

Essay

## Abraham Lincoln: A House Divided Against Itself Cannot Stand

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### Abstract

America's founding fathers strove to preserve balance while providing for the basic needs and the freedoms of the American people. But the modern era brought unique challenges, where if we are not careful those provisions and freedoms will soon disappear forever. This is because the split dividing political ideologies is like a wedge between qualities that make people virtuous, and this threatens to tear the hearts of America apart. At the same time, it makes America vulnerable to influence from all kinds of unfriendly forces, both abroad and at home. So we need to wake up, because it doesn't matter who did this to us or why. What does matter is living up to our name by finding our unity and becoming the United States of America again. We should heed the warning by Abraham Lincoln: "A house divided against itself cannot stand."

**Keywords:** American people, society, united, Abraham Lincoln.

In today's world, people are faced with choices and decisions that characterize them within the social hierarchy. It is innocuous enough at first, but our likes and dislikes our strengths and our weaknesses are catalogued by others over time to determine our personality type and abilities or proficiencies. Society is fierce in its efforts to pigeonhole people too, and it guides them away from being a polymath or Renaissance person – even though such people are sorely needed. Instead, it forces us to choose well-defined jobs or professions where people are already needed and employed. But beyond this, we are pegged in every manner possible, every time we choose things or people to seek out, and what or whom we are better off avoiding. People identify with their choices too, especially after making similar decisions in a variety of settings. So over time, patterns of behavior get locked in, and become a part of our personality or personal affect. People tend to develop habit patterns within their decision making, which determine the character of a person, as well as guiding the outcomes of their actions or interactions. However, this doesn't absolve us from taking on a wide range of roles, when the situation we face demands it. We might be uncomfortable to be humble in one situation or demanding and decisive in another, but taking appropriate action in a crisis forces us to leave concerns of personal comfort aside.

We know sometimes our preferences won't matter anyway, because we must do difficult things that we don't like or would avoid. Unpleasant jobs abound, and in some cases that is why people

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get paid to do them. But even the most privileged must, on occasion, do difficult, unpleasant, or even abhorrent things – at some times in their life. The burdens of life come regardless of our station, so it is wise to remember that we are all burdened by the challenges of life – instead of thinking some can evade them – because we all need to take a stand somewhere, and then live with the consequences. Every choice we make, whenever we must choose, contributes to our patterns of behavior over time. And everyone develops patterns of behavior. But once it happens, they are visible from the outside and get interpreted by others based upon their experiences in (what they imagine are) similar circumstances and what they might want or do, in our situation. Our real conditions often get overlooked, when we are evaluated, so there is a misattribution of motives to our actions, because others don't have a clear view of what the actual range of our choices is. Instead, our actions are judged by the choices others think we have, or believe everyone has, rather than on how well we chose among the options we had available, or knew about. Interpretation of actions and motivations based on common beliefs happened in ancient times, as did using personal information and profiling to influence and control people. But adding computers to the mix makes things even more complicated.

Social media and data mining have created a world where our preferences drive the actions and decisions of others, more and more each day. While social media gives people a platform to express their identity and choices about things, and increases their impact like handing them a microphone or putting them on TV, it is also a tool for media companies and advertisers to collect information about individuals and their personal preferences – for later use – despite any disclaimers to the contrary. And of course, once the means to collect and sort this information comes online, you can't stop or prevent any portion of it from being used for different purposes from those intended by the platform's creators and approved by the user. This was covered extensively in the Tech journals years ago, so it doesn't surprise me that an app willingly installed by thousands of Facebook users harvested their personal preference data, and was used to influence the outcome of a Presidential election. But now that this story is out, people have begun to suspect how broad sharing of personal likes and dislikes results in them being targeted or controlled – as well as providing for them more of the things they already like, or would prefer to see more of and know more about. People found out that they are already being targeted and controlled, or have been played – perhaps many times over. I'm sure this incident is only the tip of a very large iceberg, however. There are likely hundreds of apps, installed by thousands, which still silently harvest data that someone stores and analyzes.

