

THE ATTITUDE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
TOWARD THE NEGRO

AN ABSTRACT OF  
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Several different views have been presented regarding attitudes held by Abraham Lincoln toward the Negro. Our sixteenth president has been pictured as a staunch friend of Negroes and also as being indifferent to their plight during his lifetime. His statements and policies have been interpreted so that he might appear as a Messiah to slaves and also anti-Negro on some issues. It is through these historical interpretations and statements made by Lincoln himself that his attitude toward the Negro emerged.

Although he was born in Kentucky, Lincoln's background was basically of anti-slavery orientation. His parents had even changed churches in his early years because one place of worship was too friendly toward slavery to suit Abraham's father Thomas.

Throughout his life Lincoln was against the spread of slavery. He stated this view in the Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858. During these debates he also expressed several ideas about race relations feeling that the Negro should be entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, but that he should not be allowed to serve on juries, or hold elected office. Lincoln felt that the Negro

should be allowed to enjoy the fruits of his labor but that the white man should have the superior position of the two and that there should not be an equality.

During the Civil War the President was very much against the emancipation of slaves and the use of Negroes in the service of the Union. Before the war was to end Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and encouraged the raising of Negro regiments even in such states as Tennessee.

The President greatly favored compensated emancipation. On three separate occasions during 1862 he urged Border State Congressmen to accept various schemes favoring compensated emancipation.

The attitude of Abraham Lincoln toward the Negro can be summed up as follows: 1. Emancipation was to be a gradual process; 2. Both free Negroes and slaves should agree to colonize to a land that was agreeable to both the federal government and the Negro; 3. The Negro should be encouraged to colonize voluntarily and his new home should be in a land other than the United States; 4. If the Negro should choose to remain in America he would have to accept a secondary position and would in all probability not be enfranchised nor would he be likely to attain social status equal to the dominant white class; 5. Whites should have

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the superior position over Negroes but the Negro was to be subject to basic rules of fair play and in order to insure basic rules of fair play for the Negro, the federal government would need to enact certain regulatory measures.

Abraham Lincoln's environment, geographical location and the increasing number of varied political associations affected his early attitudes and subsequent changes in policies. Many of Lincoln's early attitudes were modified. Negroes were allowed and encouraged to serve in the Union forces, and the Emancipation Proclamation was issued, colonization was abandoned, and Negro voting rights in Louisiana were guardedly encouraged by the President. His views changed through association with people who possessed views that differed from his. Political expediency, conscience, and the tremendous burden of the Presidential office also were instrumental in changing many beliefs held by a great man since his early years.