

## LINCOLN, THE AFRICAN-AMERICAN, AND THE FATE OF AMERICA

The second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century saw an important spiritual event influencing humanity: the fall of the spirits of darkness into the human/terrestrial realm following their battle with Michael. This started in the early 1840s and was completed by 1879, the watershed year of the new regency of Michael as time spirit. Among other aspects we can say that previous to that time, and ever since the time of the Fall, the progressive spirits had countered the spirits of darkness wanting to bestow independence to the individual who was not ready for it. This had been countered by the evolutionary spirits through placing the individual within the stream of heredity, within the blood bonds of tribes, nations, and races.

In preparation for the Michael Age, the individual now needs to affirm herself beyond blood ties; she needs to seek her spiritual belonging, no longer the ties of blood. In Steiner's words:

[The year]1841 saw the beginning of the mighty battle of which I have spoken. Then the spirits which are related to those others [the early regressive spirits] descended to join them below. The power of the old rebels, of the continuing stream of spirits of darkness who had their tasks to perform from Lemurian and Atlantean times, is gradually dying down as the powers of their brothers begin to take effect. This means that from the last third of the nineteenth century the situation has been completely reversed. The spirits of light who have been continuing in their activities have done enough where the establishment of blood, tribal, racial and similar bonds is concerned, for everything has its time in evolution. In the general and rightful scheme of things, enough has been done to establish what needed to be established through blood bonds in humanity. In more recent times, therefore, the spirits of light have changed their function. They now inspire human beings to develop independent ideas, feelings and impulses for freedom; they now make it their concern to establish the basis on which people can be independent individuals. And it is gradually becoming the task of the spirits who are related to the old spirits of darkness to work within the blood bonds.<sup>1</sup>

At the eve of the Civil War the matter of old blood ties had reached a fever pitch in the United States. The land that welcomed immigrants from many European nations, and had forced the immigration of Africans to its shores,

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<sup>1</sup> Rudolf Steiner, "The Spirits of Light and the Spirits of Darkness," Dornach, 26 October 1917.

was marked by a hardening of racial barriers. It was threatened by an impassable wall separating one race from the other. The institution of slavery, which had been blotted out from all other parts of the world, was finding a haven, and strengthening itself on American shores. The principle of equality of all human beings, so important to the new Michaelic Age, was threatened to its very core. Suffice to think what its repercussions would have been in a land that later welcomed immigrants from all continents, a land that has become a microcosm of the whole human race. How would that have been possible?

Lincoln's presidency served to repel all solutions that invalidated a Michaelic epilogue. It avoided the formation of a whole free nation alongside another one encoding slavery in all its institutions, which would have sought to expand to its south. It avoided all kinds of hybrid compromises making room for one degree of slavery or another. It returned America to its original impulse that recognized that all human beings are created equal, and extended the meaning of that equality.

To accomplish all of the above Lincoln had to resist centrifugal forces that would have accepted a complete split; those that would have accepted a Union along very compromised principles, and those that wanted to perpetuate the war by treating the South as an occupied nation.

Lincoln achieved an effective mediation between pro-slavery border states and Radicals and every force in between, such as the Democrats seeking all sorts of early and fateful peace compromises. We could call the sixteenth president a radical moderate; radical in ideas, moderate in implementation. Far ahead of his fellow citizens in his views, he never felt he had the authority to impose them for expediency's sake, no matter how justified they could appear in hindsight. He helped and educated the nation to take the next steps only when it was ready. If in the end Lincoln achieved the goals of a Radical, in his demeanor and approach he was all but one. He did not want to import to the political process what is justified in the cultural realm. This highlights the relationship he had with Frederick Douglass. In effect, to someone who had lived slavery in his body, the steps taken by the president may have seemed exasperatingly slow.

When Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, it included a provision which called for the enlistment of black soldiers in the Union Army. Douglass and other black leaders joined the call for volunteers. However, Douglass was sour about the treatment of the black soldiers and the discriminations that they suffered.