The big news is a story that is not being told though. People in positions of influence have always used analysis and profiling to cement their power, by choosing helpers who support their agenda – as well as being qualified. The tactic of 'divide and conquer' is used by folks in charge

(our leaders and the elites), to break larger goals down into functions that can be delegated and tasks that can be completed by specialists or trainees. But it is also used to break populations into specialized groups that can be managed, to serve the needs of leaders and organizations. If each person has a well-defined skill set and ideals, they can easily be managed to do what is needed, but the power of individuals to shape the process is diminished. This limits the damage some might cause, but also limits their ability to do good by improving how things get done. A greater danger is that restrictive roles take a toll on capable people, who are worthy of better treatment. Being marginalized for too long, or forced to deal in a standard way with conditions where standard procedures don't work, can cause people to feel and behave like cornered animals – guarding fiercely against threats to who they are. To a degree, or in our political views and philosophy, we choose and defend our own corner. But with some vigor, society compels us to choose things to identify with, and then pits us against others whose beliefs differ, almost automatically. There is a real danger when people feel trapped by others' opinions of who they are and pinned down by their assessments, though, because this can have unpredictable results.

However, the ideological rift this sifting process has created brings a danger to society that is immeasurable. The ancient Greeks knew that any virtue is the product of two vices, or qualities to be avoided, one a defect and the other an excess. Courage is a virtue that emerges poised between timidity and foolhardiness, and other virtuous qualities are seen to arise similarly. But fragmented views ignore the pediment of virtue, which rests like the arch on two pillars – rising higher than either. Therefore the 'divide and conquer' strategy that has so neatly separated us, by forcing us to make unreal choices, now threatens to unravel the very fabric of our society. The Democrats and Republicans here in America are so far apart ideologically that both parties are threatened by the root or core beliefs of the opposing party – to their way of understanding – and so they spend an inordinate amount of time and effort trying to thwart the opposition, when there is real work to do instead. The original culprit may have been efforts by the elites to divide us, in the name of specialization, so we could be more easily controlled. But now the same infrastructure has been hijacked by unfriendly forces in distant lands to control us and drive us further apart. There is considerable evidence that hackers and bloggers in Russia used Facebook and other social media platforms in this way by spreading targeted messages designed to sow suspicion and mistrust over the activities of each individual's opposition party, which are thought to have influenced recent elections. So now that we are aware of being profiled, we must learn how to free ourselves from targeted influences that attempt to control us and limit our power.

Having a role in society is essential to survival, for most of us. There is no life or livelihood without making choices about what kind of work to do. One can no longer live the life of a hunter-gatherer, in most parts of the world. And most couldn't survive by working a farm or

living out in the wild, even if they had the chance. So people need to work for another person or an organization made of people, to survive and prosper. Those entities need to see you as valuable and helpful to their cause, to pay you for your time, and they will pay you only as much as they think your abilities are worth. Even those who don't need to work for a living need a well-defined role within their community, or in society, to be accepted among their peers. This makes things especially difficult, when you are an outcast, or when you are labeled as worthless to the community you are trying to survive in. It is easy to see how the perceived futility of any action to better their situation leaves some people feeling hemmed in by their own identity as well as their circumstances – to the extent they behave like cornered animals. If a person has a great enough sense of futility, the reasons for restraint fall apart and they will lash out violently at those who are perceived as responsible for their being harshly judged. The shooters at Columbine High School, and many others who have acted similarly since then, were almost certainly feeling powerless and devoid of significant meaning to their life apart from their violent acts. And a sense of futility fueled the violence. While historically, such violent acts were carried out against leaders of government or business, we now see a far greater number where people are lashing out at everyday folks perceived as helping society to box them in – however peripherally.

Non-violent forms of protest or redress of grievances require a greater amount of self-restraint than people with meaningless lives can muster. This is not to say that anyone's life is in fact without meaning. But if a person is made to feel that way, or if they are told and shown forcefully that attempts at bettering their circumstances are futile, this takes away the one factor preventing them from acting out with hatred and violence. Of course, this is exacerbated by the many messages that violence is OK, from the Movies and TV shows, from Video games, and even from political candidates. While we may imagine that the main threat is terrorists from overseas, we promote a culture of violence here in America that is spreading worldwide. And we know there are a lot of people in the USA who have bouts of depression, or battle with feelings of futility because they were told they are worthless. Without some sense of self-worth during difficult times, people will feel cornered by their own identity, and their limitations, as well as by the circumstances they find themselves in. But finding the right kind of help can be difficult. In America, it is often easier to obtain a gun and permit than it is to obtain help with psychological or psychiatric problems. And many at-risk people don't want the additional stigma of being labeled a mental aberrant. So while profiling helps to identify some individuals before they become a danger to themselves and others, it is part of the problem's cause by making people feel cornered. Therefore when we also promote unrest at home and abroad, by encouraging open disrespect of people with opposing political views or a differing background, this is a volatile combination indeed.

