THE APPROPRIATION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN BY RONALD REAGAN
AND CONSERVATIVE NOTIONS OF LINCOLN'S LEGACY, 1980-1989

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Degree of Master of Arts

by

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Yet, there is more left to us of Lincoln than the ceremony, the monument, or even the memory of his greatness as a leader and a man. There are words, words he spoke and that speak in our time or to any time, words from the mind that sought wisdom and the heart that loved justice.1

-Ronald Reagan (February 12, 1981)

There are many great quotations from famous politicians that claim to know who Abraham Lincoln was or what was most important about him. But a quote from Ronald Reagan is perhaps the most appropriate when describing the specter of Lincoln, especially in American politics, because Reagan appropriated him in his public rhetoric more than any president before him.

Reagan's quote at the Lincoln Memorial in 1981 that, "what is left to us of Lincoln is more than his words or his monuments...it is his words, words he spoke and that speak in our time or to any time..." became something of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Throughout his presidency, Reagan ensured that Lincoln's words "spoke" to the 1980s by attaching Lincoln's utterances and legacy to his contemporary agenda, both at-home and abroad. No figure in American history is more written about than Abraham Lincoln, and in seeking additional outlets

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1 Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Wreath-Laying Ceremony at the Lincoln Memorial" Feb 12, 1981. Accessed November 13, 2016. In The American Presidency Project digital archives. Edited by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley. http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=43387. All quantitative data in Table1 is taken from these online archives. Data set in Table 1 represents the total number of speeches that have one or more references to Abraham Lincoln, out of the cumulative total of each president's public speeches found in the American Presidency Project archives as of Jan 1, 2017. Data excludes all references to "Lincoln" that do not refer specifically to the 16th president's person or rhetoric, i.e. Lincoln Memorial, Lincoln Music Hall, Lincoln Township, etc. Data excludes speeches that use Lincoln's rhetoric without attribution.
Table 1. Appearance of "Lincoln" in Presidential Rhetoric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presidents &amp; Years In Office</th>
<th>% of Speeches Using &quot;Lincoln&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(R) Ronald Reagan: 1981-1990</td>
<td>146/2243 = 6.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Jimmy Carter: 1977-1981</td>
<td>17/985 = 1.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R) Gerald Ford: 1974-1977</td>
<td>33/962 = 3.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R) Richard Nixon: 1969-1974</td>
<td>25/873 = 2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Lyndon B. Johnson: 1963-1969</td>
<td>93/1445 = 6.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) John F. Kennedy: 1961-1963</td>
<td>21/711 = 2.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Dwight D. Eisenhower: 1953-1961</td>
<td>56/908 = 6.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Harry Truman: 1945-1953</td>
<td>32/917 = 3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(D) Franklin D. Roosevelt: 1933-1945</td>
<td>26/649 = 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(R) Herbert Hoover: 1929-1933</td>
<td>11/408 = .027%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of inquiry more recent scholarship is focusing less on Lincoln "the man," and instead examining Lincoln "the memory." Who Lincoln was and what he stood for has been in constant flux since his death, debated by scholars and non-scholars alike. Historians are increasingly interested in the memory of Lincoln, and especially how the memory and legacy of Abraham Lincoln have changed over time through appropriations or co-opting in American culture. Reagan is a good example of a politico who joined into those conversations over Lincoln's legacy, (perhaps unwittingly at times) by disseminating a particular version of Lincoln through his appropriations of him.

Among the first scholars to focus specifically on the political appropriation of Lincoln was historian David Donald who famously states in his 1956 essay, Getting Right With Lincoln, that Lincoln is, "everybody's grandfather...by the 1948 election, everybody [both parties] claimed themselves...the heirs to Lincoln." Donald's essay was among the earliest academic attempts to address the growing legacy of Lincoln in American politics. According to Donald, Franklin D.

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2 Ibid.

Roosevelt claimed the Democratic Party to be the true heirs of Lincoln during the 1930s and connected his New Deal policies to Lincoln. Republicans, unwilling to "surrender the stove-pipe hat," pushed back, and a tug-of-war over Lincoln's legacy was born. Donald also was among the first historians to point to a reason for Lincoln's abundant appropriation in politics, calling his continuing vogue a product of his "essential ambiguity." Lincoln scholars often restate Donald's original premise over Lincoln's ambiguity when looking for reasons as to why Lincoln has become a political tool. Perhaps Richard Carwardine said it best, "Lincoln has always been a malleable and protean figure, one who is forever being redefined to meet the needs of those who invoke him." These "redefinitions" of Lincoln are what greatly influence his legacy and Americans' memory of him. Reagan is a quintessential example of a politician portraying himself and his policies as "right with Lincoln," often redefining him and his utterances to do so.

In defining "memory," I take from different theorists like Michael Shudson, who observed that memory is not individual, but "essentially social...located in rules, laws, standardized procedures, and records...books, holidays, statues, souvenirs." As well as Friedrich Hegel, who observed that history is both res gestae (things that happened) as well as historia rerum gestarum (the narration of things that happened.) German historian Amos Funkenstein notes that memory as a concept especially deals with the historia rerum gestarum, and notes, "all

4 Ibid.
8 Ibid., 120.
remembering occurs within social contexts of environment and discourse.\textsuperscript{9} Taken in this manner, "memory" as a mode of historical discourse means to reveal a person or groups "historic consciousness."\textsuperscript{10} Opposing people and groups can have differing ideas about the significance of the events or characters in history, and few characters in history have a wider berth of interpretations over their legacy than Abraham Lincoln. During the 1980s, this played out in many different ways.

I also take some definitions of memory from Merrill Peterson, who wrote perhaps the definitive work on Abraham Lincoln in American memory. In his book, \textit{Lincoln In American Memory} (1994) Peterson shows how intricately tied Lincoln reinterpretations and appropriations are to current events. Who Lincoln was and what he stood for, what was most important about him, depended on who you were and what time period you were living. His study deals with Lincoln's place in American culture, politics, and academia and illustrates the pervasiveness of Lincoln in the American psyche. In his discussions of memory making, Peterson says:

No strict correspondence exists between the conditions of any era and the objects of its memory. Memory-making requires effort: before any individual can be regarded as worth remembering, other individuals, like colleagues and family members, political and religious leaders, biographers and artists, editors and writers, must deem that person commemorable and must be able to persuade audiences to agree.\textsuperscript{11}

Reagan was one of those political leaders who deemed Lincoln worth remembering, and his rhetoric disseminated certain beliefs about Lincoln. Famous linguist Mikhail Bahktin defines language as "not a system of abstract categories, but rather conceived as ideologically saturated,

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., 137.

language as a world view, ensuring a maximum of mutual understanding of ideological life."\textsuperscript{12} This "ideological saturation" of language shines through in Reagan's appropriations of Lincoln, and Reagan's ideology is often what facilitated him using Lincoln in the manner that he did. Reagan had a hand in portraying and memorializing a certain version of Lincoln to his audiences by appropriating him in different ways. While some conservatives tried to affect the "historic consciousness," of their audiences by introducing arguments of a tyrannical and impious Abraham Lincoln, the period's leading conservative disseminated opposing viewpoints and perhaps affected Americans' memory of their sixteenth president.

An in-depth examination of Reagan's rhetoric, focusing on Lincoln, reveals a copious amount of different appropriations. Out of the 2,243 Reagan speeches available in the American Presidency Project archives, Reagan appropriated Lincoln once or numerous times in 146 of them. This accounts for nearly 7 percent of those oral addresses. In fact, few times during his eight year presidency did Reagan go more than a month \textit{without} using Lincoln in an address, only during 8 occasions in 8 years. (One of which being the 3 month period starting in March 1981. He spent that time recovering from the Hinckley assassination attempt.)\textsuperscript{13} Keep in mind that Reagan's speech records are more extensive than any other president in this study and that the 2,243 speeches include more nomination speeches, addresses to congress over bill signings and vetoes, presidential appointments and resignations, toasts at presidential luncheons, and addresses given to foreign heads of state than most other presidents. These speeches were often meant to address specific issues or people, and were sometimes very short. In all those instances,


\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
Table 2. Appearance of "Lincoln" in Ronald Reagan's Rhetoric

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reagan's Oral Addresses</th>
<th># Speeches with &quot;Lincoln&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Inaugural Addresses</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addresses to Congress (Non-Soto)</td>
<td>0/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State Of The Union</td>
<td>3/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major To The Nation</td>
<td>5/38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farewell Addresses</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday Radio Addresses</td>
<td>10/334</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College Commencements</td>
<td>0/12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To The U.N. General Assembly</td>
<td>1/7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To Foreign Legislators</td>
<td>3/9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Uncategorized Remarks&quot;</td>
<td>111/1,559</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Toasts</td>
<td>4/13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Signings</td>
<td>2/62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill Vetoes</td>
<td>0/1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presidents News Conferences</td>
<td>4/46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Election Debates</td>
<td>1/2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regarding Executive Nominations</td>
<td>0/17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regarding Executive Appointments</td>
<td>0/3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regarding Resignations</td>
<td>0/6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total #</td>
<td>146/2,243</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

of which there are hundreds, Reagan used Lincoln very rarely. Thus, the 7 percent is a very conservative number, and Reagan used Lincoln even more often in significant addresses meant for wider audiences.\(^{15}\) This study does not make use of all 146 uses of Lincoln by Reagan, but rather chooses those which best exemplify certain trends.

Besides the sheer number of times Lincoln appears in his rhetoric, another reason for a study of Reagan that centers on Abraham Lincoln is that Lincoln is noticeably absent from so many great works on Reagan's rhetoric. Examinations of Reagan's rhetoric have been extended

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to both Martin Luther King, Jr. and John Winthrop. Denise Goldzwig's article "History, Collective Memory, and the Appropriation of Martin Luther King, Jr.: Reagan's Rhetorical Legacy," examines Reagan's speeches and argues that Reagan appropriated Martin Luther King Jr. to "...suggest equal opportunity had already been achieved...in direct violation of Dr. King's intentions."¹⁶

Scott Fosler, a political scientist writing during the 1980s, identified Reagan's use of John Winthrop's 'City on a Hill' as claiming "...a civic legacy and vision of community that reached back some 350 years..."¹⁷ Fosler's article, "Civic Renewal: The City on a Hill Revisited," shows an interesting way in which Reagan was able to ground his policy in history by reinterpreting the words and legacy of the famous Puritan. According to Fosler, Reagan's victory in the election of 1984 showed that Americans were receptive to his reinterpretation of Winthrop's vision.¹⁸

Historian John Patrick Diggins also wrote about Reagan's use of John Winthrop, and argued it is evidence to the fact that Reagan's perorations often misconstrued history, saying:

[Reagan] insisted America had a special destiny to rescue the world. [Reagan said] "We did not seek world leadership...it was thrust upon us. If we fail to keep our rendezvous with Destiny, or as John Winthrop said, 'Deal falsely with God,' we shall be made a story and byword throughout the world..." [Yet] Winthrop and the seventeenth century Calvinists...had no interest in leading the world. They were isolationists, not interventionists...Reagan, however, could rarely resist interpreting the cold war in cosmic terms.¹⁹


¹⁸ Ibid., 85-99.

Fosler argues that Reagan successfully connected his civic renewal agenda to history by reinterpreting John Winthrop, while Diggins argues that Reagan's use of Winthrop belied history. While these conversations exist among Reagan scholars, they often focus on John Winthrop or Martin Luther King. Yet, no examination of Reagan's use (and misuse) of history can be complete without an examination of Lincoln and no examination of Lincoln in American memory can be complete without an examination of those men whom appropriated him most often, like Ronald Reagan.

While few historians of the Reagan era have looked at Lincoln's appearance in politics during the period, most biographers and historians do point to Reagan's use of history in general as exceptional. Reagan biographer Lou Cannon writes that that "...Reagan spoke to the future with accents of the past," while historian Stephen Hayward elaborates, saying that Reagan's political philosophy was a "...variety of future-oriented optimism rooted in historical attachment." In an illuminating study, Andrew Busch shows that Reagan cited the founding fathers almost four times more often than his predecessors (See Table 3). A few Reagan scholars have, however, examined his connections to and invocations of Lincoln. John Patrick Diggins devoted the coda of his book, *Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and The Making of History*, to the appropriation of Lincoln by Reagan and the connections between the two presidents. Rather than delve into historical arguments about Lincoln's legacy, however, Diggins

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instead points to the similarities of the situations facing each president and the presidents themselves. While some authors, like Diggins, touch on comparisons between the two presidents or explain some of the appearances of Lincoln in his rhetoric, their studies never solely focus on them and give a fragmented picture of Reagan's "Lincoln" rhetoric. This thesis provides a more thorough examination and engages with Ronald Reagan's speeches, personal correspondence, and diaries. Reagan's appropriation of Lincoln is an important piece of both Lincoln and Reagan history.

If Merrill Peterson's premise that "memory-making involves effort from a wide-berth of individuals, from "colleagues and family members, political and religious leaders, biographers and artists, editors and writers..." is to be taken as fact, then any examination of the redefinition

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and understanding of Lincoln's legacy by Americans during the 1980s cannot be complete without an examination of the rhetoric of Ronald Reagan, the period's leading conservative and most prominent political figure. This work supplies that examination and sheds light on the question of how Lincoln's legacy and utterances have been reinterpreted, reinvented, and re-appropriated since his death.

