



Lincoln Lore

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An Interview with Harold Holzer Regarding the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation

SG: Please explain the significance of Lincoln's Message to Congress, dated March 6, 1862.

HH: In a sense it was the opening salvo in a ten-month-long march toward freedom. In a proposal that was truly extraordinary for an era in which Congress typically initiated legislation and Presidents merely approved or vetoed, Lincoln directly urged the House and Senate to authorize compensated voluntary emancipation in the slaveholding Union states. Lincoln had long believed that slavery should be placed on a course of ultimate extinction, but now he reminded Border State Congressmen that there was a good economic argument for freedom now: it was far cheaper for the government to buy slaves than to wage war. But the Southern Unionists would not be convinced. Lincoln was unable to win their support, and the initiative failed. Perhaps the most important impact of its failure, however, was positive: had Congress embraced it, abolition would have required years more to consummate fully. Instead, Lincoln was soon emboldened to act in his capacity as commander-in-chief to launch the march toward liberation by executive order, and in the states in the Confederacy instead. The failed March message set the stage for the successful September proclamation.

SG: In July 1862, were Lincoln's Cabinet officers correct in persuading him to wait until a Union battlefield victory before issuing the Proclamation?

HH: This is a difficult question to answer. William H. Seward warned



William H. Seward
OC-0928

Lincoln that a Proclamation published so soon after the recent Union humiliations on the Virginia peninsula would have smelled like an act of desperation. Lincoln admitted he'd never thought of that argument, and agreed to wait. Yet Lincoln would issue the final proclamation less than a month after yet another horrific Union loss at Fredericksburg, and the

proclamation was still regarded as a major turning point, even as it ignited predictable controversy. For all the delays that preceded the announcement of the preliminary proclamation, delays on which some historians tend to focus today, emancipation was in a sense always a desperate act—a daring effort to destroy the enemy's home front labor system while hinting at increasing recruitment in the Union army by inviting African Americans to join up. (This was announced in the final proclamation.) These were pretty extraordinary actions, and would have stirred the pot whenever they were announced. Seward convinced Lincoln to wait, but I don't think it would have made much difference had Lincoln announced his intentions in July instead of September. Actually, an earlier announcement might have made it less of an issue in the Congressional elections that fall. Emancipation, as a cartoonist of the day pointed out, was always Abraham Lincoln's "final card."

SG: Whose idea was it to issue a "Preliminary" document? Was it a good idea?

HH: Lincoln was a born gradualist and a terrific lawyer and politician to boot. He wanted public opinion behind him, and armies and courts alike poised to approve his actions. By giving rebellious states a hundred days' notice to return to the Union or risk losing their human property "forever," Lincoln bought precious time to gauge military enthusiasm



Lincoln and Seward signing the Emancipation Proclamation

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(or lack of it) for a momentous shift in war goals; gave fair warning to the courts as well as the generals to prepare for a new objective; and helped convince the public that his primary goal was to restore the Union, not to free black people—a crucial element of the President's strategy of maintaining white support. Besides, with the off-year Congressional and gubernatorial elections fast approaching, I'm convinced that Lincoln calculated that a preliminary order (which would never take effect if Confederates threw down their arms) was less likely to arouse opposition anger than a final edict designed to free millions of black people before Election Day. Considering the losses the Republican Party endured on the local and state level that autumn anyway, a final order in September might well have brought down the entire Lincoln Administration. Abolitionists chafed at the strategy of issuing a preliminary proclamation, but it may have saved the government and added teeth for the final order.

SG: Did Lincoln and members of his administration really believe that at least some states in the Confederacy would take advantage of the "100-day-grace-period" and return to the Union? If there was no real expectation that this would occur, why was the offer made?

HH: It's doubtful. By September, Confederate determination to separate from the Union or die trying was abundantly clear to North as well as South. But again, the "warning period" was good politics, and perhaps crucial as well to keeping Border States from joining the Confederacy out of fear of precipitous abolition. A grace period might also help keep England from recognizing the Confederacy—a real concern, as historian Amanda Foreman has shown in her brilliant book, *World on Fire*. London would get the news in a few weeks, and have little choice but to begin tilting toward the North; gradual

freedom would surely trump their affection for Southern aristocracy. The grace period also put the South both on notice and on the defensive; they could have their slaves if only they sacrificed their dubious claims to independence. The North would accept slavery where it existed in order to have the Union restored. Lincoln could use the next three months to prepare an anxious nation for the next steps toward freedom. And he could advance the notion that he acted only to reunite the states, not separate masters from their slaves. Given the choice between acting too soon or too slowly, Lincoln almost always sacrificed drama for permanent impact.

SG: Is there a record of the reaction of Frederick Douglass to the Preliminary Proclamation? Other abolitionists? The general public in the North?

HH: Douglass was clearly delighted that Lincoln finally issued the September 22 proclamation. "We shout for joy that we live to record his righteous decree," he wrote in *Douglass' Monthly* the following month.

But even so he lamented that the document was written in restrained legalese. "It was not a proclamation of 'liberty throughout the land, unto all the inhabitants thereof,' such as we had hoped it would be," he complained. Many other abolitionists concurred. William Lloyd Garrison thought the language tepid. The foreign-born diarist Adam Gurowski complained that it was written "in the meanest and most dry routine style," without "a word to evoke a generous thrill." Union General James Wadsworth, a Harvard-educated anti-slavery man, contended that, "never a nobler subject as more belittled by the form in which it was uttered." Yet amidst all these complaints, Northerners immediately understood the social revolution that

the preliminary proclamation portended. Republicans in general hailed the preliminary proclamation as a long-needed act, while Democrats denounced Lincoln for acting as a dictator, not a constitutionally elected chief magistrate, and doing so in behalf of black people, not whites.

SG: How did the press cover the Preliminary Proclamation?

HH: Coverage broke strictly along party lines, for the overwhelming number of Northern newspapers of the time remained loyal to either the Democratic or Republican parties. Republican papers generally applauded; Democratic journals attacked. Response was not unlike the broadcast commentary that greeted, say, the recent U. S. Supreme Court decision upholding the Affordable Health Care Act. Openly liberal MSNBC applauded the ruling, and hailed Chief Justice John Roberts for casting the deciding vote. Conservative Fox News lambasted the decision and called Roberts a traitor and worse. Not much has changed—today's cable TV news is not unlike the print press of the 1850s and 1860s. No wonder we have a house divided again. Lincoln himself was so smart he was not deluded by favorable editorials from Republican editors already inclined to support him. He admitted that "commendation in newspapers" was "all that a vain man could wish," but noted that the stock market had declined, and troop desertions increased. He was worried. "The North responds to the proclamation sufficiently in breath," he said, adding: "but breath alone kills no rebels."

SG: How did Confederates (both military and civilian) respond?

HH: Again, no surprise here. The order did nothing to deflate the Southern will at first—it constituted a dare that the Confederates gamely accepted. Newspapers united in

denouncing Lincoln as well as the proclamation—he was a desperate dictator willing to foment race war and endanger Southern womanhood. The wild card reaction here came from the military, especially the hateful resentment that black recruitment stirred among irredeemably racist commanders like Nathan Bedford Forrest, a former slave trader, who certainly ordered the execution of black soldiers who threw down their arms at Fort Pillow. But even the revered Robert E. Lee captured and re-enslaved free blacks when he invaded Pennsylvania in 1863. Anyone who clings to the belief that the Civil War was about anything but slavery should remember the response emancipation engendered among the racist Confederate military.

SG: Did Lincoln make speeches and write supportive letters during the fall?

After the Union victory at Antietam on September 17, 1862, President Lincoln felt confident enough to issue the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22.



Prang - Battle of Antietam #4479

HH: It's not easy to reconcile the leaden, legalistic prose of the Emancipation Proclamation with the poetry with which Lincoln had already shown he was fully capable as an orator and writer. The truth is, the most brilliantly written letter that he sent (and issued publicly) before the preliminary proclamation was something of a feint: the letter to *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley assuring him (and through him, a worried nation) that he would free, or not free, slaves for one reason alone: to save the Union. At the time, Lincoln had already drafted his proclamation and was merely waiting for the right moment to make it official.

Otherwise, Lincoln remained unwilling to speak or write very much more in the lead-up to his most important decree. Acting very much as he had behaved between his election and his inauguration—remaining silent, urging people to wait for his first inaugural address to learn his official policy—



Horace Greeley
OC-0667

Lincoln wanted the Emancipation Proclamation to speak for itself. That said, if we regard his December 1862 Message to Congress, his 1863 Conkling Letter, and even the Gettysburg Address, as the poetry that eventually accompanied the prose, then Lincoln certainly made up for "lost time" by providing the inspiration to accompany his dry official document. When he finally began speaking in defense of freedom, no one, ever, spoke more eloquently or persuasively.

SG: Did he promote emancipation in his Annual Message to Congress on December 1, 1862?

HH That was his first major, formal effort to defend his forthcoming final executive order, and what he produced was one of the most baffling mixed bags in his entire oratorical arsenal. Lincoln devoted much of his message to promoting not only gradual emancipation—over a disheartening 35-year-long period—but recommending that free blacks be colonized in the Caribbean or Africa. In his defense, although it is hard to defend his stubborn loyalty to even the voluntary deportation of former slaves at this late date, his party had just been whipped in the mid-term

elections. He was dealing from weakness now, not strength, as he readied to issue his final proclamation in less than a month. The next Congress would be less likely to support him; now at least he had a lame duck session perhaps more willing to enact the legislation that would cement the trend toward freedom (notwithstanding colonization). But Lincoln also knew the Message would be looked at by the public as an indication of whether the President was, indeed, going to follow through and issue his final order—and considerable doubt reigned at the time (to be compounded when the Union suffered humiliating defeat at Fredericksburg just a few days later). In his final sentences, Lincoln provided a moral argument for following through—an argument at last for doing something for humanity and history alike: “In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free—honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best, hope of earth. Other means may succeed; this could not fail. The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just—a way which, if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless.” Was he talking about very gradual emancipation in the Border States and very *expeditious* colonization of freed blacks—or about the thunderbolt he was about to announce on January 1? Perhaps both? “The fiery trial through which we pass,” Lincoln believed, no doubt about both parallel policies, “will light us down, in honor, or dishonor, to the latest generation.” And as Lincoln was convinced by then: “we cannot escape history.” It was a breathtaking defense—a clarion call for facing an uncertain future with unprecedented creativity and resolve. Only Lincoln could have brought it off. But eloquent as the Message was, it has to be remembered as a last look to the past as well as an expression of faith in

the future; an offer to step back even as America marched forward. Fortunately, Lincoln could be brilliantly eloquent even when he was being politically schizophrenic.

