

Lincoln Lore

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Table of Contents

The Disputed Parentage of Nancy Hanks Lincoln by John D. Beatty	2
<i>The Emancipation Proclamation: Three Views</i> Reviewed by Lucas Morel	9
<i>Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words</i> Reviewed by Joseph R. Fornieri	12
Abraham Lincoln and the Conservative Tradition in American Politics by Herman Belz	14
A Synopsis of Two Recent Books by James O. and Lois E. Horton	17
2006-2007 Sponsors	19
2006-2007 Corporate Members	20

Lincoln Lore

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THE LINCOLN MUSEUM

The mission of The Lincoln Museum
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**THE
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The Life and Legacy of Abraham Lincoln



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The Disputed Parentage of Nancy Hanks Lincoln

by John D. Beatty

The identity of the parents of Nancy (Hanks) Lincoln—the maternal grandparents of Abraham Lincoln—has long been the subject of speculation, both among Lincoln scholars and among presidential genealogists. After more than a century and a half of research, the question has never been satisfactorily resolved.¹ That Nancy may have been the illegitimate daughter of a wealthy Virginia planter, and that some of his traits may have been passed down to the future president, have intrigued a few scholars who have sought to find some genetic source for Lincoln's brilliance: that his greatness was in some measure programmed into his DNA. If such a notion appears outlandish, there is evidence to support a view that Lincoln himself believed his mental ability could be traced to his maternal heredity.

The foundation of the theory that Lincoln's mother was born out of wedlock can be traced to a story he allegedly told to his law partner, William H. Herndon, circa 1850 or 1851. The two men were riding from Springfield to Menard County, Illinois, to work on a complicated case involving inheritance, possibly *Hannah Miller v. Mary E. Miller et al.*, which had spanned the years from 1847 to 1851.² As Herndon later reported in a private letter:

Lincoln all at once said: "Billy, I'll tell you something, but keep it a secret while I live. My mother was a bastard, was the daughter of a nobleman so called of Virginia. My mother's mother was poor and credulous, etc., and she was shamefully taken advantage of by the man. My mother inherited his qualities and I hers. All that I am or ever hope to be I get from my mother, God bless her."³

In Herndon's 1889 biography of the president, which he wrote with ghost writer Jesse Weik, he amended "Virginia nobleman" to "a well-bred Virginia farmer or planter," and he added what transpired after Lincoln spoke these deeply personal words:

"[Lincoln] immediately lapsed into silence. Our interchange of ideas ceased, and we rode on for some time without exchanging a single word. He was sad and absorbed. Burying himself in thought, and musing no doubt over the disclosure he had just made, he drew round him a barrier which I feared to penetrate."⁴

Lincoln may have alluded to his mother's illegitimacy again in 1860, when he supplied information about his life to John Locke Scripps, a Chicago journalist, for a brief campaign biography. Scripps later told Herndon that Lincoln described his mother as having "great native strength of intellect and force of character, and he suspects that those admirable qualities of head and heart which characterize her distinguished son are mostly inherited from her."⁵ Yet Scripps also added: "Mr. Lincoln communicated some facts to me concerning his ancestry which he did not wish to have published, and which I have never spoken of or alluded to before."⁶

Herndon's account of Nancy's alleged illegitimacy remains the best documented, and there is no reason to suspect that he fabricated it. Indeed, his efforts in conducting interviews and writing letters prior to compiling his biography of the president reveal a good faith effort to get to the bottom of the matter, as well as a desire to investigate and refute rumors that Lincoln was himself the illegitimate son of one Abraham Enlow. Herndon received Scripps's letter in reply to a query written just two months after Lincoln's assassination. He also carried on an extensive correspondence with Dennis and John Hanks, Lincoln's cousins, both of whom denied her illegitimacy but asserted instead that Nancy's name was not Hanks but Sparrow. They also both acknowledged that Nancy's mother was a member of the Hanks

On the cover: "The Boy Lincoln and His Mother" Charcoal drawing by M. Leone Bracker, 1934. (TLM #975)

family and therefore their blood aunt—an assertion that has implications in the illegitimacy debate. Dennis Hanks wrote to Herndon: “If you call hir [Nancy] hanks, you Make hir a Baseborn Child which is not trew.”⁷

But Scripps warned Herndon about the reliability of Dennis Hanks’s testimony, stating in a letter: “I do not think, however, that Dennis Hanks, if he knows anything about these matters, would be very likely to say anything about them. At all events, if his statements conflict with those of the biography, it is a question of veracity or memory between him and Mr. Lincoln.”⁸

In 1887, Herndon interviewed Gov. Richard Oglesby of Illinois, who disputed assertions that Lincoln was born out of wedlock, but supported the view that Nancy was the daughter of a Virginia planter, arguing that the two stories had gotten confused. “This is the best explanation,” he counseled, “but it would be better for your book to say nothing at all.”⁹ James K. Rardin, a newspaper man originally from Coles County, Illinois, and a Democrat, supported the account of Nancy’s illegitimacy, and while he had an obvious political agenda, he told Jesse Weik, a Herndon associate, in 1888: “The more you dig into the Lincoln and Hanks families the more disgusting immorality you find. The Lincoln and Hanks families know this and they discourage all efforts to get at it.”¹⁰

Scholars have taken a variety of positions on the subject. The earliest to echo Herndon’s pro-illegitimacy view was William E. Barton, who authored several books in the 1920s that elaborated on this theme, though they were not extensively documented or deeply researched.¹¹ Harold and Ernestine Briggs sidestepped the issue in their 1952 biography of Nancy, stating that she was probably the legitimate daughter of James Hanks and Lucy (Shipley), a theory first advanced by Louis A. Warren and discussed at greater length below.¹² Adin Baber, a Hanks genealogist and the most prominent defender of Nancy’s legitimacy, blamed Herndon for not doing enough research and for spreading rumors intended to discredit Lincoln in his political campaigns. “I do not understand the peculiar mental quirk that seemed to impel Herndon to dig into dirt,” he wrote.¹³

More recent Lincoln scholars have conceded that Herndon’s story was probably true and that Lincoln at least believed his mother was born out of wedlock, whether or not she actually was. David Herbert Donald remarked in his 1995 biography that “there was endless room for speculation about Lincoln’s maternal grand-sire,” but he also observed: “... Lincoln’s remarks—if Herndon accurately reported them after a lapse of so many years—were not based on any research into his Hanks ancestry. Instead they reflected his sense that he was different from the people with whom he grew up.”¹⁴

Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, editors of Herndon’s papers, endorse the view that Nancy was illegitimate and include in the appendix of their book a genealogy prepared by Paul H. Verduin, a genealogist and a leading proponent of the illegitimacy theory.¹⁵ Michael Lind appears to agree with this view and has pointed out more recently that Lincoln reached this conclusion about his mother in the belief that the rest of the Hanks family was far inferior to her.¹⁶ He cites another remark made by

Lincoln to Herndon: “The Hanks are the lowest people in the world.”¹⁷ Dennis Hanks apparently supported this view when he recollected: “When [Lincoln] was with us, he seemed to think a great deal of us; but I thought sometimes it was hypocritical, but I am not sure.”¹⁸

Known Facts About Nancy Hanks and Her Probable Mother, Lucey Hanks Sparrow

There is little concrete evidence about Nancy Hanks’s life, and most of what is known is based on rumor, tradition, and speculation. Even the date and place of her birth are not known with certainty. In 1851 at the time of his father’s death, Lincoln penned a few lines of dates into a family Bible, though the first portion of this page, presumably containing the date of his mother’s birth, was torn off.¹⁹ His source for these dates is not known, unless he took them from memory, having heard them reported as a child. This Bible record, before being damaged, was copied at a later date by John D. Johnston, Lincoln’s step-brother, and contained what appeared to be the full record, showing the date of Nancy’s birth as 5 February 1784.²⁰ While family Bibles are generally considered by genealogists to be primary sources of evidence, it would appear that unless Lincoln copied this date from some other earlier source, the date may not be accurate and may be only an estimate.

Verduin argues that this date was likely somewhat earlier, perhaps 1783, and took place in Richmond County, Virginia, where Joseph Hanks—who he says was Nancy’s maternal grandfather—lived prior to his move to Hampshire County, Virginia, an area that is now Mineral County, West Virginia.²¹ Verduin’s arguments are plausible if Nancy’s probable mother, Lucey, was a daughter of Joseph Hanks, an assertion that remains in dispute. He cites the 1810 federal census of Hardin County, Kentucky, to prove that Nancy was born no later than 1784. In that record, Nancy was apparently the white female in the age cohort “of 26 and under 45” living in Thomas Lincoln’s household.²² Because she died on October 5, 1818, near Gentryville in Spencer County, Indiana, subsequent federal censuses are of no help in confirming her age.

That Nancy was born in Virginia appears likely. Lincoln wrote to Scripps, “She [Nancy] was also born in Virginia; and relatives of hers of the name of Hanks, and of other names, now reside in Coles, in Macon, and in Adams counties, Illinois.”²³ John Hanks agreed with the tradition that the Hanks family came from Virginia and wrote to Herndon: “My father [William Hanks] [was] born in old Va in what is called the Rappahannock River.”²⁴ However, in the same letter, he declared that Nancy “was born in Mercer Co., Ky about 1780.”²⁵

Might Nancy have been born after 1784? This appears unlikely, but such an assertion cannot be proved with certainty. Federal censuses are not always reliable, and ages often vary over time, depending on the memory of the respondent and the fact that people were not always certain of their exact age. It is possible that Nancy was recorded in the wrong age cohort or that her husband misreported her age, and Nancy’s marriage record is sometimes offered as evidence. On June 12, 1806, as “Nancy Hanks,” she married Thomas Lincoln in Washington County, Kentucky, with the ceremony

performed by the Rev. Jesse Head, a Methodist minister.²⁶ Two days earlier, Thomas Lincoln and Richard Berry Jr., who was possibly Nancy's uncle, entered into a bond for the marriage, and Berry signed the document as Nancy's guardian or "garden."²⁷

One might be tempted to construe from this fact that she was still a minor in 1806 and required her guardian's consent as mandated by a 1799 Kentucky law, which required such consents if the bride or groom was less than twenty-one years old. Usually the consent was filed separately as loose papers along with the bond. In the case of Thomas and Nancy's marriage, no formal consent was filed with the marriage bond.²⁸ Berry's presence appears to prove that Nancy was not married before, and that Hanks was her maiden name. It also suggests that Berry was her nearest living male relative. Genealogist Christopher Child has observed that the question of Nancy's age hinges on at what age—eighteen or twenty-one—the court considered a woman to be an adult. "If eighteen was the age of majority, a much later birth date of 1787 or 1788 would be more likely."²⁹

There is no specific indication on the Lincoln marriage bond that Nancy was a minor, however, and indeed, many relatives of brides signed marriage bonds during this period, even when the bride was of majority age. This practice harkened back to an earlier Kentucky and Virginia custom, when women had no contractual rights, and all executed marriage bonds required the consent of a male member of the bride's family.³⁰ For this reason, while it is possible that Nancy was born after 1784, one cannot prove it from the marriage record.