This thesis categorizes the different situations in which Reagan was most likely to appropriate Lincoln and explains that those uses coincided with Reagan's ideology. Reagan's appropriations and interpretations of Lincoln disseminated a certain view of who Lincoln was and what his legacy meant for America. Chapter 1 deals explicitly with Reagan's appropriation of Lincoln when discussing religion and when speaking to the religious right. While not quite constituting a theft in most cases, Reagan's use of Lincoln disseminated a certain belief in a pious Lincoln, counter to emerging claims among conservative intellectuals in his own party. Chapter 2 examines another major instance in which Reagan appropriated Lincoln, his Cold War rhetoric. Reagan's appropriations do constitute a theft in some of these cases, as he reinterpreted Lincoln's words and legacy to support his contemporary agenda. Again though, Reagan's appropriations of Lincoln disseminated a certain view of Lincoln and of Lincoln's ideology that was counter to far-right conservatives. The final chapter deals more with the miscellaneous uses of Lincoln by Reagan and with those appropriations left unexamined by the earlier two chapters.

This thesis accepts Merrill Peterson's assertion that Abraham Lincoln's appropriation in American society is intricately tied to current events and contemporary politics, and hence each chapter discusses the significance of the political situation in which Reagan is speaking, what he means to address, and what his use of Lincoln is meant to accomplish. Reagan occasionally commented on certain speeches in his dairies and his autobiography, and his own thoughts on his
speeches will sometimes be used to better illustrate Reagan's thought-process and beliefs. Ronald Reagan's portrayals of Lincoln and his interpretation of Lincoln's words disseminated views that were counter to far-right intellectuals and may have had a hand in driving "anti-Lincoln" sentiments from his own party underground during the 1980s. While not all of Reagan's appropriations of Lincoln would constitute a theft, Reagan "stole-Lincoln," by reinterpreting Lincoln's utterances on slavery to positively portray his Cold War agenda and by attributing quotes from other historical figures to him on accident. Reagan took advantage of Lincoln to reinterpret him in ways that backed his contemporary agenda. In doing so, Reagan accepted certain beliefs about Lincoln over others, disseminated those ideologies to his millions of viewers, and may have hand in ensuring those beliefs lived on in American memory long after his time in office.

Questions of Reagan's Speechwriters and Intent

A few problems are inherent in this type of study, especially when focusing on Ronald Reagan. Specifically, the question of intent and speechwriters must be addressed. Ask five different people the question, "did Ronald Reagan write his own speeches?" and you will probably receive five different answers with varying degrees of yes or no. Reagan himself said he took "great pride" in all his speeches, and that although there "wasn't enough time to write every speech" that he "continued to write his more important speeches" throughout his presidency.24 Especially for speeches intended for larger audiences, he would meet with his speechwriters before they wrote their drafts and he would tell them points he wanted to make. Yet, there is some ambiguity when comparing Reagan's thoughts to his writers themselves.

Peggy Noonan, one of Reagan's premier speechwriters and personal assistants until 1984, shed some light on speechwriting in the Reagan era as well, saying:

How were speeches made in the Reagan administration?...Think of a bunch of wonderful, clean, shining, perfectly shaped and delicious vegetables. Then think of one of those old-fashioned metal meat grinders. Imagine the beautiful vegetables being forced through the grinder and rendered into a smooth, dull, texture-less paste...the speech is a fondue pot, and everyone has a fork. And I mean everyone.25

Peter Robinson, another one of Reagan's speechwriters, claimed that they would "often receive extremely scanty guidance" from White House officials and they "did the first draft writing as well as the first-draft thinking" for the president. Another speechwriter for Reagan said "as much as 80 percent of what we originally write is unchanged when the president gives a speech."26

These assertions that Reagan's speeches often went through many hands or were often not written or even thought of by himself is not to say, however, that Reagan did not understand his own rhetoric, nor that he was simply a puppet for his administration. Reagan's diary and autobiography, as well as testimony from some of his administration officials, shows that Reagan always had the final word on his speeches and was extremely succinct in ensuring they communicated his values and what he wanted.

One example of Reagan exercising his power of discretion over his speeches came during his 1987 Speech at the Berlin Wall. The speech is number ten on TIME Magazines "top-10 most important speeches of all time,"27 and is widely considered Reagan's magnum opus. Reagan's speech incorporated the now-famous line "Tear down this wall Mr. Gorbachev." This was one of


the defining moments of the Cold War, although Reagan had been advised by both his staff and "entire cabinet" to not say those lines, which seemed too inflammatory and "needlessly provocative." Reagan did not listen to his advisors and went ahead with the version of the speech he wanted. Even though the speech was not written entirely by Reagan himself (it was written by Peter Robinson), perhaps the most important and lasting sentence which has resounded through history was said only because of Reagan exercising his own power over his rhetoric.

*Pictured: Reagan before his speech at the Brandenburg Gate. Looking quite pleased, perhaps in part because he had just told his deputy chief of staff Kenneth Duberstein that he was determined to say the line, "tear down this wall," even as Duberstein objected in the limousine ride to the gate.


29 Ibid.

Reagan's diary and autobiography are full of moments like the Berlin Wall speech. Another example was when he scrapped two separate drafts of his speech to the American people over the downing of a South Korean airliner. Reagan said, "I planned to spend most of [Labor Day] beside the White House Swimming pool. Instead, I spent it in damp swimming trunks sitting in a towel in my study rewriting a speech sent to me...I rewrote most of the speech so I could give my unvarnished opinion of the barbarous act..." Reagan spent much of his time "cleaning up" or putting the "finishing touches" on speeches, and he was keenly aware of how his speeches were received. Without question, Reagan's rhetoric coincided with his personal beliefs and regardless of how much control he had over the content of the speeches themselves he would absolutely not have been a puppet for his administration or writers.

Note: "Needlessly provocative" cited from this source.


32 Ronald Reagan, *The Reagan Diaries*. Edited by Douglas Brinkley (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 2007), 49. 57. 67. 82. 83. 128. 138. 140. 146. 149. 152. 160. 176. 182. 184. 191. 195. In all these cases, Reagan either expressly mentioned working on a speech, noted how a speech was received, or both. "Cleaned up speeches for tomorrow" cited on 67. "Put finishing touches on speeches" cited on 57. This is just in the years 1981-83.
CHAPTER II

PIOUS LINCOLN: THE APPROPRIATION OF LINCOLN BY REAGAN ON RELIGION AND CONSERVATIVE NOTIONS OF LINCOLN'S LEGACY

Abraham Lincoln called the Bible "the best gift God has given to man." "But for it," he said, "we could not know right from wrong," ...Lincoln described a people who knew it was not enough to depend on their own courage and goodness; they must also look to God their Father and Preserver.  

- Ronald Reagan (January 30, 1984.)

Many appropriations of Lincoln by Reagan came when he was speaking to religious groups. Reagan portrayed both Lincoln and himself as pious individuals constantly searching for guidance from a higher power. Throughout his presidency, Reagan assured religious groups that both he and Lincoln believed that "the Bible was God's greatest gift to man..." As stated earlier, Reagan inserted himself into intellectual debates on-going in conservative and academic circles over the meaning and legacy of Lincoln. Yet, Reagan's presidency has often been cited as the quintessential example of an "anti-intellectual" presidency and Reagan as the quintessential "anti-intellectual." Hence, the idea that Reagan's use of Lincoln exemplified the opposite of anti-intellectualism might be poorly received. Studies into anti-intellectualism began with Richard Hofstadter's Pulitzer-Prize winning book, Anti-intellectualism in American Life. Hofstadter defined anti-intellectualism as "a resentment and suspicion of the life of the mind and those who

are considered to represent it; and a disposition to constantly minimize the value of that life."

To Hofstadter, especially in the time he wrote his book (1963) distrust of intellectuals in American culture was at an all time high. Intellectuals were seen as snobbish people who claimed to know better than ordinary Americans, and could even be dangerous. Colleges were hotbeds of Communist and Socialist ideologues, and religious leaders pushed an anti-intellectual agenda, as it was often intellectuals who took the lead in chastising secular religion.

Subsequent authors built on Hofstadter's work on anti-intellectualism in American culture by examining the presidency with the same lens. Elvin T. Lim characterized "anti-intellectualism" in the presidency as "...the relentless simplification of presidential rhetoric...the increasing substitution of substantive arguments with applause-rendering platitudes, partisan punch lines, and emotional and human interest appeals." Reagan of course was a master at "partisan punch-lines, platitudes, and emotional and human interest appeals." Some authors like Lou Cannon have even identified those emotional and human appeals, "talking evocatively and using folksy anecdotes," as a part of what made him the "Great Communicator." But later authors, especially those like Lim who defined Reagan's administration as the quintessential example of an "anti-intellectual" presidency were moving too far away from Hofstadter’s original thesis. Hofstadter, perhaps with great foresight wrote in his original work on anti-intellectualism that, "the greatest hazard of this venture is that of encouraging the notion that


anti-intellectualism is commonly found in a pure or unmixed state." Reagan was absolutely an "anti-intellectual" at times, but at other times he was not. His use of Lincoln exemplified this, as Reagan's rhetoric and personal ideology showed surprising cognizance of intellectual debates in American conservatism over the primacy of "natural-rights" in politics and the belief in the principles of Jefferson's Declaration of Independence as central to American Democracy.

However, Reagan committed various "thefts" of Lincoln as well, and at times redefined his legacy to favorably portray his own agenda, which was indeed a form of anti-intellectualism. As the proceeding chapter shows, Reagan's appropriation of Lincoln on religion actually supported one conservative intellectual, Harry Jaffa, over another, Melvin E. Bradford, in debates over Lincoln's faith and his rhetorical legacy on religion.

Conservative Catholics and Evangelical Protestants supported Reagan during the 1980 election, and the 1980s were a period of increased influence of those religious groups due to new forms of worship such as televangelism, "mega-churches," and electronic mailing lists. Not only that, but the political organization of those groups through committees like the Moral Majority brought religion to the forefront of political life. Organized by Jerry Falwell, a Baptist minister at the Thomas Road Baptist Church in Virginia, (which would become one of America's largest churches,) the Moral Majority gathered together Evangelical and Fundamentalist religious conservatives and "stood firmly for family values, condemned godless communism, and prayed for the wayward souls of liberal secularists." By 1980, the religious right had "become the strongest grass-roots, community based movement of late twentieth century

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38 Hofstadter, Anti-Intellectualism in American Life, 21.
political life."\textsuperscript{41} James Patterson notes that by 1980, groups belonging to the religious right registered at least 2 million voters, which increased throughout most of the decade before falling off.\textsuperscript{42} Falwell's Moral Majority organized religious groups into a united voting bloc, and "lobbied to end abortion, reinstate school prayer, re-establish traditional gender roles for men and women, defeat the Equal Rights Amendment, quash special rights for gays, and help the country get back to its roots."\textsuperscript{43}

As the first president to be divorced, Reagan's relationship with conservative religious groups was tenuous at first. But in getting them over to his side he was helped by Jimmy Carter who had angered religious groups by "filling his administration with pro-choice advocates, reaching out to gay rights groups, and threatening to revoke tax exemption for private Christian schools."\textsuperscript{44} Reagan, who had not been known for his support of the religious right before the election of 1980, correctly sensed that his agenda of anti-communism, non-federal intervention in domestic affairs, and contrast with Jimmy Carter would facilitate growth of support from the religious right.\textsuperscript{45} As such, the agenda of the religious right became Reagan's agenda, which dominated the Republican Convention in 1984. Reagan's invocation of God and morality during his presidency was "something more significant,"\textsuperscript{46} than the normal desire for politicians to

\textsuperscript{41} Ibid., 134.

\textsuperscript{42} Patterson, \textit{Restless Giant}, 140-144.


\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 29.

invoke God in their rhetoric because of the growing strength of the religious right in politics during the period and because of his own religious history. Reagan's explicit connections to Lincoln in his rhetoric to those groups implied the acceptance of a prevailing interpretation of Lincoln. That he was pious and truly looked to God and a higher power for guidance and reassurance, and that there was nothing wrong with his invocation of God in his condemnations of slavery.

Reagan's appropriations of Lincoln disseminated the belief in a truly "pious" Lincoln, yet Lincoln's piety, and his use of morality in his arguments, was being questioned and debated by conservative intellectuals before and during Reagan's time in office. Some like Harry Jaffa, a conservative writing in the early 1970s, praised Lincoln for making a religious connection between natural rights and civil liberties in his essay, "On the Nature of Civil and Religious Liberty." Jaffa was writing in response to revisionist Civil War scholars who denigrated Lincoln as perpetuating the Civil War needlessly to serve his own ends. Jaffa lamented this turn away from ethics and morality and reiterated that the war was fought to secure the natural right to liberty for the country's black population. According to Jaffa, "To reject the moral actuality of the Civil War is to foreclose the possibility of an adequate account of its causes."

