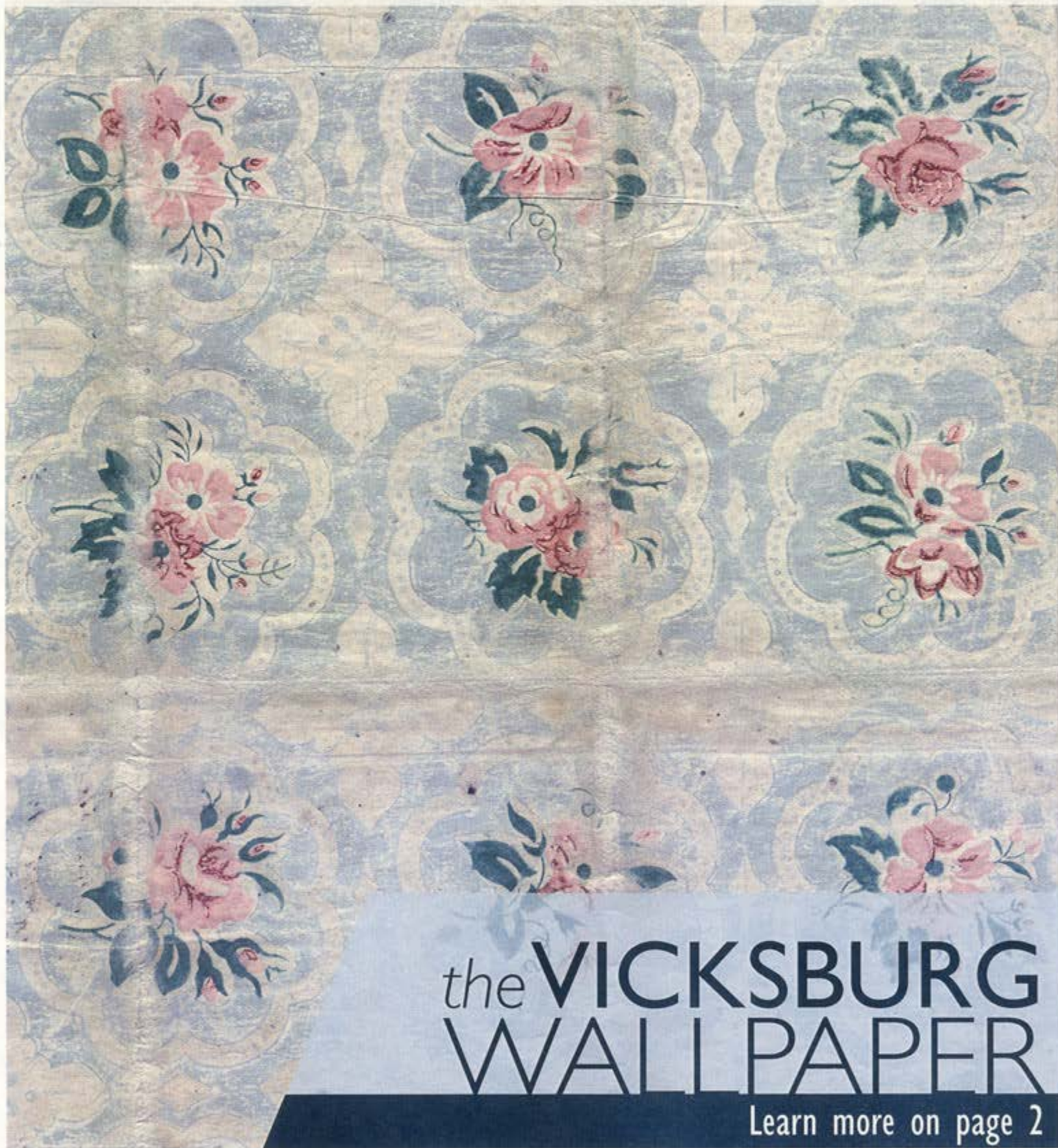




# LINCOLN LORE

●●● NUMBER 1906 SUMMER 2014



*the* **VICKSBURG**  
**WALL PAPER**

Learn more on page 2

# Lincoln Lore

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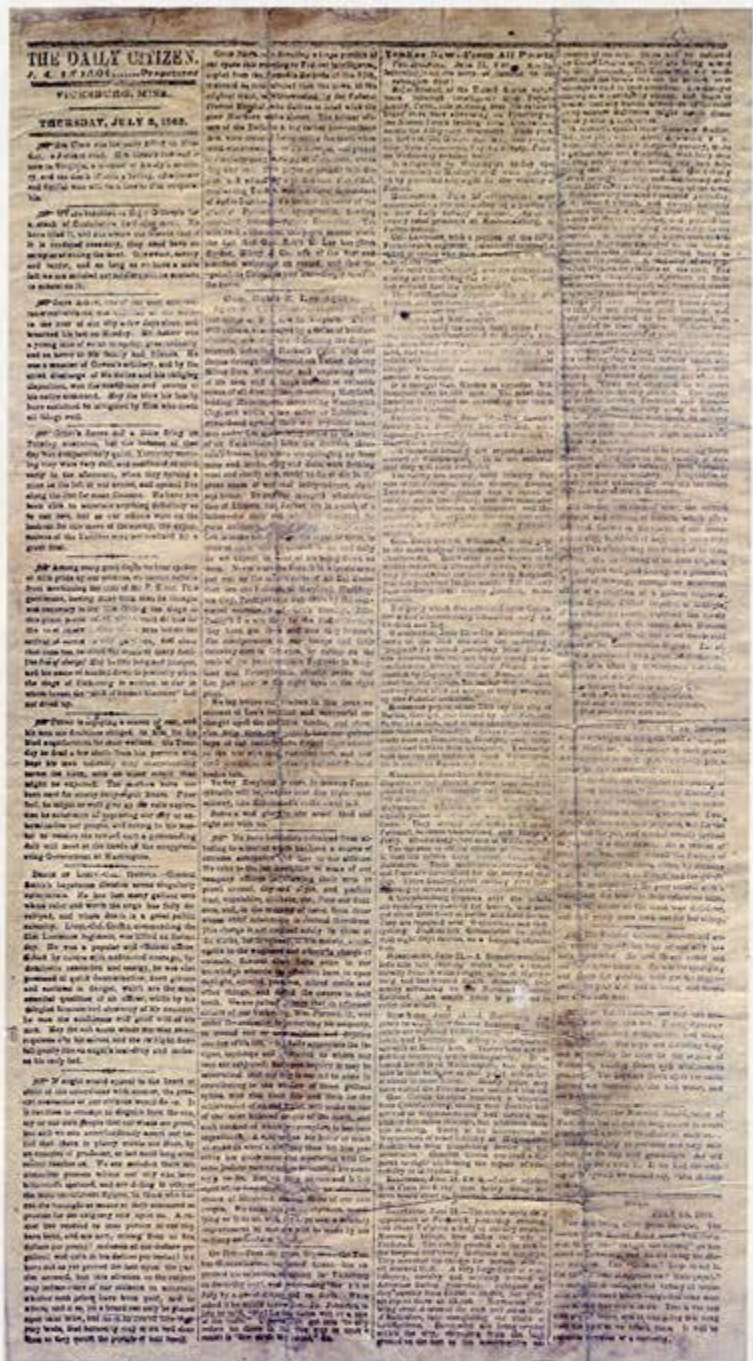
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Carefully preserved at the Allen County Public Library in Fort Wayne, Indiana, is an important artifact from the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection: a piece of wallpaper on the back of which was printed an edition of the *Vicksburg Daily Citizen*. The Union siege of Vicksburg resulted in many shortages for the Confederates living there. One example was the loss of sufficient quantities of newspaper. Nearing the inevitable end of the siege, citizens began to strip wallpaper from their homes so that the reverse side could be used to print the *Daily Citizen*. This edition is dated July 2, 1863, but, according to the Library of Congress Periodical Division, "On July 4 Vicksburg surrendered, the publisher fled, and the Union forces found the type of the Citizen