Nancy's mother is generally conceded by many historians to have been named Lucy or "Lucey," as she appears in contemporary records. As "Lucy Hanks," she was indicted before a grand jury in a Mercer County, Kentucky, courtroom on a charge of fornication on 24 November 1789.³¹ No other details are given in the record, but it was likely because she was living as the common law wife of one Henry Sparrow, a Revolutionary War veteran. The case was continued on 23 March 1790 as "Commonwealth v. Lucy Hanks, on presentment. Alias summons ordered."³² However, it was dropped on 25 May 1790, "for reasons appearing to the Court,"³³ and though it was not specified, Sparrow and Lucey had likely declared to the court their intention of marrying.

Still, Lucey did not marry Sparrow until 3 April 1791 in Mercer County.³⁴ The original marriage bond is now lost, but the noted Lincoln scholar, Louis A. Warren, photographed it in the 1920s before its disappearance. The document read:

I do Sertify that I am of age and give my approbation freely for henry Sparrow to git out Lisons this or eny other day given under my hand this April 26th 1790.
Test Robert michel, John berry [wi?]doy Lucey Hanks³⁵

The bond was co-signed by one John Daniel, who attested that Lucey was of legal age. Warren contends that the presence of the letters "doy" before Lucey's name, along with several faded pen marks before it, is evidence for the word "Widoy," signifying that Lucey was a widow at the time of her marriage.³⁶ If so, this fact has considerable significance for determining her identity, but the

matter is by no means settled. Warren points out that some have argued that "doy" means "day," in reference to April 26th.

Additional evidence through the Berry family links Lucey Hanks to Nancy, Lincoln's mother. John Berry (b. ca. 1771), who witnessed Lucey's marriage license, was the older brother of Richard Berry Jr. (ca. 1773-1843), the guardian of Nancy Hanks. Both were sons of Richard Berry Sr. and wife Rachel (Shipley), and Rachel is alleged by some theorists to be the older sister of Lucey.³⁷ This same John Berry was also part of the grand jury who heard charges of Lucey's alleged fornication a year earlier.

Nancy appears to have been raised by her aunt and uncle, Thomas and Elizabeth (Hanks) Sparrow, instead of in the household of her mother and step-father. Thomas and Elizabeth were married on 17 October 1796 in Mercer County, when Nancy was about twelve years old.³⁸ Why she was forced to live apart from her mother is not known, but it may have been because she was not welcomed or accepted by her step-father.

Several theories have been advanced to account for all of the above evidence, but none of them can produce documentation to resolve conclusively the question of Nancy's parentage. A review of past scholarship reveals a number of ideas, none of them authoritative.

Baber-Sturgill Theory

Adin Baber was a prolific genealogist of the Hanks family. In a series of books beginning in 1959, Baber attempted to prove Nancy's legitimacy by rejecting the suggestion that Lucey was her mother and Joseph Hanks her grandfather, and instead insisting that she was the daughter of one Abraham Hanks and wife Sarah (Harper) of Campbell County, Virginia.³⁹ Abraham, the son of Luke Hanks and Elizabeth (___) of North Farnham Parish, Richmond County, Virginia, was allegedly born about 1745 and died, according to tradition, about 1790 in Campbell County. His wife, Sarah Harper, was the probable daughter of George and Elizabeth (Shipley) Harper of Prince William County, Virginia.⁴⁰ Baber contends further that Nancy had eight siblings, namely: Abraham Jr., Luke, William, George, Fielding, John, Sarah, and Mary "Polly."

Baber's research has been expanded upon in a sweeping new volume of Hanks genealogy compiled by his daughter. Though the scope of the research is impressive, the work lacks annotations, except for some parenthetical statements that are not always elucidated. The basis for Nancy's placement as the daughter of Abraham and Sarah appears to be an undated letter by Caroline Hanks Hitchcock of Ladora, Iowa County, Iowa, who stated that Abraham was a Revolutionary soldier and "had a daughter who was the mother of Abraham Lincoln."⁴¹ Mrs. Hitchcock was not a close relation of the president, however, and Abraham Hanks left no will to prove that Nancy was his daughter.⁴²

David Andrew Sturgill of Piney Creek, North Carolina, has expanded on Baber's work, agreeing that Nancy was likely the daughter of Abraham Hanks and Sarah (Harper), but he also asserts that she was likely born in Carroll County, Virginia. He admits that his conclusions are based on traditions from various descendants

while also conceding that “most people who were named Hanks or who were Hanks descendants claimed the Lincoln kinship.”⁴³ In Sturgill’s case, one of his own ancestors, Lewis Sturgill, married Sarah Hanks, oldest daughter of Abraham Hanks, so there is a personal reason for supporting this tradition.

The chief problem with the Baber-Sturgill research is that it appears to conflict directly with the testimonies of Dennis and John Hanks, both of whom had better connections to Lincoln than any other Hanks family member. Both had known him in childhood and had known his mother. They possessed the strongest claim of familiarity with his family, even if some of their recollections about Nancy’s birth name as Sparrow may have been erroneous. Baber has accused Herndon of being an opportunist with a taste for muck-raking—a charge that most other Lincoln historians tend to refute. At the same time, Baber ignores the existence of Lucey Hanks and fails to place her within his genealogy—a major flaw in his work. Sturgill admits her existence, but dismisses her as being Nancy’s mother. Further, he diminishes the connection to the Berry family by claiming that Nancy probably worked as a servant for Richard Berry, which is not an adequate explanation for Berry’s guardianship of her.

Warren Theory

Louis Warren’s research into Lucey Hanks’s background has persuaded many, including this writer, that she was a widow before marrying Henry Sparrow, even though the “doy” on their marriage bond is ambiguous. Warren asserts that Lucey was a Shipley, one of five sisters whose exact parentage he failed to establish but who may have been one Robert Shipley of Virginia.⁴⁴ He asserted further that Richard Berry Jr., Nancy Hanks’s guardian, was an uncle, who married one of the Shipley sisters, Rachel Shipley, while another sister, Margaret, married Robert Mitchell and was the mother of one Sarah Mitchell, who, like Nancy, grew up in the Berry household (Robert Mitchell also signed Lucey’s marriage bond). Another sister, Ann, married David McCord, while Lucey or Lucy married James Hanks.⁴⁵ His article produces no first-hand evidence, however, except the correspondence of one R. C. Simpson, a descendant of Ann (Shipley) McCord. As neatly as this theory would tie up the evidence from Kentucky, the lack of primary source evidence makes Warren’s theory unsupportable when considered alone. Other genealogists would build on his foundation, however.

Verduin Theory

The historian Paul H. Verduin has taken Lincoln and Herndon at their word and has constructed a Hanks pedigree based on the notion that Nancy was the illegitimate daughter of Lucey Hanks by an unknown Virginia aristocrat. He posits that Lucey was an unnamed daughter of Joseph Hanks of Nelson County, Kentucky, and his wife Ann “Nannie” Lee, and that Joseph left Lucey out of his will on account of her illegitimate daughter, even though other daughters are named in the document. Verduin then attempts to reconstruct the movements of Joseph Hanks from Richmond County, Virginia to what is now Mineral County, West Virginia, arguing that Lucey conceived Nancy as a teenager

living in Richmond County at a location about three miles from the Rappahannock River in North Farnham Parish about 1781. While the father of Nancy remains unknown, he offers Griffin Fauntleroy and Elisha Lingan Hall, the latter a nephew of Richard Henry Lee, as possible candidates who lived in the vicinity.⁴⁶

On the whole, Verduin’s research into Joseph Hanks from a variety of Virginia court records is impressive, though there are some



“Grave of Nancy Hanks Lincoln” Pioneer Cemetery, Lincoln City, Indiana(TLM #2097)

inconsistencies, and the theory that Nancy was illegitimate is certainly plausible. The chief weakness of his argument is his placement of Lucey as the daughter of Joseph—an assertion for which there is no shred of supporting evidence outside the testimony of Dennis Hanks. It fails to account for the “doy” on Lucey’s marriage bond to Henry Sparrow, which may indicate that she was a widow. It also fails to account for the presence of John Berry on Lucey’s marriage bond, and Richard Berry as Nancy’s guardian. Clearly there was a family connection. While it is possible that Joseph Hanks left Lucey deliberately out of his 1793 will in Nelson County, it cannot be proved. In Verduin’s favor, it could be argued that Lucey was absent not out of her father’s spite or in an effort to punish her, but because she had already married Henry Sparrow by this date and thus had already received her dowry, a fact that has no bearing necessarily on the legitimacy or illegitimacy of Nancy. The other daughters named in the will were all unmarried at the time. Yet if Lucey was Joseph’s daughter, he or one of his sons should have signed Lucey’s marriage bond in 1790 as next-of-kin. Neither of them did so, and those who did were connected to the Shipley family.