Revisionist conservatives like Melvin E. Bradford on the other hand, maintained that Lincoln simply used religion as "the language of moral superiority to legitimize a quest for

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power."^{49} A Dallas professor of literature, Bradford opposed Lincoln in order to "couch his opposition to Civil Rights."^{50} Bradford's revisionist views of Lincoln and the Civil War were both pro-Confederate and pro-southern, and he became immensely popular among many far-right and southern conservatives. Bradford attacked Lincoln's moral credentials in his October 1979 essay, "Abraham Lincoln Reconsidered," by saying:

His habit of wrapping his [rhetoric] in the idiom of Holy Scripture, concealing within the Trojan horse of his gasconade and moral superiority in an agenda that would have never been accepted in any other form...a rhetoric confirmed in its authority by his martyrdom, enshrined in the iconography of...monuments such as the Lincoln Memorial, where his oversized likeness is elevated above us like that of a Roman emperor, or god-king seated on his throne. The place is obviously a temple, fit for a divinity who suffered death and was transformed on Good Friday. It is both unpatriotic and irreligious to look behind the words of so august a presence...^{51}

Bradford's "reconsideration" was more of a "condemnation." What Bradford terms, "the myth of Lincoln as a 'political messiah,'" or the idea of Lincoln as an infallible or unassailable character of moral authority, was absolutely wrong. Bradford argues that Lincoln "is a major source of [our country's] present confusion," and Lincoln's reliance on God as well as his incorporation of religious rhetoric was simply the "Trojan horse" for delivering his agenda. Lincoln, according to Bradford, affected American political discourse for the proceeding centuries and laid the groundwork for future presidents to "imitate Lincoln's epideictic, quasi-liberal rhetoric...and every 'good cause' is a reason for increasing the scope of government."^{52}

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^{50} Feldman, Painting Dixie Red, 4-5.

^{51} Bradford, "Abraham Lincoln Reconsidered"

^{52} Ibid.
Bradford argues that political imitation of "edideictic, quasi-liberal rhetoric," is Lincoln's greatest legacy, one that is overwhelmingly negative, and he explained it in "Dividing the House: The Gnosticism of Abraham Lincoln" thusly:

The peculiar characteristic of Anglo-American politics since the beginning of the modern era that our leaders, when put to the test, revert from the mild and materialist meliorism or gnosticism of the New Whigs to the activist and sectarian arrogance of their forefathers...though they rightly sense that in that role they are, for in an electorate formed within a tradition of bibliolatry, difficult to resist. Regrettably, whenever they succumb to this temptation...they partake as heirs in the legacy of Abraham Lincoln...  

Bradford reinterprets Lincoln's legacy in late 1970 and early 1980 as negative, and points towards his religious rhetoric as being both disingenuous and damaging to the American political system. Bradford laments the turn away from "New Whig agnosticism" to "sectarian arrogance" in American political rhetoric, and blames Abraham Lincoln for being the forbearer of such a legacy due to his moralistic rhetoric. Eric Foner said of Bradford:

One revisionist scholar...more than any other...has created a storm among the Moral Majority and neoconservatives...over the sensitive issues of...morality in government...Lincoln's elevation of equality into the fundamental axiom of our political culture, Bradford argues, produced a recipe for long-continuing turmoil since demands for equality can never be satisfied...[Hence] there is logic in connecting the egalitarian horrors (as perceived by conservatives) of the New Deal, New left, and Civil Rights movement to Lincoln, according to Bradford.

Foner paraphrases Bradford's argument, that Lincoln started America down a long and winding road of turmoil predicated on the advancement and assurance of "rights," secured through religious and moral arguments. Historian John Barr posits Bradford's early 1980s position on Lincoln's religion and moral rhetoric as part of:

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...a long, continuous, antiliberal tradition of white southern Christians...all of whom interpreted the Civil War as a war between a Christian confederacy and an allegedly atheist or unorthodox North...such thinkers portrayed the Confederate states of America in referential, even Christian, terms while the North, and Abraham Lincoln, were depicted negatively as American Jacobins, fanatics, and atheists.”

While Bradford found a home for his ideas in the far-right wing of conservatism and southern confederate apologizers, Bradford's reinterpretation of Lincoln as adopting religion to serve his own purposes, thereby being the irresponsible harbinger to centuries of moralistic political rhetoric, fell absolutely flat in mainstream conservatism. According to Barr:

By the end of the Cold War in 1989, or shortly thereafter, Bradford's brand of ill will towards Lincoln had been largely eliminated or, more accurately, momentarily driven underground from mainstream conservatism. Conservatism had been redefined, at least in its public stance towards Abraham Lincoln, by Harry Jaffa. While Barr posits Jaffa's writings as being the ideological definition of mainstream conservatism regarding Lincoln during the period, Jaffa was not the only leading conservative who disseminated that interpretation of Lincoln’s legacy. Reagan may also have had a hand in eliminating Bradford’s reinterpretation of Lincoln's legacy long before it gained any currency among conservatives by reiterating the connection between Lincoln and God in his speeches and correspondence. In his attempts to appeal to the religious right, Reagan ironically weaved morality and reliance on God into his own rhetoric. Even while supporting his ally Bradford politically, Reagan was ideologically aligned with the "Jaffian" interpretation of Lincoln and helped to disseminate a positive view of "the pious Lincoln" to religious groups and the nation at large throughout the 1980s.

One major example of how Reagan used Lincoln in this manner was when speaking to religious groups early during his presidency on Supreme Court cases dealing with religion. The

55 Barr, Loathing Lincoln, 239.
56 Barr, Loathing Lincoln, 240.
Supreme Court ruled against officially sponsored prayer or bible readings in schools in the early 1960s and the issue of prayer in school became a major focus of the religious right during the 1970s and into Reagan's presidency. The adoption of the religious right's agenda by Reagan can be seen in his support for a constitutional amendment to allow for prayer in schools.\(^57\) This was illustrated by Reagan's September 1982 radio address on prayer in which he vehemently protested an Alabama Supreme Court case regarding the constitutionality of an Alabama statute allowing for a one-minute prayer time in schools.

The case was filed by an agnostic father Ishmael Jaffree after teachers in Mobile, Alabama, led their classes and by extension his three children in daily prayers. Jaffree's complaint was filed in May 1982, and in Reagan's September address he used Lincoln's rhetoric to defend prayer time in school during the trial. He maintained that America was founded on Christian principles and to deny those principles would be heinous.\(^58\) Reagan, after speaking on the Plymouth settlers and George Washington at Valley Forge, told the nation, "...in the midst of a tragic and at times seemingly hopeless Civil War, Abraham Lincoln vowed 'that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom.'"\(^59\) Reagan alluded to the Jaffree case and similar cases, when he said, "a group of children who sought...to begin the school day with a 1-minute prayer meditation have been forbidden to do so...a few people have even objected to prayers being said in Congress. That's just plain wrong."\(^60\) In this instance, the events of the 1980s and the agenda of one of Reagan's biggest support groups lent themselves to Reagan's favorable

\(^{57}\) Patterson, *Restless Giant*, 145.

\(^{58}\) Ibid., 137-138.


\(^{60}\) Ibid.
interpretation and dissemination of Lincoln's religious ideology. Reagan portrayed Lincoln as pious by quoting his Gettysburg Address and emphasizing under God, a far-cry from far-right conservative interpretations of Lincoln as an atheist or simply maintaining a mock piety to legitimize a "quest for power."  

Another way in which Reagan might have helped to silence anti-Lincoln sentiments among conservatives, or at least dull their message during the 1980s, was through his copious usage of Lincoln's utterance, "I would be the most foolish man on Earth...if I thought I could fulfill these duties without the help of One who is wiser than all others." Reagan used this utterance to portray himself as a pious individual in need of God's guidance, basically a promise to the religious right that their agenda, "God's agenda," would be at work in the presidency through him. The fact that Reagan always connected this utterance to Lincoln helped to disseminate that same idea for both men. By using this phrase so often when speaking to the religious right, Reagan affirmed "Jaffian" brand conservatism and connected no societal problems to the moralistic "natural rights" rhetoric of Lincoln. Not only did Reagan affirm "Jaffian" ideas on Lincoln, he portrayed both Lincoln and himself as pious individuals who were greatly affected by their very real religious beliefs. In his attempts to add historical legitimacy to his claims by connecting himself to Lincoln he also affirmed positive notions of Lincoln's legacy to his conservative religious audiences.

Reagan continued pushing for loosening restrictions on school prayer throughout his presidency, and continued using Lincoln utterances in his arguments. On May 6, 1982, at a White House ceremony in observance of National Prayer Day Reagan, while speaking to a crowd of religious adherents of many faiths, said:

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Prayer has sustained our people in crisis, strengthened us in times of challenge, and guided us through our daily lives since the first settlers came to this continent... Abraham Lincoln said once that he would be the most foolish man on this footstool we call Earth, if he thought for one minute he could fulfill the duties that faced him if he did not have the help of One who was wiser than all others...I'm particularly pleased to be able to tell you today that this administration will soon submit to the United States Congress a proposal to amend our Constitution to allow our children to pray in school...The amendment we'll propose will restore the right to pray...I thank you all for coming here today and for the good work that you do for our people, our country, and our God every day of the year. But I also hope that I can count on your help in the days and months ahead as we work for passage of this amendment...Together, let us take up the challenge to reawaken America's religious and moral heart, recognizing that a deep and abiding faith in God is the rock upon which this great Nation was founded.

A long quote, but one that exemplified Reagan's rhetoric towards the religious right, his use of Lincoln, and the context of the 1980s that facilitated Reagan's use of Lincoln in this manner. Reagan adopted the arguments put forward by the religious right and asserted them in his speeches to them on prayer, that "faith in God is the rock upon which this great Nation was founded." That faith manifested itself through prayer, which has "sustained us," "Strengthened us," and "guided us." Finally, Reagan introduced his proposal to amend the constitution to protect prayer in schools, incorporating a major part of the religious right's agenda of the 1970s and 1980s (and even today) into his own administration’s policy. Reagan's anecdote, that "Lincoln required the help of God" implicated the sixteenth president in the purported pious history of America, and connected him to an ideology of adherence to religious belief. Reagan in his attempt to add historical legitimacy and credence to his message also propagated one aspect of Lincoln's legacy to conservatives; that he was keenly religious and that his faith mattered.

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Reagan did not disseminate this view of Lincoln only in public. Indeed, the phrase was "one of his favorites" and he would use it often spontaneously when defending himself against attacks on his own piety or when writing to religious persons. This was exemplified in a letter to Sister Mary Ignatius on November 26, 1984, that thanked her for a previous epistle that had congratulated him on his reelection and that promised to pray for him and Nancy. Reagan told her:

We are, as always, even more grateful for your prayers in our behalf. I believe in intercessory prayer and I know I have benefitted from it...Abe Lincoln once said that he would be the most stupid human on this foot-stool called earth if he thought for one minute he could fulfill the obligations of the office he held without help from one who was wiser and stronger than all others...I understand what he meant completely—and if that is mixing politics and religion then it is a good and proper mix.

Even in his personal correspondence, Reagan portrayed himself and Lincoln as requiring and requesting God's guidance. He did not explicitly reject far-right conservatism's views on Lincoln here, but the way he used Lincoln portrayed both himself and Lincoln as pious individuals. Reagan would have helped dissuade his listeners from believing conservative intellectuals like Bradford who denigrated Lincoln's rhetorical legacy on religion. Reagan propagated "Jaffian" notions of Lincoln's religious legacy, in that he saw Lincoln's "mixing [of] politics and religion" as a "good and proper mix," not as Bradford saw it, a "Trojan horse" for pushing an agenda to "an electorate formed within a tradition of bibliolatry."

Another example of Reagan's spontaneous use of Lincoln on religion was during the 1984 re-election campaign in a debate with Walter Mondale on October 7, 1984. When asked by the debate moderator, "How would you describe your religious beliefs, noting particularly

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whether you consider yourself a born-again Christian, and explain how those beliefs affect your Presidential decisions?" 65 Reagan told the audience:

Well, I was raised to have a faith and a belief and have been a member of a church since I was a small boy. In our particular church, we did not use that term, "born again," so I don't know whether I would fit that--that particular term. But I have--thanks to my mother, God rest her soul--the firmest possible belief and faith in God. And I don't believe--I believe, I should say, as Lincoln once said, that I could not--I would be the most stupid man in the world if I thought I could confront the duties of the office I hold if I could not turn to someone who was stronger and greater than all others. And I do resort to prayer. 66

Again Reagan connected himself to Lincoln's notion that "I could not confront the duties of office without turning to God." Specifically saying, "As Lincoln said...," also connected Abraham Lincoln to the ideology that piety and faith were extremely important.

Reagan also used other utterances of Lincoln when speaking to the religious right, but kept with the same tradition of appropriating Lincoln to position himself, (and by extension, Lincoln), as pious individuals. At a convention of the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in March 1983, Reagan said that he, "...understood how Abraham Lincoln felt when he stated, 'I have been driven many times to my knees by the overwhelming conviction that I had nowhere else to go.'" 67 This is also considered one of Reagan's greatest speeches, where he famously condemned the Soviet Union as an "evil empire." 68 At the convention for the NAE the following year Reagan gave a different speech, but his phrase about understanding Lincoln's


66 Ibid.


feeling of being 'driven to his knees' remained - showing how Reagan saw Lincoln's message as a powerful tool to bolster his own rhetoric among his evangelical supporters.\textsuperscript{69} While using Lincoln's rhetoric on religion to bolster his own image in the minds of religious observers, Reagan also bolstered Lincoln's through his constant referral to Lincoln's belief in the sanctity of a higher power.

