Write a 750-word essay on the following topic. Your essay is due in CLA 251 by 4 PM on FRIDAY March 5. Please include a title (not on a separate page), single space, and use both sides of a single sheet of paper. Also, please include a word count.

Did Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address “remake” America? Wills, using the great man theory of history, argues that it did. The four political scientists we read (Orren, Skowronek, King, and Smith) would say no. Which side has the better view?

Be sure to use direct quotations from the reading to bolster your argument and to cite the page number in parentheses after the quotation. Finally, be sure to include at least one claim-objection-rejoinder sequence.

Although it may not be directly obvious, which unit of analysis we use to assess American political development matters. The assessment changes if we take the great man (e.g., Lincoln) or the political order (e.g., the egalitarian political order known as Reconstruction) as the independent variable (see King and Smith 76). Both approaches we study, Wills’ focus on the great man and the American Political Development (APD) subfield focus on durable shifts in authority through political orders, offer perspective on how American politics develops. Gary Wills is able to show how several key traditions are channeled and synthesized by Lincoln in the Gettysburg Address. Emphasizing above all the tradition of Transcendentalism, Wills is able to argue that the use of the Declaration of Independence by Lincoln—i.e., his use of the proposition “all men are created equal” in the Address—remakes a nation made in the first place by dedication to that proposition.

There is a weighty issue hovering behind the choice of different units. Wills’ approach suggests that American political development does indeed have a direction because Lincoln was able to reassert the original liberal order to trump (at least verbally) the ascriptive order that developed under “the Slave Power.” Lincoln’s intervention thus provides evidence for the claim that American politics moves in a liberal direction over time. But by focusing on political orders, the article by Orren and Skowronek suggests that movement in the liberal direction in the case of Reconstruction is more “fragmented …[and] uneven” (143) than Wills’ focus on Lincoln suggests. King and Smith go so far as to doubt that the durable shifts are always liberal since they argue that the ascriptive tradition—the “hierarchical order of white supremacy” (77) founded the country and often trumped—as it did in the case of Reconstruction. The liberal tradition—the “transformative egalitarian order” (77)—thus can and has been reversed. There is no discernable priority for the liberal tradition, nor a discernable movement in the liberal direction over time.