The will of Joseph Hanks, which was dated 8 January 1793, included bequests of horses to his sons, whom he named as Thomas, Joshua, William, Charles, and Joseph. He left heifers to daughters Elizabeth, Polly, and Nancy, while the remainder of his estate he left to his wife Nancy.⁴⁷ Verduin’s subsequent genealogical research makes no account of the sons Thomas, Joshua, and Charles. William is identified correctly as the father of John Hanks, the correspondent of Herndon who claimed to know Lincoln in his youth. Of the daughters of Joseph Hanks, Verduin is also likely correct in identifying Elizabeth as the wife of Thomas Sparrow, brother of Henry, whom she married in 1796 in Mercer County and who likely acted as a foster parent of Nancy, the president’s mother. Mary or “Polly” Hanks married Jesse Friend in 1795 in Hardin County, Kentucky. Nancy Hanks, the aunt and apparent namesake of Nancy (Hanks) Lincoln, became the mother out-of-wedlock in 1799 to Dennis Hanks, the father being Charles Friend, brother of Jesse. They did not marry, though Nancy later married Levi Hall, with whom she had seven more children. Joseph Hanks Jr., the youngest of the children of Joseph Hanks, was raised presumably by an unknown brother in Hardy County, now West Virginia. He returned to Hardin County, Kentucky, before 1810, where he married Mary Young and had children.⁴⁸

Verduin also adds a second illegitimate child for Lucey, arguing that a Sarah Hanks (ca. 1787-ca.1854), was born in Kentucky several years after Nancy and before Lucey’s marriage to Henry Sparrow. She was apparently the “Aunt Sarah” whom Lincoln once claimed in a letter to have visited. Sarah herself had allegedly six of her own children out of wedlock, including Sophia, Greenberry, Creed Harris, Samuel Haden, Margaret, and James Anderson Hanks. Sophia, the eldest daughter, lived with Elizabeth and Thomas Sparrow, and after their deaths, resided in Spencer County, Indiana, in the Thomas Lincoln household.⁴⁹ This family has also been subject to other interpretations, however, including David Sturgill’s claim that she was actually his own relative, Sarah Hanks Sturgill.⁵⁰

Despite these conflicting theories, most evidence would seem to point to the conclusion that the president’s mother was a

granddaughter of Joseph Hanks. The question of whether Lucey was herself a Hanks or a Hanks widow and the daughter-in-law of Joseph is not resolved by the evidence in these two studies. Sturgill, a critic of this theory, argues that there were likely two men named Joseph Hanks who have been merged into one by Verduin, a claim that may have merit. Tax records show that Joseph Hanks of Hampshire County, Virginia, had eleven children in 1784, and this was apparently the same man still living there in 1790. At the same time, Joseph Hanks of Nelson County, Kentucky, the 1793 testator, had a grant of Kentucky land in 1787.⁵¹

Keiser Theory

David S. Keiser of Greensboro, North Carolina, a Lincoln genealogist, proposed a theory in 1970 that Nancy (Hanks) Lincoln was the daughter of Joseph Hanks’s eldest son, Thomas, by an unknown wife, who was perhaps a Berry.⁵² Keiser reasons that Thomas was the only son of Joseph who did not accompany his father to Kentucky, a statement that is by no means certain. He also asserts that the presence of Richard Berry as Nancy’s guardian on her 1806 marriage bond is proof that she was born in 1787, an idea that has also been refuted. Nancy’s unknown mother died in Virginia, and she was brought by her Berry relatives to Kentucky.

Keiser’s theory is not supported by corroborating evidence, however, and it fails to account for Lucey Hanks or the Sparrow connection as asserted by Dennis Hanks.

Bell-Child Theory

Raymond Martin Bell, a respected genealogist, proposed several theories about Nancy’s parentage, and his ideas evolved over time, especially after extensive correspondence with another genealogist, Christopher Challenger Child. At first persuaded by the arguments of Keiser, Bell believed Nancy’s father was Thomas Hanks while also recognizing Nancy’s close association with the Shipley and Berry families. He cited an 1891 affidavit in Washington County, Kentucky, by Robert Mitchell Thompson (1812-1895), son of John Thompson and Sarah Shipley Mitchell (1778-1855), stating that the mother of Nancy Hanks Lincoln was the “cousin” of his mother. This led Bell to conclude that Nancy’s mother must have been a daughter of Richard Berry Sr. and wife Rachel (Shipley) of Charlotte and Campbell counties, Virginia.⁵³

By 1997, shortly before his death, Bell was persuaded by the argument first advanced by Louis Warren that Nancy was the daughter of James Hanks and Lucy (Shipley).⁵⁴ “Somehow Lucy met and married James Hanks about 1781. A daughter, Nancy, was born Feb. 5, 1784. James died soon after. About 1787 Lucy and daughter, Nancy, went to Ky. They lived with the Berrys until Lucy was remarried in 1790. Nancy continued to live in Berry homes until her marriage in 1806 to Thomas Lincoln.”⁵⁵

Child, as we have seen, has greatly expanded on this thesis in a 2003 article, pointing out more circumstantial evidence linking Lucey to the Shipleys. Part of the clue, Child contends, lies in the naming pattern of Lucey’s children. Her eight children with Henry

Sparrow included Polly, Rev. James, Betsy, Margaret or Peggy, Thomas, Rev. Henry, George, and Lucindy Sparrow. James may have been named for James Hanks, while the names George and Margaret are also found among her alleged Shipley siblings.⁵⁶

Members of the Shipley family lived in Mercer and Washington counties, Kentucky, where Lucey lived. Robert Shipley, possibly Lucey's father, was exempted from the further payment of levies due to his age and infirmity in October 1792. On 28 February 1792, George Shipley and Daniel Mitchell were granted administration of the estate of Robert Mitchell, who reportedly had drowned in the Clinch River. Mitchell had signed Lucey's marriage bond and had married Naomi Shipley, allegedly Lucey's sister. Richard Berry, who had married Rachel Shipley, spent time both in Mercer and Washington counties, where Nancy Hanks Lincoln also lived. An excellent genealogical summary of the Shipley data, though not sourced, appears in *The Shipleys of Maryland 2002*, volume one, compiled by the Shipleys of Maryland under the editorship of John M. Shipley.⁵⁷ This work asserts that the parents of Lucey were Robert Shipley Jr. and Sarah (Dorsey), originally of Queen Caroline Parish, Maryland, and later of Lunenburg County, Virginia, and Mecklenburg County, North Carolina.

Despite the abundance of circumstantial evidence in Kentucky and the likelihood of a Shipley connection, the weakness of the Warren-Bell-Child theory lies in its failure to find any primary source evidence for a James Hanks. As Child explains, "James Hanks cannot be found in contemporary records, but these families often moved and if James died by 1789, he would have been very young and any record of him may have been destroyed."⁵⁸ Sturgill proves that this James could not have been the James Hanks, son of Richard of Rowan County, North Carolina, but this evidence does not negate the fact that there may have been another James Hanks.

Conclusion

The mystery of Nancy Hanks Lincoln will likely never be satisfactorily resolved. Every theory depends in no small measure on oral traditions that are inconsistent and unreliable, and there simply is not enough primary source evidence to prove one over another. In this writer's opinion, the Warren-Bell-Child theory offers the best explanation of all of the evidence that does exist, but the matter no doubt will continue to be debated. The old adage "If you want your family history traced, run for public office" does not apply to our greatest president, much of whose ancestry continues to be unknown.

John D. Beatty is Reference Librarian and Bibliographer at the Allen County Public Library in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. The Library houses the largest genealogical and local history collection in a public library in the United States.

Endnotes

¹ For a precise summary of Abraham Lincoln's known ancestry, see Gary Boyd Roberts, *Ancestors of American Presidents*. 2nd ed. (Santa Clarita, CA: Carl Boyer III, 1995), 33-36.

² Hannah Miller v. Mary E. Miller et al., Chancery Docket Books 1-2, Menard County, Illinois, Circuit Court.

³ William H. Herndon quoted in Emanuel Hertz, ed., *The Hidden Lincoln: From the Letters and Papers of William H. Herndon*. (New York: Viking Press, 1938), 73-74.

⁴ William H. Herndon, *Herndon's Life of Lincoln*. 1889. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1983), 2.

⁵ John Locke Scripps, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 31.

⁶ John L. Scripps to William H. Herndon, 24 June 1865, in Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements*. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 57.

⁷ Dennis Hanks to William H. Herndon, 10 February 1866, in *ibid.*, 199.

⁸ John L. Scripps to Herndon, 25 June 1865, in *ibid.*, 57.

⁹ Herndon notes in *ibid.*, 639.

¹⁰ James K. Rardin to Jesse W. Weik, 9 March 1888, in *ibid.*, 651.

¹¹ William E. Barton, *Paternity of Abraham Lincoln*. (New York: George H. Doran, 1920), 218-219; Barton, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1925), 40-42; Barton, *Lineage of Lincoln*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1929).

¹² Harold E. Briggs and Ernestine B. Briggs, *Nancy Hanks Lincoln: A Frontier Portrait*. (New York: Bookman Associates, 1952), 32-36.

¹³ Adin Baber, *Nancy Hanks: The Destined Mother of a President*. (Kansas, Ill.: Adin Baber, 1963), x-xi.

¹⁴ David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 20.

¹⁵ Wilson and Davis, *Herndon's Informants*, 779-783.

¹⁶ Michael Lind, *What Lincoln Believed*. (New York: Doubleday, 2005), 36.

¹⁷ Herndon to T. H. Bartlett, quoted in Reinhard Luthin, *The Real Abraham Lincoln*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 142.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ Roy P. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1953), 2: 94-96.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 94.

²¹ Paul H. Verduin, "New Evidence Suggests Lincoln's Mother Born in Richmond County, Virginia, Giving Credibility to Planter-Grandfather Legend," *Northern Neck of Virginia Historical Magazine*, volume 38 (December 1988): 4359-4362.