Yet another strong example of Reagan appropriating Lincoln's utterances when speaking to religious conservatives was exemplified in his January 1984 speech to the annual convention of National Religious Broadcasters. These speeches were very important, as 'televangelists' helped to facilitate Reagan's popularity and were some of his major supporters.\textsuperscript{70} Religious broadcasters gained increasing strength and political power during the late 1970s and early 1980s, using much of the same fiery "moral, conservative, and patriotic symbolism"\textsuperscript{71} as Reagan himself and as many as 13 million Americans tuned into religious broadcasters by 1984.\textsuperscript{72} Reagan used Lincoln's words in his own rhetoric to demonstrate his own piety to those broadcasters by saying, "Abraham Lincoln called the Bible, 'The best gift God has given to man'...[without it] we could not know right from wrong'...Lincoln described a people who knew...they must also look to God their father and Preserver."\textsuperscript{73} Reagan postulated that Lincoln "knew...[people] must...look to God their father and Preserver," thereby reinforcing the notion of a pious Lincoln to the religious right. Reagan's appropriation of Lincoln to the televangelists can


\textsuperscript{70} Johnson, \textit{Sleepwalking Through History}, 195-203.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid, 197.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

be seen as exceptional, in the same way as his appropriation of Lincoln to the NAE. When speaking at the next year's convention of Religious Broadcasters, he gave a different speech but kept the phrase that Lincoln called the Bible "God's greatest gift to man," which epitomized his continued appropriation of Lincoln and the dissemination of a pious Lincoln to religious groups.

If John Barr's notion that, "the conservative party had been redefined, at least in its public stance towards Abraham Lincoln..." during the 1980s is to be taken as fact, then it is easy to see how that redefinition was caused not only by conservative intellectuals like Harry Jaffa, but also through public figures like Ronald Reagan. If, according to Merrill Peterson, memory-making involves effort from a wide-berth of individuals, from "colleagues and family members, political and religious leaders, biographers and artists, editors and writers..." then any examination of the redefinition of Lincoln's legacy during the 1980s cannot be complete without an examination of the rhetoric of the period's leading conservative, Ronald Reagan. While historians disagree on whether Reagan was overtly aware of all the intellectual debates around him, it is obvious that he joined those debates. Reagan most definitely deemed Lincoln commemorable, and his use of Lincoln may have persuaded others to agree.

If Bradford's "brand of ill will towards Lincoln had temporarily been driven out of mainstream conservatism" during the 1980s, and Ronald Reagan's religious rhetoric portrayed an image of Lincoln often directly counter to Bradford's analysis, then it is a succinct and valid conclusion that Ronald Reagan played a role in driving those arguments out. Reagan, perhaps unknowingly in these cases, disseminated and propagated certain strands of intellectual discourse on Lincoln's purported legacy over others. This veneration of certain strands of intellectual thought about Lincoln's legacy over others definitely would have affected his audiences' perception of the sixteenth president and helped push those "ill-will" arguments temporarily
underground. If language is ideologically saturated, and a person's historical consciousness is dependent on their environment and the discourse they are presented with, then it is easy to see how the many positive portrayals of a pious Lincoln by Reagan to his constituents would have countered other conservatives like Bradford. In this manner, the rhetorical legacy of Ronald Reagan had an effect on the legacy of Abraham Lincoln in American memory. Prayer and religion were not the only ways that Reagan entered debates over Lincoln's legacy. He also disseminated certain views over others in his Cold War rhetoric. The next chapter deals with that rhetoric, and deals in large part with how Reagan "stole" Lincoln by reinterpreting his utterances on slaves and slavery to denote the citizens of countries under Communist rule. Especially in his Cold War rhetoric, Reagan entered conservative intellectual debates over the primacy of the Declaration of Independence in American politics and the meaning behind its language of freedom and equality.
CHAPTER III

NATURAL RIGHTS AND AN IMPERIAL LINCOLN: THE "THEFT" OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN BY REAGAN ON COLD WAR ISSUES

This is Lincoln's greatest lesson, this lesson in liberty. He understood that the idea of human liberty is bound up in the very nature of our nation. He understood that America cannot be America without standing for the cause of Freedom.74

-Ronald Reagan (February 12, 1987.)

Reagan's appropriation of Lincoln utterances on faith can be understood partially as efforts to portray himself as a pious individual to the Moral Majority and other religious groups. In the same manner in which Reagan's appropriations of Lincoln on faith depended on his specific circumstances and goals, so too did his appropriations of Lincoln on Cold War issues. Much like his rhetoric to religious audiences that disseminated a favorable interpretation of Abraham Lincoln contrary to far-right conservative opinions, his Cold War rhetoric did the same. Specifically, Reagan's interpretation of the ideals outlined in the Declaration of Independence as having constitutional status, especially the clause on human rights, coincided with Lincoln's ideology. Reagan's endorsement of this interpretation of Lincoln absolutely countered opposing claims within his own party over the primacy of both "natural rights," in politics as well as the meaning of Lincoln's interpretation of the Declaration of Independence.

In 1976, historian William Appleman Williams published his work, *America Confronts a Revolutionary World, 1776-1976*, and in it he "directly challenged Lincoln's legacy as positive for either the United States or the world."\(^{75}\) While often associated with the New Left, intellectual historian John Barr argues that Williams "could plausibly be placed squarely in alliance with Old Right libertarians."\(^ {76}\) Williams' strongest critique of Lincoln's legacy was his use of "imperialist" rhetoric and he centered his critique on the language that Lincoln used in his Lyceum Address, given on January 27, 1837. Lincoln's address focused on the issues facing the country in his time and ensured his audience that America's greatest enemies would come from within (speaking to the widening political rift dividing the country over slavery's expansion.)

Lincoln said:

> ...at what point is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time or die by suicide...Is it unreasonable to expect, that some man of the loftiest genius, coupled with ambition...will at some time spring up amongst us? And when such a one does, it will require the people to be united with each other, attached to the government and laws, and generally intelligent, to frustrate his designs.\(^ {77}\)

Earlier historians like Edmund Wilson have posited this speech as a quintessential example of an imperialist bent to Lincoln's rhetoric and went as far as comparing his subsequent destruction of the "internal enemies" of the Confederacy to Russia's destruction of Hungarian rebels in 1956.\(^ {78}\)

William Williams, however, took these arguments a step further and in his 1976 book wrote that Lincoln's Lyceum address was, "the act of imposing one people's morality over

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\(^ {75}\) Barr, *Loathing Lincoln: An American Tradition from the Civil War to the Present*, 252.

\(^ {76}\) Ibid., 254.

\(^ {77}\) Ibid., 244.

\(^ {78}\) Ibid., 245.

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another's...an imperial denial of self-determination.\textsuperscript{79} This argument by Williams was for the right of self-determination (apparently even when self-determination meant self-determining slavery was okay.) "Imperial denials," of southern states right to "self-determine" was an unstoppable process that would lead to "no end to empire except war and more war."\textsuperscript{80} To Williams, Lincoln was no better than a Vladimir Lenin, and his language perpetuated the idea that "expansionism and empire are essential to America's well-being...Lincoln is the ultimate personification of the Great Seal of the United States: warm, soft olive branches and cold, honed arrows. The ruthless crusader for peace."\textsuperscript{81} Williams argues that Lincoln's rhetoric was imperial, and opened the door for an American empire. According to Williams, by Lincoln denying Southerners "right to self-determine" on the basis of ending a great moral wrong, slavery, "Lincoln consolidated and extended all the earlier precedents for the President to use any and all powers at his discretion,"\textsuperscript{82} to do the same. Williams goes on to explain American empire as a history of American leaders pushing for American expansion. Theodore Roosevelt's notion that his intervention in Columbia was a duty "performed for the duty of mankind," is an example that Williams gives. The denial of Panamanian independence on the basis of American ideas of civilization and morality for example, was an "imperial denial of self-determination" that Williams traced back to Lincoln and his suppression of the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{83}

Melvin E. Bradford also had a harsh interpretation of Lincoln in describing reasons for American empire. In his 1971 article, "Lincoln's New Frontier: A Rhetoric for Continuing


\textsuperscript{80} Williams, \textit{America Confronts a Revolutionary World: 1776-1976}, 113.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 119-120.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 121.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 141.
Revolution," Bradford condemned Lincoln's reading of the Declaration of Independence. According to the Intellectual historian Fred Arthur Bailey, Bradford maintained that Lincoln's exaltations of the phrase "all men are created equal" from the Declaration turned that "single statement into a sacred dictum, and loosed a religious crusade for 'equality' that threatened to undermined fundamental institutions of social order for centuries."\(^8^4\) Perhaps the ideological underpinnings for his later piece discussed in chapter one, "Abraham Lincoln Reconsidered," Bradford's earlier article condemned Lincoln for turning the Declaration of Independence, what he termed as simply a "lawyers document,"\(^8^5\) into a cornerstone of American values. To argue that the Declaration of Independence, written by a slave owner was intended to affirm the equality of mankind was erroneous, and Bradford maintained that, "no liberal, new or old, can make of that framework a plea for universal equality."\(^8^6\) Bradford called this interpretation of the Declaration, "Lincoln's lasting and terrible impact on the nation's destiny."\(^8^7\) Bradford and Williams' claims are similar and they both argue that Lincoln laid the groundwork for an American empire premised on the defense of American values and morality.

It is important to note that while Reagan chose to uplift the principles outlined in Jefferson's Declaration, and disseminated a favorable opinion of Lincoln, he did so in ways that were facilitated by political necessity and his own beliefs. Unlike debates over Lincoln's religion, Reagan absolutely was aware of debates over the sanctity of the Declaration, and openly disseminated a view overtly contrary to Bradford's. Reagan noted in his autobiography that the

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\(^8^5\) Ibid., 296-297.

\(^8^6\) Ibid., 303.

\(^8^7\) Ibid., 304.
principles of Jefferson, "'the equal rights of every man and the happiness of every individual'...the best government was the smallest government...[these] are what Abe Lincoln once called, 'the definitions and the axioms of a free society."\textsuperscript{88} While Reagan saw this ideology as important enough to discuss multiple times in his autobiography and diary, he also reiterated that belief during his presidency. In his remarks on December 9, 1983, on signing the Bill of Rights and Human Rights Week proclamation, Reagan said:

When Americans think about the nature of human rights, we begin with what Abraham Lincoln called "the definition and axioms of free society contained in the Declaration of Independence." Well, that testament of liberty declares that all men are created equal and are endowed by their Creator with inalienable rights. To secure these rights, it states "governments are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed." Well, those words reveal the meaning of human rights and our philosophy of liberty that is the essence of America.\textsuperscript{89}

Reagan like Lincoln, posited that the Declaration of Independence was "revealing the...philosophy of liberty that is the essence of America." Reagan saw no problem with this correlation, and disseminated the idea often throughout his presidency to both foreign and domestic audiences. Whether Reagan was consciously choosing a side in this conversation is debatable, but his incorporation of the rhetoric and his continued usage of Lincoln when discussing the Declaration places him squarely counter to Bradford. The fact that Reagan used the Declaration’s principles on freedom and equality to back interventionist movements in foreign countries was ironically imperial in a way, but was more an example of a misuse, "theft," of Lincoln by Reagan than a vindication of Williams' claim of Lincoln's presidency leading to an imperial America.

\textsuperscript{88} Reagan, \textit{An American Life}, Chapter 16, final page.

While Reagan disseminated Lincoln's ideology that the Declaration should be held in esteem, and not simply a "lawyers document," he did so because of his own beliefs and contemporary agenda. Like Diggins states, Reagan's perorations often misconstrued historic fact, and his incorporation of Lincoln's rhetoric on the cold war is no exception. While Lincoln used the Declaration to attack the institution of slavery, Reagan did so to attack Communism and often attached Lincoln's utterances to speeches that called for an interventionist agenda. Ironically, Reagan's appropriations of Lincoln during the Cold War may slightly vindicate Williams' earlier denigration of Lincoln as allowing an "imperialist bent," though perhaps his vitriol should have been aimed at Ronald Reagan as opposed to Lincoln because I argue that Reagan "stole," Lincoln to do so. Lincoln's utterances on American slavery only allow the "Imperialist bent," Williams alludes to when they are misused and reinterpreted. Hence, it was not Lincoln whom far-right conservative intellectuals should focus on when looking for reasons to chastise the American empire, but rather those who reinterpreted his words and applied them to contemporary issues, like Reagan.

Historians have examined this idea of "Lincoln-theft," at length. One significant claim Donald makes in his essay "Getting Right With Lincoln," is that it was Republicans seeking to reclaim Lincoln from Democrats like Franklin D. Roosevelt that facilitated fights over Lincoln's legacy in American politics. A much more recent work by David Blight, The Theft of Lincoln in Politics, Public Memory, and Scholarship, also examines Republicans seeking to reclaim Lincoln as a major reason for his appearances in contemporary American politics. Blight argues that 2005-Bush era Republicans sought a "warrant to the past through Abraham Lincoln in an

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attempt to push an agenda of color-blind conservatism." In other words, they emphasized their party's historic connection to Lincoln as a way of sweeping their long history of discriminatory racial policies under the rug. Blight argues that this was done during NAACP speaking engagements and through "freedom calendars." (Calendars given to Black churches with a cover photo of Lincoln and the headline, "celebrating over a century of Civil Rights gains by the party of Lincoln.") Blight argues that this phenomenon in 2005 is situated within a long history of the Conservative movement to "rewrite history" using Lincoln and coins the term "theft" when defining this appropriation of Lincoln to support contemporary political agendas. Blight's work truly defines this newer facet in Lincoln studies, and reminds scholars that unexamined aspects of Lincoln's persona exist in the more recent reinterpretations and "thefts" of Lincoln in politics.

