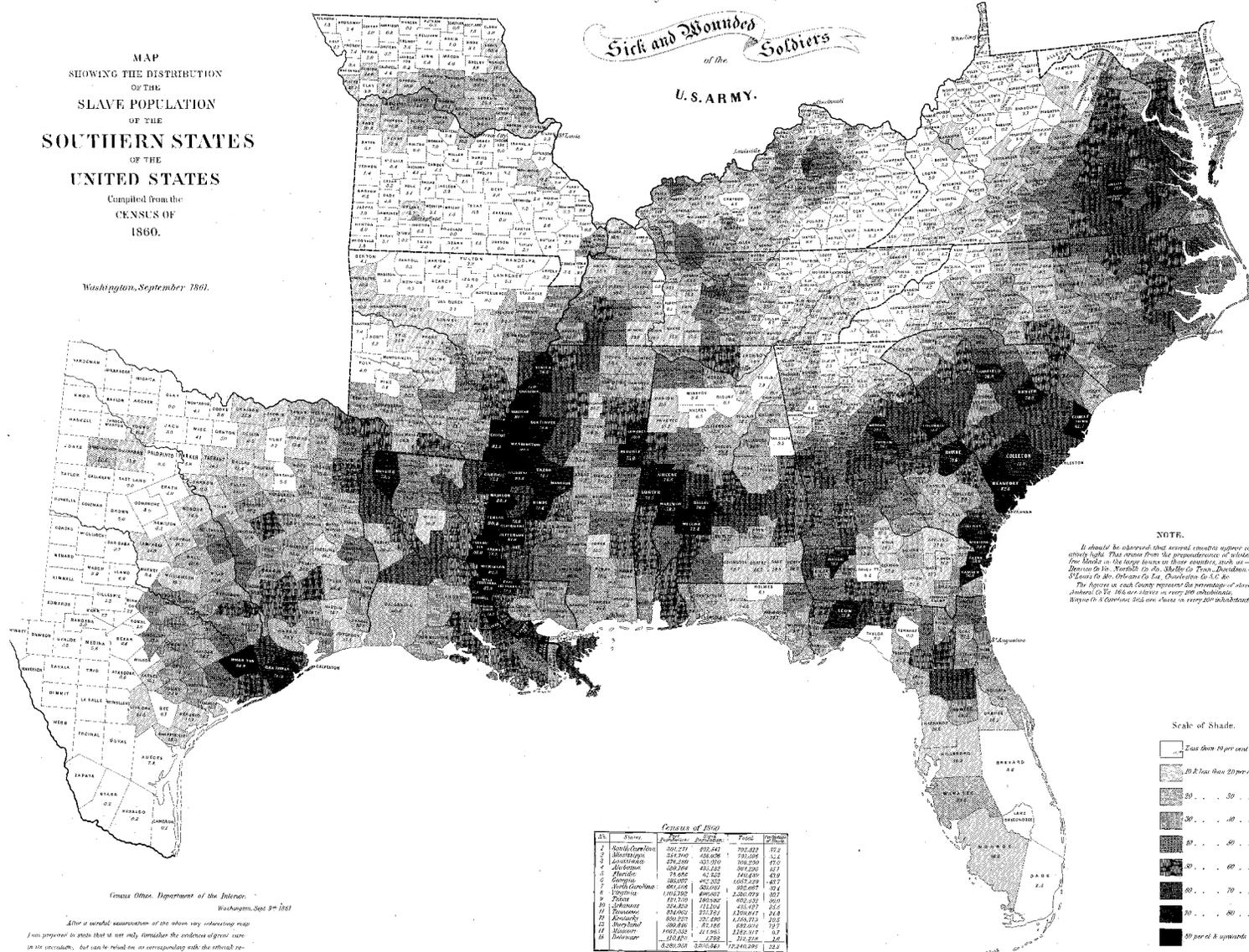
According to the Census of 1860, in States where slavery was legal, 3.9 million blacks were enslaved, or 32% of the population

- In the 15 states where slavery was legal, on average only 25% of *families* actually owned slaves. By state: 12% in Maryland, 49% in Mississippi, 26 % in Virginia, 28% in Texas
- Among the families that *did* own slaves 60% owned 1-6, 36% owned 7-39, and 4% owned 40 or more
- Many people in the South, including slave owners, as well as most Northerners were unhappy with slavery on both moral and practical grounds. Thomas Jefferson criticized the institution strongly in his *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1785)
- Slave ownership was concentrated in specific agricultural belts

MAP  
SHOWING THE DISTRIBUTION  
OF THE  
SLAVE POPULATION  
OF THE  
**SOUTHERN STATES**  
OF THE  
**UNITED STATES**  
Compiled from the  
CENSUS OF  
1860.