- ²² Thos. Lincoln household, 1810 U.S. Census, population schedule, Hardin County, Kentucky, page 299, line 6; National Archives micropublication M252, roll 6.
- ²³ Letter of Lincoln to John Scripps, 1860, quoted in Baber, *Nancy Hanks*, vi-vii.
- ²⁴ Letter of John Hanks to William Herndon, undated, circa 1866, in Wilson and Davis, *Herndon's Informants*, 454.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ "Marriage Records, Licenses and Bonds, and Ministers Returns," Washington County, Kentucky, Marriage Book 1: 66, Washington County Courthouse. The marriage bond was dated June 10.
- ²⁷ Louis A. Warren, "The Unknown Hanks Ancestry," *Lincoln Kinsman*, number 2 (August 1938): 3.
- ²⁸ Roseann Reinemuth Hogan, *Kentucky Ancestry: A Guide to Genealogical and Historical Research*. (Salt Lake City, UT: Ancestry, 1992), 83.
- ²⁹ Christopher Challender Child, "The Maternal Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln: The Origins of Nancy Hanks Lincoln, a Study in Appalachian Genealogy," *New England Ancestors*, volume 4, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 25.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*
- ³¹ Mercer County, Kentucky, Court Order Book 1 (1786-1790), page 414, cited in Michael L. Cook, ed., *Mercer County, Kentucky Records, Volume 1*. (Evansville, IN: Cook Publications, 1987), 150.
- ³² *Ibid.*, 172, citing Order Book 1, page 482.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 182, citing Order Book 1, page 516.
- ³⁴ The original marriage bond was extracted in Elizabeth Prather Ellsbury, *Mercer County, Kentucky Marriage Records 1766-1800, Will Records, 1786-1801*. (Chillicothe, MO: Elizabeth Prather Ellsbury, undated), 5. The original bond is reportedly lost.
- ³⁵ Document transcribed and a facsimile reproduced in Warren, "Unknown Hanks Ancestry," 5.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*
- ³⁷ John M. Shipley, ed., *The Shipleys of Maryland*. 3 volumes. (Baltimore, MD: Gateway Press, 2002), 1: 29.
- ³⁸ Warren, "James Wright Sparrow," *Lincoln Kinsman*, no. 11 (May 1939): 6.
- ³⁹ Baber, *Nancy Hanks*, 115.
- ⁴⁰ Baber's work has been expanded in a new volume: Adin Baber, Nancy Baber McNeill and Louis Franklin Hanks, *Hanks Family of Virginia and Westward*. (Spokane, WA: Arthur H. Clark Company, 2004), 137-138.
- ⁴¹ Caroline Hanks Hitchcock note in *ibid.*, 138-139.
- ⁴² Additional research of Mrs. Hitchcock, in the collection of the New England Historic Genealogical Society in Boston, Massachusetts, supports her erroneous conclusion that Nancy was the daughter of Joseph Hanks of Nelson County, Kentucky, when this Nancy, in fact, married Levi Hall and was the mother, out-of-wedlock, of Dennis Hanks. See Child, "Maternal Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln," 26, 29.
- ⁴³ David Andrew Sturgill, "Who Was Nancy Hanks Lincoln?," unpublished manuscript available on-line at <www.geocities.com/marianapolis99/sturgill.htm?200611>, downloaded 8 September 2006.
- ⁴⁴ Warren, "Five Shipley Sisters," *Lincoln Kinsman*, no. 4 (October 1938): 1-8.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 6.
- ⁴⁶ Verduin, "New Evidence Suggests Lincoln's Mother Born in Richmond County," 4356.
- ⁴⁷ Joseph Hanks will (1793, Nelson County, Kentucky Will Book 1, page 107.
- ⁴⁸ Verduin, "Appendix: Brief Outline of the Joseph Hanks Family," in Wilson and Davis, eds., *Herndon's Informants*, 779-783.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 780.
- ⁵⁰ Sturgill, "Who Was Nancy Hanks Lincoln?," previously cited. Baber cites a claim from Sarah's grandson, Dr. James Legrand, that her real name was Mary or "Polly" and she chose "Sarah" after the birth of her first child, Sophie, in 1807. He also acknowledges that all of Sarah's children were illegitimate, but that Sarah herself was the daughter of Abraham Hanks and the sister of Nancy Hanks Lincoln. See Baber, *Hanks Family of Virginia and Westward*, 156.
- ⁵¹ Sturgill, "Who Was Nancy Hanks Lincoln?," cited previously.
- ⁵² David S. Keiser, "How I Found Nancy Hanks' Father, Thomas Hanks, without Trying," 1970, reprinted on <www.geocities.com/marianapolis99/keiser.htm?20068>, downloaded 8 September 2006.
- ⁵³ Raymond Martin Bell, *The Grandfathers of Nancy Hanks: A Speculative Study*. (Washington, PA: The Author, 1993), 2. Bell reiterated this theory in a second work of the same title, published in 1996.
- ⁵⁴ Raymond Martin Bell and Christopher Challender Child, *Mother of the President: Nancy Hanks Lincoln 1784-1818*. (Coralville, Iowa: The Authors, 1997), 2.
- ⁵⁵ *Ibid.*
- ⁵⁶ Child, "Maternal Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln," 28.
- ⁵⁷ Shipley, ed., *The Shipleys of Maryland 2002*, 1: 16, 29-31.
- ⁵⁸ Child, "Maternal Ancestry of Abraham Lincoln," 28.

The Emancipation Proclamation: Three Views

By Harold Holzer, Edna Greene Medford, and Frank J. Williams.
Louisiana State University Press, 2006
Reviewed by Lucas E. Morel, Associate Professor of Politics,
Washington and Lee University.

Before Allen Guelzo's definitive account of the Emancipation Proclamation was published in 2004, there had been no scholarly book on the subject for forty years. One would think this gap between serious examinations of American emancipation indicates that little needed to be said on the subject. Lincoln + Slavery = Emancipation. End of story. Everyone knows Lincoln freed the slaves, right? As this new collection of essays shows, however, even an event as pivotal to American history as the Emancipation Proclamation contains many facets deserving of a fresh look.

In a foreword to this slender volume on the Emancipation Proclamation (its length belied by the super-small, eye-strain-inducing font), John Hope Franklin notes that reflections about "how to celebrate" freedom will be occasioned by these essays. The need for this book is spurred in part by recent criticisms of Lincoln's proclamation as "timid, conservative, and deceptive." What used to be viewed as a manifestly bold and just executive order is now either cast as a sign of Lincoln's desperation and weakness (by critics on the modern-day left) or an abuse of presidential prerogative (by critics on the libertarian right). Lincoln's reputation as the Great Emancipator has come under sufficient fire to speak to the importance of a scholarly reconsideration of his legacy as a liberator—and this collection of three essays is a pretty good place to start.

Edna Greene Medford, Associate Professor of History at Howard University, takes up the perennial question of whether emancipation ultimately was Lincoln's deed or that of the slaves. "Even before hostilities commenced," Medford observes, slaves began their own "assault on slavery." This suggests that Lincoln's formal proclamation of January 1, 1863, was a necessary but not sufficient cause of the liberation of American slaves. However, the fact that the slaves' initiative for freedom was chiefly due to Lincoln's election is a point Medford could have emphasized when she remarks that slaves attempted to escape "whenever the Union forces drew near [rebel] plantations and farms."

Medford states that Lincoln's views "fell short of the abolitionist creed," insofar as his concern for black freedom was moderated by "reverence for" the protection of property and the rule of law. His "commitment to the Constitution" even required supporting the notorious fugitive slave clause, just one of several founding compromises with the state institution of slavery. The interesting question is why he considered himself anti-slavery but "no abolitionist." While Medford distinguishes between abolitionist and anti-slavery modes of emancipation, her measured account of Lincoln's anti-slavery *bona fides* falls short in explaining the connection he saw between a strict observance of the Constitution and the eventual emancipation of American slaves.



Edna Greene Medford (seated), Harold Hozer (center) and Frank Williams (standing). Photograph by Virginia Williams.

This was perhaps the grandest political irony of American history: namely, that to secure self-government required the enforcement of slavery where it already existed. As Lincoln put it: "I hold it to be a paramount duty of us in the free states, due to the Union of the States, and perhaps to liberty itself (paradox though it may seem) to let the slavery of the other states alone." Only by upholding constitutional forms and procedures at both the state and federal level could Americans hope to establish a self-governing way of life that would eventually include all members of their society.

Medford rightly points out that "Lincoln failed to fully comprehend or appreciate the resolve of African Americans to remain" in the U.S., noting that widespread public opinion against blacks in America weighed heavily on his mind (as it did on Thomas



"Primary School for Freedmen, in Charge of Mrs. Green, at Vicksburg, Mississippi" *Harper's Weekly* June 23, 1866. (TLM #2634)

Jefferson, Alexis de Tocqueville, and other leading thinkers about the future of American slavery). One could argue that the Americanization of transplanted African slaves—their adoption of America's republican politics and Christian religion—helped prevent more frequent slave revolts, leading to a greater desire on their part to receive the full protection of their natural rights than to seek vengeance upon their former masters.

Regarding Lincoln's approach to reconstruction, Medford casts him as a "conservative" due to his "conciliatory stance toward the South" and insufficient appreciation of black opinion. This is true as far as it goes, but gives scant consideration of Lincoln's political thought, which saw states and not the federal government as the prime engines of social and political reform. In general, Medford's account stands as an indictment of Americans who were unwilling to live up to the noblest claims of their much vaunted regime of self-government. Lincoln is not exactly placed with both feet in this camp of "unfulfilled promise," but at least one foot appears firmly planted there by Medford's lights.

While Medford's essay implicitly asks if an American union of whites and blacks would prove workable in a post-Emancipation nation, Frank Williams's essay declares of Lincoln, "A Union with

slavery is not worth saving." Drawing from Harry V. Jaffa's insight that Lincoln's moral convictions could be measured by the extent to which he sought to gain "political advantage for the antislavery argument," Williams presents the Emancipation Proclamation as "the most convincing illustration of his extraordinary legal and political genius."