Another recent work, *Loathing Lincoln: An American Tradition from the Civil War to the Present*, by John Barr catalogues in great length and extreme detail "anti-Lincoln" arguments in American politics and culture. Barr notes that, "[Lincoln's] detractors have always attempted to rewrite the American historical narrative by denigrating the person and actions of the sixteenth president and the values and hopes he (and the antislavery movement) embodied." Barr's broad examination of Lincoln's detractors shows how closely related "Lincoln Loathing" is to the far-right, anti-federal power movements like Libertarians, and that their attempts to portray Lincoln in a negative light quite purposefully "threatens to revise the past." One example of an argument disseminated by these right-wing groups is that Lincoln started the Civil War not because of slavery, but because he wanted to increase the power of the Federal Government and

91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Barr, *Loathing Lincoln*, 16.
94 Ibid.
took advantage of the political climate to wage a needless war. Barr argues that those attempts to portray Lincoln in a negative light affected how some Americans viewed the Civil War. Some evidence to the staying-power of such arguments Barr brings up is Libertarian presidential candidate Ron Paul's assertions in 2012 during a televised appearance on Meet the Press when he echoed these sentiments, saying Americans had been "led to believe, and pounded into our kids, that the only issue involved was slavery. And yet, that— that was the excuse, and that was the rabble-rousing issue. And it was; you can't deny it was an important issue. That really wasn't the issue of why the war was fought, in my estimation." According to Barr, Paul is an example of "Lincoln Loathing" arguments used by some Conservatives which negatively impacted some Americans understanding of the Civil War.

Jared Peatman is another historian who looks at the political and cultural appropriation of Lincoln. His book, The Long Shadow of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, argues that Lincoln's words at Gettysburg were co-opted by various interest groups across the political spectrum, their uses not reflecting the "true meaning" of the address until the 1960s Civil Rights movement. Peatman argues that Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and especially the utterance; "A government of the people, for the people, by the people" was used as pro-Democratic propaganda against the Nazis in the 1940s and later during the 1960s in Indo-China against Communist sympathizers. Postage stamps in America during World War Two and flyers passed out to Indochinese countries during the Cold War were emblazoned with Lincoln's likeness and his utterance that assured that America would come to the defense of governments "of the people, for the people,

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95 Ibid., 15.


by the people."98 While Peatman does not expressly call this a "theft," his argument that the "true meaning" (including both equality & Democracy, as opposed to either/or) of the Gettysburg Address was not realized, even down-played, in these periods shows these uses constitute as a "theft." Peatman even directly references Blight and says he probably would consider them thefts.99

Reagan also "stole" Lincoln, especially in his Cold War rhetoric, in a number of different ways. The Lincoln utterances used by Reagan included "No man is good enough to govern another without that other's consent," "...the mystic chords of memory," "right makes might," and "our defense is in the spirit which prized liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands everywhere. Destroy this spirit and you have planted the seeds of despotism at your own doors..." Reagan reinterpreted all these utterances, to different degrees, to back an interventionist agenda and condemn Soviet Communism. In doing so, Reagan committed a "theft" of Lincoln and to use Diggins' term, often "misconstrued the history" behind Lincoln's words. Yet, even though his reasons were different than Lincoln's, he still disseminated a certain ideological belief, contrary to far-right conservatives, in the ideas in the Declaration as central to American Democracy.

One example of Reagan "stealing" Lincoln to positively portray himself or his policies is his copious application of the utterance "...the mystic chords of memory," taken from Lincoln's First Inaugural Address. Reagan reinterpreted this utterance in the 1980s to denote an international, united front against Soviet Communism. This usage is exceptional because Reagan is the only American president in this study who interpreted Lincoln's "mystic chords of


99 Ibid., 5. Jared Peatman says David Blight probably would consider some of the uses he discusses "theft," though he informs the reader he will not use Blight's terminology.
memory" in an international context. The original context of Lincoln's speech came on the onset of the Civil War, as Lincoln pleaded for peace between North and South. Lincoln said,

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it." I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature...  

Lincoln's original use of "...the mystic chords of memory" was to support America's reunification as more states seceded and the Civil War loomed. Reagan reinterpreted this phrase because it fit perfectly with the contemporary themes of his war rhetoric and the political climate of the 1980s.

According to the presidential rhetoric scholar Karlyn Campbell, one of the five major things required for a president to be successful in their war rhetoric is "...justification through a chronicle or narrative from which argumentative claims are drawn"101 Lincoln's phrase that America's bonds were formed through "the mystic chords of their memory," lends itself for Reagan to use internationally as another way of disseminating his belief in the prudency of a united front against Communism. While Lincoln's "mystic chords of memory that bind us" denoted the shared memories of "battlefields, graveyards, hearts and hearthstones in America,"102 Reagan reinterpreted Lincoln's chords of memory to denote all democratic peoples in the world. This was a quintessential example of Lincoln-theft, as Reagan was reinterpreting Lincoln and

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100 Abraham Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address" In Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln. Edited by Marion M. Miller, Vol. 5 (New York: Lincoln Centenary Association, 1907), 146.


102 Lincoln, "First Inaugural Address."
changing the meaning of his words from a domestic to international context to support his contemporary agenda.

One example of this usage came on February 22, 1983, during Reagan's remarks at the annual Washington conference of the American Legion. Reagan told the crowd of military veterans:

> Maintenance of our allied partnerships is a key to our foreign policy. The bedrock of European security remains the NATO alliance. NATO is not just a military alliance; it's a voluntary political community of free men and women based on shared principles and a common history. The ties that bind us to our European allies are not the brittle ties of expediency or the weighty shackles of compulsion. They resemble what Abraham Lincoln called the "mystic chords of memory" uniting peoples who share a common vision. So, let there be no doubt on either side of the Atlantic: The freedom and independence of America's allies remain as dear to us as our own.\(^{103}\)

Reagan committed a "theft" of Lincoln here, and a critical reinterpretation of Lincoln's legacy, because he changed so many contextual aspects of Lincoln's original speech. Reagan purported that Lincoln's "chords of memory" were about uniting peoples of a "common vision" — yet, in 1861 Southerners and Northerners were fundamentally opposed in their visions for America. It was their shared history as Americans that Lincoln alluded to, but that made it much more difficult for Reagan to connect Lincoln's utterance to contemporary foreign affairs. Instead, Reagan committed a theft of Lincoln by widening the berth of the shared "chords of memory" and applying them to all people in the world. Reagan characterized all NATO countries as sharing American ideals of "freedom" and "independence." While this usage was not pervasive in American presidential rhetoric at the time, German historian Jörg Nagler notes that Willy Brandt, chancellor of West Germany from 1969 to 1974, thought of Lincoln as an "an apostle for the international struggle for freedom" and used Lincoln's "mystic chords" in his keynote address

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to the Abraham Lincoln Association. This further illustrates the prudence of using Abraham Lincoln in the 1980s, as an increasingly favorable global opinion of America's sixteenth president further facilitated a reinterpretation of Lincoln by Reagan to endear himself and his agenda to those international audiences.

An example of Reagan's reinterpretation of Lincoln's utterance, "the mystic bonds of memory," to international audiences came on June 4, 1984, before a joint session of the Irish national parliament. Reagan told the Irish Parliament:

> Who knows but that scientists will someday explain the complex genetic process by which generations seem to transfer across time and even oceans their fondest memories. Until they do, I will have to rely on President Lincoln's words about the "mystic chords of memory"—and say to you that during the past few days at every stop here in your country, those chords have been gently and movingly struck. So, I hope you won't think it too bold of me to say that my feelings here this morning can best be summarized by the words "home—home again."  

Reagan connected himself as an Irish-American, to Ireland and used Lincoln's words on the "mystic chords of memory" to exemplify the "fondness" he felt for the country of his ancestors.

Perhaps a less serious reinterpretation of Lincoln’s words, but a new interpretation all the same and still a misconstruction of the historical facts behind Lincoln's original speech.

Another utterance Reagan used throughout his presidency was, "No man is good enough to govern another without that other's consent." The utterance was originally from Lincoln's Peoria, Illinois, speech on October 16, 1854, and is well known for being one of the "Douglas debate" speeches that helped vault Lincoln to national esteem. Before his audience on that day Lincoln made one of the strongest condemnations of slavery in American politics to date, saying:

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When the white man governs himself that is self-government; but when he governs himself, and also governs another man, that is more than self-government—that is despotism. If the negro is a man, why then my ancient faith teaches me that "all men are created equal;" and that there can be no moral right in connection with one man's making a slave of another.\footnote{Abraham Lincoln "Speech at Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854." In Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln, edited by Roy Basler, Vol. 2. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 248-283.}

Judge Douglas frequently, with bitter irony and sarcasm, paraphrases our argument by saying "The white people of Nebraska are good enough to govern themselves, but they are not good enough to govern a few miserable negroes!!"\footnote{Ibid.}

Well I doubt not that the people of Nebraska are, and will continue to be as good as the average of people elsewhere. I do not say the contrary. What I do say is, that no man is good enough to govern another man, without that other's consent. I say this is the leading principle—the sheet anchor of American republicanism.\footnote{Ibid.}

Lincoln established a principle here that he reiterated multiple times in his life, including in his Gettysburg Address. Freedom from slavery was a right, a "leading principle" given by America's founding document, the Declaration of Independence. While Lincoln was talking about slavery here, Reagan reinterpreted Lincoln's utterance that, "no man is good enough to govern another without that other's consent," to fit contemporary politics. Reagan appropriated Lincoln's utterance to insist that the Soviet Union was a despotic government, a notion employed throughout the Cold War, but which Reagan took to a new level. In the words of Richard Carwardine, "In this universal struggle of liberty and tyranny Lincoln conferred on the United States an international responsibility."\footnote{Richard Carwardine, The Global Lincoln, edited by Richard Carwardine and Jay Sexton (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 36.}

Reagan expressed the idea of the United States "international responsibility," and hence added an "imperialist bent," to Lincoln's rhetoric, through his appropriation of Lincoln's Peoria address line, "no man is good enough to govern another..." One such example was Reagan's July
19, 1983, speech to the nation on the annual observance of captive nations week, especially significant for these purposes as captive nations week was dedicated on July 17, 1959, to recognize that:

Enslavement of a substantial part of the world's population by Communist imperialism makes a mockery of the idea of peaceful co-existence...Whereas these submerged nations look to the United States, as the citadel of human freedom, for leadership in bringing about their independence...\(^\text{110}\)

Reagan used Lincoln and reinterpreted his utterance on governance to support the contemporary notion of the Soviet Union as a tyrannical government of "Communist imperialists." Reagan told the nation, but really addressed the world in saying:

Two visions of the world remain locked in dispute. The first believes all men are created equal by a loving God who has blessed us with freedom. Abraham Lincoln spoke for us: "No man," he said, "is good enough to govern another without the other's consent." The second vision believes that religion is opium for the masses. It believes that eternal principles like truth, liberty, and democracy have no meaning beyond the whim of the state. And Lenin spoke for them: "It is true, that liberty is precious," he said, "so precious that it must be rationed." Well, I'll take Lincoln's version over Lenin's— [laughter] —and so will citizens of the world if they're given free choice.\(^\text{111}\)

This use coincides with many historians' work on the "out-sourcing" of Abraham Lincoln's legacy to the world at large. Richard Carwardine points to Lincoln's influence among world leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi in India, Willy Brandt in Germany, and others in Ireland, India, Japan, or Latin America.\(^\text{112}\) This can be seen during Reagan's presidency as well. Reagan used Lincoln four times in his toasts to foreign leaders in Washington and those foreign leaders used


\(^{112}\text{Carwardine, The Global Lincoln, 11.}\)
Lincoln positively on ten different occasions in their remarks in Washington during the 1980s.\textsuperscript{113} In this case, Reagan reinterpreted Lincoln's utterance to denote consent of the governed in Eastern Europe as opposed to American slaves, and he did so with language that was overtly contrary to Williams. Not only was Lincoln not a Vladimir Lenin, as Williams asserted, but also Reagan took Lincoln's vision of society over Lenin's. Reagan used Lincoln in this manner often, to posit America as the enemy of Communism to foreign audiences.

