Lincoln Lore

August, 1986

Bulletin of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum. Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor.
Ruth E. Cook, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the
Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

Number 1770

SOME FRENCH VIEWS OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL WAR

The question of French popular opinion on the American Civil War remains largely unanswered. The fundamental problem is the lack of substantial evidence from reliable sources. Napoleon III's government was so repressive that the modern historian sometimes feels he has access only to the most extreme opinions: those of the government itself and those of its most daring critics. Such an appraisal exaggerates the problem of historical sources, of course, for no nineteenth-century state was bureaucratically efficient enough to be truly ruthless, as twentieth-century nations can be. But there is surely a kernel of truth in it.

Working-class opinion, for example, seems wholly inaccessible. The Second Empire, as the government of Napoleon Bonaparte's nephew was called, outlawed strikes and workers' coalitions until 1864, forbade unauthorized meetings of more than 20 people, as well as marches and public demonstrations, and declared trade unions illegal. There were no workers' newspapers. Illiteracy and lack of organization constituted serious problems of the working class — especially outside Paris. It is little wonder, then, that we know so little of French popular opinion on the American Civil War, and Thomas A. Sancton's "The Myth of French Worker Support for the North in the American Civil War," *French Historical Studies*, XI (Spring 1979) is most convincing when it stresses this agnostic conclusion.

Historians have done the best they could by looking at official diplomatic documents, *bourgeois* newspapers, and reports on public opinion supplied the government in Paris by local political appointees. Perhaps the most reliable conclusion arrived at by examining these sources is that the American Civil War seemed rather remote and primitive to Frenchmen. With the curious exception of Abraham Lincoln's assassination, which had a dramatic and well-documented impact on the French popular imagination, it seems entirely possible that most Frenchmen rarely thought about the events in the great conflict across the Atlantic.

A curiously unexamined source for this question is the political cartoon. A half-dozen of these, removed from French illustrated newspapers of the day, have recently come into the collections of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum, and examining them for cataloguing has prompted this *Lincoln Lore* issue. All of the cartoons were clipped from *Le Charivari*, probably the most famous of French satirical periodicals in this period. Students of the American Civil War, who are likely to be more familiar with the sources of English satirical drawings in this period, may recall that London's *Punch* was officially titled *Punch, or the London Charivari.*

James A. Leith's ground-breaking article on French cartoons in the 1870s, "The War of Images surrounding the Commune," in the book he edited called *Images of the Commune* (Montreal, Canada: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978), characterizes *Le Charivari* as a "right-wing" publication. More than anything else, that factor may explain the view expressed in these cartoons, as indeed it probably explains how they could be published in the first place. Censorship presumably eliminated any left-wing cartoons.

Nevertheless, their content is interesting and intriguing, too, because such pictures, dependent for their meaning on only a few words expressed in a caption, had potentially a broader reach than even the most sententious political pamphlet or book. Whatever the precise demographic reach of these French cartoons, the cartoonists operated in a much different environment from what American cartoonists were used to. Censorship and the threat of government prosecution shaped their art, as the lack of mass political parties shaped their audience. And yet, there were similarities too. Nineteenth-century French caricature has a high reputation among modern historians of the subject and it is sometimes contrasted with the rather backward qualities of American cartoons from Lincoln's era, but the cartoons in this *Lincoln Lore* are not markedly different from their counterparts in the New World. They are better drawn perhaps, but their format is much the same as the cartoons which appeared in New York's illustrated newspapers.

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

The French cartoon on the cover of this *Lincoln Lore*, is no doubt familiar to readers of Donaldson Jordan and Edwin J. Pratt's *Europe and the American Civil War* (Boston, Houghton Mifflin, 1931), where it is reproduced. It appeared originally in the October 13, 1865, issue of *Le Charivari*, and nicely summed up some of the principal themes of French

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

cartoon comment on the American Civil War.

The European gentleman asks, "Well, are you succeeding in patching them together?" America replies "They're a bit knocked about, but the pieces are sound." The emphasis on the destruction caused by the war was consistent with most of the French cartoons on the subject I have seen. And the feathered savage symbolizing the country in the New World echoed a theme present in another cartoon reproduced in Donaldson and Pratt and suggests the primitive remoteness of the contest to most Frenchmen. The other cartoon, not reproduced here, depicts an Indian acting as mediator between Northerner and Southerner and saying to them, "Gentlemen, please — put some ceremony into it. We don't butcher each other that way." The savage looks quite savage indeed, with a large ring thorugh his nose, tattoos, and an exaggerated feather headdress. Many Frenchmen were clearly ready to believe in the savagery of a military contest even among white people in the New World.