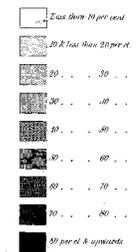
Washington, September 1861.

Sold for the benefit of the  
**Sick and Wounded Soldiers**  
of the  
**U.S. ARMY.**



**NOTE.**  
It should be observed that several counties appear comparatively light. This arises from the immensity of white and free blacks in the large towns in those counties, such as — Boston in Norfolk Co. Va. Middle in Town in Davidson Co. N.C. St. Louis in Mo. Orleans in La. Charleston in S.C. No. The figures in each County represent the percentage of slave vs. whites in 1860. 100 is white in every 100 inhabitants. 100 per 1000 is 10 per cent. 1000 is 100 per cent.

Scale of Shade.



Census Office, Department of the Interior.  
Washington, Sept 3<sup>rd</sup> 1861

After a careful examination of the above very interesting map I am prepared to state that it not only furnishes the evidence of great error in its execution, but can be relied on as corresponding with the actual returns of the 8<sup>th</sup> Census.

*J. C. Kennedy*  
Secretary of the Interior

CENSUS OF 1860

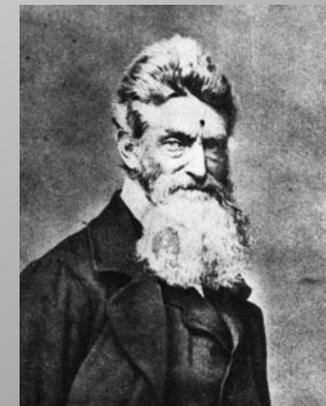
State	Population	Slaves	Per Cent
Alabama	505,273	253,141	50.1
Arkansas	324,760	158,006	48.7
Florida	202,200	123,000	60.8
Georgia	508,768	253,141	49.7
Louisiana	284,664	142,332	50.0
Mississippi	585,000	292,500	50.0
North Carolina	1,012,200	404,880	40.0
South Carolina	697,200	348,600	50.0
Texas	1,012,200	404,880	40.0
Virginia	1,012,200	404,880	40.0
West Virginia	202,200	101,100	50.0
Delaware	101,100	50,550	50.0
District of Columbia	69,720	34,860	50.0
Total	8,200,000	3,000,000	36.6



#### **4. Most Southerners were slaveholders, or wanted to be, and saw nothing essentially wrong with the institution**

After the Nat Turner rebellion in Virginia (1831), Southern states became increasingly sensitive to *any* criticism of slavery, feeling that even to allow it openly would encourage slave revolts. Turner's rebellion more or less insured that the Virginia legislature's debate on gradual emancipation came to nothing

After John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry in 1859, a significant minority of Southerners became virtually paranoid about abolitionist plots, infiltrators and other threats of violent action against slavery. In hindsight, they generally had good reason, although there is no evidence that further raids like John Brown's were imminent





## 5. Unlike most northerners, Southerners regarded blacks as an inferior race

While racism is as old as humanity, the nineteenth century saw the advent of *scientific racism* which tried to use the tools of science to sort out races from superior to inferior based on such factors as skull measurements (Surprise! Whites were *always* at the top!)