Part of this genius is shown in Lincoln's rivalry with Stephen A. Douglas, a proponent of local "popular sovereignty." Lincoln believed this policy of congressional noninterference with slavery in federal territory was blowing out what Henry Clay called "the moral lights" of the people. Without a firm conviction of the evil of slavery, Americans would eventually use the democratic processes merely to further the immediate self-interest of the majority, rather than protect the rights of every citizen. Ironically, Lincoln's concern for the rule of law derived from his devotion to moral right, suggesting that divorcing the laws from their basis in natural right would eventually rob them of their justification and turn constitutional government into crude majoritarianism.

Williams highlights this important element of Lincoln's political thinking and shows why the principle of consent (formally referred to as "the requirements of the Constitution") needs to be

remembered in any discussion of that other important principle of the Declaration of Independence—human equality. The consent of the governed remained an abiding concern for Lincoln, whether reflected in his openness to colonizing black Americans or his public defense of executive prerogatives in the first months of the war (when Congress was out of session) for which he himself invited congressional approval.

It should not surprise the reader that Williams's own occupation as Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court leads him to show how Lincoln's lawyerly skills and disposition became a providential asset to his presidency. During the war, Lincoln faced a radically disposed Congress that sought more invasive measures regarding the rights of citizens. Given that war and other national emergencies typically find the executive, not the legislature, augmenting its authority, this was quite unexpected and helps defend Lincoln from charges of overreaching his constitutional prerogatives.

Lincoln understood himself as preserving the Constitution in his pursuit of Union and liberty. For example, while some might interpret Lincoln's lukewarm enforcement of Congress' First and Second Confiscation Acts as a lack of concern for the American slave, Williams finds instead a laudable concern for legality and constitutionality. To defend the Constitution from the physical violence of rebellious southerners, Lincoln sought not to undermine it through the legal violence of northerners.

Convinced as this reader is that Lincoln's various strategies through the Civil War reflected the dictates of prudence as applied to shifts in public opinion and the ebb and flow of the battlefield, Williams's distinguishing of the final from the preliminary emancipation proclamation as a "major conceptual change" in Lincoln's thinking remains unpersuasive. As Williams notes from a letter Lincoln wrote to his vice president, "The North responds to the proclamation sufficiently in breath; but breath alone kills no rebels." Simply put, Lincoln hesitated regarding the timing of emancipation in great part because of the uncertain state of public opinion. Prudence required that he prepare the ground for its reception by employing other military tactics, as well as public statements, that he hoped would achieve two objectives: namely, smooth the way to black liberation in rebel-held territory and vigorous execution by a military now committed by Lincoln to "recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom."

"In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free." So spoke Lincoln in his 1862 annual message to Congress, less than a month before his final emancipation proclamation. Herein is a pithy but profound statement of how Lincoln viewed the connection between black emancipation and free government: to deny forever the natural rights of black slaves, white Americans forget the only legitimate basis of their own freedom. No constitution could long protect the rights of whites once they believed that those self-same rights were not grounded in human nature but in merely self-interested and vacillating political majorities.

What Williams calls the "mundane specificity" of the Emancipation Proclamation, though galling to abolitionists then and puzzling to most Lincoln observers today, Lincoln saw as instrumental to its success as a public measure. Its "legalese, written as a war measure by the commander-in-chief to survive challenges in court," was intended to instruct as well as command the nation. It was not enough to condemn slavery; one had to eliminate it in a way that would not undermine the very government the freedmen would need to protect their rights. Abolitionists failed to appreciate this link between emancipatory means and ends. This is why Lincoln never claimed to be an abolitionist.

Rounding out the collection is Harold Holzer's "Picturing Freedom: The Emancipation Proclamation in Art, Iconography, and Memory," which chronicles the depiction of emancipation in painting, sculpture, and the public prints. He asks, what was the public told about Lincoln's great act through its visual portrayal in an age that preceded television and the internet? The association of Lincoln with emancipation, and not simply as savior of the Union, followed immediately upon his assassination. But Holzer points out, "No explosion of Great Emancipator graphics greeted the announcement of either the preliminary or final proclamation."

Prior to his becoming what Frederick Douglass called "the first martyr President of the United States," there was no huge production of emancipation prints because there was no huge demand. Holzer notes, "It hardly inspired reverential portraiture at the outset." Still, Lincoln did cooperate with certain artists who sought to depict him as an emancipator, most famously sitting for Francis Bicknell Carpenter, whom Lincoln allowed to set up shop in the White House for six months in 1864. Although well received in the abolitionist and anti-slavery quarters, the Proclamation itself remained a controversial and doubtful act to many other northerners.

In fact, before and after emancipation, as Holzer's essay literally shows in a variety of illustrations, the popular prints displayed Lincoln in caricature and lampoons, and not simply as a president revered by some quarters of the union. With profit as a key motivator of public portrayals of political figures and events, Holzer's narrative and reproductions (thirty-five in all) demonstrate that white racism and a desire for peace and a return to normalcy dictated much of what was depicted about Lincoln as emancipator during the war years. During Lincoln's lifetime, "Almost no artistic depictions of what Francis B. Carpenter described as the 'second Declaration of Independence' were principally designed for its chief beneficiaries, African Americans." If a picture is worth a thousand words, the story of Emancipation as told by American artists remained for the longest time a racially biased one.

*(Reviewer's note: For those interested in a thorough, scholarly examination of the Emancipation Proclamation, one need look no further than Allen Guelzo's *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation* (2004). But for an introduction to the subject that addresses not only what the Emancipation Proclamation achieved but how it was received by key constituencies, the Medford/Williams/Holzer literary triptych on Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation fits the bill.)*

Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words

By Douglas L. Wilson

Knopf, 2006

Reviewed by Joseph R. Forni, Associate Professor of Political Science at Rochester Institute of Technology

It has been said that, "The pen is mightier than the sword." Yet placed in the proper hand, the pen may be wielded as a "verbal sword." Such was the case with Abraham Lincoln, whose command of the English language equipped him to confront the momentous challenge of Civil War. Long after this ordeal, Lincoln's words continue to define our collective hopes and aspirations. Indeed, the success of a wartime leader in a democracy depends in great measure upon his ability to communicate a vision to the people. Testifying to this truth with fitting eloquence in *Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words*, Douglas L. Wilson masterfully combines an engaging narrative with meticulous scholarship to show how Lincoln deftly wielded the verbal sword to guide the American regime through the "fiery trial" of Civil War.

Through a close textual analysis of the Sixteenth President's writing style, Wilson elucidates Lincoln's intention to guide public opinion towards the twin goals of preserving the Union and ending slavery. Among the key presidential writings examined by Wilson are the *Farewell Address at Springfield, Illinois (February 11, 1861)*; the *Message to Congress in Special Session (July 4, 1861)*; the *Letter To Horace Greeley (August 22, 1862)*; the *Letter to Erastus Corning and Others (June 12, 1863)*; the *Letter to James C. Conkling (August 26, 1863)*; the *Gettysburg Address (November 19, 1863)*; and the *Second Inaugural Address (March 4, 1865)*. In each case, Wilson furnishes a narrative of the historical context that prompted Lincoln to take up his verbal sword. He reveals how each writing was tailored for the circumstances and issues at hand—most notably, the impending Civil War; the alleged violation of civil liberties; the freeing and arming of the slaves; sustaining the draft; reconstructing the Union; and securing a just and lasting peace—one that would uphold the promise of freedom to all.

In particular, the Emancipation Proclamation "constituted a special problem in writing."

Wilson states:

As conceived by its author over a period of many months and through numerous trials, the problem was to find not only the right formula of ingredients and the most advantageous order of presentation, but to employ highly disciplined language. Most of all, it had to be emotionally chaste; it must avoid words and phrases that would appeal only to partisans and be land mines for others. Unlike almost any other kind of purposeful writing, it would be enhanced by its rhetorical barrenness. Its ultimate appeal would consist largely in its *lack* of linguistic or rhetorical appeal (141).

Wilson's analysis is enhanced by reproductions of original drafts of Lincoln's writings. Displayed at various stages of the writing process, these illustrations speak for themselves as compelling proof of Lincoln's intent in each case. They provide a fascinating window into the Sixteenth President's thought process and writing style. Seeing successive drafts of Lincoln's own handwriting with scribbled text where he had made revisions left a stirring and eerie impression upon me as a reader. One can see the outlines of the original draft that lurk just beneath the scribbled ink. Indeed, Wilson's method of combining historical narrative with a close textual analysis corroborated by reproductions of the original texts is simply superb. It powerfully elucidates the President's message.

To provide but one example: Wilson reveals that in the original draft of the July 4th, 1861 *Message to Congress* Lincoln wrote, "And having thus chosen our course, without guile, and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in the justice of God, and go forward without fear, and with manly hearts." In a subsequent revision, Lincoln deleted the phrase "in the justice of God," substituting the simpler version, "let us renew our trust in God." Wilson infers that Lincoln changed the text to avoid the appearance of self-righteousness. To be sure this interpretation is consistent with other well-documented expressions of Lincoln's humility before the mystery of the Divine Will. Wilson explains that "being privy to Lincoln's striking out the part about the "justice" of God gives us perhaps the first glimmering of what would become an obsessive attempt by Lincoln to fathom the part that Providence was to play in the war. His apparent reluctance here to claim the justice of God for his cause, which he emphatically believes is just, is a telling discrimination (100)."

In subsequent chapters dealing with the *Second Inaugural*, Wilson explores the depth of the Sixteenth President's religious convictions. He persuasively argues that Lincoln's faith deepened as President, especially after the death of his son Willie in February 1862.

Though Wilson refers to Lincoln's belief as "fatalism," what he actually describes is perfectly compatible with the dynamic tension of faith—the condition of being poised between one's humble acceptance of God's ultimate benevolence and an agnosticism concerning the ultimate workings of the Divine Will. Living within the uncertainty of this tension means striving to do one's best in "the best light [God] gives us" as Lincoln put it in his Letter to Mrs. Gurney (September 4, 1864). The tension of faith does not abolish the role that humans are called to play in the drama of Divine Providence. Wilson correctly recognizes that God for Lincoln was neither a Divine puppet master nor a celestial rubber stamp.