The Indian cartoon illustrated here may make clear as well a theme not so graphically present in other French cartoons about the Civil War but present in them nevertheless: the essential unity of the American nation. America here, at any rate, is a motherly figure putting her comically destructive puppets back together from their still sound parts, only temporarily and not fatally separated by their ridiculous Punch-and-Judy-show bashing. America's conflict may have been silly and primitive, but America *was* a country.

Aside from the image of the Indian, French cartoonists, as we can tell from this cartoon as well, had ready to hand a fairly standard symbol of the American. It was a figure not far removed from British caricature's Brother Jonathan, a tall, lean, lanky Yankee sometimes (though not in this particular cartoon) dressed in pants striped like the American flag. Curiously enough, since Frenchmen regarded the United States as a young country, the figure was old, depicted usually with a long white goatee and long, stringy white hair. The French cartoon Yankee lacked some of the dignity of the British cartoon Yankee. He appears somehow a little less civilized than even his British-made counterpart in caricature.

Looking back at cartoons published before this one, before the outcome of the Civil War was certain, one finds mainly themes of exhaustion, futility, senseless slaughter, and comic violence. In "Choeur des deux Ameriques" ("The Chorus of the Two Americas"), one exhausted combatant says to the other, "Say, why don't we profit from the fact that all eyes are turned toward Italy and rest a little?" The success of Italian nationalism coincided almost exactly with the failure of American nationalism in 1861, but the European crisis referred to here, apparently, stemmed from the Franco-Italian Convention of 1864. By that agreement France pledged to remove in two years the French soldiers guarding the papal states. The Pope could raise his own forces in the meantime, and ultimately Italy's King Victor Emmanuel would guarantee Rome's security from attack by republicans like Giuseppi Garibaldi. Astute observers saw in the plan the eventual evolution of Rome into the capital of Italy, but for now the Italian government voted to move the capital from Turin to Florence.

Exhaustion of human resources in America was the theme of "The Last Resources of the Two Americas." The North, propping up an old man with a rifle in his hand, says, "Excuse my new recruit, but it's all that is left to me." The South, with an infant in a dress, replies, "Here is my last volunteer, but he is still very presentable."

"A Vicious Circle" pointed to the futility of the 1862 military campaigns in America. The two antagonists circle each other in a well-worn path around Washington and Richmond. The Americans are notable for their somewhat exotic weaponry: both carry multiple-barreled pistols. And both wear trousers that are tattered at the cuffs. Northern cartoonists frequently depicted Southerners that way as a comment on the backwardness of the Confederate economy, but here the French artist depicts Southerner and Northerner alike in their poverty and threadbare exhaustion.

The presence of the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac* in the cartoon discussed above reminds us that Europeans naturally placed a heavy emphasis on the naval aspects of the American Civil

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

UN CERCLE VICIEUX

— Bon ! nous voilà revenus au même point qu'au commencement !

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

War, the part most likely to affect Europeans directly. In a well-drawn cartoon, a Confederate sea captain asks a European, "Do you want to visit my ironclad ship?" "Much obliged!" replies the top-hatted visitor, "It has perhaps, like the Merrimac, a bump for suicide, and this mania is liable to seize it while I am inside! Thanks!!" A "bump" was a penchant or aptitude, and the idea came from phrenology, a pseudo-science which explained aptitudes or destiny by the configuration of the head. The *Merrimac* (or *Virginia*, as she was actually rechristened by the Confederate Navy) had been scuttled by the Confederates on May 9, 1862, when the fall of Norfolk left her isolated and unable to withdraw on the shallow James River.

From the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum

"The rudest projectile yet received by the South" was perhaps the most astute of the cartoons discussed in this article. The reelection of President Lincoln was a hard blow for the South, whether Jefferson Davis knew it or not, and to be able to realize that while observing the war from Paris was no mean feat.

Nor, if one stops to think about it, does the message of this cartoon or some of the others discussed here fit perfectly with the common idea of French opinion on the American Civil War. The overall message of futility, senselessness, and exhaustion would, it is true, fit well the idea that France should intervene somehow to stop the war. But this view gave an evenhandedness to French cartoons that may have stemmed as well from a genuine emotional indifference to the outcome of this remote and rather primitive contest. Certainly, the French cartoonists, even the right-wing ones like "Cham," did little to glorify the South. By ignoring slavery in these cartoons, they may have improved the Southern image, hurt the North, and helped suggest a lack of any great principles at issue in the war — a key to making mediation to stop the war seem humanitarian and moral. But one can find considerable ridicule of the South in French cartoons as well, from the "suicidal" *Merrimac* to the soldier bowled over by the shot from Lincoln's reelection mortar. Southerners do not appear noble or aristocratic in these cartoons; they do not seem like underdogs or the oppressed. They are at least as foolish as the Yankees.