still standing. They replaced two-thirds of the last column with other matter already in type, added the now famous Note of July 4 at the end and printed a new edition."  
"July 4, 1863. Two days bring about great changes. The banner of the Union floats over Vicksburg. Gen Grant has "caught the rabbit;" he has dined in Vicksburg, and he did bring his dinner with him. The "Citizen" lives to see it. For the last time it appears on "Wall-paper." No more will it eulogize the luxury of mule-meat and fricassed [sic] kitten—urge Southern warriors to such diet nevermore. This is the last wall-paper edition, and is, excepting this note, from the types as we found them. It will be valuable hereafter as a curiosity."

# An interview with Eric Foner

2014 McMurtry Lecturer

**Sara Gabbard:** I bought *Who Owns History* when it was first published, and I “return to it” frequently.

**I think that our readers will be interested in your comments about “creative forgetfulness” as the topic applies to slavery and the Civil War. Also, when and why did historians begin to abandon this “forgetfulness” on the topic.**

**Eric Foner:** Of course, the Civil War remains a subject of endless fascination for historians and the general public. Millions of people visit Civil War battlefields, and books on the war continue to appear and often sell very well. Then there is the related but distinct “Lincoln industrial-complex,” as one historian has described it. As you know, the history of slavery has also been the subject of innumerable important works of scholarship in the last half-century. Historians today are convinced of the centrality of slavery to an understanding of American development, from the earliest days of colonial settlement up to the Civil War. And, more broadly, they have made slavery central to the entire history of the Western Hemisphere from the earliest days of European exploration and conquest. Here, however, there seems to be a gap between scholarly and public understanding. To be sure, slavery has developed a presence in public history—museum exhibitions, for example. And the success of the film “*Twelve Years a Slave*” suggests that a broad audience interested in a “real” account of slavery (rather than Hollywood’s pernicious fictions of the past, as in “*Gone With the Wind*”) exists.

Nonetheless, slavery remains an uncomfortable subject for many Americans. There is no museum of slavery in this country, nor are there many monuments that draw attention to the history of slavery. The presentation of slavery at many historical sites in the South remains woefully out of date. When I lecture, as I frequently do, to non-academic audiences, I am struck with how much resistance there is to accepting that slavery was “somehow” (as Lincoln put it) the fundamental cause of the Civil War. This does not mean that there were no other causes, but it is remarkable how many people cling to the old Beardian view that the tariff was the basic cause, or “states rights” as an abstract doctrine, dissociated from the defense of slavery. People seem to

see it as a personal accusation of some kind to be told that the Civil War, in many ways, was fought over slavery.

I was in France last year and visited a small monument in Luxembourg Gardens, commemorating the end of slavery in France and its empire. No such monument exists in the United States as far as I am aware. Moreover, instead of self-congratulation—celebrating how France abolished slavery—the monument thanks the slaves themselves for their efforts for freedom, and states that their struggle forms part of the history of liberty enjoyed by all French people. Even Americans who do see slavery as central to the Civil War still often fall back on the notion that “we” freed the slaves, whereas historians have long since placed great emphasis on slave resistance as an important component of the end of slavery.

Of course, this is an old story, as David Blight showed in “*Race and Reunion*.” Forgetting some things about slavery and the Civil War was essential to national reconciliation (among whites) as it emerged in the late nineteenth century.

**SG Sometimes I read the word slavery and sometimes chattel slavery. Is there any difference between the two terms?**

**EF:** I happen to think that the word slavery should be used very precisely. That is—the reduction of a human being to property (i. e. chattel), in a system where the status passes from generation to generation. Of course, history has seen many kinds of slavery systems, from the plantation slavery of the Western Hemisphere to household slavery, slaves as concubines, as warriors, and in other capacities. But the chattel principle is crucial to slavery.