The idea that people can be divided into types or categories has a long history, which I will not try to recap. But there are many ways one can split people up by their attributes, proclivities, and choices. We can speak of good and evil people, rich and poor people, smart and stupid people, strong and weak people, winners and losers, givers and takers, and so on. But it is seen that one can arrange some types like the points of a compass or medicine wheel. One need not look farther than the Pop music of the '80s to find a meaningful example of this division by types. The 1983 song "Sweet Dreams" by the Eurythmics suggests that we are all looking for something, and then describes four types of people by enumerating categories of things people look for.

*Sweet dreams are made of this.  
Who am I to disagree?  
I travel the world  
and the seven seas,  
Everybody's looking for something.  
Some of them want to use you.  
Some of them want to get used by you.  
Some of them want to abuse you.  
Some of them want to be abused.  
- Anne Lennox and Dave Stewart -*

It appears true that everybody is looking for something in life. This song tells us that some people are users or abusers while others want to be used or abused instead. While it's obvious there are people in the world who exemplify all of these orientations, it makes us uncomfortable to imagine or admit that we behave that way ourselves. We can imagine if we want that we are like this but not like that, when we see an array of opposites. And of course, you can turn each statement around, saying some people only want to help or be helped, and to heal or be healed by us, as a way to disprove the song lyric. Unfortunately, while we might like to avoid being a victimizer or victim entirely, it is not easy. It is almost impossible to completely refrain from using or abusing other individuals, while neither getting used nor abused – over the course of most people's lives.

Therefore, we must deal with these uncomfortable aspects of the human psyche, whether we like it or not, and whether or not we identify with these qualities. If we need the help of other people, it is perhaps essential to use them on some level, but we might want to draw the line at being abusive. However we also need to be used by others, to make a gainful living in modern society, but we would prefer not to be abused. So again, when faced with a range of choices or conditions, some choices are more comfortable than others, but we might be forced to do uncomfortable

things in an emergency, or by other people. The same issues arise if you are attempting to take charge of your own life, because doing so pits the individual against society in some measure. This idea is explicitly represented in the works of Carlos Castaneda, where the path of the warrior demands that a person takes honing his or her personality as their prime responsibility, and takes society as a world of folly that the individual must skillfully navigate through – or be ensnared. It is explained in “The Power of Silence” that we should persistently stalk ourselves, in order to efficiently eliminate alities of the ego that would prevent our freedom. This is greatly similar to some Buddhist mindfulness exercises designed to cut through the illusions in life, by making us aware of how our own behavior either fights or facilitates our ensnarement. The work of Castaneda, as explained in the words of his mentor Don Juan Matus, describes four moods of stalking that a warrior uses to hone their identity and navigate through society’s folly.

A similar idea is employed in method acting, where one must actively acknowledge that the people around you are obliged to wear masks in order to function in society, which they have forgotten they are wearing, but which you as an actor can learn to wear. However, it is more than just putting on a different face, as one adopts the posture and physiology of the person one is looking to become. In Castaneda’s work, it is used as a technique for freeing ourselves from the ravages of society’s craziness. Don Juan teaches Castaneda that changing our self-perception can alter our place in the world, but to do so we must learn all the quirks of our own disguise, and how to adopt a new persona at will. To this end, the warrior’s path requires that we be ruthless, cunning, patient and sweet – with ourselves – and that each quality is tempered by its opposite compass point as follows.

*Ruthlessness should not be harshness,  
Cunning should not be cruelty,  
Patience should not be negligence, and  
Sweetness should not be foolishness.*

- Carlos Castaneda -

In this instance, patience tempers ruthlessness, and sweetness tempers cunning, in some measure. This is similar to the lesson from Classical Greece, where complementary qualities are tempered by each other – or we emphasize the ills instead of the virtues. Unfortunately, that is the situation here in America, where the ideological split between the Democrats and the Republicans has brought out all the negative qualities cited above

The current day political parties in the USA caricature the ideals held by those same parties in my childhood. So it is not surprising that some people who had a strong party affiliation have left their party or taken an independent stance, in recent days. But the biblical reference invoked by