Moreover by making the Northerner and Southerner just alike in their shabby, lanky, bearded, and long-haired appearance, the cartoonists failed to endorse Southern nationalism or cultural distinctiveness. A brother's war seems senseless in a way but only if one assumes that the two brothers belong under the same roof in family harmony. Curiously enough, the French cartoonists apparently assumed this and thus assumed that Jefferson Davis' experiment in Southern independence was wrongheaded. The tacit message of these cartoons seems to endorse the nationalism of the Lincoln administration.

Le plus rude projectile qu'ait encore reçu le Sud !

CUMULATIVE BIBLIOGRAPHY, 1985

by Ruth E. Cook

1985

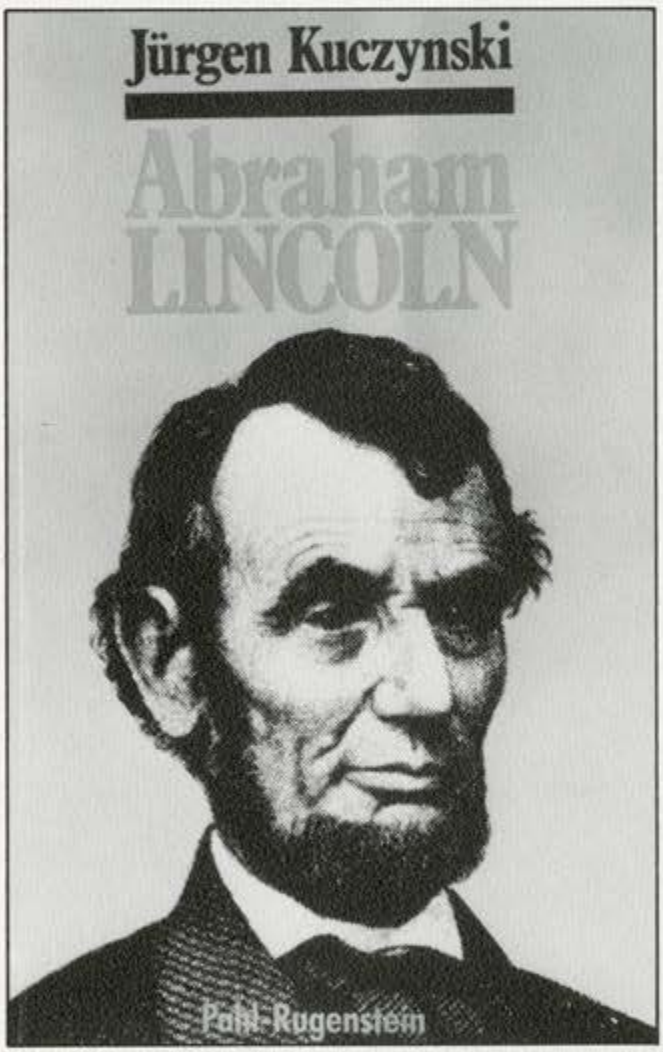
ABRAHAM LINCOLN ASSOCIATION 1985-11

Papers/of the/Abraham Lincoln/Association/Index/Volumes I-VI/1979-1984/Abraham Lincoln Association/Springfield, Illinois/1985/

Pamphlet, paper, 9" x 6", 34 (4) pp.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN ASSOCIATION 1985-12

Papers of the Abraham Lincoln/Association/Volume VII 1985/Lincoln and American Writers/By Roy Prentice Basler/Lincoln's Presidential Example in Dealing/With the Military/By Herman Hattaway/The Use and Misuse of the Lincoln Legacy/By John Hope Franklin/Lincolniana in 1985/By Frank J. Williams/Abraham Lincoln Association/1985/Marilyn Huff Immel Editor/Pamphlet, paper, 9" x 6", 79 (6) pp., illus. Yearly membership dues include a subscription to this yearly publication. Requests for information should be sent to Olive S. Foster, Secretary, Abraham Lincoln Assoc., Old State Capitol, Springfield, IL 62706.