The more specific events of the 1980s also lent themselves greatly to the reinterpretation of Lincoln’s utterances by America's leading conservative, especially on issues of natural rights and American intervention. One such event was the downing of a South Korean airliner by the Soviet Union on September 1, 1983. The craft had deviated over 200 miles from its original flight path due to an "improper auto-pilot display and an inadequate user-model,"\textsuperscript{114} and was shot down by a Soviet jet after several failed attempts to contact the airliner. The downing of the aircraft, a horrific tragedy that took the lives of all 269 international civilians on board, became an international crisis as the Soviets denied all responsibility and refused to share their findings from the "black box" data recordings for over a decade. That political climate lent itself to Reagan's reinterpretation and theft of Lincoln's utterances for denouncing Soviet Communism to world audiences.\textsuperscript{115}

Reagan's speech to the Japanese Diet in Tokyo on November 11, 1983, directly addressed the Korean airliner, and used Lincoln's utterance on governance to denounce the Soviet Union


\textsuperscript{115} Ibid., 5-7.
and connect democratic freedoms to both America and their allies. One way in which he did this was by postulating that both Japan and the United States had a rich history in securing democratic freedoms for their own people. He said that, "the United States and Japan represent the deepest aspirations of men and women everywhere—to be free, to live in peace..." He used Japan's Fukuzawa and America's Lincoln to portray those deep roots of democratic freedoms in American and Japanese history, saying:

Yukichi Fukuzawa, the great Meiji-era educator, said it for you: "Heaven has made no man higher or no man lower than any other man." Our great American hero Abraham Lincoln put it in political perspective for us: "No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent."...our freedom inspires no fear because it poses no threat. We intimidate no one, and we will not be intimidated by anyone. The United States and Japan do not build walls to keep our people in. We do not have armies of secret police to keep them quiet. We do not throw dissidents into so-called mental hospitals. And we would never cold-bloodedly shoot a defenseless airliner out of the sky. We share your grief for that tragic and needless loss of innocent lives.  

Reagan established democratic freedoms as central to both Japan and United States societies, in direct opposition to the "cold-blooded" Soviets, and then argued that the two nations need to work together to project their democratic freedoms. Reagan challenged Japan and America to be strong on Communism, and to defend those historic values by joining together in "the defense of freedom for world prosperity" saying:

For much of our histories our countries have looked inward. Well, those times have passed... The simple hope for world peace and prosperity will not be enough. Our two great nations, working with others, must preserve the values and freedoms our societies have struggled so hard to achieve...the defense of freedom will be a shared burden.

Reagan brought his argument full-circle here. He used historical arguments, through Lincoln and Fukazawa, to ground Japan and the United States as having common values (Democracy) and

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117 Ibid.

118 Ibid.
then argued that their shared historical bond (a love of freedom) denoted a special relationship, a shared burden, to defend freedom against Soviet Communism.

Reagan used Lincoln's utterance on slavery as a way of affirming his notions of shared responsibility to stand against Soviets when speaking to Chinese community leaders as well, in Beijing on April 27, 1984. To the audience of Chinese leaders, Reagan said:

America and China are both great nations. And we have a special responsibility to preserve world peace. To help fulfill that responsibility, the United States is rebuilding its defenses, which had been neglected for more than a decade. Our people realize this effort is crucial if we're to deter aggression against America, our allies, and other friends. But we threaten no nation. America's troops are not massed on China's borders. And we occupy no lands. The only foreign land we occupy anywhere in the world is beneath gravesites where Americans shed their blood for peace and freedom. Nor do we commit wanton acts, such as shooting 269 innocent people out of the sky for the so-called cause of sacred airspace...America and China both condemn military expansionism, the brutal occupation of Afghanistan, the crushing of Kampuchea; and we share a stake in preserving peace on the Korean peninsula...we're people who've always believed the heritage of our past is the seed that brings forth the harvest of our future. And from our roots we have drawn tremendous power from two great forces: faith and freedom...Abraham Lincoln defined the heart of American democracy when he said, "No man is good enough to govern another man without that other's consent."119

Again, Reagan used Lincoln's utterance and expressed his support for the notion that the ideals in the Declaration "defined American democracy." Again, the events of the 1980s and Soviet maleficence in events like the "Korean airliner, the brutal Afghan occupation, the crushing of Kampuchea" played a key role in the pertinence of Reagan's expansive use of Lincoln during the time period, and his interpretations counter Bradford's analysis of Lincoln and argue for the centrality of the Declaration in both American Democracy and in defining Democracy as a whole.

Reagan applied this notion internationally to many nations during the Cold War. One example was on February 23, 1988, in an address to the citizens of Western Europe. Reagan stated:

Today, in a sense, we live not simply in the same locality but in a single house, a house that may someday include all of mankind among its residents: the house of democracy. "In my Father's house are many mansions." In the house of democracy are many languages and many national heritages, but one ideal: the dignity of man, or as Abraham Lincoln said, the belief that "no man is good enough to govern another without that other's consent." All of us honor this truth. All of us are united in defending it. We have raised high the roof beam of this great structure of an alliance to shelter that truth from all the winds that blow and all the bears and wolves that prowl.  

Reagan called the "belief that all men are created equal" the "one ideal" in the "house of democracy." But as was often the case, the appropriation and interpretation of Lincoln by Reagan in this instance was to implicate a connection and a responsibility shared between Democratic nations to "unite in defending the dignity of man." (Against Soviet Communism.) Reagan connected Lincoln's belief in the Declaration as defining the fundamental promises of American Democracy, and disseminates this idea as both positive and correct, but reinterprets it to argue for America and their allies to unite against Soviet maleficence abroad.

Another utterance taken from Lincoln by Reagan is the phrase "right makes might," from Lincoln's Cooper Union Address. The address, according to some historians was the "address that won Lincoln the Presidency," and was given to a crowd in New York on February 27, 1860. Many historians posit this speech as evidence of Lincoln's pragmatic approach to the divisive issue of slavery before the Civil War. Lincoln's Cooper Union Address rebuked Southern arguments that the Republican Party sought to eliminate slavery where it already

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existed, saying "John Brown was no Republican..." but ended by arguing that slavery should not be allowed to spread further and should eventually cease to exist. His ending phrase that "right makes might," was a prediction that the Republican Party would be proven right on the issue of slavery by winning the upcoming election. Many historians have pointed out the foreshadowed irony in Lincoln's statement, as he would go on to prove the opposite, that "might makes right," by righting America's greatest wrong slavery, through military might.

It made sense that Reagan would appropriate a term such as "right makes might," though he often switched the utterance around to "might makes right," perhaps accidentally (he still attributed the phrase to Abraham Lincoln regardless of which way he used it.) Whereas Lincoln's original utterance was on the issue of slavery, Reagan's use constituted a "theft" because he recontextualized the utterance to support contemporary politics during the Cold War. This is best seen in Reagan's reactions to Cold War events. After the downing of the Korean airliner by the Soviet Union, Reagan addressed the nation. In his remarks, he stated that:

We know it will be hard to make a nation that rules its own people through force to cease using force against the rest of the world. But we must try. This is not a role we sought. We preach no manifest destiny...Much we have already given; much more we must be prepared to give. Let us have faith, in Abraham Lincoln's words, "that right makes might, and in that faith let us, to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it." If we do, if we stand together and move forward with courage, then history will record that some good did come from this monstrous wrong that we will carry with us and remember for the rest of our lives.

It was not a "role [Americans] sought," yet Americans must be "prepared to give." The "duty" Reagan alluded to in his reinterpretation of Lincoln's utterance was to one day defeat, outlast, or make peace with the Soviet Union. Again, as he did constantly throughout his Presidency,

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122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

Reagan connected America's destiny to being the antithesis of Communism and this ideological saturation of his rhetoric shines through in his appropriation of Lincoln's utterances. Ironically, again Reagan's appropriation of "right makes might," to argue for increased American presence overseas and abroad as a bulwark against Soviet Communism lends some marginal validity to Williams' claim that Lincoln's rhetoric could be construed as "imperial." Yet considering the vast differences between their situations, the connection between Lincoln and American imperialism has more to do with the theft of his rhetoric by politicians like Reagan than a causal correlation.

Another utterance of Lincoln's appropriated by Reagan was the phrase, "Our defense is in preservation of the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands, everywhere," which came during Lincoln's speech at Edwardsville, Illinois, on September 11, 1858. This speech was famous because it was among Lincoln's strongest rebuttals of popular sovereignty and other legislative compromises of the past half-century. Lincoln's original utterance came near the end of his remarks that day, ending:

[Weapons and armies] are not our reliance against a resumption of tyranny in our fair land. All of them may be turned against our liberties, without making us stronger or weaker for the struggle. Our reliance is in the love of liberty which God has planted in our bosoms. Our defense is in the preservation of the spirit which prizes liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands, everywhere. Destroy this spirit, and you have planted the seeds of despotism around your own doors. Familiarize yourselves with the chains of bondage, and you are preparing your own limbs to wear them...  

Lincoln spoke of a "love of liberty" at the heart of America's spirit of "reliance against tyranny." Reagan took this utterance and reinterpreted it, concluding that yes, "love of liberty" was at the core of America's creed, but changed some key aspects. Throughout the 1980s Reagan decontextualized that proposition, that "love of liberty" is essential to the American spirit, and recontextualized it to fit the Cold War paradigm. To Reagan, "liberty" was American

Democracy, and "the preservation of that spirit...is the heritage of all men, in all lands, everywhere" gave a convenient historical legitimizer, a claim wrought out of a historical narrative, to outsourcing American "liberty" to countries like Nicaragua or Iran to preserve their "liberty" from Communism.

One example of Reagan using Lincoln's utterance in that manner came at a fundraiser for Senator Paula Hawkins on May 27, 1985, and also at a fundraiser for Senator Don Nickles on June 5, 1985. At the fundraiser for Paula Hawkins, Reagan discussed a few of her major "contributions," including a tough stance on Latin American Communism and support for giving aid to Nicaraguan "freedom fighters." Reagan asserted:

The freedom fighters are a shield for Nicaragua's democratic neighbors, preventing the Communist regime from focusing its full strength on subversion and aggression. The freedom fighters are the best hope for democracy in that troubled country. Those who would have us abandon them and the people of Nicaragua are cutting off our chances to avoid a major crisis in Central America...Lincoln's words ring as true today as they did over a hundred years ago, "our defense" he said, "is in the preservation of the spirit which prized liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands everywhere..."  

He went on to say:

...let's recognize the truth that Fidel Castro is behind much of the trouble in Central America. His consuming hatred of America and his commitment to Communist tyranny has impoverished his country and oppressed its people.  

Reagan finished up his speech with a warning and perhaps a call to action:

I firmly believe the tide of history is moving away from Communism and into the warm sunlight of human freedom. To win this struggle, to preserve our way of life, to maintain peace, we must be strong and true to our ideals.  


127 Ibid.  

128 Ibid.
Here, Reagan appropriated Lincoln to help support his belief that "to preserve our way of life" America had to be strong on Communism and not allow it to spread. Lincoln's utterance lends itself to Reagan perfectly here and helped to add historical legitimacy to his ideals. It both connected American Democracy to the "prized liberty" of all men, and gave a historical basis for preserving that liberty abroad, and projecting American ideals across the globe, not just at home.\textsuperscript{129}

At a fundraiser for Senator Don Nickles later that year Reagan addressed the Cold War situation in Latin America more directly, specifically on Nicaragua. Nicaragua is considered a major blemish on Reagan's record and was an example of the "Reagan doctrine" (which provided aid to anti-communist forces in war-torn countries), failing. Congress sought to curb some of that aid, especially to the Contra rebels in Nicaragua, with the passing of the Boland Amendment in October 1984. The amendment allowed for the allocation of a maximum of only $14 million in federal aid to Nicaragua that could be approved only by Congress and was "attached to a stop-gap twelve-hundred-page continuing resolution necessary to keep the federal government running."\textsuperscript{130} Reagan could not take the risk of vetoing the amendment due to the political fallout from shutting down the government for three weeks before the election and had to find other ways to work around the amendment. Reagan had been exploring ways to circumvent Congress in providing aid to the Contras as early as February 1984. He did so by signing off on secret arms

\textsuperscript{129} Ibid. Also see Campbell, Presidents Creating the Presidency, 227-241. On war rhetoric in Presidential speeches - employing national defense, history, etc.

deals to Iran, and the money would be used to fund "Reagan doctrine" projects in defiance of the Boland Amendment for another two years.\textsuperscript{131}

Reagan's anger towards Congress over the passing of the Boland Act, and his unwavering stance to fight Communism in Nicaragua came through in his June 5, 1985, fundraising speech for Don Nickles when he said:

\begin{quote}
It was a dark day for freedom when the Soviet Union spent $500 million to impose Communism in Nicaragua, the United States could not support a meager $14 million for the freedom fighters in Nicaragua who were opposed to that totalitarian government...Lincoln's words ring true today when he said, "our defense is in the spirit which prized liberty as the heritage of all men, in all lands everywhere. Destroy this spirit and you have planted the seeds of despotism at your own doors..."
\end{quote}

He then concluded his speech on a solemn note that, "freedom isn't free. If freedom is taken from our neighbors, freedom will be taken from you and me."\textsuperscript{132} Reagan used Lincoln here to ground his agenda, (that the U.S. needed to support Nicaraguan freedom fighters,) in a historical narrative. Especially poignant is Lincoln's utterance here, as it provides the historical legitimization to Reagan's proposition that liberty must be defended, "in all lands everywhere," including those just south of "our own doorsteps." Reagan reinterpreted Lincoln's utterance to support the Contras in their own bid for liberty, and postulated then that American liberty was also at stake.\textsuperscript{134} In both of these cases, Don Nickles' and Paula's fundraisers, Reagan in a way vindicated Bradford and William A. Williams in that he was quite literally attaching Lincoln's

\textsuperscript{131} Johnson, \textit{Sleepwalking Through History: America in the Reagan Years}. 275-300.