SG: What were the financial ramifications of his proposal?

HH: Lincoln always maintained it was far less expensive to purchase slaves than to support armies in the field. Lincoln left the precise budgetary implications blank in his Message, but he also reminded Congress that “emancipation would shorten the war, perpetuate peace,” and “...insure the wealth of the country.” As he explained it, “we should pay all the emancipation would cost, together with our other debt, easier than we should pay our other debt, without it.” It is worth noting that however retrograde some parts of the annual message seem to the modern reader, Lincoln did forcefully make clear that he did not believe emancipation would bring swarms of free black labor into the work force, thus reducing wages. “Emancipation,” he argued, “even without deportation, would probably enhance the wages of white labor, and, very surely, would not reduce them.” This was arguably the most important “financial” argument Lincoln made: be not afraid; elevating one class of people would not hurt another.

SG: In the Lincoln Collection of the Allen County Public Library (Fort Wayne, IN) are the letters which local soldier George Squier wrote home to “My own dear Ellen.” On December 24, 1862, he wrote: “There is now no room to doubt that the President’s proclamation of emancipation, though in itself right, and intende for good, has come fer short of his and many others’ wishes and expectations. That proclimation will without the shadow of a doubt add one hundred thousand men to the rebbels’ army and take nearly as many from our army. Men are deserting every night by scores, mostly from the Ky.

regiment.” Squier goes on to say that he doubts that many Yankee soldiers will be willing to “peril their lives” in the cause of emancipation. Was Squier correct? Did emancipation have a negative effect on Union troops and a positive one on Confederate numbers as he predicted?

HH: Well, there is no doubt that countless white soldiers had real and sincere doubts about fighting for emancipation—and risking their lives for black people. They had signed up to fight for majority rule and the beloved Union, not freedom for slaves. And once the proclamation became public, desertions increased, to Lincoln’s and his generals’ dismay. What is far more extraordinary than Squier’s doubts is how many enlisted men eventually came around to understand that emancipation and reunion were inextricably intertwined. Historians William C. Davis and James McPherson have both done admirable work studying soldier response to emancipation, concluding that Union forces quickly came to support



Squier Letter from the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

emancipation if only because they believed it would shorten the war and reduce their exposure to danger. Later, when black troops began risking their own lives fighting, if not side by side with white recruits and draftees, then at least on the same side and in the same battles, white men who had never before known black men as other than slaves, servants, or menials, came to a new, highly personal understanding of the promises that freedom offered.

SG: Did high-ranking Union officers express the same concern as Squier?

HH: Well, Lincoln surely paid the price in 1862 for recruiting so many Democrats to raise regiments in 1861—when it seemed important to have all political parties united in preserving the Union. Invariably, officers who opposed Lincoln in politics reacted insubordinately to emancipation. Fitz-John Porter, for one, told a Democratic newspaper editor that the order was the work of a “political coward,” and had elicited “disgust, discontent, and expressions of disloyalty” in the army. George B. McClellan, whose victory at Antietam had ironically inspired Lincoln to pull the trigger on emancipation, told his wife he might resign his commission out of “self respect,” claiming he would find it difficult to “fight for such an accursed doctrine as servile insurrection—it is too infamous.” McClellan’s opposition was no secret—he had brazenly so advised Lincoln—and some Republicans fretted that McClellan might march on Washington with his loyal troops and seize the government. (I always respond that there is no reason to believe that this chronically timid general would have been any more successful in conquering Washington than he had been a few months earlier in conquering Richmond). I do think Lincoln definitely worried about these officers, and could not wait for the opportunity to get rid of McClellan once and for all.



George B. McClellan
OC-0800

It surely helped when his faith in the army was vindicated in the 1864 presidential election. Let’s not forget that despite all the initial doubts and complaints in both the ranks and the officers’ corps, Lincoln won 80% of the separately counted soldier vote—quite a vindication.

SG: Please comment on President Lincoln’s “Reply to Emancipation Memorial Presented to Chicago Christians of All Denominations” (September 13, 1862)

HH: This was the third of the three counter-intuitive public statements Lincoln made in the maddeningly frustrating run-up to the preliminary proclamation, each successively more bizarre. In the first, he sends Greeley a letter hinting he wouldn’t issue a proclamation, when of course he had already written it and was merely waiting for the chance to make it public. In the second, he meets with a delegation of free blacks and practically tells his unsuspecting visitors that blacks had caused the whole war and would be better off leaving America for colonies in West Indies or in Africa. And these sentiments were not casually shared: Lincoln was well aware that an AP correspondent was on hand to record his words, and distribute them to newspapers nationwide. Once again, Lincoln was willing to sacrifice his

future reputation as a liberator in order to assure fearful, and intractably racist, white voters that if he did act, he would do so only to restore the Union, and not out of a philanthropic impulse to help (non-voting) black people. Then comes the delegation of ministers to whom Lincoln inexplicably suggests a proclamation from his weakened hands would do little good; it would be regarded like a Pope’s famous bull declaring that Halley’s Comet would not be allowed in the sky (it appeared anyway). For good measure, Lincoln warned against arming black soldiers, and questioned whether emancipation would help him much politically in the North. Then he did an about-face and told his understandably perplexed visitors, “I have not decided against a proclamation of liberty to the slaves, but hold it under advisement.” Historian Mark Neely believes this meeting represented Lincoln at his most uncertain—the actions of a foundering politician genuinely stumbling as D-Day on emancipation neared. Neely has cited the disturbing fact that the ministers’ own transcript of the session appeared in the Chicago Press after it reported news of the emancipation itself. But keep in mind: Lincoln had no way of knowing that McClellan would prevail in Maryland only a few days after the ministers had departed; after all, hadn’t Pope failed him at Second Bull Run earlier that summer, delaying the proclamation until now? No, Lincoln was being prudent here, if perhaps a bit too manipulative even for him: marking time, making sure the public knew he was still considering his emancipation option when the time was right, and his hand stronger (he had bought into the “victory first” strategy now, dubious as it seems in retrospect). That the Union won at Antietam a few days later was a happy accident. By then, Lincoln may have regretted his rambling comments to the Chicago ministers. But he could not have been happier that events had rendered them obsolete. Actions still spoke louder than words.

SG: In the document itself, Lincoln defines the status of states to be determined “not then in rebellion against the United States” (as of January 1, 1863). Were these stipulations reasonable?

HH: Of course. Lincoln had no power to abrogate the Constitution on the matter of private property—even human property—in states that had maintained their legal and constitutional relationship with the federal Union, like Maryland and Delaware. He would use his powers as commander-in-chief to confiscate property in those states in open rebellion, something Congress had already endeavored to do legislatively—but without providing the power of the armed forces to provide enforcement. Lincoln was crossing all the “t’s” here. The implication is clear: if any Border State decided that the order was so provocative they would consider seceding too, here was fair warning—emancipation could apply to them, too.

SG: What is your final assessment of the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation?

HH: Well, above all it has been misunderstood. It was long-awaited, long-anticipated, maybe even anti-climactic, but it was still a huge event. It heralded both a new war and a new social order. Yes, reformers and radicals thought it could have been issued sooner; but had it not been timed as perfectly, it might have angered the Border States out of the Union and agitated England into recognizing the Confederacy as an independent nation. Partisan and impassioned editorial response in its own day makes it abundantly clear that contemporaries immediately regarded it as a controversial order that transformed Lincoln into a revolutionary leader overnight. True, the final order would not come for 100 days. But the war and the president would never be the same again.

I can only add that as a New Yorker, I am truly proud that my state owns and has since 1864 successfully preserved the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln donated it that year to an Albany relief bazaar, the abolitionist Gerrit Smith won it in a raffle (he sort of stacked the odds by buying 1,000 chances), and then the state legislature bought it after Lincoln’s death. Chicago did its

best to preserve Lincoln’s handwritten copy of the *final* proclamation (also donated to charity), but this icon perished in the 1871 Great Fire. The State Capitol was almost destroyed by its own fire in 1911, but a brave fellow rescued the handwritten preliminary proclamation, and it has remained safe ever since. This fall, Governor Andrew Cuomo has made sure it goes on a public tour throughout the state—a sesquicentennial opportunity for New Yorkers to see first hand the words that changed the country. The manuscript even boasts a fingerprint—and I have no doubt it’s Lincoln’s. He probably got some glue on his hands when he cut out, and pasted-in, a few paragraphs from the Confiscation Act. But there it is; and for me, it’s like seeing the finger of God at the Sistine Chapel—a human, personal, palpable connection to the Emancipation and the Emancipator.

Harold Holzer is chairman of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation. He also served as co-chair of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. He is the author, co-author or editor of over 40 books on Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War.



Your membership dues at work: Children visit a branch of the Allen County Public Library to study a traveling Lincoln exhibit. The traveling exhibit is sponsored by the Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana.

Stepfather Abraham: Frederick Douglass's Contribution to Lincoln Lore

by Peter C. Myers
Professor of Political Science
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire

'Here comes my friend Douglass.' With those words Abraham Lincoln welcomed Frederick Douglass to the reception celebrating Lincoln's second inauguration. Although Lincoln had treated Douglass cordially in their two previous White House meetings, the former slave was naturally apprehensive upon deciding to attend the inaugural reception, where indeed he was initially detained at the door. But word of his detention reached Lincoln, and soon Douglass found himself in the East Room of the White House, "amid a scene of elegance such as in this country I had never before witnessed," beckoned grandly by the President of the United States in a voice raised "so that all around could hear him."¹

Douglass loved to tell that story. It marks a high point in the larger story of his personal rise from enslavement and obscurity, and it is the culminating event in the heartwarming story of his developing friendship with Lincoln. The story of their friendship is heartwarming partly due to its improbability, for there was much that

could, and initially did, divide those two great men. They were, after all, *great* men, each in his way driven by a most importunate personal ambition; they were great *public* men, with differing views of the public good at a time of great national crisis; they occupied different, often conflicting stations, one an elected official and the other a radical reformer, an outsider; and deepest of all in the America of old, one was white and the other black.