BROWN UNIVERSITY 1985-13

Books At Brown/Volumes XXXI-XXXII/1984-1985/Lincoln/And/Lincolniana/The Friends/Of The Library/Of Brown University/Providence, Rhode Island/[Copyright 1985 Brown University]

Book, paper, 9" x 6", xiv p., 126 (4) pp., illus. Requests for information should be sent to the Friends of the Library, Box A, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912.

KOCH, FREDA POSTLE 1985-14

Colonel Coggeshall — /The Man Who/Saved/Lincoln/Freda Postle Koch/(Coggeshall coat-of-arms)/PoKo Press/P.O. Box 14766/Columbus, Ohio 43214/(Device)/[1985]

Book, paper, 9" x 6", 261 (9) pp., illus., price, $8.95. Requests for information should be sent to Poko Press, P.O. Box 14766, Columbus, OH 43214.

KUCZYNSKI, JURGEN 1985-15

Jurgen Kuczynski/Abraham Lincoln/Eine Biographie/Mit 30 Abbildungen/Pahl-Rugenstein/[Copyright 1985 by Akademie-Verlag, Berlin]

Book, paper, 7 1/2" x 4 5/8", 183 (6) pp., illus., contents in German. Request for information should be sent to Adler's Foreign Book, Inc., 915 Foster St., Evanston, IL 60201.

LEE, JENNIFER B. 1985-16

Resources for the Study of/Abraham Lincoln/at Brown University/(Caption title)/[Offprint from *Books at Brown*, Vol. XXXI-XXXii, 1984-1985]

Pamphlet, paper, 9" x 6", 36 (3) pp., illus. Request for information should be sent to the Friends of the Library, Box A, Brown University, Providence, RI 02912.

LINCOLN COLLEGE 1985-17

Lincoln/Newsletter/(Device)/Volume V, Number 4 Lincoln, Ill. Spring, 1985/(Cover title)/

Pamphlet, paper, 11" x 8 1/2", (12) pp., illus. Requests for information should be sent to Lincoln College, Lincoln, IL 62656.

LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY 1985-18

Lincoln Memorial University Press/(Device)/Spring 1985/Vol. 87, No. 1/Lincoln Herald/A Magazine devoted to historical research in the field of Lincolniana and/the Civil War, and to the promotion/of Lincoln Ideals in American/Education./[Harrogate, Tenn.]

Pamphlet, flexible boards, 10 1/8" x 7 1/8", 1-32 pp., illus., price per single issue, $5.00.

LINCOLN MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY 1985-19

Lincoln Memorial University Press/(Device)/Summer 1985/Vol. 87, No. 2/Lincoln Herald/A Magazine devoted to historical research in the field of Lincolniana and/the Civil War, and to the promotion/of Lincoln Ideals in American/Education./[Harrogate, Tenn.]

Pamphlet, flexible boards, 10 1/8" x 7 1/8", 33-64 pp., illus., price per single issue, $5.00

[LINCOLN SAVINGS BANK] 1985-20

Lincoln Savings Bank/(Photograph, Daniel French statue)/120th Anniversary 1866-1986/(Cover title)/

Calendar, paper, 8 1/2" x 11", (26) pp., illus. Every month carries pictures of Abraham Lincoln and has information regarding him. Requests for information should be sent to the Lincoln Savings Bank, 200 Park Avenue, New York, NY 10166.

SUPPIGER, JOSEPH E. 1985-21

The/Intimate/Lincoln/Joseph E. Suppiger/University/Press of/America/(Device)/Lanham • New York • London./[Copyright 1985]

Book, paper, 8 1/4" x 5 1/4", vii p., 259 pp., price, $12.75. Requests for information should be sent to the University Press of America, Inc., 4720 Boston Way, Lanham, MD 20706-9990.

SWANN GALLERIES, INC. 1985-22

Public Auction Sale Number 1373/Abraham Lincoln/and his contemporaries/(Silhouette)/Thursday, May 23, 1985/. . . /Park I-Books & Autographs/. . . /Part IV-Ephemera/. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /. . . /

Book, paper, 9 1/2" x 6 1/2", (88) pp., illus., price, $10.00. Requests for information should be sent to Swann Galleries, Inc., 104 E. 25 Street, New York, NY 10010.

[TREASURES . . . TOKYO LINCOLN CENTER] 1985-23

Treasures/of the/Tokyo Lincoln Center/(Photograph)/Kodama Memorial Library/Meisei University/Tokyo Japan/(Cover title)/[1985]

Pamphlet, paper, 10 1/8" x 7 1/8", 28 (5) pp., illus. Text in English and Japanese.