



Lincoln's Quest for Equality: The Road to Gettysburg

Carl F. Wieck

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The "House Divided" speech helped to win Lincoln the presidency; the Gettysburg Address made him an icon. How did Lincoln come to speak the words that would change a nation? Analyzing the ideas and rhetoric in these two crucial speeches, Carl F. Wieck argues that the radical abolitionist movement exerted a significant influence on Lincoln's thought and moral development.

One of the most famous phrases in the Gettysburg Address—"government of the people, by the people, for the people"—was previously associated with Unitarian minister and radical abolitionist Theodore Parker, and Wieck argues that Lincoln's debt to Parker extends far beyond borrowing these few words. Establishing a clear connection between Lincoln and Parker through their mutual friend and Lincoln's law partner, William Herndon, Wieck traces the similarities between Lincoln's key speeches and the philosophy, rhetoric, logic, and ideas found in writings by Parker and other abolitionists.

Ever the cautious politician, Lincoln sought to hide his intellectual and personal connections to the maligned and unpopular abolitionists. The usefulness of such subterfuge became apparent when, after John Brown's attempt to incite a slave revolt, Lincoln could truthfully state that he had no direct contact with radical abolitionists. In the meantime, Lincoln not only drew from Parker's abolitionist propaganda but also was influenced by Daniel Webster, a fervent nationalist who had advocated compromise over slavery in order to preserve the Union. Combining these seemingly contradictory political traditions, Lincoln created a contested middle position that ultimately brought him to the White House.

Tracing the Great Emancipator's political ideology from the antebellum era and culminating at Gettysburg, *Lincoln's Quest for Equality* sheds new light on the intellectual development of the president who reshaped American political culture.

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