



Abraham Lincoln, Philosopher Statesman

By Joseph R. Fornieri

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What constitutes Lincoln's political greatness as a statesman? As a great leader, he saved the Union, presided over the end of slavery, and helped to pave the way for an interracial democracy. His great speeches provide enduring wisdom about human equality, democracy, free labor, and free society. Joseph R. Fornieri contends that Lincoln's political genius is best understood in terms of a philosophical statesmanship that united greatness of thought and action, one that combined theory and practice. This philosophical statesmanship, Fornieri argues, can best be understood in terms of six dimensions of political leadership: wisdom, prudence, duty, magnanimity, rhetoric, and patriotism. Drawing on insights from history, politics, and philosophy, Fornieri tackles the question of how Lincoln's statesmanship displayed each of these crucial elements.

Providing an accessible framework for understanding Lincoln's statesmanship, this thoughtful study examines the sixteenth president's political leadership in terms of the traditional moral vision of statecraft as understood by epic political philosophers such as Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas. Fornieri contends that Lincoln's character is best understood in terms of Aquinas's understanding of magnanimity or greatness of soul, the crowning virtue of statesmanship. True political greatness, as embodied by Lincoln, involves both humility and sacrificial service for the common good. The enduring wisdom and timeless teachings of these great thinkers, Fornieri shows, can lead to a deeper appreciation of statesmanship and of its embodiment in Abraham Lincoln.

With the great philosophers and books of western civilization as his guide, Fornieri demonstrates the important contribution of normative political philosophy to an understanding of our sixteenth president. Informed by political theory that draws on the classics in revealing the timelessness of Lincoln's example, his interdisciplinary study offers profound insights for anyone interested in the nature of leadership, statesmanship, political philosophy, political ethics, political history, and constitutional law.

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Editorial Review

Review

“In this wonderfully concise work on the politics of Lincoln, Joseph R. Fornieri performs to perfection the task of laying out the lines of Lincoln's politics, not only for his time but also in terms of the seven classical characteristics that make for ‘greatness of soul.’ Put away the treacly little handbooks that promise to deliver Lincoln’s ‘leadership secrets’—here is the real stuff of Lincoln’s statesmanship.”—Allen C. Guelzo, author of *Fateful Lightning: A New History of the Civil War and Reconstruction*

“By bringing the insights of political philosophy to bear on the study of Abraham Lincoln, Fornieri enriches our understanding of what made the sixteenth president not only a great politician but also a great statesman. Rejecting the cynical notion that a seasoned political operator cannot also be a principled idealist, Fornieri shows that what made Lincoln great was that he was both. Clearly written and passionately argued, this is a book from which scholars can learn but that general readers can enjoy.”—James Oakes, author of *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States*

“Viewing Lincoln through the lens of political philosophy, Fornieri convincingly shows how the sixteenth president piloted the ship of state prudently between the Scylla of utopian perfectionism and the Charybdis of mere cynical shrewdness.”—Michael Burlingame, Chancellor Naomi B. Lynn Distinguished Chair in Lincoln Studies, University of Illinois Springfield

About the Author

Joseph R. Fornieri is a professor of political science at the Rochester Institute of Technology and the director of the Center for Statesmanship, Law, and Liberty. He is the author or editor of five books, including *Abraham Lincoln’s Political Faith* and, with Sara Vaughn Gabbard, *Lincoln’s America*.

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