ism provided the legal basis for the single most revolutionary moment in the political history of the United States: the liberation of four million enslaved Americans.

It is therefore crucial to understand how, over the course of his career, Abraham Lincoln came to endorse the same basic principles of antislavery constitutionalism embraced by most abolitionists. He denied that the Constitution protected slavery as a right of property. He claimed that all slaves brought into the territories were presumptively free. Slaves who stepped beyond the borders of a slave state were thereby entitled to the rights of due process, the privileges and immunities of citizens, and the right against arbitrary seizure. In 1860 the platform on which Lincoln was elected president went far beyond claiming that Congress should ban slavery in the territories; it denied that Congress could constitutionally allow a territorial legislature to legalize slavery. That same platform rehearsed the most vital precept of antislavery constitutionalism—that the egalitarian principles of the Declaration of Independence were “embodied” in the US Constitution. For Lincoln, who repeatedly claimed that the promise of fundamental human equality was flatly incompatible with slavery, the conclusion was inescapable: Despite a couple of carefully delimited rights guaranteed to the slaveholders, the Constitution itself was an antislavery document. In the phraseology of his day, the Constitution made freedom the rule and slavery the exception.

Having adopted the major precepts of antislavery constitutionalism, it is hardly surprising that Lincoln would also embrace the various policies specified in the Antislavery Project—a project first enunciated by abolitionists in