Slavery is also used as a kind of all-purpose metaphor for inequality and injustice. This was the case in the eighteenth century, when the American revolutionaries spoke incessantly of being reduced to slavery by British taxation and other policies. This is metaphorical slavery, a use of language whose power derives from knowledge of the actual slavery that existed in that society. In the nineteenth century, the labor movement spoke of “wage slavery” and feminists of the “slavery of sex.” Of course, to associate your position with slavery can often be a way of gaining sympathy for your cause. Abolitionists were often annoyed at these

usages. Wage earners were oppressed, but they were not slaves. Women did not enjoy anything like legal or social equality, but free women were not slaves. In our own time, I hear students invoke slavery for all kinds of situations. “Stop and frisk” (the police practice in New York City, until recently, of police searching nonwhite young men on the street for no reason) is iniquitous, but it is not, as I have heard people say, “the same as slavery.” Slavery was a uniquely evil institution. This does not mean that people who are not slaves all enjoy equality—nothing could be further from the truth. But we should try to be precise in our use of language.

**SG Please describe your experience with the exhibit at the Chicago Historical Society on “A House Divided: America in the Age of Lincoln.”**

**EF:** That’s an interesting story. Nearly thirty years ago, when I was coming to the end of writing my book on Reconstruction, I received a call from the CHS (now known as the Chicago History Museum) asking me to become one of the two co-curators on this exhibition. They had just been working with Alfred Young, a scholar of the revolutionary era, on an exhibition on that period, and they wanted a scholar for the next one. I said they probably had called the wrong person—I had no experience with museum exhibits (except as a consumer). They said, in effect, we know how to do an exhibit, but we want to make sure the history is up to date. They promised what we would call in the University world, academic freedom—I would make the decisions about the themes and content of the exhibit. There was only one caveat—we had to include the bed on which Lincoln died, which somehow had made its way to the Society. People come from all over the world to see it.

The Society was taking a gamble. They would dismantle a very popular exhibition on Lincoln, which, to a historian, seemed like an exercise in hagiography and trivia. It had dioramas of various moments in Lincoln’s life, and things of no particular historical value, such as Lincoln’s ice skate (if I remember correctly) and even a piece of wood allegedly from the log cabin in which he was born. It lacked all sense of historical context.

I was very fortunate to work as co-curator with Olivia Mahoney of the CHS, who not only was an expert in exhibition planning but had a keen interest in and open-minded



*Freedmen's school, Edisto Island, S.C./LC-DIG-ppmsca-11194*

approach to history. Our plan was, of course, not to eliminate Lincoln, but to place him in historical context. So the exhibit included material about slavery, the anti-slavery movement, the political battles of the 1850s, racism in the antebellum North, and the Civil War, including military, political, and social history. We emphasized the role of black soldiers in the war and the significance of emancipation. I am glad to say the exhibit was a big success. It won various awards and was on display for perhaps twenty years. Of course, some visitors wondered where those dioramas had gone. But overall audience response was very positive. And I think it had an impact on other museums, for the practice of teaming professional historians from outside the museum with professionals within it is now standard practice all over the country. Libby and I subsequently curated an exhibit on Reconstruction, which opened at the Virginia Historical Society and traveled to several other venues, North and South, in the 1990s. (Both exhibits have been digitized; links are on the home page of my website: [www.ericfoner.com](http://www.ericfoner.com).)

I learned a great deal from work on this exhibit, especially how to convey historical content visually and through objects rather than words, which I was used to. I was told, for example, that the label on slavery could not exceed 150 words. Try to summarize the history of slavery in 150 words. I also quickly learned that unlike writing a book, an exhibit is a collaborative venture, with input from designers, lighting technicians, people involved in education, and others.

Libby and I made the content decisions, but there is so much more in putting together an exhibition, and this involves work with many other people, and, sometimes, compromise. Overall, it was a very rewarding experience.