As the century developed, any non-Nordic, non-Anglo-Saxon race was tarnished with inferiority, major targets being not just Africans but American Indians, Irishmen, Italians, Jews, Mexicans and Asians. Racism tended to be equal opportunity in finding inferiors

The major opposition to scientific racism came from traditional Christians, who quoted such verses as Galatians 3:28:

“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus”

***There is no evidence that Southerners as a group were any more racist than Northerners***



**6. Southerners resisted Federal authority and raised armies to defend their right to hold slaves, which for them was the most important element of their society**

As we have already seen, slavery played *no role at all* in the Northern invasion of the South

Southerners who resisted the invasion were fighting for their homes, families and the right to govern themselves

In Virginia and Tennessee, which bore the brunt of early fighting, roughly 75% of families owned *no* slaves. The war in general did not reach areas of high slave ownership (South Carolina and Mississippi) until spring of 1862 and later

Just as outrage at Southern secession and fear of economic disaster (not slavery) motivated the North to attack the South, Southern outrage at the North's cavalier disregard of the Constitution and laws protecting slavery motivated them to resist



**6. Southerners resisted Federal authority and raised armies to defend their right to hold slaves, which for them was the most important element of their society**

Yankees are fond of quoting the clause in the Confederate Constitution (Article I Section 9) which states that no law shall be passed “denying or impairing the right of property in negro slaves” as if that was the main concern of the document

In fact, most of the Confederate Constitution is identical to the U.S. Constitution with changes mostly confined to changing “United” to “Confederate” and making other changes, few relating to slavery, that many feel constitute improvements on the original

*Southerners in general, especially those forming the Confederate government, revered the Constitution and wanted to make as few changes as possible . They were not lawless, rebellious anarchists as the North liked to portray them.*

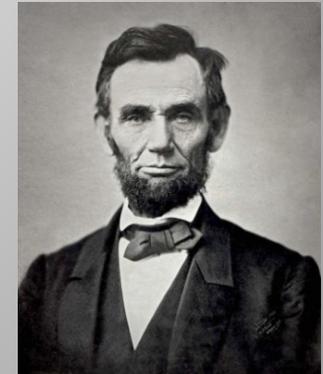


## 7. Lincoln was committed to full freedom and equality for all, black and white

Lincoln is frequently described as “detesting” slavery, but a better description of his attitude towards it is “disapproval,” which was precisely the attitude of most Northerners

Unlike people like William Lloyd Garrison and John Brown who pretty much detested slavery more than *anything*, Lincoln *never* made anti-slavery the focus of his political activities

His attitudes towards race and equal rights for blacks, long recognized (and clumsily apologized for) by Lincoln scholars were typical of most whites of his time and are best expressed, and frequently repeated by him, in his speeches in the Lincoln Douglas debates (1858):



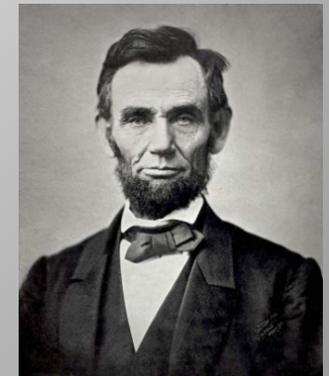


## 7. Lincoln was committed to full freedom and equality for all, black and white

*“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, 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 cannot 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.”*

(Speech at Charleston, IL, September 18, 1858)

There is no evidence that Lincoln *ever* substantially changed these opinions, even though shortly before his death he said that the “more intelligent” black soldiers who had served the Union faithfully *might* be entitled to the vote.





## Rules for Dealing with Lincoln

1. Lincoln is always right
2. When Lincoln is wrong, Rule #1 applies



**8. The South started the war by firing on Fort Sumter. The North raised armies to defeat Southern aggression only after the belligerence of the Confederacy forced them to it**

If aggressive action against Federal installations by Southerners meant they “started the war”, the war would have started not with Fort Sumter but with the seizure of Federal installations throughout the South *early* in 1861. But that’s not very dramatic, and in fact few Northerners seemed to care

Although Southerners insisted on maintaining their independence and raised armies for their defense, there were **NO** plans to invade the North. President Davis insisted in his inaugural address that Southern aims were entirely peaceful

Southern action against Ft. Sumter was *entirely defensive* to prevent a *now foreign* government from reinforcing a strategic fort in a major Southern city





**8. The South started the war by firing on Fort Sumter. The North raised armies to defeat Southern aggression only after the belligerence of the Confederacy forced them to it**

The Southern attack on Fort Sumter occurred only after *extensive* unsuccessful Southern efforts at defusing the situation, efforts aided by many key Northerners, especially Secretary of State Seward, who ultimately, along with Lincoln, yielded to radical demands to “crush the rebellion”

Border state efforts to defuse the secession crisis peacefully, most notably the Washington Peace Conference of February 1861, (called by some wags “The Old Gentlemen’s Conference”) went nowhere because by then the new Confederate government was forming and it was too late to turn back the clock. The question then was: Shall secession be recognized or not?