\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{134} Patterson, \textit{Restless Giant: The United States from Watergate to Bush V. Gore}, 203-205. On the 'Reagan Doctrine' and helping anti-communist groups in Latin America. See also; Johnson, \textit{Sleepwalking Though History: America in the Reagan Years}, 280-282. Info on the Boland Amendment in October, also information on how Reagan had planned since February to support 'contras' without Congresses approval. See also; Cannon, \textit{Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power}. 407-413. Congressional opposition to $14 million in support to 'contras', more on 'Reagan Doctrine' See also: Hayward, \textit{The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counter-Revolution}. 330-338.
rhetoric to his agenda for American foreign intervention. However, the differences in their situations coupled with the fact that Reagan was appropriating Lincoln in ways that misconstrued the historic facts behind him actually was counter to claims made by late 20th century conservatives like Bradford and Williams. Reagan's use of Lincoln in these instances shows that American Imperialism after WWII was in no way a result of Lincoln's presidency but rather how his presidency and legacy have been reinterpreted and appropriated since his death by others.

Reagan also used Lincoln's phrase, "the last, best hope of earth," (though he often changed it to the "the last, best hope on earth") throughout the 1980s. It was used most often to portray the United States as the world's staunchest bulwark against Communism. The utterance was originally coined in Lincoln's concluding remarks to Congress on December 1, 1862. Lincoln ended his remarks saying, "In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free -- honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth." While Lincoln posited America as 'the last best hope of earth' for assuring "freedom to the free," Reagan reinterpreted the utterance to mean 'the last best hope of earth' as it related to the spread of Communism.

Reagan used the utterance "the last best hope of earth" to contrast an exceptional America with a despotic Soviet Union throughout his presidency. One example of this came at a luncheon for Republican Senator and former Vietnam POW Jeremiah Denton. Reagan spoke to the audience about Denton's courage in facing the "inhumane horrors of the North Vietnamese Gulag," and said Denton learned first-hand the "struggle for the cause of human freedom."  

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136 Ibid.

137 Ibid.
According to Reagan, Denton learned the true meaning of "Abraham Lincoln's words...that the United States is still 'the last best, hope on earth." Reagan's use of the word "gulag" was a crafty implication of the Soviet Union in the creation of the North Vietnamese state and the conditions that existed wherein, and Lincoln's utterance helped Reagan build the image of a destitute Soviet Force opposite American freedom.

Reagan's remarks on signing the Bill of Rights Day and the Human Rights Day and Week Proclamation on December 9, 1985, exemplified his use of Lincoln to denote an exemplar America in comparison to a despotic Soviet Union. Reagan pontificated:

President Lincoln once called America the last, best hope of man on Earth. Mr. Lincoln's remark has special poignancy today, when American determination and strength are central to the peace and freedom of the entire democratic world. It is therefore incumbent upon us to work for the expansion of freedom throughout the world. Reagan said that, "Mr. Lincoln's remark has special poignancy today," and argued that "it is incumbent upon us to work for the expansion of freedom throughout the world." Whether it was to gain support for the Contras in Nicaragua, condemning the Soviet Union for their destruction of a Korean airliner, or simply to position the United States as the bulwark of Democratic freedoms compared to Soviet Communists, Reagan stole Lincoln's words to ground these Cold War agendas in a historic narrative. Ironically, Reagan's appropriation of Lincoln's words and person in his arguments for an exceptional America that "works for the expansion of freedoms throughout the world," was absolutely imperial. However, contrary to the analysis of conservatives like Bradford and Williams, the appropriation of Lincoln and the use of his rhetoric in the American Imperial project was not a fault of Lincoln, but rather those who have

138 Ibid.
hijacked his memory and legacy to support their contemporary agendas. Reagan further distanced himself ideologically from Bradford in these instances as well and he attributed no problems to the elevation of the principles of the Declaration of Independence to their current status. In fact, Reagan like Lincoln argues that the ideals in the Declaration, that all men are free and equal, are central to American Democracy. (If only to show the world in the midst of a Cold War that America was the antithesis of Soviet Communism.)
CHAPTER IV

REAGAN'S MANY "MISCELLANEOUS" APPROPRIATIONS OF LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln once said, "you can't fool all of the people all of the time." Well, this week our liberal friends have been trying to prove him wrong. They've charged that our record of lowering your taxes, ending runaway inflation, and igniting the longest peacetime economic expansion ever has been bad for middle class, working Americans. Well, it's time to remind them of a few facts.\textsuperscript{140}

-Ronald Reagan (October 22, 1988.)

Section 1 - Reconnecting the Republican Party to Lincoln

Up to this point, Reagan's appropriations and interpretations of Lincoln have had an intellectual bent, in that they (perhaps unknowingly) disseminated some beliefs about Lincoln's legacy over others. Unlike his belief in the ideals outlined in the Declaration or the vision of a pious Lincoln, Reagan's appropriations of Lincoln in other manners were often what Elvin T. Lim called "applause-rendering platitudes, partisan punch lines, and emotional and human interest appeals,"\textsuperscript{141} or simply as Diggins put it, "read like peroration's."\textsuperscript{142} The quote above epitomized one of those types of appropriations of Lincoln by Reagan: as a way to re-connect the Republican party to Lincoln. While these appropriations do not necessarily coincide with any intellectual debates over Lincoln during the period, they must be examined, as many definitely


\textsuperscript{141} Lim, The Anti-Intellectual Presidency: The Decline of Presidential Rhetoric from George Washington to George W. Bush, 94.

\textsuperscript{142} Diggins, Ronald Reagan: Fate, Freedom, and the Making of History, 266.
constitute what David Blight would call thefts. As Diggins notes, Reagan's rhetoric may sometimes "believe the historic context..." and this was especially true in these instances, as some of his attributions of language to Lincoln was actually false.

Reagan's October 22, 1988, radio address to the nation on the economy (cited above) uses the phrase, "you can't fool all the people all the time." This was a great example of Reagan's misappropriating Lincoln as there was nothing more substantial than "a few dubious recollections," linking Lincoln to the quote. Historians have traced the origin of the quote to Illinois lawyer and statesman William Pitt Kellogg and also Bloomington Railroad superintendent Richard Price Morgan. Kellogg claimed that Lincoln uttered those words in his May 29, 1856, speech to the Illinois State Republican convention in Bloomington. According to Lincoln scholar Don E. Fehrenbacher, historians are generally disposed to doubt that this quote originated with Lincoln at all. Kellogg and Morgan's phrasing of the aphorism differed too much, and they even disagreed as to which specific speech it appeared. (Lincoln gave speeches on both May 28th and the 29th; with Morgan positing the 28th as the day Lincoln used the phrase.) Quote Investigator attributes the quote to 17th century French intellectual Jacques Abbadie, who wrote that (translated from French) "One can fool some men, or fool all men in some places and times, but one cannot fool all men in all places and ages." Fehrenbacher does

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143 Ibid.
145 Ibid., Section on William Pitt Kellogg, footnote 271.
146 Ibid., Section on Richard Price Morgan, footnote 343.
Quote Investigator is a website that "catalogues the investigatory work of [Yale scholar] Garson O'Toole who diligently seeks the truth about quotations," Taken from Homepage.
not postulate reasons as to why the quote became attributed to Lincoln over the years, but Quote Investigator theorizes that the use of the quote during prohibition naturally led proponents of the movement to attach the quote to Lincoln, who had supported the earlier temperance movement.\footnote{Abraham Lincoln, "Temperance Address." In Life and Works of Abraham Lincoln, edited by Marion M. Miller, Vol. 2. (New York, NY: Lincoln Centenary Association, 1907), accessed November 22, 2016. http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln1/1:294?rgn=div1;view=fulltext}

Considering that Reagan was attaching rhetoric to Lincoln that he probably never said, David Blight would consider this appropriation a theft. Yet, Reagan used the utterance to position the Democratic party as counter to Abraham Lincoln's legacy, regardless of whether Lincoln said it or not. Reagan's use of Lincoln to reclaim him for Republicans shows that the phenomenon David Donald identified in his 1956 article, "Getting Right with Lincoln," was still very much alive in the 1980s through Reagan. In his October 22, 1988, radio address Reagan demonstrated this, though instead of "getting right by Lincoln," he argued that Democrats "have been trying to prove him wrong." (Though what is unsaid of course, is that if Democrats are getting wrong by Lincoln, it stands to reason that Republicans have been getting right by Lincoln.) This theft of Lincoln — i.e. the reinterpretation of his utterances, or the attribution of utterances to him that were not his, to reconnect Republicans to Lincoln's legacy was a phenomenon that was not going by the wayside as Merrill Peterson writes,\footnote{Merrill Peterson, Lincoln In American Memory, 377-378. Note: Peterson says here that during the 1980s, "Speechmaking about Lincoln, especially by politicians, fell off dramatically. 'Getting Right with Lincoln" was no longer important." I argue with this examination that it was very much alive in Reagan's rhetoric, albeit hidden under more layers and less specifically focused on Lincoln.} but was alive and well during Reagan's time in office.

One major way Reagan connected his party back to the memory of its founder was by often mentioning Lincoln along with the Republican party or calling it the "party of Lincoln." Reagan was not the only Republican facilitating this reassertion of Lincoln in the party. In fact,
the 1980 Republican platform was the first to include a section specifically for "Black Americans" and stated directly underneath that, "as the Party of Lincoln, we remain equally and steadfastly committed to the equality of rights for all citizens, regardless of race."¹⁵⁰ The next party platform, released in 1984, increased the number of references to Lincoln (albeit only by 1,) making it the Republican party platform with the most references to Lincoln up until that point (going back the party's founding.)¹⁵¹

Reagan attempted to connect his party to Lincoln in many cases. At his remarks at a White House reception for Republican members of the House of Representatives on June 23, 1981, Reagan began by saying, "Lincoln, that first Republican President, once said, 'I am not bound to win but I am bound to be true.' He said that because he believed in the uncommon wisdom of the common people..."¹⁵² At a fundraising dinner for governor James R. Thompson, Jr. in Chicago two weeks later Reagan remarked, "fellow Republicans, one year ago in a Midwestern city only a few hundred miles from here, those of us in the party of Lincoln met in convention."¹⁵³ In his remarks at a Republican fundraiser on September 30, 1988, in Chicago he told the audience, "more and more Chicagoans are beginning to realize that if you want to go with a future of opportunity, economic growth, and peace through strength, there's only one


place to turn: the party of Abraham Lincoln, the Republican Party." The reiteration of his party's historic connection to Lincoln was something Reagan did both early and late into presidency.

In some cases, Reagan *directly* connected the present-day Republican party to Lincoln by saying that Lincoln would "be proud," of his administration. At a Republican National Committee fundraiser in Dallas, Reagan told the audience:

"It's the Republican Party, the party of the new majority, founded 130 years ago and lifted to greatness by the candidacy of an awkward and obscure lawyer who had some new ideas himself. And when he had won the Presidency, he said some words that reflect what all of us think when we look at the policies of the other party. He said: We must disenthrall ourselves with the past, and then we will save our country. Well, Abe Lincoln was one great dreamer, one great risk-taker, one great soul, and one great hero. And I think he would be proud of his party today."

In this instance Reagan perpetuated the same phenomenon first identified by David Donald in 1956, and expanded upon by authors like David Blight. Reagan attempted to reclaim Lincoln's legacy for the Republican party by constantly reminding his constituents that they were the "party of Lincoln." Not only were they the "party of Lincoln," in name or historic fact, but also Lincoln would "be proud of his party today." Reagan reaffirmed what David Blight called "Lincoln-theft," and expressed the viewpoint that the Republican party of the 1980s was the true inheritor of the mantle of Lincoln.

Reagan went to even further extremes at some points to make connections between present day Republicans and Lincoln. David Blight writes that Republicans in the early 2000s sought to cover up their historic failings on civil rights and apply a brand of "color-blind

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conservatism."\textsuperscript{156} Reagan's remarks to members of the Republican National Committee and the Reagan-Bush campaign staff in Dallas shows an even earlier example of this phenomenon. Reagan says, "today, you take up positions of the highest responsibility in one of the oldest, proudest political parties on Earth—a party that's always stood for human freedom, a party that's given the world leaders like Theodore Roosevelt and Dwight David Eisenhower and, yes, Abraham Lincoln."\textsuperscript{157} Reagan told his fellow Republicans that they were the party that gave the world Abraham Lincoln, and that they had "always stood for human freedom." Less than twenty years after being the party voting against the Civil Rights Act, Reagan posited his Republicans as the true inheritors of Lincoln, as well as the party that had always stood for freedom. In these different ways, Reagan perpetuated Donald's premise of "getting right with Lincoln," and posited his party as the party most "right with Lincoln."

\textbf{Section 2 - Reagan's Appropriation of Lincoln When Speaking to Minority Groups}

Reagan, perhaps because he knew that not even the name "Lincoln" could bring him any moral currency among black Americans or other minority groups, used Lincoln's name and rhetoric very little when speaking to them (at least in comparison to religious or war rhetoric.) Reagan's veto of economic sanctions against the South African regime during apartheid, his unfriendliness towards social welfare problems, and his minimal appointment of black judges all greatly alienated the black community.\textsuperscript{158} His appropriation of Lincoln when talking to

\textsuperscript{156} Blight, "The Theft of Lincoln in Scholarship, Politics, and Public Memory," 280.