Throughout his book, Wilson richly chronicles Lincoln's method of writing. He traces a gestation process from inspiration to publication. After being struck with inspiration, the Sixteenth President would jot his thoughts down on foolscap—a kind of scrap paper. He collected these pearls of wisdom in his hat, or elsewhere, until they could be assembled into a coherent and unified draft. He would revise his message, often scribbling over an initial printed version that was pieced together by the publisher. According to Wilson, Lincoln possessed the rare but crucial gift of getting to "the nub of things": he could distill the essence of an issue and make it accessible in simple yet forceful terms to the public.

Lincoln had a penchant for reading out loud. As Wilson emphasizes, the Sixteenth President wrote for the ear. This explains his almost obsessive use of the comma, which he keyed to the rhythm of the spoken word. Lincoln also strove for clarity. He once told an acquaintance that, "among my earliest recollections I remember how, when a mere child, I used to get irritated when any body talked to me in a way I could not understand." His tenacious young mind would not be satisfied until he "had put it in language plain enough, as [he] thought, for any boy [he] knew to comprehend." Lincoln's stepmother also shed some light on his writing habits and budding abilities when she recalled that, "Abe read all the books he could lay his hands on—and when he came across a passage that struck him he would write it down on boards if he had no paper & keep it there till he did get paper—then he would re-write it—look at it repeat it—He had a copy book—a kind of scrap book in which he put down all things and this preserved them (21)." Though he was not formally schooled, Lincoln's youthful habits served him well as President.

While we take Lincoln's eloquence for granted today, this was not always the case. The northeastern intelligentsia was skeptical about the Sixteenth President's unconventional style, doubting his ability to communicate effectively in a time of crisis. Emerson, for example, who called for a distinct American literary form initially failed to recognize Lincoln's literary genius. Emerson would atone for this failure by acknowledging Lincoln's literary prowess in his eulogy to the fallen President on April 19, 1865: "What pregnant definitions; what unerring common sense; what foresight; and, on great occasion, what lofty, and more than national, what humane tone! His brief speech at Gettysburg will not easily be surpassed by words recorded on any occasion (279)."

Wilson explains that Lincoln's lack of formal literary training may actually have contributed to his development of a distinct American literary style. The absence of formal training freed Lincoln from many of the rigid, verbose, and ornate literary conventions of the time. Instead, Lincoln used homely images and metaphors to reach his audience. These shocked, but nonetheless gripped, his readers. A classic example of this is his use of the emetics simile in the letter to Corning to distinguish between the application of the Constitution in peace and in war time. Responding to those who feared that the curtailment of civil liberties in times of war would lead to a "slippery slope" in times of peace, Lincoln explained in a vivid and tightly packed sentence that he was "unable to appreciate the danger"

that the American people will, by means of military arrests during the rebellion, lose the right of public discussion the liberty of speech and the press, the law of evidence, trial by jury, and Habeas Corpus, throughout the indefinite peaceful future which I trust lies before them, any more than I am able to believe that a man could contract so strong an appetite for emetics during temporary illness, as to persist in feeding upon them through the remainder of his healthful life (176-177).

Though Lincoln's reference to emetics—a drug used to induce vomiting—may have shocked some Victorian sensibilities, it also disposed public opinion to approve of his extraordinary use of executive power to crush the rebellion.

Lincoln's debate with his editor John Defree over using the expression "sugar coated" to describe secession in the *First Inaugural Address* is yet another example of how his unconventional style was effectively used as a verbal sword. Already frustrated by Lincoln's overuse of the comma, Defrees objected that the word "sugar coated" was vulgar and unseemly to which Lincoln replied: "that word expresses precisely my idea, and I am not going to change it. The time will never come in this country when the people won't know exactly what *sugar-coated* means! (90)" Nor could one forget the memorable image used by Lincoln to emphasize that reunion could not occur without the south paying a price for slavery, "Broken eggs can not be mended."

As a stylistic device, Lincoln was fond of antithesis—the juxtaposition of opposites. Wilson shows how the Sixteenth President employed this technique in an early draft of the *First Inaugural Address* (March 4, 1861). Initially, he considered asking the South, "Shall it be peace or a sword?" As is well known, upon Seward's recommendation, Lincoln revised the bellicose tone of the *First Inaugural*. He deleted the antithesis of "peace or a sword" and substituted the more conciliatory appeal to "the better angels of our nature." Here Wilson correctly points out that it is the mark of a good writer to listen and to learn from trustworthy reviewers. Perhaps the most powerful use of antithesis occurred in the *Second Inaugural Address* where Lincoln affirmed the justice of God's will in allowing the war to continue "until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword."

Lincoln was also a master of the interrogative, as used in the *Letter to Corning*, "Must I shoot a simple-minded soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wiley agitator who induces him to desert?" This passage, which combines both interrogative and antithesis, resonated powerfully with family members whose sons had recently been drafted. Here Lincoln's verbal sword turned the table on the wiley agitator Clement Vallandigham.

Wilson's discussion of Lincoln's *Letter to Conkling* is particularly enriching. Written in the late summer of 1863 in anticipation of re-election, the letter was addressed to a crowd in Springfield to gain public support for Lincoln's war time policies. Nicolay and Hay state that, "Among all the state papers of Mr. Lincoln from his nomination to his death this letter is unique. It may be called his last stump-speech, the only one made during his Presidency (192)." Making use of the many stylistic devices mentioned above, Lincoln famously stated:

Peace does not appear so distant as it did. I hope it will come soon, and come to stay; and so come as to be worth the keeping in all future time—It will then have been proved that, among free men, there can be no successful appeal from the ballot to the bullet; and that they who take such appeal are sure to lose their case, and pay the cost. And then, there will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while I fear, there will be some white ones, unable to forget that, with malignant heart, and deceitful speech, they have strove to hinder it (191-192).

An equally important detail in the above text that Wilson does not explicitly address is Lincoln's crucial qualification that the peace must be "worth the keeping." (underlining mine). A treacherous peace that returned blacks to slavery as the Democrats sought in 1864 was not "worth the keeping" for Lincoln. Only a peace that would honor the promise of freedom to all was so worthy. Lincoln's moral qualification of a peace "worth the keeping" is consistent with his similar statement in the *Peoria Address* of October 16, 1854, that the Union must be forever "worthy of the saving." These qualifications reveal the extent to which Lincoln's view of the common good was not simply pragmatic, but informed by substantive moral considerations.

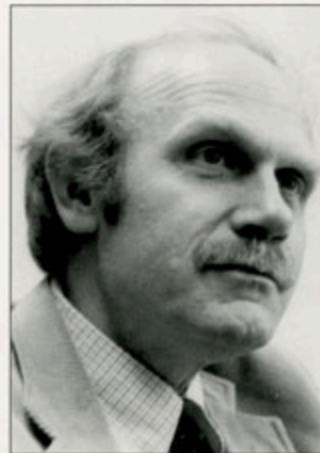
Of the Conkling letter, George Templeton Strong observed, "There are sentences that a critic would like to eliminate, but they are delightfully characteristic of the 'plain man' who wrote it and will appeal directly to the great mass of 'plain men' from Maine to Minnesota."

In view of what Strong says about the power of the word upon "plain men," Wilson's book raises timeless questions about the relationship between rhetoric and philosophy in a democratic society. In his dialogue *Gorgias*, Plato highlights the clash in Athens between the sophists who used rhetoric to manipulate their audience; and philosophers like Socrates who used the dialectical method to seek wisdom. Socrates, purportedly the wisest man in Athens, was executed, in part, for his unwillingness to use rhetoric to flatter the mob and for his inability to persuade them of the justice of his cause. Plato's teaching seems to suggest the irreconcilability between rhetoric and justice. A careful reading of *Gorgias*, however, points to the possibility of a statesman who can speak to the people by using a philosophical rhetoric that ennobles and enlarges, rather than debases and diminishes them. Lincoln was such a statesman. In recognition of this fact, Wilson reminds his readers in the epilogue that Lincoln's success as a writer and speaker was not merely the result of rhetorical devices, but sincerity and conviction as well. If he were alive, Plato would likewise remind us that writing and rhetoric must be governed by truth and justice. Style is no substitute for substance. For as both Plato and Lincoln well knew, the sophist wields his verbal sword not for the common good; but for his or her own private interest.

In conclusion, who would think that a book on Lincoln's writing could be such a page turner? Wilson's analysis is at once an education about Lincoln and the writings process. It is an absolute must for those to whom the written word is either a passion or a livelihood. In today's era of e-mails, cell phones, and text messages, we find ourselves exchanging the painstaking discipline of the art of writing for instantaneous messages that speak "an infinity of nothing." We talk more and say less. Wilson's book is a potent antidote to these impoverishing trends and to the postmodern ideologies regnant in many Literature departments that emphatically deny the possibility of ever knowing an author's intention. Wilson's book will appeal broadly to both the general public and to academics. It could serve as a valuable tool for college writing, political science, history, and communication courses. Wilson, who began his career as professor of American Literature, has proved that he is the perfect candidate to help us appreciate the grace and power of the written word in our loud but inarticulate times.

Abraham Lincoln and the Conservative Tradition in American Politics

By Herman Belz, Professor of History, University of Maryland



Herman Belz

More than any other American political leader, the statesmanship of Abraham Lincoln, sixteenth president of the United States, implicates perennial problems and historically contingent issues that define the meaning of conservatism in the American political tradition. Lincoln's signal achievement was to maintain the founders' regime of federal republicanism against forces of democratic popular sovereignty that culminated in the movement of revolutionary secession. As Russell Kirk wrote, in the contest between

the claims of order and the claims of freedom that was posed by the Civil War, "Lincoln prevented the victory of disorder."