8. **The South started the war by firing on Fort Sumter. The North raised armies to defeat Southern aggression only after the belligerence of the Confederacy forced them to it**

Lincoln and his party had determined from the beginning *not* to recognize secession, which, unless they changed their opinion, meant that the South *must* inevitably sooner or later be forced into submission

***But if the South had a right to secede, it follows necessarily that they had a right to defend themselves against foreign aggression***





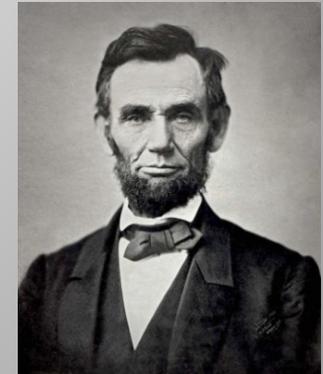
## 9. Lincoln was our greatest President since he saved the Union from the two great evils of rebellion and slavery

Lincoln *did not* in fact “save” the Union at all. That Union had failed and dissolved with the secession of South Carolina followed by the other Southern states

What Lincoln *did* do was to *invade and conquer a newly independent neighboring country* to force them to yield to a superior military force and to give up their right to self government

Lincoln *of course* wanted slavery to end as a result of the war, but this did not happen until the forced and illegal adoption of the Fourteenth Amendment *after* his death

The *Radical Republicans*, *not* Lincoln, must be credited with ending slavery

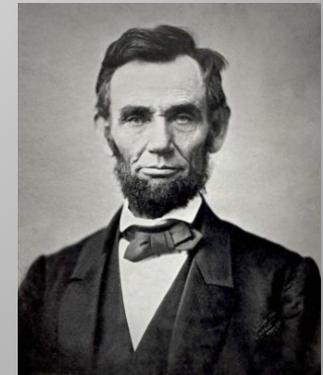




## 9. Lincoln was our greatest President since he saved the Union from the two great evils of rebellion and slavery

Was Lincoln “great?”

- He was undoubtedly good with words, although the ideas behind his eloquence were frequently wrong
- His actions in establishing a police state in the North without outright executing opposition politicians and journalists definitely showed considerable skill which modern despots could well learn from
- Although lacking any significant education, formal or otherwise, he did manage to be a generally effective war leader

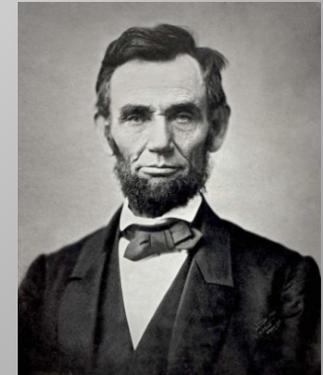




## 9. Lincoln was our greatest President since he saved the Union from the two great evils of rebellion and slavery

Was Lincoln “great?” On the other hand:

- Lincoln demonstrated an almost total lack of leadership in seeking a peaceful solution to the Secession crisis. He spent most of his time after election figuring out who should get patronage jobs, not seeking to resolve the political crisis
- He certainly did not need to either *recognize* or *invade* the Confederacy, which Yankees typically see as his only alternatives. In fact, if he had tacitly left the first seven seceding states alone, perhaps warning them that threats to commerce such as interfering with trade on the Mississippi would be dealt with by force, he would no doubt have had the support of the Upper South, which his call for volunteers instead drove to secession

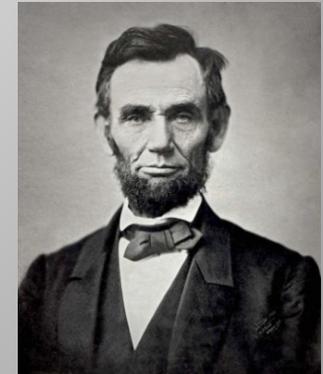




## 9. Lincoln was our greatest President since he saved the Union from the two great evils of rebellion and slavery

Was Lincoln “great?” On the other hand:

- Radical Republicans were always unhappy with Lincoln, whose moderation tended to infuriate them. Lincoln no doubt feared they might even try to impeach him if he did not show sufficient firmness towards the South
- My take on Lincoln generally is that he was sincere in his beliefs but was basically a very ordinary politician whose guiding star was personal ambition, not what was best for the country
- Few have noticed that “our greatest President” was unable to effect a bloodless emancipation of slavery, something that *all* slaveholding countries had accomplished by 1900, the U.S. and Haiti being the only exceptions





## 10. The Southern states seceded not because of concern about threats to slavery, but mainly because of tariffs and economic issues

Although this has long been a staple of Southern defense, it's time it was laid to rest

While Southern opposition to what they thought were unfair tariffs dated to even before the Nullification Crisis, it was a relatively minor issue compared to the threats to slavery and *everything else* posed by a Northern hegemony fully prepared to disregard the *Constitution and federal laws on slavery and by extension any Southern position they could now outvote*

There was little or no Southern support for setting up an independent polity for purely economic reasons. In fact, before Lincoln's election all but a small minority of Southerners were staunch supporters of the Union, tariffs and all. Most Presidents before the war were Southerners and slaveholders



## 10. The Southern states seceded not because of concern about threats to slavery, but mainly because of tariffs and economic issues

A review of Southern Ordinances of Secession and Declarations of Causes of Secession shows that only three (GA, MS and TX) of the eventual fourteen states that seceded *even mentioned* Northern economic unfairness at all

The *major* complaints instead concerned *violations of the Constitution* in regard to fugitive slaves, aiding and abetting slave rebellions such as John Brown's, and advocacy of full civil and political equality for blacks (which Republicans, including Lincoln, explicitly rejected, not adopting it until *after* the War)

Whether slave holders or not, many Southerners became convinced they could not continue as members of a Federal government that disregarded not only Southern interests but its own laws as well. For them, Lincoln's election was the unmistakable prelude to a future as *second class citizens*



**11. Post war Southerners invented a fanciful myth of the “Lost Cause” which ignored or minimized slavery and glorified the “moonlight and magnolias” culture of the Old South, where “people knew their place”**

This claim is largely a Yankee myth, useful when rational argument fails. *Of course* Southerners regretted losing the War and admired the leaders who had fought bravely for Independence. Why wouldn't they?

This does *not* mean that Southerners in general regretted the end of slavery: In general they were glad to be rid of it, but would have preferred a different mechanism for ending it, needless to say

**The “Cornerstone” Affair:** Yankees are fond of claiming that Alexander H. Stephens, Vice President of the Confederacy, stated in a speech on March 21, 1861 that “the cornerstone of the new Confederacy was slavery.” They claim that after the war he denied or distanced himself from this claim, citing mainly Constitutional issues in his book *A Constitutional View of the Late War Between the States*. This is a serious misrepresentation, endlessly repeated in textbooks and blogs.

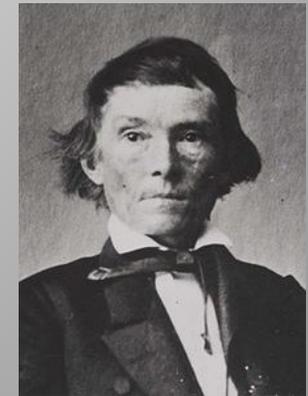


**11. Post war Southerners invented a fanciful myth of the “Lost Cause” which ignored or minimized slavery and glorified the “moonlight and magnolias” culture of the Old South, where “people knew their place”**

(On Stephens’ “Changing His Tune” after the War):

Stephens’ original remark was in regard to whether the races are equal or not. He said the failure of the Founding Fathers to face this question squarely was a major cause of the eventual failure of the Republic. Against this idea of racial equality, Stephens said was a different view:

“Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner- stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first, in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth.”



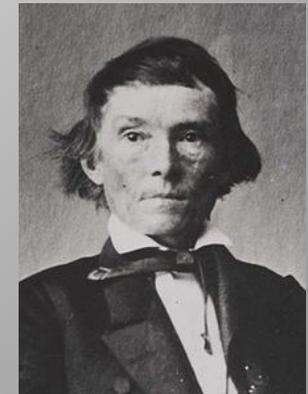


**11. Post war Southerners invented a fanciful myth of the “Lost Cause” which ignored or minimized slavery and glorified the “moonlight and magnolias” culture of the Old South, where “people knew their place”**

(On Stephens’ “Changing His Tune” after the War):

While we may not endorse Stephens’ view of racial inequality today, it was a common and accepted view point at the time in both the *North and South*. Few Northerners, as we have seen, were in favor of equal rights for blacks.