Racially charged as it was, their story resounds with larger significance. A few short years before, demagogic attacks by Stephen A. Douglas, the incumbent whom Lincoln challenged for a seat in the U.S. Senate in the famous campaign of 1858, had forced Lincoln to renounce notions of comprehensive racial equality. In Senator Douglas's insinuations, Lincoln was an abolitionist associate of "Fred Douglass, the negro" who stood so far for "negro equality" as to approve marriages between blacks and whites. Lincoln then disavowed any past or present support for "the social and political equality of the white and black races." But not quite seven years later, there was Lincoln as president, hailing the great black abolitionist as he entered the East Room and telling him, 'there is no man in the country whose opinion I value more than yours.' For Frederick Douglass, it signaled the advent of a new America and a new world. *Here comes my friend Douglass.*

Friendships, however, are complicated things. As Aristotle if not experience teaches, they are bound ordinarily by pleasure or interest, and in better and rarer cases by a shared devotion to what is right and good. These and other complications were not lost on Douglass, to whose recollections we owe most of our knowledge of his friendship with Lincoln. His recollections are generally warm and edifying, in the spirit of his inaugural reception story. Yet, in the most carefully crafted and publicly significant of them, his speech at the unveiling of the Freedmen's Monument to Lincoln on April 14, 1876, he downplayed the personal dimension and highlighted the complications—the tensions and conflicts—in the larger relationship between Lincoln and black Americans. Yes, Douglass acknowledged, Lincoln was "our friend and liberator"; but he was also "preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men," and "we are at best only his Step-children ... children by force of circumstances."³

Why did Douglass say this? By this apparent ambivalence, what did he mean to teach his audience (present and future) about Lincoln, about his friendship with Lincoln, and about race relations in America?⁴ Let us consider from the beginning the complicated story that Douglass told.



Second Inaugural Address March 4, 1865

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

Lincoln first drew Douglass's attention at roughly the same time he first drew the nation's attention, in his 1858 debates with Senator Douglas. The abolitionist Douglass could readily identify with Lincoln in this contest. He himself had endeavored a few years earlier to engage the eminent Senator in debate over the latter's Kansas-Nebraska bill—that “hell-black scheme for extending slavery over Nebraska,” Douglass had called it.⁵ Inclined by principle and temperament to support radical abolitionist parties, Douglass still viewed hopefully the rise of mainstream antislavery parties, the Free Soil and Republican parties, and he readily supported them in opposition to the likes of Stephen Douglas. Discussing the Illinois senatorial contest in an August, 1858 speech, Douglass focused on the incumbent's weaknesses and took only a brief notice of the Republican challenger, one “Mr. Abram Lincoln.”⁶

This first notice was nonetheless laudatory. Douglass seems to have formed his impression of the future president largely from Lincoln's speech to open the campaign, in which Lincoln identified the election's central issue as freedom versus slavery and issued a soon-to-be famous warning: ‘a house divided against itself cannot stand.’ Those words were “well and wisely said,” Douglass commented. Lincoln had “nobly upheld ... the principles of the Republican Party in Illinois.”⁷

Douglass's cautious optimism about Lincoln endured waveringly into the 1860 presidential campaign. In a June editorial, he weighed Lincoln's inexperience against his character and principles. The Republican nominee, though “untried,” was “perseveringly industrious,” possessed a “cool, well balanced head, great firmness of will,” and was “one of the most frank, honest men in political life.” Better yet, abolitionists could support Lincoln without seriously compromising their principles; Douglass saw in the heart of the ungainly westerner a “radical Republican ... fully committed to the doctrine of the ‘irrepressible conflict’” between slavery and freedom, which he believed to be approaching a climactic moment. “Since the organization of Government,” he declared, “there has been no election so exciting and interesting as this.”⁸

Yet Douglass's doubts about Republicans, including Lincoln, persisted and deepened through the campaign. In the aftermath of their victory, he had come to expect them to wilt under the pressure of declarations or threats of secession from slaveholding states, just as risk-averse northern politicians had done, in his view, throughout the slavery controversies. He fumed in a December editorial: “if Mr. Lincoln were really an Abolition President, which he is not; if he were a friend to the Abolition movement, instead of being, as he is, *its most powerful enemy*,” then

slave states might have cause to secede. As things stand, Douglass predicted, Lincoln “and his party will become the best protectors of slavery where it now is.”⁹ For the first eighteen months of Lincoln's presidency, he believed that this prediction was abundantly confirmed.

The disappointments to come, as Douglass viewed matters, were signaled by the new president's inaugural address. In it, Lincoln firmly declared the illegality of secession and yet tried to conciliate those states that had resolved to secede or were contemplating it. To this end he reiterated his position that as an officer of the federal government, he had no lawful right “to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists,” and he added that he had “no inclination to do so.” He held “no objection” to a proposal to inscribe expressly into the Constitution that policy of federal noninterference. He further suggested with respect to the Fugitive Slave Law—roundly execrated and at times violently resisted by abolitionists—that it would be “much safer for all, both in official and private stations, to ... abide by, all those acts which stand unrepealed, than to violate any of them.”¹⁰

Douglass saw no prudent restraint and no rhetorical artfulness but only a craven conservatism in Lincoln's public statements concerning the proper war objective—as in the famous letter to Horace Greeley in which Lincoln said, “If I could save the Union without freeing *any* slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing *all* the slaves I would do it.”¹¹ Lincoln feared that to adopt an expressly antislavery war policy prematurely would be suicidal for the Union cause, further dividing northern opinion and pushing Unionist slaveholding states into the arms of the Confederacy. Dismissing those fears, Douglass's exasperation with Lincoln grew with the passing months, as he saw the president returning slaves rather than liberating them, revoking his generals' declarations of particular emancipations rather than endorsing and expanding them, and rejecting black volunteers rather than enlisting them. Meanwhile, the casualties mounted and the ultimate outcome grew ever more doubtful. In a January, 1862 editorial, Douglass wrote acidly, “Lincoln ... shows himself to be about as destitute of any anti-slavery principle or feeling as did James Buchanan, his predecessor.”¹⁴

THE TURNING

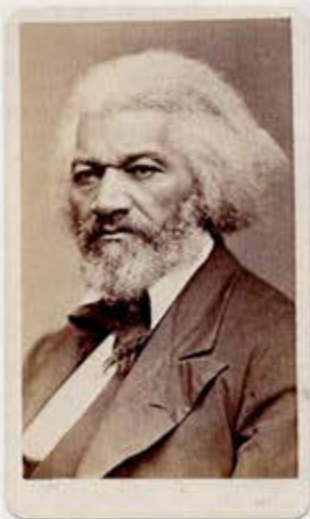
Douglass's impatience with Lincoln prevailed until September 22, 1862, to be precise, when the president issued a proclamation that, as Douglass saw it, radically changed the course of the war. The crucial passage read: “I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America, and Commander-in-chief of the Army and Navy thereof, do hereby proclaim and declare ... on the first day

of January in the year of our Lord, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any state, or designated part of a state, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free."¹⁵

Douglass was exultant. "We shout for joy that we have lived to record this righteous decree.... oh! long enslaved millions ... the hour of your deliverance draws nigh!... The rebellion suppressed, slavery abolished, and America will, higher than ever, sit as a queen among the nations of the earth."¹⁶ A month after the final Proclamation came, he told a Cooper Institute audience that Lincoln's action was "the greatest event of our nation's history It is a mighty event for the bondman, but it is a still mightier event for the nation at large, and ... it is still mightier when viewed in its relation to the cause of truth and justice throughout the world." He later recalled the New Year's Eve gathering in Boston at which he and other friends of liberty received the news: "I never saw joy before."¹⁷

The Proclamation did not instantly dissolve Douglass's skepticism regarding Lincoln. The document "was throughout like Mr. Lincoln," he later reflected not altogether admiringly, "framed with a view to the least harm and the most good possible in the circumstances." Momentously significant in its moral thrust, it was yet "extremely defective" in its particulars. "It was a measure apparently inspired by the low motive of military necessity, and ... would become inoperative and useless when military necessity should cease."¹⁸

Nonetheless, the Proclamation had declared emancipation and provided for the enlistment of black troops into the Union army, thus meeting Douglass's main, longstanding demands concerning war policy. The latter provision also set the stage for another crucial event in raising his esteem for Lincoln.



Frederick Douglass.
no date
From the Lincoln Financial
Foundation Collection
#OC-0553

The two men first met in August, 1863, when Douglass came to the White House hoping to persuade Lincoln to correct the unequal treatment accorded black soldiers. He left only partially satisfied with the substance of Lincoln's response, but the larger significance of their interview appeared in Lincoln's treatment of *him*. He had gone to this meeting with trepidation. "I was an ex-slave, identified with a despised race, and yet I was to meet the most exalted person in this great republic." But when they met, "I was never more quickly or more completely put at ease in the presence of a great man than in that of Abraham Lincoln."¹⁹

The decisive turn in their relationship occurred in their second meeting, a year later. In the meantime Douglass had turned negative toward Lincoln again. He feared that Lincoln's plans for governing the recaptured state of Louisiana portended a weak Reconstruction plan, too generous to the ex-rebels and inattentive to the rights of southern blacks, and so he briefly sided with those who sought a more radical Republican nominee for the upcoming presidential campaign.²⁰ This time, however, it was Lincoln who invited Douglass to the White House for a late-summer conversation, and he had larger concerns than regaining the radicals' electoral support.

The fact of the invitation was itself significant. "In daring to invite a Negro to an audience at the White House," Douglass remarked in a June, 1865 memorial speech, "Mr. Lincoln did that which he knew would be offensive to the crowd ... It was saying to the country, I am President of the black people as well as the white, and I mean to respect their rights and feelings as men and as citizens."²¹ Even more significant was the meeting's substance. Lincoln feared that should he fail to win re-election, the result would be a premature peace and renewed life for slavery. He therefore sought Douglass's assistance in devising a plan—"somewhat after the original plan of John Brown," as Douglass described it—to send scouts behind rebel lines to urge those still enslaved to escape before it was too late. "What he said on this day," Douglass wrote in *Life and Times*, "showed a deeper moral conviction against slavery than I had ever seen before in anything spoken or written by him."²² By this proposal, Lincoln erased all doubt in Douglass's mind that his objection to slavery was truly moral, not merely incidental to the Union's preservation.

