

# What should Lincoln have said in his inaugural address?

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10 years ago, while working on my comprehensive theory of human life, I spent 6-8 months on the cause of the American Civil War. One of the first things that I did was read Lincoln's first inaugural address, which he gave on March 4, 1861, exactly two weeks after the Confederate States had declared their independence from the United States.

I was shocked to discover what Lincoln said. Put simply, he supported slavery and opposed secession. More specifically, Lincoln supported a constitutional amendment to give the states autonomy over their domestic institutions, including slavery, thereby preventing the federal government from interfering with such institutions. Lincoln also argued that secession was both illegal and irrational.

As for Lincoln's position on slavery, I had understood Lincoln as the Great Emancipator, who had famously adapted a metaphor of Jesus, stating that a house divided against itself cannot stand and that, therefore, the United States could not remain half slave and half free.

As for Lincoln's position on secession, in 1776 the American Declaration of Independence had justified secession, and the 13 colonies had implemented it by seceding from their mother country of Great Britain.

That's how my study began.

As I was approaching the end of my study, I decided that the best way to clarify what Lincoln's policy should have been was to write a hypothetical inaugural address whose substance he could have delivered. That is, I wanted to avoid drawing on hindsight. I wanted to base the content of the address on what was known at the time.

For example, the results of the 1860 census were known, revealing that 75% of the families in the slave states owned no slaves. Moral considerations aside, the average family couldn't afford to own a slave, given its high overhead cost. Furthermore, less than 1% of the families were large-scale slaveholders, whose livelihood depended on slavery.

But my most fascinating discovery came in reading Chief Justice Roger Taney's opinion in the infamous Dred Scott ruling of 1857. I was shocked to discover that the most famous quote attributed to Taney is taken out of context and that, when read in context, the quote means exactly the opposite of how it is interpreted out of context. Here's the way that Taney is normally quoted:

***Taney held that blacks were "so far inferior that they had no rights which the white man was bound to respect."***

What Taney actually said is that this was the attitude toward blacks at the founding of the United States. He went on to say that, at the time of the founding, due to the acceptance of slavery, the equality clause of the Declaration of Independence could not have been understood "to embrace the whole human family", but that if the clause were used today (in 1857), it would be understood to embrace the whole human family, thereby including blacks.

I was amazed because Lincoln and other antislavery northerners were known to have excoriated Taney for his Dred Scott opinion. Yet in that opinion, Taney had delivered to northerners a polemic against slavery! Evidently no northern leader had taken care to read the opinion dispassionately so that they could see what it really said.

In preparation for this meeting, I encourage you to take into consideration the foregoing insights as you answer the question:

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For those who have my 2008 book, here are relevant pages: analysis of Taney's famous words, p. 561-562; analysis of the Dred Scott decision, p. 557-564; hypothetical inaugural address, p. 574-582; analysis of Lincoln's real inaugural address, p. 582-588; additional analysis, p. 546-557, 565-574, 588-599. Note that this is a substantially shortened presentation, which, in the unpublished, unabridged version, comprises nearly 200 pages of size 8.5 x 11.