In the Springfield Lyceum address of 1838, Lincoln analyzed the problem of preserving constitutional liberty and civil and religious rights against the potentially destructive power of popular sovereignty. As a Whig lawyer-politician in frontier Illinois, he represented middle class, evangelical Protestant, and procapitalist interests concerned with projects of economic and moral improvement. In partisan contests against anticapitalist Democratic agrarianism in the Illinois legislature and the U.S. Congress, Lincoln supported the Whig program of government funded transportation projects, protective tariffs for domestic manufacturing, and a national banking system. An affirmation of the National Republican American System, Whig political economy was intended to strengthen national unity and economic prosperity against European monarchies abroad and the influence of proslavery partisanship in domestic politics.

In the slavery controversy that led to the Civil War, Lincoln recommended a conservative antislavery position. Where Congress had authority to legislate, in the District of Columbia, he favored a plan of gradual, compensated emancipation to be approved by popular referendum. Opposed to abolitionism, Lincoln as a Whig and later as a member of the Republican party occupied the centrist free soil position in the spectrum of antislavery politics that formed in the 1850s to resist the nationalizing and expansionist demands of the slave states.

In 1854 Lincoln achieved acclaim and notoriety for his political and moral opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the controversial measure of Democrat Senator Stephen A. Douglas to open unorganized national territory to slavery penetration by repealing the antislavery restrictions of the Missouri Compromise. Appealing to the principles of the Declaration of Independence, Lincoln stated: "no man is good enough to govern another man, *without that other's consent* Let us turn slavery from its claims of 'moral right' back upon its existing legal rights, and its arguments of necessity." Not only moral principle, but also free labor economic interests, justified resistance to proslavery aggrandizement. "The whole nation is interested that the best use shall be made of these territories," Lincoln said. "We want them for the homes of free white people."

Seeking election to the Senate in 1858, Lincoln assumed a more radical position based on the conviction that proslavery demands threatened republican government and free society in the nation as a whole. Criticizing the proslavery *Dred Scott* decision, he predicted in the House Divided Speech that the sectional conflict would be resolved by the country becoming either all slave or all free. Relentlessly, Lincoln condemned the popular sovereignty principle of political rival Stephen A. Douglas as a form of moral neutrality that effectively promoted the cause of slavery expansion. In 1860 Lincoln won the Republican presidential nomination as a moderate alternative to the more extreme antislavery Senator William H. Seward of New York. Which of the four parties competing for the presidency—Republicans, northern Democrats, southern Democrats, and Constitutional Unionists—was the true conservative party in representing the constitutional principles of the founding was the question to be decided.

The Republican platform recognized slavery as a local institution under federal constitutional protection in the states where it existed. The party opposed the extension of slavery in national territories and declared the principles of liberty, equality, and consent in the Declaration of Independence to be essential to the preservation of republican institutions in the United States. Before his nomination Lincoln gave hundreds of speeches condemning slavery as a violation of the nation's founding principles, while scrupulously disavowing abolitionist ends and proposing vaguely that slavery be placed on a course of ultimate extinction, consistent with the framers' intent. Southern Democrats' claim to conservative constitutional fidelity rested on the argument that no practical or moral distinction existed between immediate abolition of slavery in states where it existed and opposition to territorial slavery. In general, southerners held slavery to be the foundation principle both of American constitutional republicanism and of a progressive, racially hierarchical order.

After Lincoln was elected president, fear for the safety of their domestic institutions led South Carolina and six other southern states to secede from the Union. Secession was based on claims of a reserved and unalienable right of sovereign state-nations to withdraw at will from a legally nonbinding constitutional compact. The focus of national politics now shifted from the problem of slavery and republican government to the question of the existence of sovereign state immunity to overthrow the government of the Union created by the unanimous consent of all the

American states. The issues posed were: whether the American people constituted a nation, the conditions under which it was lawful and just for them to maintain their territorial and political integrity; and whether the government of the Union possessed legitimate authority to suppress a movement aimed at destroying the federal republic.

In this political crisis, Lincoln acted on conservative grounds to maintain the existence of the Union under the Constitution ordained by the people of the United States. In his First Inaugural Address, he rejected the idea of a legal and constitutionally privileged right of secession as anarchical in nature and contrary to fundamental law. Affirming the central principle of the American political tradition disputed by the secessionists, Lincoln declared: "A majority, held in restraint by constitutional checks, and limitations, and always changing easily, with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people."

Lincoln acknowledged the liberal principle of a right of revolution to which an aggrieved minority could with moral justification appeal should the majority deprive it of a clearly written constitutional right. He denied that deprivation of "vital rights" of minorities had occurred. Observing that southerners still had the protection of the Constitution and laws on slavery they had written, Lincoln asked for "a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people." The federal government, he declared, would not assail them. When the Confederate states decided to exercise the right of secession by using military force to occupy Fort Sumter in South Carolina, Lincoln used military force to defend the Union against what he proclaimed to be lawless and unjustified rebellion.

Whether Lincoln or the secessionists acted on a correct constitutional understanding of the nature of the Union, and where responsibility lay for starting the Civil War, remain controversial questions. Sympathetic to claims of local liberty against the dictates of twentieth-century centralized sovereignty, a body of conservative opinion regards Lincoln as a revolutionary nationalist and racial egalitarian whose willful rejection of compromise and denial of the right of secession plunged the country into war. In this view, the Confederate states seceded not to preserve the system of Negro slavery, as appearance might suggest, but to defend their sovereignty as independent state-nations in the voluntary and noncoercive Union established by the founding fathers. Lincoln is charged with derailing the American political tradition from its constitutional unconcern with equality, canonizing the equality principle of the Declaration of Independence at the center of American political experience through revolutionary means. Allowed to pursue the path of local liberty and self-determination, conservatives of this persuasion argue, the Confederate states would have separated from their northern brothers on equitable terms and resolved the slavery question in a humane and racially progressive way, without the catastrophic loss of life and property exacted by Lincoln's decision for war.

Although provocative, the libertarian conservative critique unhistorically exaggerates the role of Lincoln and the Republican party as the source of contemporary statist liberalism and egalitarian

excess that modern conservatism opposes. If the Union was the nonbinding compact of sovereign states that secessionists said it was—in essence a pure interstate anarchy system—it is difficult to understand why the northern states did not have as much right to defend the interests of free labor in liberal republican society as the southern states did the interests of slave labor in patriarchal republican society. If, on the other hand, the nature of the Union was ambiguous, the constitutional arguments of north and south canceling each other inconclusively, then superior prudence and deep understanding of the American political tradition can be considered the decisive factor in resolving the crisis of American nationality. On this score Lincoln's historical reputation as a conservative statesman is not undeserved.

In political circumstances that portended the “mortal feud” and “conflagration through a whole nation” that concerned the founding fathers, Lincoln acted with conscious and deliberate intent as a constitutionalist, not as a revolutionist. As an antislavery reformer and representative of bourgeois capitalist society, Lincoln recognized political and constitutional limits on the federal government—including the power of the chief executive in time of war—that casts doubt on the view of him as a radical egalitarian nationalist. In the face of extreme antislavery pressure, Lincoln endeavored to prevent the war from degenerating into a “violent and remorseless revolutionary struggle.” With single-minded determination, he insisted on the priority of maintaining the Constitution and the Union as the aim of the war. His actions as president-elect in the secession crisis and as wartime chief executive were politically controversial and debatable precisely because the Constitution was not in any comprehensive way suspended. Like its Confederate counterpart in Richmond, the Lincoln administration found it necessary to restrict individual civil liberties in areas of disloyal activity and overt military operations. Temporary

suspension of civil rights was owing to the friction and abrasion of war, however, rather than to a systematic design to subvert the constitutional order and establish executive dictatorship.

Lincoln's actions on the slavery question reflected the prudence of a moderate reformer concerned with constitutional limitations and existing legal obligations. The reason for the Republican party's existence, and the cause of Lincoln's presidency, was to maintain free political and social institutions against the threat of proslavery political domination. With the outbreak of war it was obvious that changes in the institution of slavery might occur. Yet Lincoln scrupulously subordinated action on the slavery question to the strategic objective of maintaining the Union and the Constitution. He issued the Emancipation Proclamation as a measure warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, which was “sincerely believed to be an act of justice.”

In the view of conservative scholar Richard Weaver, the statesmanship of Abraham Lincoln was distinguished by recognition that a politically effective American conservatism must be based on principles grounded on a fixed concept of the nature of man. Conservatism was evident in Lincoln's challenge to Douglas's relativist doctrine of popular sovereignty, his appeal to the moral idea of freedom and the political idea of Union as ideal objectives rising above political expediency, and his respect for established principles of American government. In transcending the passions of war in his Second Inaugural Address, Weaver observed, Lincoln offered his fellow countrymen, north and south, a final demonstration of conservative statesmanship.

(Editor's note: This essay first appeared in American Conservatism: An Encyclopedia, published by ISI Books. It is reprinted by permission.)

Upcoming National Events

Kim Bauer, Director of the **Lincoln Heritage Project**, Decatur, IL, is hosting a panel discussion of Abraham Lincoln's DNA in Decatur on April 21.

62nd Annual Boy Scout Lincoln Pilgrimage, Springfield, IL — April 27–29.

Annual Lincoln Institute for Teachers, Southern Indiana University, Evansville, IN — June 14–15.

The Watchorn Lincoln Memorial Association and **The Will J. Reid Foundation** are hosting a tour honoring the life of Abraham Lincoln and the 75th anniversary of the **Lincoln Memorial Shrine** that includes visits to Washington, Gettysburg, and Springfield, May 5–13. **Lincoln Shrine** (909) 798 7632 or **Laura's Travel Service** (909) 793 7551.