On that day, it would seem, in Douglass's eyes the transformation of Lincoln was complete. Lincoln the cautious legalist had become an antislavery visionary, and Douglass the diffident and even scornful critic would become a zealous apostle of Lincoln's statesmanship. In that June, 1865 memorial, Douglass offered unprecedented

words of praise: "Abraham Lincoln ... was ... in a sense hitherto without example, emphatically the black man's president."²³

LINCOLN AS ICON

Speaking at a Rochester memorial service only hours after Lincoln had died, Douglass continued in the spirit of Lincoln's Second Inaugural. He ventured a hope that "in the inscrutable wisdom of Him who controls the destinies of nations," the evil of the assassination might bring some good. "[I]t may be that the blood of our beloved martyred President will be the salvation of our country," binding all the Union's loyalists of any color to the principle, "for the safety of all, let justice be done to each." And in the years and decades to follow, he labored to make it so. As David W. Blight astutely observes, Douglass's exaltations of Lincoln in this period reflect both his personal regard and a purpose "to make Lincoln mythic and therefore useful to the cause of black equality."²⁴

To that end, Douglass went beyond extolling Lincoln's wisdom and prudence as a statesman—"the greatest statesman that ever presided over the destinies of this Republic." In his most glowing statements, Lincoln appears as both a Christian and an American icon. Lincoln's Second Inaugural characterization of the war as the story of a great nation's sin, punishment, and redemption—and at Gettysburg, as the story of the nation's death and resurrection—rendered inevitable his posthumous exaltation as a Christ-like savior, and Douglass on occasion played the part of a latter-day Apostle Paul to preach the meaning of Lincoln's career. At an 1893 Union League celebration of Lincoln's birthday, he remarked that he had met no man who impressed him as "possessing a more godlike nature" than did Lincoln. Underscoring the point, he praised the "over-mastering mercy and benevolence" that Lincoln displayed in their first White House meeting, revealing "a President ... who could, even in war, love his enemies."²⁵

Alongside Douglass's imagings of Lincoln as a Christ-figure stand his representations of Lincoln by means of another, more strictly civil or secular, figure in American civil religion: the incarnation of democratic freedom and opportunity, the self-made man. In his popular speech by that name, Douglass called America "preeminently the home and patron of self-made men," and he crowned Lincoln "the King of American self-made men."²⁶ Lincoln was an, or *the*, exemplary American, a symbol of what was best in the American spirit. Douglass sounded this theme in the Freedmen's Monument speech, too, describing Lincoln as a "plebeian" (unlike his "patrician" predecessor Buchanan), a man "born and reared among the lowly ... a man of work" who rose by his own toil to the highest

office in the land, and a patriotic son of democratic America—"an American of the Americans."²⁷

The Lincoln whom Douglass artfully commended to American civil religion's pantheon of heroes thus appeared in two dimensions, as the nation's redeemer and its greatest exemplar. In the Freedmen's Monument speech he appears in both these dimensions, for black and white Americans an object of the most profound gratitude and also of emulation.

Speaking on behalf of his black fellow citizens to express their gratitude, Douglass prefaced his comments with a measure of irony. "We, the colored people, newly emancipated" hereby express our grateful appreciation to Lincoln, he said, but in so doing, we profess no "superior devotion" relative to that of whites. The irony in that statement becomes evident in his very next paragraph, where Douglass plainly implied that blacks did indeed have superior cause for gratitude: "while Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose."²⁸



Thomas Ball-"Emancipation" (Freedmen's Monument)
#1500

That was not to denigrate the importance of saving the country, for blacks or for whites. For blacks, of course, it was their country, too, that Lincoln saved, and Douglass fully appreciated the importance of that fact. Against black advocates of emigration from the U.S., he insisted that a sense of home was vital to sustain blacks' morale and efforts at self-elevation; that to have a proper sense of home required a country they could call their own; and that for the vast majority of black Americans, the only viable possibility for a home was the land of their birth.²⁹ Lincoln performed for them the invaluable service of saving their country in the literal, existential sense, and as a personification of what was best in America, he saved and strengthened their sense of grateful, hopeful attachment to America as a land of liberty and possibility.

As for whites, their cause for gratitude toward Lincoln remained profound in its own right. Douglass assured them of their "pre-eminence in this worship" in part to remind them of their own large debts and duties to Lincoln. By erecting our monument to Lincoln, he told them, we blacks would not supplant or diminish any like effort on your part; instead "we would exhort you to build high his monuments."³⁰

Within this seemingly humble, pious exhortation was a gracefully understated protest. To honor Lincoln properly required more than words and statues, significant as those were. At stake in Lincoln's memorializing were the proper understanding and steady advancement of his legacy. To Douglass, of course, that meant waging to its completion Lincoln's war against the "spirit of slavery and barbarism, which still lingers ... in some dark and distant parts of our country," and it meant continuing Lincoln's "wise and benevolent rule," as a result of which (Douglass again exaggerated) "prejudice and proscription, was [sic] rapidly fading away from the face of our whole country."³¹

Later, as conditions worsened for blacks in the post-Reconstruction era, Douglass would state with blunter force the practical interest that a proper remembrance of Lincoln would serve. He concluded his Union League speech with this sharp rebuke: "Did [Lincoln's] firm hand now hold the helm of state ... we should not, as now, hear from the Nation's capital the weak and helpless, the inconsistent humiliating confession that ... there is no power under the United States constitution to protect the lives and liberties of American citizens in any one of our own Southern states from barbarous, inhuman and lawless violence."³²

All this sheds much light on what Douglass had in mind when he concluded his Freedmen's Monument speech by saying, "Fellow citizens.... we have done a good work for our race to-day."³³ Following Professor Blight's lead, we

can easily enough understand why Douglass considered it a good work for his black fellow citizens to honor Lincoln as their friend and liberator and to exhort white Americans to revere him and to complete his work. But our initial question recurs. Having eleven years previous extolled Lincoln as "emphatically the black man's president," why did Douglass on this occasion—on this of all occasions, the unveiling of his own people's monument to the great president—denigrate Lincoln as "preeminently the white man's President?" Why would he have considered it a *good work* for his people to do so?

AMBIVALENCE

The simplest answer might seem to be the best: that Douglass's expressions of ambivalence in this speech, composed to signify "a national act ... which is to go into history," reflect his true sentiments regarding his fallen friend. He did preface his assertion that Lincoln was the white man's president by observing that "[t]ruth is proper and beautiful at all times and in all places," and never more so "than when speaking of a great public man." It was a respect for truth, Douglass stated, that "compels me to admit" that "Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man."³⁴

The simplicity of this answer is appealing, but it does not settle the question. Douglass's professed ambivalence toward Lincoln rested on two main grounds. The first is what he called the "genuine abolition ground," from which Lincoln, cautious as we have seen in making the war an abolition war, appeared "tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent" in acting against slavery. The second is the charge that Lincoln "shared the prejudices of his white fellow-countrymen against the Negro."³⁵ It is doubtful at best that in his mature, settled opinions, Douglass believed that either of these claims adequately represented the truth about Lincoln.

It is true that Douglass never fully renounced the "genuine abolition ground" that he defended for the first two decades of his career. Evidence of his lasting sympathy for abolitionist radicalism appears foremost in his undying, extravagant praise for John Brown, and we see it also in a statement in *Life and Times*, reprising his doubts about the prudence of Lincoln's wartime policy.³⁶ Nonetheless, in the Freedmen's Monument speech itself, when he contrasted the view from "the genuine abolition ground with the perspective of the "statesman," he clearly affirmed the latter as the superior perspective. In contrast to the partial or partisan reformer, the democratic statesman takes a "comprehensive" view of the needs of his country and the opinions of his compatriots. In

particular, Douglass conceded, "had [Lincoln] put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible."³⁷

Still more doubtful are Douglass's imputations of Lincoln's color prejudice. Granted, in the Freedmen's Monument speech itself he did not retract those imputations, unlike his criticisms of Lincoln's war policies. But the more pertinent fact is that his charge of racism in the Freedmen's Monument speech contradicts virtually all his other known statements on Lincoln. His reference here to Lincoln's "unfriendly feeling" stands in precise opposition to his remark, in a December, 1865 speech, on Lincoln's "friendly feeling for the colored race."³⁸ More generally, the charge of racism contradicts his repeated testimony, recorded in the near aftermath of the two men's meetings (before he had any interest in polishing Lincoln's image for posterity) and in his later recollections, that Lincoln stood far above the prejudices prevailing among his countrymen.³⁹

It sits uneasily, too, beside his repeated suggestions that Lincoln, had he survived, would have supported full civil and political equality for all Americans irrespective of color.⁴⁰

If Douglass did not believe Lincoln guilty of racism, why did he make the charge? We might first recall that by his own testimony, he meant for his speech not only to tell the *truth* regarding Lincoln but also to say something *useful*, to further a good work. Often, of course, those two ends are in less than perfect harmony with one another. A suggestive bit of evidence appears in Douglass's remark, made immediately after he asserts that Lincoln shared most whites' color prejudice, that that prejudice served as "one element in his wonderful success in organizing the American people for the tremendous conflict before them."⁴¹

As we noted at the outset, Lincoln himself was certainly cognizant of the political utility of a reputation for color prejudice. It is evident that he judged some such reputation useful to him in his contest with Stephen A. Douglas, and one can hardly doubt that its utility in U.S. politics extended beyond 1858. As in the remark just quoted, Frederick Douglass thought that color prejudice, or the appearance thereof, was useful to Lincoln even in the endeavor to organize the country against secession and slavery. Did Douglass judge that the *imputation* of such prejudice to Lincoln might also serve his own purposes after the war—even in the ongoing effort to expand the war's gains by dismantling such prejudice's broader effects?

The possibility is not so far-fetched as it might initially appear. A closely related opinion was later forwarded by W.E.B. Du Bois, who regarded Lincoln as an actual racial bigot whose racism paradoxically made him more useful to the struggle against race discrimination; Lincoln in his view was a man who did justice to blacks even though he despised them, thus lending credibility to the hope that other, similarly bigoted whites would do likewise. Perhaps Douglass, who did *not* believe Lincoln despised blacks, nonetheless acted on similar reasoning as he decided in 1876 that it would be wise to refrain from repeating before the entire nation that Lincoln was "emphatically the black man's president."