It is also clear that Stephens claimed that the “cornerstone” of the Confederacy was not **slavery** but the fact of the **inequality of races**. But as soon as Northern editors got a hold of his remarks, it was framed as a declaration that the Confederacy had *slavery* (bad!!) not *racial inequality* (no problem!) as its cornerstone





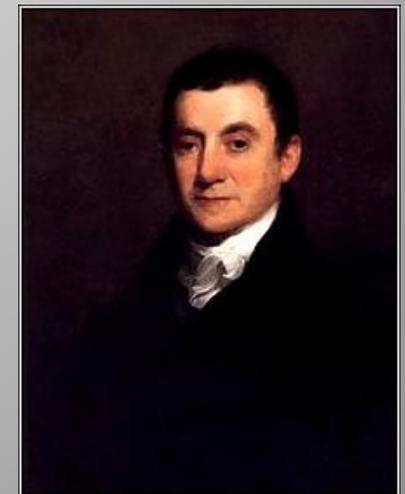
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In fact, Stephens was paraphrasing a remark (well known at the time) made by Supreme Court Justice Henry Baldwin (a Pennsylvanian) in an 1833 case involving a fugitive slave:

“Thus you see that the foundations of the government are laid, and rest on the rights of property in slaves—the whole structure must fall by disturbing the corner stones--...” (Johnson vs. Tompkins, 1833)

While Stephens could have quoted Baldwin’s remark verbatim to justify slavery as a cornerstone of the Confederacy, he *modified* it to make a far less controversial claim about the inequality of races, but of course, this did him no good



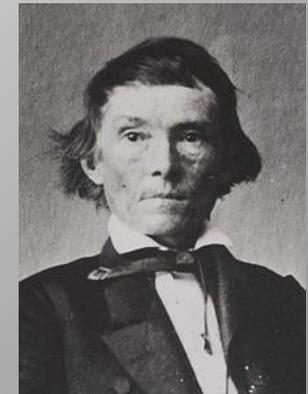


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The reason Stephens never backpedaled from his earlier claim about slavery as the cornerstone of the Confederacy is that he *never in fact made such a claim* so had nothing to backpedal from

In general, Alexander H. Stephens was not a man to back down from previous claims or try to weasel out of them. He said what he meant and was *never* in the habit of changing his views to suit his listeners or readers





**12. Only ignorant racists and political extremists would stoop so low as to defend the Confederacy, whose blatant disregard of human rights led to a brutal war that was at bottom entirely the fault of the South**

This claim, generally implied but sometimes explicit (especially on the Internet, a forum not known for moderation or courtesy) illustrates the principle that in politics, when reason and argument fail, one should resort to name calling

The foundation of Yankee approaches to the War is to maintain that it is *obvious* that the South was engaged in an evil enterprise to profit on the scarred backs of other human beings who were kidnapped from their homes and forced to labor in inhuman conditions.



**A comment on distorting history from a political commentator who was himself well versed in the tactic:**

“...in the big lie there is always a certain force of credibility; because the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted in the deeper strata of their emotional nature than consciously or voluntarily; and thus in the primitive simplicity of their minds they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods. It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. “

The Author?.....



Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf* (1925), Volume I, Chapter X, Section 1





## In Conclusion...

The appeal and utility of a “good guys vs. bad guys” mythic construction of history is obvious, and helps explain its wholesale adoption by the public school education establishment, which by its nature tends to be much more interested in inspiring and patriotic stories than it is in messy and inconvenient historical facts

Myths are unavoidable in history but historians need to approach them with a critical eye and continually ask whether evidence and reason support them

In conclusion, I hope this discussion has been helpful in outlining just such an approach to the “Myths of the Late Unpleasantness”



# Myths of the Late Unpleasantness

Fact, Fiction, and Misrepresentation Concerning Secession and the War for Southern Independence



Don Evans

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