Abraham Lincoln applies all too well today, “a house divided against itself cannot stand.” So the opposites must be united in us. Courage is neither foolhardiness nor timidity, but it is informed by knowing what it means to be foolhardy and timid. If we truly understand courage, it is because we have been too timid to fight on some occasions and too eager to jump into the fray or engage an argument on others. If a nation can have virtue, it is possible only by bridging the gap between the opposing philosophies to build the pediment of virtue. But we must realize the profound importance of seeing through society’s illusions, however compelling they might be, and of learning how to assume or create a better identity for ourselves. Specifically, to be in control of our own lives, we need to see some of the choices before us as unreal or half-true answers which we must learn to balance with tempering qualities. But American politics is divided in a way that leaves those tempering qualities out of the picture and ignores the middle ground, in favor of extreme positions taken to guard against the ills of the opposition. So we have the Republicans guarding against the perceived negligence and foolishness of the Democrats, and the Democrats guarding against harshness and cruelty by the Republicans, where nobody dares to take a balanced view – which is what we need to solve today’s problems.

We may teach that patience is a virtue, but it is virtuous only if being patient means waiting until the proper time to act, and then taking action. One can board a train only after it has arrived, so one needs to be patient until then, but it will leave without you if you are not on the platform ready to step forward when the doors open. So patience alone won’t get you where you want to go. In recent years, the value of ruthlessness as a virtue has been highlighted in Business, as useful to cultivate for career advancement. But this carries with it some heavy baggage unless tempered to avoid harshness. Of course, we all need to learn how to be decisive and assertive, in order to survive. Taking action will get things done, while being passive will not. But that doesn’t mean we need to cut the opposition down, to rise above them. That notion is heard often today but it is dangerous. When one political party extols ruthlessness and cunning, without realizing it is harsh and cruel, while the other party extols patience and sweetness, without realizing they are being negligent and foolish, it creates an unsound ideological basis for both parties. But more frighteningly, it dilutes the power of either party to do good. Our government does a poor job of serving the American people today, because the parties are too busy fighting each other.

What is needed instead is to understand that a sound ideological basis requires a more balanced view that values the ideas of the opposition, and acts as though their cooperation is important, when the ultimate goal is to get things done. If we fail to act in a manner that helps knit opposing views together, we are dooming ourselves and this country by putting false values above the need to make things work. Perhaps we were forced into a corner by efforts of others who would separate us. But we don’t need to stay in our corner, if we want to stand up for what is real and

true. While the pundits may feel that one party's view is valid while the other is flawed, they earn a living by playing to the preferences of one or the other. There are no political pundits who preach the need for unity and the commonwealth these days. But we need a whole class of such people, to have a hope of overturning the hegemony in today's political machines. The elites are still controlling the people by forcing us into corners of our own design, and hoping to keep us separated for fear we would find too much in common with our peers otherwise. However, the corners we find ourselves in are too real for us to forget those qualities that define us. Though we need to find common ground and apply a balanced philosophy, and while we know that there is profiling going on by others trying to put us into a corner, we can still celebrate our individuality and enjoy the diverse range of types and beliefs we see around us.

America's founding fathers strove to preserve balance while providing for the basic needs and the freedoms of the American people. But the modern era brought unique challenges, where if we are not careful those provisions and freedoms will soon disappear forever. This is because the split dividing political ideologies is like a wedge between qualities that make people virtuous, and this threatens to tear the hearts of America apart. At the same time, it makes America vulnerable to influence from all kinds of unfriendly forces, both abroad and at home. So we need to wake up, because it doesn't matter who did this to us or why. What does matter is living up to our name by finding our unity and becoming the United States of America again. Both political parties seem more intent on dividing up the nation and its people, than they are in creating unity of offering a unifying vision. If our great nation is being torn apart by leaders who are promising to restore its greatness, or who only want to undo their predecessor's work, then we the people need to rise above the divisive rhetoric and insist that our leaders behave like adults. Even if our leaders can't see past the need to keep up the 'good fight,' and be a 'loyal opposition' for those across the aisle; many people in America wish they could spend more time governing and less time arguing about what are rightly philosophical issues. When our leaders feel like cornered animals themselves; it is no wonder they often behave like adolescents. But if they can't see the benefits of doing the right thing as more important than keeping to the values of their party, we need to replace them with leaders who are more sensible and adult.