This possibility may shed further light on why Douglass took pains, in the Freedmen's Monument speech, to emphasize Lincoln's common identity with whites. Lincoln was *your* "man," he told the whites in his audience, not ours. Lincoln *belongs* to white America in a way that he does not belong to blacks, Douglass reasoned, and therefore "to [whites] it especially belongs to sound his praises, to preserve and perpetuate his memory ... and commend his example." Because Lincoln was fundamentally one of them, whites had a special duty to honor him. And because Lincoln was to be their "model" as well as their "man," he needed to remain accessible as an object of emulation. Perhaps this, too, is what Douglass meant in calling Lincoln "an American of the Americans"—an American of the *white* Americans in his color prejudice as in other respects. A common white man by origin and sympathies, Lincoln yet did altogether uncommon things in the service of justice. In Lincoln the low and mean somehow coexisted with the high and noble—or alternatively, a sympathy for the low and common ultimately prevailed over a prejudice against the very lowest. Either way, Douglass suggested to his white fellow citizens, so it could be for you, too.⁴³

Douglass's expressions of ambivalence toward Lincoln also contained lessons and even admonitions directed toward his black fellow citizens. The crucial inspiration for these was his steadfast insistence that the primary work in achieving their full liberation and elevation fell naturally, necessarily, and properly on the shoulders of blacks themselves. He liked to quote the poet Byron: "Who would be free, must himself strike the blow."⁴⁴ In fact, biographer Benjamin Quarles reports, Douglass disapproved of the Freedmen's Monument's design, thinking that it conveyed a sense of submissiveness on the part of blacks. 'It showed the Negro on his knees,' he is said to have complained, 'when a more manly attitude would have been indicative of freedom.'⁴⁴ If so, then it would seem that Douglass crafted his

complex, apparently ambivalent dedicatory speech to correct the misimpression that the monument might produce.

In part, that correction would take effect through his emphasis on the virtues that blacks demonstrated in erecting their monument. Honoring Lincoln in this way, they displayed the closely related virtues of gratitude and justice, both vitally important to republican government. They did justice to Lincoln as they properly estimated Lincoln's character and contributions and, in a slightly more partial sense, as they conferred upon him a kind of immortality in return for the immense benefits that they had received from him. So public a display of gratitude and justice, demonstrating capacities to recognize benefits and benefactors, thus to discern the right and the good, and above all to esteem and honor human greatness, presented a powerful refutation of the "blighting" prejudice "that the colored man is soulless."⁴⁶

In part, too, however, Douglass's corrective assertion of virtuous self-reliance on the part of blacks would operate via his very expressions of ambivalence toward Lincoln. For the deepest cause for their ambivalence, in Douglass's argument, was not Lincoln's alleged color prejudice or hesitancy in acting against slavery; instead it was the danger to both their virtue and their freedom posed by an excessive exaltation of Lincoln on their part.

When Douglass called Lincoln "pre-eminently the white man's president" and told white Americans, "You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children," he was also saying to the nation's black citizens, let us beware of building *too* high our monuments to this great man. We noted above Lincoln's posthumous sanctification in the public mind. Speaking shortly after the assassination, Douglass told the story of a black woman weeping at the White House gate. "Oh! sir," she told a gentleman passing by, "we have lost our Moses." The passerby replied, "the Lord will send you another," and she agreed it was possible. "But ah! we had him," she said, and continued to grieve.⁴⁷ To many black Americans in those years, Lincoln was at once a Moses- and a Christ-figure—the man who led them toward their promised land, the martyred savior who gave his life to deliver them and the nation from the evil of slavery. For Douglass, the weeping woman was profoundly justified in her grieving. But the story conveys also the troubling sense that she felt simply forlorn without Lincoln, left only to await the second coming of a savior for her people. It was that sentiment that Douglass judged a serious danger to his people's progress.

The great English political philosopher John Locke observed that the "wisest and best princes"—the "God-like Princes"—"have been always most dangerous to the Liberties of their People," because by their very goodness they lull people into a condition of trusting dependency.⁴⁸ On this point as on numerous others, Douglass was a principled Lockean. He was naturally mistrustful of merely human saviors—he and his people had had quite enough experience with rulers professing paternal benevolence—and there was certainly no reason to relax this diffidence in the case of elected politicians, not even one of such singular virtue as Lincoln. Speaking to an American Anti-Slavery Society convention in late 1863, Douglass elevated Lincoln to a status equal to that of George Washington and then added: "we are not to be saved by the captain this time, but by the crew. We are not to be saved by Abraham Lincoln."⁴⁹ This sentiment also informed his Freedmen's Monument speech. To vindicate Lincoln as Emancipator, he needed to diminish Lincoln as savior.

Here are the central lesson and paradox of Douglass's eulogies to his fallen friend. To advance the cause of liberty for black Americans, a cause for which Lincoln gave his life, Douglass found it necessary at once to exalt and to diminish the luster of Lincoln's heroism. In view of his singular virtues and his measureless benefactions to black Americans, Lincoln was eminently worthy of honor as Father Abraham. He was justly revered as the father and the principal representative of a new or newly reborn nation, a redeemer of America's larger promise of liberty and justice for all. Likewise, his friendship with Douglass could be celebrated as symbolic of the reborn nation's possibilities of interracial reconciliation and harmony.

And yet for black Americans, Lincoln remained a public official elected by and responsible to a constituency that excluded nearly all of them. That fact made it prudent for them to regard his benefactions as products of "circumstances and necessity" and therefore to honor him somewhat reservedly. For them, Lincoln could be no more than a uniquely beneficent "step-father Abraham," because absent voting rights for all, the very greatest democratic statesmen can never be more than stepfathers or accidental benefactors. Douglass's ambivalence reflects his twofold purpose to venerate Lincoln and to deplore the condition that reduced blacks to a dependency on a savior-figure such as Lincoln—and so to remind them of their urgent need and responsibility to strive to overcome that condition. It is a paradox that Lincoln himself—discomforted, as the story goes, by the worshipful gesture of a newly freed man kneeling before him⁵⁰—would have readily understood.

Notes:

- ¹ *Douglass: Autobiographies* (New York: Library of America, 1994), 802-4.
- ² *The Complete Lincoln-Douglas Debates of 1858*, edited by Paul M. Angle (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958, 1991), 193-4, 235.
- ³ *The Frederick Douglass Papers*, Series One, volume 4, 434, 440, 431, 436 (author's emphasis).
- ⁴ On the speech in question, see Peter C. Myers, "A Good Work for Our Race To-Day': Interests, Virtues, and the Achievement of Justice in Frederick Douglass's Freedmen's Monument Speech," *American Political Science Review* vol. 104, no. 2 (May 2010), 209-225.
- ⁵ *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, edited by Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1950), vol. 3, 282.
- ⁶ *Douglass Papers*, 3.233.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 237.
- ⁸ *Life and Writings*, 2.483-4; *Douglass Papers*, 3.376.
- ⁹ *Life and Writings*, 2.527 (author's emphasis).
- ¹⁰ *Abraham Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, edited by Roy P. Basler (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001), 580.
- ¹¹ *Life and Writings*, 3.72, 74.
- ¹² *Ibid.*, 3.89, 94 (emphasis original).
- ¹³ *Lincoln: His Speeches and Writings*, 652.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 3.186; see also 3.159-162, 202-8, 250-59.
- ¹⁵ Lincoln, "Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation," accessed 8/6/2012 at <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?>
- ¹⁶ *Life and Writings*, 3.273, 277.
- ¹⁷ *Douglass Papers*, 3.549, 551, 568.
- ¹⁸ *Douglass: Autobiographies*, 792-3.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 785-6.
- ²⁰ James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican*, (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 221-9.
- ²¹ "Lincoln, Abraham, folder 3, Images 1-2," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress*.
- ²² *Douglass: Autobiographies*, 796.
- ²³ "Lincoln, Abraham, folder 3, Image 12," *Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress* (author's emphasis).
- ²⁴ *Douglass Papers*, 4.76-79; David W. Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 85.
- ²⁵ *Life and Writings*, 4.368; *Douglass Papers*, 5.536, 540.
- ²⁶ *Douglass Papers*, 5.569, 566.
- ²⁷ In his June, 1865 speech, Douglass remarked that Lincoln "was a better representation of American institutions than were the men who made them, because he was the natural child of those institutions." "Lincoln, Abraham, folder 3, Image 1," *Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress*.
- ²⁸ *Douglass Papers*, 4.430-32.
- ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.527; *Life and Writings*, 4.514.
- ³⁰ *Douglass Papers*, 4.432.
- ³¹ *Ibid.*, 429, 434.
- ³² *Douglass Papers*, 5.545.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 4.440.
- ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.428, 431.
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.436-7.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.7-35; *Douglass: Autobiographies*, 793.
- ³⁷ *Douglass Papers*, 4.436-7, 439.
- ³⁸ "Abraham Lincoln: A Speech," *Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress*, Image 13, <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage>
- ³⁹ *Douglass Papers*, 4.481-2, 5.340-41, 5.541.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.111, 5.545.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 4.436.
- ⁴² *Du Bois: Writings* (New York: Library of America, 1986), 1196-9.
- ⁴³ *Douglass Papers*, 4.431-2; Paul and Stephen Kendrick, *Douglass and Lincoln* (New York: Walker & Company, 2008), 245.
- ⁴⁴ E.g. *Douglass Papers* 2.86; *Life and Writings* 4.381.
- ⁴⁵ Benjamin Quarles, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 277.
- ⁴⁶ *Douglass Papers* 4.430, 440.
- ⁴⁷ "Lincoln, Abraham, folder 3, Image 12," *Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress*; also Benjamin Quarles, *Lincoln and the Negro* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 12-13, 209-10, 239-49.
- ⁴⁸ John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, edited by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 377-78.
- ⁴⁹ *Douglass Papers* 3.608.
- ⁵⁰ David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 576.

An interview with John Marszalek regarding U.S. Grant

SG: Some information, please, on the childhood of Ulysses S. Grant.

JM: In his memoirs, Grant begins by stating: "My family is American . . ." He might also have said that it was Midwestern, rural, entrepreneurial, affectionately cool on the mother's side and demanding on the father's, ambitious for his future, yet lenient about his childhood activities.