A Synopsis of Two Recent Books by James O. and Lois E. Horton

Slavery and the Making of America (Oxford University Press, 2005) and *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* (The New Press, 2006)

Compiled by Denise D. Meringolo

James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton are among the nation's most prolific and well-respected scholars in the field of African American history. Their primary research has been in the history of free black communities in the 18th and 19th centuries, and their pivotal works on the subject—*Black Bostonians* and *In Hope of Liberty*—have gone through multiple printings. More recently, the Hortons have begun writing about the history and memory of slavery, bringing their attention to detail and their gift for storytelling to one of the most difficult subjects in American history. Their two most recent books encourage readers to recognize slavery not as an uncomfortable footnote, but as a critical aspect of the past that continues to resonate in American life and culture.

Slavery and the Making of America documents the impact of slavery on American social, cultural and political life. In their introduction, the Hortons briefly describe the evolution of historical scholarship on the subject. Since the 1970s, scholars have focused their attention on the African and African American experience of slavery. Yet, public discussion on the subject remains muted at best, and too often represents slavery as an abstract institution or an aberration—an exception to the rule of American democracy and freedom. Throughout their recent work on the subject of slavery, the Hortons argue that slavery is central to the American experience, demonstrating through well selected anecdotes and stories that it was the focus of social activism, public policy and national debate for more than 300 years.

Slavery and the Making of America was published in conjunction with a PBS television series of the same name. In only 231 pages of text and six chapters, the book covers an enormous amount of historical territory. Yet, the narrative is engaging and easy to follow, a testament to the authors' skill in weaving personal stories and first hand accounts into a clear and focused analysis. The book aims to humanize the subject of slavery in an effort to facilitate better public understanding of its historical significance. It asks readers to consider not simply what slavery meant in national politics, but also what it felt like for African American people.

Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American History is a collection of essays for which James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton served as editors. It is a useful companion to *Slavery and the Making of America*, particularly for teachers and museum pro-

fessionals who are incorporating the history of slavery into their educational programs. The essayists offer a variety of perspectives about why slavery and race relations remain difficult topics in classrooms and at historic sites. Taken as a whole, the book argues that a better understanding of slavery is a necessary prerequisite for understanding both historical and contemporary race relations in the United States.

These books hold a specific relevance for the readers of *Lincoln Lore* because James Oliver Horton is one of the fifteen appointed members of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. According to the Commission's official website, its goal is not simply to commemorate the 200th Anniversary of Lincoln's birth in 2009, but also to "inform the public about the impact Abraham Lincoln had on the development of our nation, and to find the best possible ways to honor his accomplishments." In this context, the Hortons' body of scholarship on race and slavery—particularly its effort to bring current scholarship to the attention of both general readers and museum visitors—is enormously relevant. Slavery is an essential lens through which to measure Lincoln's legacy in American social and political life.

It is fair to say that Abraham Lincoln's official place in the annals of American history seems certain. His presidency was dominated by the Civil War, and most scholars recognize the critical role he played not only in successfully preserving the Union, but also in overseeing the end of slavery as a legal institution in the United States. Yet, popular perceptions of Lincoln tend to fluctuate over time, and his meaning differs in different areas of the country and among different communities of people. Lincoln's public image is colored not simply by the history of slavery and race relations, but also by the extent to which slavery is a subject too complicated or painful for most Americans to talk about with objectivity or emotional distance. Although slavery ended nearly 150 years ago, it is still a powerful presence in American life.

The essays in *Slavery and Public History* testify to the power of slavery's memory and meaning by documenting the ways in which slavery remains a controversial subject in history classrooms and at historic sites. Dwight Pitcaithley, the former Chief Historian of the National Park Service, spearheaded the effort to broaden the historical narratives at Civil War Battlefields. For decades, exhibits and tour guides at most battlefields avoided any mention of the causes of the war, focusing instead on a narrow narrative about the specific battle that occurred at a given site. Beginning in 1998 the National Park Service—with official sanction from Congress—began to describe slavery as a primary cause of the Civil War and to include information about the experience of African Americans as slaves, soldiers and camp followers. This effort to expand the historical perspective at Battlefield Parks met with intense scrutiny and protest from a variety of sources, including groups such as the Sons of Confederate Veterans.

These protests are not aberrations. Indeed, they are an outgrowth of a long process of remembering and forgetting that has shaped Americans' sense of the significance of the Civil War. By the end of the 19th century, the necessity of re-unifying Americans in the North and South led many veterans groups, local political groups and others to romanticize the Confederacy and marginalize the

significance of slavery. Over time, as commemorative parades, historical re-enactments, and solemn memorials were performed on specific battlefields, whites in the North and South developed a sense of nostalgia for the Southern "Lost Cause." By excluding the perspectives of African Americans, the story of the Civil War in popular memory became a quintessentially American story about individual soldiers making a stand for independence against a powerful federal authority.

Slavery and the Making of America offers general readers and history buffs an important perspective on Abraham Lincoln and his legacy. Lincoln left a compelling record of his own thoughts about the institution of slavery and about the humanity of African Americans. The Hortons analyze the significance of these documents by juxtaposing them against a similarly compelling record of ideas, arguments and actions taken by African Americans during the same period. Listening to these voices, readers can begin to recognize that it was not simply the legal institution of slavery that dominated political discourse during Lincoln's lifetime. African American people were active participants in American politics and culture. Measuring Lincoln's words through the reactions of African Americans provides a more accurate context for measuring the impact of his presidency.

The Hortons argue that Abraham Lincoln was the best hope for abolitionists at the time of his election. Other white politicians and activists were more vehemently opposed to slavery, and a handful expressed a belief in full equality for black people. However, their views were too far outside the thinking of most Americans. Lincoln was a rather moderate leader whose views on race were a product of the social and political milieu in which he was raised. Nonetheless, he agonized over the place of slavery in a nation built on the ideal of freedom, and his perspective evolved over time.

Not surprisingly, African American voters found Lincoln and his party disappointing at best. Free people of color generally supported the Republican Party, but black leaders were well aware that its platform was not particularly friendly to African American interests. Nonetheless, Republican efforts to restrict slavery's expansion made its candidates preferable to those endorsed by the pro-slavery Democratic Party. One black leader wrote in the abolitionist newspaper, *The Liberator*, "We do not pledge ourselves to go further with the Republicans than the Republicans will go with us."

Unfortunately, the Republicans proved they would only go so far. In New York, the 1860 ballot asked voters to consider an amendment to the state constitution that would end the property requirement for black voters. Republicans unanimously supported this change, but they failed to draw attention to the issue, fearing their stance would damage Lincoln's chances of winning the state and fuel the Democrats' portrayal of Lincoln as an abolitionist. Lincoln and the Republicans carried the election in New York, but the effort to end restrictions on black suffrage failed. African Americans felt betrayed by the Republicans. Frederick Douglass wrote, "The blow is a heavy and damaging one. Every intelligent colored man must feel it keenly." Lincoln's election generated little more than cautious optimism among African Americans who generally

found the President too willing to make concessions to the Confederate States.

At the same time, Southerners labeled Lincoln a "Black Republican," a derogatory term applied to staunch abolitionists and advocates of African American civil rights. By the time of Lincoln's inauguration on March 4, 1861, Southern States had already begun to secede from the Union. Lincoln was forced to reconcile his interest in preserving the Union with his personal opposition to slavery. He attempted to reassure the Southern States, arguing that he had neither the inclination nor the legal power to interfere with slavery where it already existed. His words were insufficient. On April 12, 1861, Confederate forces opened fire on Fort Sumter, pushing the crisis beyond the possibility of peaceful reconciliation.

As the war raged on, popular opinion gradually shifted. The mainstream press began to argue that the key to Union victory was the complete end of slavery. This shift in public opinion encouraged Lincoln to articulate a bolder statement about the purpose of the war. He proposed a plan of gradual emancipation that would encourage states to end slavery over a reasonable amount of time. In April of 1862, Congress passed an Act to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia.

Though these were more modest proposals than some abolitionists would have liked, James Oliver Horton and Lois Horton demonstrate that African Americans recognized the cautious first steps as the beginning of the federal government's commitment to black freedom. African Americans in slave-holding Maryland were legally unaffected by emancipation in Washington. Nonetheless, one Maryland resident "clapped her hands and shouted...let me go tell my husband that Jesus has done all things well." Black leaders began to express faith in the possibility that Lincoln's government would end slavery. Runaway slaves flooded into Washington, DC, establishing community roots. Free people from northern states set up schools and other institutions to help ease the transition from slavery to freedom.

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address in 1865 was a stark contrast to his first. No longer tempered by a fear of losing the war, Lincoln struck a verbal blow against slavery. According to the Hortons, "He contended that God might use the war to deprive Americans of the wealth they had unjustly amassed from slave labor and that the war might continue 'until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword.'" After Lincoln's assassination, African Americans mourned him. His symbolic role in ending the institution of slavery far outweighed any shortcomings of his earlier presidential policies.

James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton underscore the importance of understanding Lincoln's symbolic value as well as his historical significance. *Slavery and Public History* testifies to the relevance of slavery in current public discourse, but it also demonstrates the emotional stronghold that slavery still has on Americans' sense of their national past. *Slavery and the Making of America* is a model for educators, museum professionals and historians alike because it demonstrates the ways in which a shift of perspective can help amplify the significance of slavery, the Civil War and Abraham

Lincoln. By working to identify places where Americans can catch a glimpse of both the historical and the symbolic Abraham Lincoln, the Lincoln Bicentennial Commission will best serve its own educational agenda to explore Lincoln's significance in American life and culture.

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(Editor's note: James O. Horton presented the 2006 R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture at The Lincoln Museum. Thanks to the McMurtry family for sponsoring this article.)

Endnotes

¹ <http://www.lincolnbicentennial.gov>

² Horton, James Oliver and Lois E. Horton. *Slavery and the Making of America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Page 169

³ Horton, James Oliver and Lois E. Horton. *Slavery and the Making of America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Page 169

⁴ Horton, James Oliver and Lois E. Horton. *Slavery and the Making of America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005. Page 179.

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2007 McMurtry Lecture

Doris Kearns Goodwin, author of *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, will give the 2007 McMurtry Lecture at The Lincoln Museum on September 21.

Doris Kearns Goodwin, photograph by Richard N. Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*, Simon & Schuster Paperback

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