\textsuperscript{158} Johnson, Sleepwalking through History: America in the Reagan Years, 170-175. On Reagan's relationship with African-American community. See also Hayward, The Age of Reagan: The Conservative Counter-
minorities, though few, can still be interesting. Reagan's attempts at using Lincoln in his conversation with black Americans can be seen on March 26, 1982, at a White House Luncheon for Black Clergymen. At the luncheon, he stated that:

"...[Words of] Abraham Lincoln—'that is a house divided against itself cannot stand.' Divisions among the American people have been a concern among many presidents, not just Lincoln...There is concern in the black community about this administration, I thought we could break bread and talk about it."  

He would go on to state that his economic policies were actually, "for the benefit of everyone."

If Reagan meant to encourage mutual understanding or strengthen his bonds among the black community by invoking Lincoln, there is strong evidence that he failed. One historic black newspaper, the *Baltimore Afro-American*, ran an article that sarcastically stated, "The President told about 75 black clergymen attending a White House luncheon that his program meant to turn the economy around - including the elimination of programs that help everyone." The only other mention of Reagan in the eight-page newspaper was a transcript of his meeting with the National Newspaper Publishers Association. Not even Lincoln could buy support for his policies in minority communities.

Reagan appropriated Lincoln in 1983 to bring up issues of race in a speech given on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday in January and it did not go well. He stated simply that, "Abraham Lincoln freed the black man. In many ways, Dr. King freed the white man from his prejudice...where others - black and white - preached hatred, he taught the principles of love and

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non-violence..." Speaking on violence and classifying it as both black and white, and then saying "Dr. King freed the white man from his prejudice," did exactly what Denise Goldzig argued. It "suggested equal opportunity had already been achieved," by implying white Americans were no longer prejudiced. If he meant to invoke Lincoln to bolster his message, he ultimately failed. A January 22, 1983, article in the Afro-American on the observance of Dr. King's birthday covered half the front page and brought up speeches given by Vice President George Bush, Coretta Scott King, and only mentioned Reagan's speech on the second page. The article devoted more time to Rep. Charles Rangel, who "blasted Reagan for 'rolling back civil rights efforts and deliberately alienating minority groups,'" and Rep. Harold Washington, who said, "blacks remain in the same position they held when King fought discrimination in the 1960's," the paper even went as far as quoting the Soviet news agency Tass to rebuke Reagan, as the agency blatantly said, "Facts show Reagan's administration conducts a policy of brutal discrimination toward 25 million black Americans." Even though he invoked Lincoln in some of his messages to primarily black Americans, their responses show little receptivity.\(^1\)


Section 3 - Reagan, Lincoln, and Comedy

There's been quite a few Inaugurations in my lifetime. I missed Abe Lincoln's but-
[laughter] — I do remember Calvin Coolidge 's. [Laughter] 163

-Ronald Reagan (January 21, 1985.)

What better note to end on, after discussing the denigration of Lincoln by some
conservative intellectuals as well as his "theft," than the jovial and light-hearted appropriations of
Lincoln by Reagan. Reagan, like Lincoln, was well known for his down-to-earth nature and
ability to joke. Joking about his age was a tactic Reagan often employed that went over well with
his audiences, and he often used Lincoln to do so. At his remarks at the Cenikor Foundation in
Houston, Reagan told the audience, "it isn't true that I heard Lincoln give the Gettysburg
Address." 164 He told high school students at an address on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday that,
"just to set the record straight, I may be old, but there's no truth to the story that Abe Lincoln and
I walked to school together back in Illinois." 165 At the 1988 Republican National Convention
Reagan said, "This convention brings back so many memories to a fellow like me. I can still
remember my first Republican convention: Abraham Lincoln giving a speech that- [laughter] —
 sent tingles down my spine. No, I have to confess, I wasn't actually there. The truth is, way back
then, I belonged to the other party." 166 At a campaign fundraiser for Senator Pete Wilson (who
had just turned 55) Reagan told his listeners, "You see, I was very moved at my own 55th

163 Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Inaugural Luncheon at the Capitol" January 21, 1985. In The
http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=38699&st=luncheon+at+the+capitol&st1=

164 Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Cenikor Foundation Center in Houston, Texas" April 29, 1983. In The

165 Ronald Reagan, "Address to High School Students on Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Birthday." January 15,

166 Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at the Republican National Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana." August
birthday when President Abraham Lincoln showed up and said a few kind words. [Laughter]
Now, for some people, turning 55 is something of a milestone. Not for Pete—he still gets carded in bars."167

These appropriations of Lincoln by Reagan serve as evidence that not all of Reagan's uses of Lincoln were meant to link his agenda, administration goals, or personal beliefs to Lincoln. Peggy Noonan notes that Reagan used humor to "illustrate a point, defuse a moment, clinch a deal."168 While Lou Cannon notes that humor often "relieved the sternness of his message."169 Historian Justin D. Garrison said of Reagan that he had a "Chimeric Imagination," what he meant by that was that Reagan's imagination (philosophy, world-view, goals, and rhetoric) were made up of many different strains, often with "mixed degrees of reality."170 One of those strains was simply a proclivity for humor in his rhetoric. A trait he shared with Abraham Lincoln, and that perhaps helped Americans be so receptive to his messages. Peggy Noonan notes that "normal people liked [his story-telling and jokes] just fine. Newspapers and magazines ran his joke of the week; The Washington Post had a Reagan joke file. It was like the profusion of paper booklets produced when Lincoln was president, with titles like Abes Jokes—Fresh from Abraham's Bosom and Old Abes's Jokes."171 Many authors have cited Reagan's propensity for humor as an important example of his political tact and reasons for his popularity. Reagan's humor made both his message and his person more palpable for average Americans. Hence even


169 Cannon, Governor Reagan: His Rise to Power, 18, on self-depreciating humor. 118, humor "relieving the sternness of his message."

170 Garrison, The Chimeric Imagination, 142, on "mixed degrees of reality." See also 26 and 127 for fuller descriptions of what Garrison terms Reagan's "Chimeric Imagination."

Lincoln's appearance in seemingly trivial moments of Reagan’s rhetoric, like jokes and stories, has significance.
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Of all the American presidents in this project, not only did Reagan use Lincoln more often, but he also reinterpreted a wider swath of Lincoln utterances to support his agenda. Some utterances were present in previous presidents' rhetoric, and indeed, some historians like Jared Peatman have discussed the prevalence of Lincoln among other presidents. Civil Rights and war discourse are the two areas in which Lincoln's name appears most frequently. Hence, it made sense that Lyndon B. Johnson had such a high percentage of Lincoln appropriations. In pushing for the Civil Rights Act of 1964 he told crowds on numerous occasions (over 10 different times) that:

Abraham Lincoln signed the Proclamation of Emancipation a hundred years ago. And he took the chains off of the slaves, but he did not free the Negro of prejudice that people have of the color of his skin. And it is up to you to pick up where Lincoln left off.

Lyndon Johnson often told reporters to "Expect the Civil Rights Act to be passed by Lincoln's birthday." In fact, the vast majority of Lyndon Johnson's appropriations of Lincoln coincided with the Civil Rights movement. Jared Peatman would argue that this interpretation of Lincoln's legacy or at least the use of the Gettysburg Address lines, "of the people, by the people, for the


people..." during the Civil Rights movement to denote the freedom of all people in a Democracy
(as Martin Luther King used it in his famous I Have a Dream speech) was most in-line with the
actual meaning behind Lincoln's address.174

Reagan's use of Lincoln was not so clear-cut, however, and he appropriated Lincoln on
seemingly everything, from religion to politics to humor. When Reagan was asked in 1988 what
made him the "Great Communicator," he said that:

I never thought it was my style or the words I used that made a difference: it was the
content. I wasn't a great communicator, but I communicated great things, and they didn't
spring full bloom from my brow, they came from the heart of a great nation—from our
experience, our wisdom, and our belief in the principles that have guided us for two
centuries.175

Of course, Reagan said he "communicate[d] great things...from the heart of our nation," and his
use of Abraham Lincoln to communicate those things disseminated certain ideas over who
Lincoln was and what was important to him. While one may be predisposed to demarcate all of
Reagan's speeches as "anti-intellectual," or "lofty-perorations" that "belied the facts of history,"
in reality not all of what he said should be dismissed. Truly, Reagan's appropriations of Lincoln
exemplified the many different trends that often coincide with Lincoln's appearance in politics.

He sided with some intellectuals as opposed to others in debates over the level of
Lincoln's piety and posited both Lincoln and himself as pious individuals. He, like Lincoln,
elevated the principles in Jefferson's Declaration to Constitutional status and disagreed that it
was a negative influence for America. He also "stole," Lincoln, by misappropriating him, and
even misquoting him at times. Reagan, just as earlier Republicans did during the late 1940s and
50s, attempted to "get right with Lincoln," and reassert his party as the "party of Lincoln."


175 Ronald Reagan, "Farewell Address to the Nation" January 11, 1989. In The American Presidency
Project digital archives. Edited by Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley.
Lincoln's appearance in political discourse during the 1980s is especially useful in studies of historical memory, because it shows just how subjective the term can be. Separate narratives on the legacy of Lincoln existed in the historical consciousness of intellectuals like Harry Jaffa, Melvin E. Bradford, and their followers. Contrary to the belief that all Reagan's rhetoric was anti-intellectual, Reagan too had his own historical consciousness and also disseminated a certain vision of Lincoln to his millions of supporters. This should be recognized as an integral part of the history of Lincoln, especially in how he is interpreted and remembered as well as the history of Reagan.
CHAPTER VI

EPILOGUE

The different appropriations of Lincoln in American political rhetoric did not begin with Reagan or end after he left office. In fact, they have continued into our present political discourse. The phenomena of "getting right by Lincoln" and "Lincoln-theft" still exist, and it seems that they are getting more attention as well. Our present political discourse focusing on "fake-news" and "alternative facts" as well as the ability to source-check almost instantly through the internet have facilitated renewed efforts to identify "Lincoln-theft" the moment it arises. On February 12, 2017, to celebrate Lincoln’s birthday the GOP posted a "Lincoln-quote," on their twitter which read “And in the end, it’s not the years in your life that count, it’s the life in your years.” Re-tweeted by President Donald Trump, Lincoln never actually said the quote. Yet, there was swift blowback, the tweet was deleted within a day, and even historians joined the debate. Lincoln scholar Harold Holzer chastised the quotes attachment to Lincoln, but praised the quick reaction of the media and the public for identifying its dubious origins. Holzer said that, “Fake Lincoln is just as bad as fake news, because this is American scripture, so it’s worth examining and worth applying.” In our modern age, it does not take a scholar like Holzer to


177 Ibid.
identify "Fake-Lincoln," or "Lincoln-theft," and a little research can tell the average person whether their politician is actually, "right with Lincoln."

Republicans are not the only ones who wish to be "right by Lincoln" in our present day political atmosphere either. At the October 9, 2016, presidential debate Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump squared off in St. Louis and attempted to endear themselves and their policies to the millions of Americans watching at home. One of the more contentious moments of the debate came at the midpoint, when debate leader Martha Raddatz asked Clinton:

...Secretary Clinton, purportedly say you need both a public and private position on certain issues...Is it acceptable for a politician to have a private stance on issues?\(^{178}\)

Clinton replied:

Well, right...after having seen the wonderful Steven Spielberg movie called "Lincoln." It was a master class watching President Lincoln get the Congress to approve the 13th Amendment. It was principled, and it was strategic.\(^{179}\)

And I was making the point that it is hard sometimes to get the Congress to do what you want to do and you have to keep working at it. And, yes, [when] President Lincoln was trying to convince some people, he used some arguments, convincing other people, he used other arguments.\(^{180}\)

Trump lambasted her for using Lincoln in that instance saying:

Look, now she's blaming -- she got caught in a total lie. Her papers went out to all her friends at the banks, Goldman Sachs and everybody else...And she lied. Now she's blaming the lie on the late, great Abraham Lincoln. That's one that I haven't...\(^{181}\)

(LAUGHTER)


\(^{179}\) Ibid.

\(^{180}\) Ibid.

\(^{181}\) Ibid.
"OK, Honest Abe, Honest Abe never lied. That's the good thing. That's the big difference between Abraham Lincoln and you. That's a big, big difference. We're talking about some difference."  

This was an almost too perfect example of the struggle for politicians to "get right by Lincoln."

In one instance, Clinton is trying to defend herself by comparing her "pragmatic" approach to politics to Lincoln's. Of course, their situations were absolutely different, one can advance a strong argument that Lincoln had every right to be untruthful at times to end slavery and save the Union. Clinton, by comparison, had no great moral impetus for disguising her agenda depending on her audience. Clinton tried to "get right by Lincoln," while Trump tried to show that she was "wrong by Lincoln." Perhaps there should be a "Lincoln's law" in American political history akin to "Godwin's law," in sociology. A psychoanalytical theory that states two or more American politicians arguing long enough will eventually bring Abraham Lincoln into it.

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182 Ibid.
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