Grant was born on April 27, 1822, in Point Pleasant, Ohio, but the family moved to nearby Georgetown in Ohio during his first year. He attended the local schools for most of his youth, except for two years in better schools in Maysville, Kentucky. His father, Jesse, was a successful business man owning his own tannery. Grant hated the smells and the sounds of the trade and quickly came to enjoy agriculture, particularly his relationship with animals. At a young age, he was plowing the soil behind a horse and demonstrated his ability, almost his camaraderie, with these animals. His mother showed little emotion toward him or his brothers and sisters, but his demanding father gave him the chance to enjoy normal childhood activities. His parents also let him travel alone—to Cincinnati, Louisville, and Chillicothe, not the usual experience of children in that era.

The most exciting yet humbling childhood experience for Grant concerned his purchase of a horse he badly wanted to own. His father offered to pay \$20 for the animal, but the neighbor demanded \$25. Jesse Grant said that price was too much and walked away. The eight year old Grant, however, kept pestering his father to purchase the horse at the asking price. Jesse Grant gave in but advised his son how to bargain. He said to offer \$20, and if that was

refused to offer \$22.50. If the neighbor still balked, Jesse Grant told his son to offer \$25. And that was what Grant did—literally. He told the neighbor that his father had told him to offer \$20, and if not accepted, \$22.50, and if that was not accepted \$25. As Grant said in his memoirs: "It would not require a Connecticut man to guess the price finally agreed upon." Neighboring boys never let him forget, and neither did he.

SG: What is your "take" on the fact that Grant can be considered to be a failure in business ventures and yet be so successful during the Civil War?

JM: During the pre-Civil War years, Grant did not do well in any entrepreneurial activities—mirroring, perhaps, his failure as a horse trader. In some ways his failures were his own fault; in other ways he was the victim of circumstances. He worked hard at everything he did, so it was not laziness or lack of ability that seemed to doom him. While in the army, he and a fellow officer planted potatoes to supplement their incomes, only to see nature refuse to cooperate. He later took on farming full-time, but he developed a fever which sapped his strength for a year. He worked for his father in the tannery business in Galena, Illinois, but he never liked the job. To say that he was an economic failure when the war began, however, is to miss the fact that his job in Galena allowed him to provide his family with a comfortable home and receive the respect of his friends and neighbors.

When the Civil War began, his neighbors asked Grant to chair the town meeting called to respond to the secession crisis, because he was a West Point graduate and assumed to have the knowledge needed at that time in Galena. He handled the job reluctantly but efficiently and then refused to command the company he had helped form. He believed that he deserved higher rank and wanted a colonelcy and command of a regiment.

These attempts failed, and it took his successful organization of Illinois's recruiting efforts, done at the request of the state's governor, to draw attention to his military talents. Once he got his chance, however, he demonstrated his ability to do what had to be done, and his star began to rise. Did any special talents develop suddenly to give him success? Hardly. His talent of determination and refusal to quit and calm pursuit of his objective had always been there. War simply brought them out in him, and he succeeded. Without the lessons of the uncertainties of his past, it is doubtful that he could have been the success he became.

SG: Please trace his military record prior to his service under Abraham Lincoln.

JM: In 1839 Grant received an appointment to West Point due to the influence of his father. Jesse Grant wanted his son to go there not for a military future, but for the no-tuition engineering education. Like so many Americans, Jesse Grant saw West Point as the avenue to a good living in the engineer-starved American society of that age.

Grant never liked West Point, but he survived, finishing in the middle of his class. His first tour of duty began in September 1843 with the 4th Infantry Regiment stationed at Jefferson Barracks, St. Louis, Missouri. He stayed for less than a year (although there meeting his future wife, Julia) and then was ordered to Louisiana because of the events leading up to the Mexican War. Grant participated in this war, which he despised, and distinguished himself in the fighting. In one instance, he hauled a cannon into a Mexican church tower and pinned down elements of the Mexican Army. In another instance, he risked his life to deliver a dispatch by racing through a town hanging on one side of a horse to shield himself from Mexican gunfire.

With the war over in 1848, Grant married Julia Dent who had spent four years waiting for his return. (West Point friend James Longstreet was one of the groomsmen.) He was now ordered to posts in Sacketts Harbor, New York, and Detroit. He traveled from the East, by way of the pestilent Isthmus of Panama, to the Pacific Coast. He landed in San Francisco and then was ordered to Fort Vancouver in Oregon Territory and Fort Humboldt in upper California. It was at this latter post that he so missed his wife and children that he drank to quash his loneliness. Under the threats of his martinet commanding officer, he resigned the army in 1854 and returned East. He did not put on a uniform again until the Civil War.

SG: By all reports, Julia Grant was a remarkable woman. Please discuss her role in her husband's career.

JM: Julia Dent Grant was the daughter of Colonel Frederick Dent of Missouri, a slaveholder and defender of the institution. She grew up as a beneficiary of the black slaves her father owned. When Grant began to court her, he was attracted to her horsemanship, and the couple enjoyed frequent rides on her father's land. She could not see any problems with slavery, but Grant frequently debated Julia's father over the institution. Despite this important difference of opinion, Ulysses and Julia fell in love, and Julia adapted to life in the army and then to being the wife of a struggling farmer and businessman. Her entire life consisted of supporting her husband, the idea of a separate career was simply not anything she contemplated.

The two remained totally in love with one another all their lives, and to Julia must go much of the credit. No matter what, she was there for her "Uly," and he reciprocated in kind.

SG: Please inform our readers about your work with Grant's papers.

JM: It was in July of 2008 that long time executive director and managing editor of the Ulysses S. Grant Association, John Y. Simon, died. In August of that year, the USGA Board of Directors asked me to take on the position. By this time, John Simon and his editors had published thirty volumes of the *Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* and were on the verge of publishing volume 31. Even before Simon's death, irreconcilable differences between USGA and its host institution, Southern Illinois University, had determined that the USGA would be moving to a new host institution. Mississippi State University offered its Mitchell Memorial Library, and in December 2008, the 15,000 linear feet of Grant material moved to Mississippi.

This affiliation could not have worked any better. The Library Dean Frances Coleman and MSU President Mark Keenum, and USGA President, Rhode Island Supreme Court Chief Justice Frank J Williams, and the Board of Directors, plus an excellent staff have worked together to improve on the past 46 years of USGA success. Three of the first four annual meetings were held on the MSU campus, and volume 31 was completed and then the final chronological volume, volume 32, was published.

The National Historical Preservation of Records Commission (NHPRC) and the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH) provide financial support for the publication project which is now concentrating on producing the first scholarly edition of the Grant memoirs.

In addition, the National Park Service has provided funding for two summer Social Science Teachers Institutes on the teaching of the Civil War, and the Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation has funded a series of programs and a traveling library exhibit on "Lincoln and Grant in Mississippi."



Grant and wife
OC-0659



Grant and family
OC-0660

An important way for us to reach out to the general public and scholars is through our website:

<http://library.msstate.edu/usgrant>

We have digitized the first thirty volumes of the Grant papers and made this searchable source available, at no cost, to the public. We have also placed on our website a catalog of unpublished letters. (The published volumes only represent around 20% of the Grant material we have, and we believe we have copies of every known Grant letter and every known letter written to him.) Information on how to join the USGA is located on our website as is a Grant chronology, genealogy, and a variety of photographs and images.

In the past year, we have received an outstanding collection of Grant photographs (Bultema-Williams Collection) and many books on Grant and his era to add to the 4,000 or so monographs we have long held.

A direct Grant descendant has recently donated scrap books, photographs, and original correspondence dealing with the time US Grant's son, Fred, spent in Europe as US Minister to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.

Just this past May, at the 50th anniversary meeting of USGA, the announcement was made that we are now the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library. The MSU president is planning to fund the addition of two floors on top of the present Mitchell Memorial Library, one of which floors will house the Presidential Library with museum display space, offices for the staff, a conference room, and storage space for the 15,000 linear feet of material.

SG: What was Grant's greatest strength as a commander? His weakness?

JM: Ironically, it might be argued that Grant's greatest strength was also his weakness. He did not worry about what he could not see or what the enemy might be doing. This attitude

allowed him to always think offensively and confidently, but it also created problems when the enemy was doing something Grant did not expect.

SG: Please compare U. S. Grant and Robert E. Lee as military strategists and as motivators of their troops.



*Grant & Lee at Appomattox
#4338*

JM: One of the favorite topics among historians and the interested public is to compare Grant and Lee. Just who was the great general of the Civil War? Soon after the War, a number of Confederate generals who fought with Lee in Virginia made a conscious decision to make sure that the history of the Civil War was a Confederate history, which would emphasize the importance of the Virginia campaigns, and ensure that Robert E. Lee was remembered as the greatest general during the conflict. This so-called Lost Cause view resulted in a deification of Lee: some even calling him Christ-like, and a corresponding denigration of Union generals especially Grant and Sherman. Grant was labeled a butcher who won only because he threw his men recklessly to their slaughter and then callously replaced them and thus wore out Lee's Army of Northern Virginia. (Sherman was called a brute because of his psychological, destructive war.)

As long as Civil War Federal soldiers survived, Grant's reputation remained heroic. For example, his funeral in

1885 remains the greatest funeral in American history and his remains the second largest in the world, second only to Victor Emmanuel's in Italy. Until the 1920s, the most visited tourist attraction in New York City was Grant's Tomb.

About that time, the Lost Cause vision of Lee and Grant took hold, and Grant became the victim of unhistorical unrelenting criticism and abuse—he was portrayed as nothing but a drunk and a butcher, while Lee was the saintly general.

This view is now no longer held. Grant is now generally perceived as a superior strategist, while Lee is seen as so concentrating on Virginia that he allowed the Federals to win the war in the western theater, between the Mississippi River and the Appalachian Mountains. As early as 1952, Louisiana State University professor T. Harry Williams, in his classic book *Lincoln and the Generals* argued for Grant's superiority to Lee as a modern general. Although not every historian agrees, most do, including this one.

SG: During the Civil War, did Grant write or speak about slavery? Did he comment on the US Colored Troops?