On August 1863 he took an overnight train to Washington, and sought an audience with the president the very same day. He had the good luck of meeting Senator Pomeroy, the anti-slavery senator of Kansas, who escorted him to Lincoln. Since Douglass had been critical of the president, he was also a little anxious about his reception. Lincoln treated him quite amiably, putting him at ease. But to the point of the retaliation to the excesses heaped up on

black soldiers in the South, Lincoln could only say that he was not comfortable with such a measure that inflicted a punishment on one person for a crime committed by someone else.

Douglass had to admit that "he saw the tender heart of the man rather than the stern warrior, ... and while I could not agree with him, I could but respect his humane spirit." Lincoln agreed on principle on the idea of equal pay for whites and blacks, and for the promotion of black soldiers that the secretary of war would recommend. Douglass summed up his impressions of the president by saying that he was someone "whom I could love, honor and trust without reserve or doubt." Lincoln returned the compliment stating of Douglass that he was "one of the most meritorious men in America."<sup>2</sup>

After the visit Douglass continued to be critical of Lincoln, in particular about the reticence to give the vote to the blacks now that they had given their lives to the country. When he was invited again to the White House Lincoln was worried about his prospects of reelection and had a plan to bring more slaves across Union lines into freedom. Douglass wanted to charge himself to organize a corps of scouts that would call for slaves to run across Union lines. He would have supplemented this idea by making emancipation the law of the land. Lincoln was enlisting Douglass to help him win the war, and Douglass needed Lincoln to bring a fatal blow to slavery. The abolitionist left the meeting more deeply convinced about Lincoln's moral opposition to slavery. The plan turned out to be unnecessary because of a series of victories of the Union Army, which also helped secure reelection.

Douglass finally threw his full support behind the president for his reelection. When that happened Douglass wanted to congratulate him personally. He joined the celebrations of the inaugural reception at the White House, the first African American to do so. After gaining an audience he so much desired, he congratulated Lincoln about his inaugural speech.

This relationship is worth highlighting. Both Douglass and Lincoln were right from their own perspective; Lincoln in acting as a political figure, Douglass as a cultural/spiritual leader. In his writings Lincoln could inspire as a moral authority; in his position as politician, he was bound to other obligations. He could not act as a Radical, because that would have entailed forgetting his ultimate obligation toward the national compact that bound him to his office: the Constitution. Privately he had all the reasons to approve of Douglass, who could say all that the president couldn't.

Not only does Lincoln's life point to the past of the nation and the past of the Michaelic movement. He also shows the way forward to what America has to become. Echoes of the Civil War lived a hundred years later in the Civil Rights Movement, carrying further Lincoln's unfinished Reconstruction. Lincoln and

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<sup>2</sup> Russell Freedman, *Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass: The Story Behind an American Friendship*, 84–85.

Martin Luther King both lived in a time of revolutionary ferment in the US and in the world. Both worked in the 60s of their century, as Stephen B. Oates points out.<sup>3</sup> The Voting Rights Act outlawing literacy tests and voting restrictions were the result of King's Selma campaign of 1965, one hundred years after the end of the Civil War.

King was an admirer of Lincoln and aware of the parallel themes of Civil War and civil rights. The Emancipation Proclamation went into effect on January 1, 1863, and in 1963 King asked President Kennedy to offer a second Emancipation Proclamation. He later delivered his famous August 28, 1963, "I have a dream" speech at the Lincoln Memorial. King saw a new mission for the African American in introducing a new moral standard in the US and in the world. Like Lincoln, King saw in the US the land where the experiment of the integration of all races could take place. If it failed in America, it would equally fail the world over. King extended the message of Lincoln by seeing the dimension of globalization of world issues, and how America stood at the center of it all for good or for ill.

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<sup>3</sup> Stephen B. Oates, *Builders of the Dream: Abraham Lincoln and Martin Luther King, Jr.*