JM: Even before the Civil War, Grant was an opponent of slavery. Despite his unbounded love for Julia Dent, he freely argued with his pro-slavery father-in-law. In 1859, at a time when he was suffering economic woe, he voluntarily freed the slave that his father-in-law had given him. He needed money and could have sold this man, but instead he simply freed him.

During the war itself, when his armies were receiving large numbers of slave fugitives in Tennessee and Mississippi, he worked hard to give them work and protect them from Confederates. He supported Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's policy of including blacks in the Federal military.

He told the president that he would do whatever Lincoln desired and forthrightly supported equality of treatment for black soldiers. When Confederates committed atrocities against black soldiers in his area of command, he let it be known that he would not allow this to continue, believing that blacks deserved the same treatment as the whites in his command

SG: Did he speak or write about Abraham Lincoln? During the War? After the War?

JM: Amazingly, Grant did not meet Lincoln until he came to Washington in March 1864 to become commanding general of all Union armies. The tall Lincoln and the short Grant took the measure of each other and liked what they saw. They developed a relationship of trust—Grant believed that Lincoln would support him as best he could, and Lincoln believed that Grant would not keep asking for more and more as other generals had, but would move forward with what he had.

When Lincoln was assassinated, the Civil War historian Bruce Catton described Grant standing for hours by Lincoln's casket, crying, and saying: "He was incontestably the greatest man I have ever known." He never changed his mind

SG: Many historians see Grant as a failed President. Why?

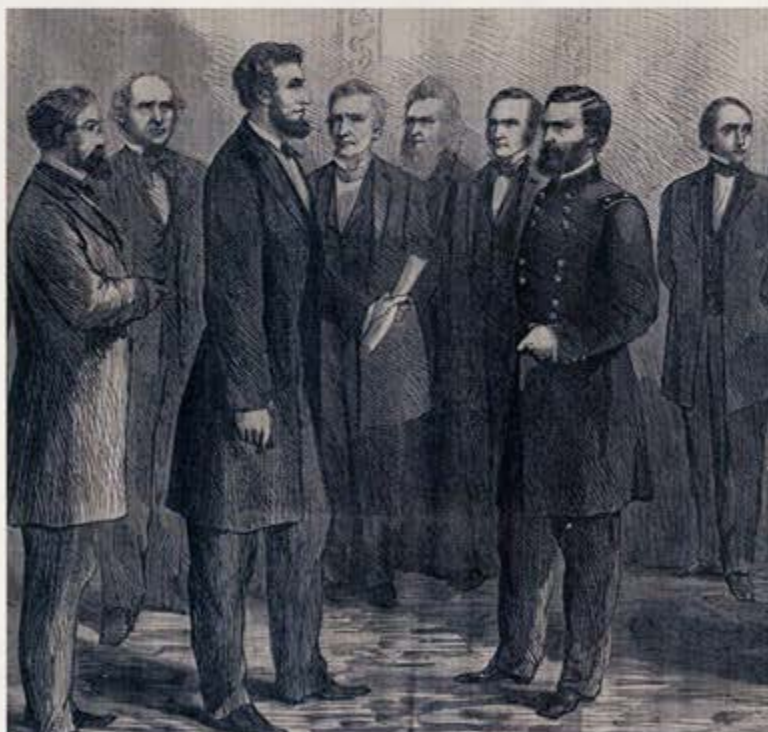
JM: It was common historical belief for a long time that it might be conceded that Grant was a good general, but it could never be said that he was a great president. Bruce Catton's book on Grant, in fact, states that those qualities of delegation and trust that Grant placed in his subordinates simply did not work in the sordid post-war political world he inhabited. Catton called Grant "a political innocent" and said that "none of the great qualities that had served him so well during the war was of any

use now." William Hessestine was even more disdainful. He saw Grant's presidency as one of unrelenting corruption, which Grant might not have participated in but allowed to happen.

In more recent years, such observations have changed. It is a fact that Grant did more than any other president, other than Lincoln, for black Americans, and he tried to do more for the Native Americans than anyone else. Before the Civil Rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, such attitudes doomed Grant to ridicule and charges of being a horrible president. In more recent times, historians, whose view of Civil Rights is diametrically opposed to that of earlier historians, look at Grant's policy toward minorities and see something to praise, not condemn.

SG: Given the commentaries about the awful state of financial security for the Grants after the presidency, can you explain what went wrong?

JM: Even though historians today credit Grant for having a fiscal policy that paved the way for the great economic expansion of the late nineteenth century, it is true that he was not a good handler of his own funds. Both he and his wife believed that they should live a good life, particularly after what Grant had done for the nation in preserving the Union. Wealthy Americans lavished the family with money and houses, so when his son Ulysses Jr. (Buck) came to him with the news that a widely acknowledged young Wall Street wizard was willing to throw his cause in with the Grant family, particularly the famous former general and president, Grant did not see any warning signs. As in battle, he made a decision and plunged forward. He signed papers here and there, but he generally let Ferdinand Ward make the decisions. To his dismay, one day it became clear that Ward had swindled Grant out of his money and that of many other Americans. Grant who one day was in a financial nirvana



Grant receiving commission HW 3-26-1864 #1641

suddenly found himself forced to go to one of the wealthy Americans who had feted him before, William H. Vanderbilt. He asked for a loan and then insisted that it was not a gift but a loan and eventually paid it off by signing over to Vanderbilt much of his property.

Grant had to do something to get his family's financial ship afloat. In the end, he agreed to write his memoirs and came to enjoy the exercise. Tragically he was struck with throat and mouth cancer (no doubt the result of smoking some twenty cigars a day) and had to battle the disease as he fought to complete his memoirs before cancer won—his last great battle. He finished it, dying some two weeks after completing his work. A year after his death, his widow received the largest royalty check ever paid to an author up to that time—\$200,000. The total amount of royalty that the Grant family received was \$450,000.

SG: I am so fascinated by the information surrounding the eventual deep friendship between U. S. Grant and Mark Twain. Please comment on this remarkable twosome.



Mark Twain
JC-1024

JM: Samuel Clemens (Mark Twain) was among the literary lights of the late 19th century. He had a brief and undistinguished career as a Confederate soldier, certainly having nowhere the military experience or fame of U.S. Grant. They met at a post-war banquet and developed a friendship. Twain came to realize that, in addition to writing articles for *Century* magazine's "Battles and Leaders of the Civil War Series," Grant had committed himself to publishing his memoirs with this magazine's publishers. When Grant revealed the financial arrangements, Twain was appalled. He told Grant not to sign the contract he seemingly had accepted and to allow Twain's new company "Charles L. Webster and Company" to do the publishing at a much better royalty. Grant was torn, but accepted his friend's offer.

Twain, in fact, was the business mind behind the publication of the memoirs and its huge success. He read sections of it as it was being written, but it is a slander on Grant's memory to charge, as some later writers have and as myth would have it, that Twain actually ghost-wrote the memoirs. Grant wrote them himself with the research and editorial help of his son, Fred, and, for a time, his former Civil War colleague, Adam Badeau. However, it is clear from reading the original manuscript of the memoirs that its author was Ulysses S. Grant.

Ironically, although the memoirs were both a literary and financial success, Twain's company later went into bankruptcy, the fault, Twain insisted, of its managers.

SG: Probably an unfair question, but, in general, do you think that historians have been fair in their assessment of Grant?

JM: This is a fair question. I do not think that past historians have been accurate in their assessment of Grant as a general and as a president. I do believe, however, that this attitude is changing. Once historians were able

to evaluate Lee critically, that is treat him like any other historical figure, and see the true facts about Grant, the latter's reputation improved correspondingly. Today most historians consider Grant to be a great general, one of the greatest in American history, and view him as the first modern president. Without being too self-serving, I believe that the work of John Y. Simon and his many assistant editors at USGA over some forty years of publishing the *Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, have provided historians with the documentation necessary to see the reality about this great American.

Exterior and Interior Grant Collection Mississippi State University



Mitchell Memorial Library



Where He Grew Up— Indiana's Lincoln Memorial

By William E. Bartelt,
author of *There I Grew Up*
(Indianapolis: Indiana
Historical Society, 2008)



The Indiana Panel of the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial Memorial Building-Visitor Center (Photo by author)



Senator Vance Hartke stands directly behind the President; Bill Koch to the Senator's left, Congressman Denton on the end, 1962.

On February 19, 1962, President John F. Kennedy signed a law in the Oval Office creating Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial. Following the 1959 Lincoln sesquicentennial celebration, local businessman Bill Koch, Senator Vance Hartke, and Congressman Winfield Denton spearheaded the effort so that the National Park Service could administer the land where Abraham Lincoln lived between ages 7 and 21. This action was the most recent event in an

almost century-old effort to recognize the 16th President's life in Indiana.



Neighbors re-visit the Lincoln Cabin, 1865

Perhaps the first event to memorialize the Lincoln site occurred soon after President Lincoln's 1865 assassination. After receiving word of the President's death, six citizens and a photographer from the nearby town of Elizabeth (now Dale) traveled by wagon to the old Lincoln homestead. The group posed for a photograph in front of what they believed to be the Lincoln log cabin. Also the men struck another pose with a maul and other tools imitating the "rail-splitter president." The cabin seen here was actually one the Lincolns began building in 1829 shortly before they decided to move to Illinois. The cabin, though indeed a Lincoln cabin, is not one the family lived in.



Rowbotham's sketch of Nancy Lincoln's grave, 1865

Source: Joseph Barrett, *Life of Abraham Lincoln*, (Cincinnati: Moore, Wilstach, and Baldwin, 1865)

The year 1865 brought two additional "tourists" to see the Spencer County, Indiana, Lincoln sites. The first, during summer, was John Rowbotham, an illustrator for Joseph H. Barrett's 1865 *Life of Abraham Lincoln*. In addition to sketching the 1829 Lincoln cabin, he recorded the first image of Nancy Hanks Lincoln's grave. Lincoln's mother, who died of milk sickness in 1818, was buried beside neighbors on a hilltop at an adjacent farm. (This burial plot was no longer used after the Little Pigeon Primitive Baptist Church began a proper cemetery a mile or so to the south). As we see in Rowbotham's illustration, the burial plot was unmarked and forgotten.

Then, in September 1865 Lincoln's law partner William Herndon visited Spencer County to talk with the residents who remembered the President's youth. At the grave Herndon recorded in his notes, "God bless her— if I could breathe life into her again I would do it. "Could I only whisper in her Ear — 'Your Son was Presdt — of the U.S from 1861 to 1866,' I would be satisfied." Although Herndon erred about the end date of Lincoln's Presidency, his sentiment marks the beginning of a century of efforts to memorialize the slain president's mother.



Studebaker's 1879 stone for Mrs. Lincoln's grave

In 1868 Civil War veteran William Q. Corbin visited Mrs. Lincoln's grave and wrote a poem about its neglected condition. Published in the *Rockport Journal*, this poem prompted a group of local citizens to try to erect an appropriate stone. When this effort failed, Rockport businessman Joseph D. Armstrong erected a simple, two-foot-tall marker.

The first significant attempt to memorialize Lincoln himself in Spencer County came on April 23, 1872. On that date four Cincinnati investors platted a new town they named Lincoln City. The plat included Mrs. Lincoln's grave and the Lincoln homestead. Two years later, Lincoln City became a station on the Cincinnati, Rockport, and Southwestern Railroad.

Over the next few years, more visitors came, and more articles appeared about the unkempt grave. When one article came to the attention of Peter E. Stuebaker of South Bend, Indiana, Stuebaker sent the Rockport postmaster \$50 to purchase an appropriate stone for Mrs. Lincoln's grave. On November 27, 1879, a marble marker was placed on the grave identified by long-time residents. Fifty local residents each donated a dollar to enclose the grave with an ornate fence. In the same year, one-half acre of land surrounding the grave was deeded by the Cincinnati developers to Spencer County Commissioners "forever in trust for the people of the United States." Soon more burials occurred in the cemetery to accommodate the Lincoln City population.

In 1897 visitors expressed dismay to find neither roads nor trails to the gravesite. As a result, Indiana Governor James A. Mount formed the Nancy Hanks Lincoln Association, which raised \$1156.62 over the next ten years, with \$1000 of that total coming from Robert Lincoln in 1900.



The Culver Stone, 1902

Also in 1900, Spencer County acquired 16 acres around the grave and deeded the land to the Association.

A dramatic change occurred in 1902. On October 1 a large stone, discarded from rebuilding President Lincoln's tomb, was dedicated directly in front of the 1879 Stuebaker stone. This Culver stone, as it became known, was donated by J. S. Culver, who remodeled Lincoln's Oak Ridge Cemetery tomb in Springfield, Illinois. The stone remained in this location until 1933 and still stands a short distance from the cemetery.



The 1908 Nancy Hanks Lincoln Park

Still the grave area remained unkempt, and Spencer County residents complained to Governor J. Frank Hanley. In 1907 the state dissolved the Nancy Hanks Lincoln Association and created a new board of commissioners to oversee the 16-acre park. By 1909 this group had cleared the underbrush, erected an iron fence around the park, and created an impressive entrance with elaborate

gates flanked by large lions on stone posts. Farther up the cemetery drive, a flagpole and columns topped by eagles were installed. The park became a popular picnic area and a site for Grand Army of the Republic Civil War veterans' reunions. Starting in 1924, the Boonville [Indiana] Press Club held an annual pilgrimage and picnic at the park to draw attention to Nancy Hanks Lincoln's grave. Over 12,000 persons attended the 1934 second Sunday in July event.



Spencer County Memorial stone at Lincoln Cabin site, 1917

The Lincoln farm and cabin site lay outside this park and, in fact, Lincoln City houses, commercial buildings, and the local school occupied the site. When Indiana's 1916 centennial created statewide interest in Indiana history, Spencer County joined the craze by deciding to mark the Lincoln cabin site. On March 12, 1917, three men who remembered the cabin found the site and dug down to uncover hearthstones and bits of crockery. The following April 28, a large Spencer County Memorial stone was placed on the spot. The stone—on the Lincoln City School playground—probably marks the site of that 1829 cabin seen by Rowbotham and Herndon in 1865.



Nancy Hanks Lincoln Memorial court plaza, 1932

The early 1920s saw yet another reorganization of park management with formation of another short-lived commission. But more important, in 1925, the state legislature assigned control of the park to the Indiana State Department of Conservation and its director Richard Lieber. Director Lieber envisioned an historic site recognizing Indiana's role in shaping Abraham Lincoln. To oversee the development of this memorial, Governor Edward L. Jackson appointed 125 influential citizens to the Indiana Lincoln Union and asked the ILU to build a national shrine that "... will express both our deathless devotion as well as our indefinite gratitude to the soul of the great departed and his Mother." The ILU hired Frederick Law Olmstead Jr. to design a landscape plan reflecting honor and dignity.



Hibben 1935 Cabin Site Memorial

Although not part of the Olmstead plan, the site of the Lincoln cabin became a shrine as well. In 1929 Frank C. Ball of Muncie, Indiana, purchased 26 acres of the Lincoln farm and deeded the land to the Department of Conservation. The department and the Indiana Lincoln

Union purchased more land, removed the Lincoln City structures, and planted native trees on the old farmstead. Since log structures would detract from the shrine concept, the ILU invited Indiana native Thomas Hibben to design an appropriate cabin-site memorial. Hibben's design called for a bronze casts of hearth and sill logs of the cabin's size at the same level as the original cabin. A stonewall behind which visitors could look down on the memorial surrounded the casts. While preparing for the memorial, Civilian Conservation Corps workers uncovered a large number of hearthstones below the surface at the cabin site identified in 1917. Cast in Munich, Germany, the bronze memorial, was placed in summer 1935. Visitors return to the parking plaza by walking a trail marked with stones from significant sites in Lincoln's life. Thus the Indiana Lincoln Union completed the first phase of developing a national shrine in 1938.



The Lincoln Memorial Building completed in 1944

The second phase called for constructing an attractive, yet functional memorial building at the south end of the parking plaza. From here, visitors would enjoy a vista looking up Olmstead's allee to Nancy Hanks Lincoln's grave. The concept called for the memorial to consist of the Abraham Lincoln Hall, a meeting room for up to 250 persons, connected by open cloister to the Nancy Hanks Lincoln Hall, with reception area, restrooms, and administrative offices. Richard E. Bishop was selected as the project's

architect. Designers aimed for "... a forthright expression of honesty, simplicity and dignity that we associate with Lincoln and his mother." There were to be no facades or other false construction and the memorial would incorporate only native Indiana stone and lumber. On May 20, 1941, ILU officers and two Spencer County children placed the building's cornerstone. Work continued during World War II, with the building completed in 1943 and landscaping finished in 1944. Because of the war, no formal dedication of the memorial building occurred.



Daniels's sculpture and carvings completed in 1943

On the courtyard's exterior walls, we see dramatic images and words associated with Abraham Lincoln. Five carved-limestone panels measuring 13 1/2 feet long and 8 feet 10 inches high represent four key places in Lincoln's life—Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois, and Washington, D.C.; the central panel symbolizes the President's legacy. Nine quotations from Lincoln's speeches appear above the panels and openings. Sculptor E. H. Daniels, who contracted for the work on August 4, 1941, carved on site and completed the work in 1943. Thus the second phase of Nancy Hanks Lincoln State Memorial was completed in 1944. This facility became Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial—Indiana's first National Park Service area—on July 10, 1962, when Governor Matthew E. Welsh transferred ownership to U. S. Secretary of Interior Stewart Udall.



The National Park Service 1966 modified Memorial Building Visitor Center

Not only ownership of Indiana's Lincoln memorial, but also philosophy of the visitor experience changed. No longer did focus remain on merely creating reflections on the greatness of Lincoln and his mother. Rather, the NPS strove to foster better understanding of the man and his life in Indiana by engaging visitors in educational experiences. The first physical change involved converting the impressive memorial building into a visitor center with late 20th-century guest services. With minimal change in exterior appearance NPS enclosed the open cloister and added offices, an auditorium, a museum, and modern restrooms to the rear of the building. Moreover, visitors could learn about the importance of this site by viewing a movie, browsing educational exhibits, and talking with rangers.



The Lincoln Living Historical Farm built in 1968

The most dramatic interpretative change occurred at the Lincoln home-site. As Superintendent Al Banton Jr. commented, the area was transformed from a "site" to a "sight." In 1968 a living historic farm was added just beyond the cabin-site memorial. Yet, because Lincoln City

structures destroyed archeological evidence over the years, the farm was never intended to reproduce exactly the Lincoln farm. Known features of the farm, however, were incorporated into cabin, barn, smokehouse, chicken house, and tool shed. Starting in 1969 farmers and interpreters staffed the farm to offer the visitors a deeper understanding of Lincoln's Indiana experience.

Visitors to northern Spencer County find two parks dedicated to the memory of Abraham Lincoln and his family. In addition to Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, Lincoln State Park remains a recreational area with camping, picnicking, a lake with a beach, and a number of hiking trails. Recently that park's historic Lincoln sites have received new attention. Within the Lincoln State Park boundaries lies the site of Noah Gorden's mill where a horse kicked Lincoln in the head and in his words, from his 1860 autobiographical statement for Scripps left him, "apparently killed for a time." Both the Little Pigeon Primitive Baptist Church grounds and its cemetery where Lincoln's only sister, Sarah, was buried after dying in childbirth are within the park, as well as the home-sites of Lincoln neighbors including merchant and Lincoln employer James Gentry.

Beginning in 1987, visitors may learn about Lincoln's life by attending dramas in the 1500-seat, covered, Lincoln amphitheatre.



The Lincoln Bicentennial Plaza, 2009

The 2009 Lincoln Bicentennial plaza represents the most recent attempt to interpret Lincoln's Indiana years. The Indiana Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission contracted with Indiana architect George Morrison and artist Will Clark to create a memorial in a wooded setting just inside the park's entrance. The designers used William Wordsworth's words "The child is father of the man" as an inspiration. A curved wall of limestone pillars suggests the height of the boy for each year as he grew to manhood. On the back wall carvings of the Gettysburg Address and Second Inaugural address flank a twice-the-life-size bust of President Lincoln. Additional freestanding limestone pillars supply information on major events of young Lincoln's life.

In an early version of Lincoln's 1846 poem, "My Childhood-Home I See Again," he writes

*The very spot where grew the bread
That formed my bones, I see.
How strange, old field, on thee to tread,
And feel I'm part of thee!*

For further reading

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All photographs in this article are courtesy of the National Park Service, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial unless noted.