**SG: What is your opinion of Ken Burns' interpretation of the Civil War?**

**EF:** Ken's series should be praised for stimulating public interest in the Civil War era. TV, or film, obviously has the potential to reach a far broader audience than we do in books. They can convey a sense of immediacy. I don't think they are particularly suited to conveying complex ideas. There always seems to be a tendency to personalize the history, to focus on individuals, which is fine up to a point, but broader historical forces can be lost sight of. I thought Ken left it to Barbara Fields (one of the main "talking heads") to raise important questions rather than addressing them directly himself. I wrote an essay in a book edited by Robert Toplin criticizing the treatment (or non-treatment) of Reconstruction in Burns's final episode and will not repeat that criticism here. But overall, the series was certainly several cuts above what one usually sees on television.

**SG: Your edited book on Nat Turner was published in 1971. Please comment on your selection of material to be included.**

**EF:** That is going back a ways. You will recall that in the late 1960s a controversy arose over William Styron's novel, "The Confessions of Nat Turner." Several black scholars condemned it for what they felt

was a belittling portrait of Turner. I was asked around that time to do a book in this series, "Great Lives Observed," and chose Turner in the hope of getting historical information about him out there so people could judge for themselves. The main source, of course, has the same title as Styron's book—a white lawyer's pamphlet based, he said, on interviews with Turner while he was in prison. I supplemented this with newspaper articles from the time (some of which referred to Turner's wife, who had been omitted from Styron's account). I also included documents relating to the broader response to Turner's rebellion—accounts of a widespread reign of terror against blacks, abolitionist responses, and the Virginia debate on slavery of 1832 that followed from the uprising. And I included some documents illustrating how various groups have invoked Turner's legacy in the century and more since his rebellion. The format was basically established by the series, but Turner was an unusual choice—most figures in *Great Lives Observed* are political leaders and the like.

**SG: What was the significance of "Gideon's Band?"**

**EF:** Gideon's Band were the men and women (mostly women) who ventured to the Sea Islands of South Carolina after the Union navy captured the region in late 1861. They set up schools to teach the emancipated slaves on the islands, and sought to assist in the transition from slave to free labor. As Willie Lee Rose noted many years ago, the result was a "Rehearsal for Reconstruction,"

which took place under a public microscope as northern newspapers avidly followed the progress of events there.

Issues such as the capacity of former slaves for citizenship, what kind of labor system should replace slavery, whether the government should give blacks access to land, and, more broadly, how much supervision whites should exercise over the freed slaves, were all debated and worked out on the Sea Islands. Many of these teachers brought paternalistic attitudes toward the former slaves. But one cannot but be impressed by their dedication (Laura Towne remained near Beaufort until her death in the early twentieth century). Overall, they were committed to helping the former slaves achieve autonomy, and many pressed vigorously for the government to allow them to acquire plots of land so that they would not have to work for white employers. In this they ran up against the interests of white investors from the North who bought up abandoned plantations and wanted blacks to grow cotton as free laborers. Overall, as Rose argued, events on the Sea Islands demonstrate that Reconstruction began during the Civil War, not in 1865.

**SG: Your monumental book *Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* is perhaps the most significant contribution to the study of this subject. Why did you choose 1863 and 1877 as the beginning and end of this period?**

EF: Thank you. I chose 1863 (I could have chosen 1861 but that would have made the book even longer than it is) to make the point that Reconstruction is the inevitable outgrowth of the destruction of slavery. I began with the Emancipation Proclamation, not because Lincoln suddenly freed all the slaves on January 1, 1863, but because the Proclamation changed the character of the war, guaranteeing that if the Union emerged victorious, slavery would perish. As long as the aim was restoring the prewar Union, Reconstruction was irrelevant. Once it is decreed that slavery must die, a new social order will have to be constructed in the South, a new labor system, new kinds of race relations, etc. So the date 1863 indicated that Reconstruction begins during the war with the decision for emancipation. That raises the fundamental question of Reconstruction—what will be the status of the four million former slaves when the war has ended?

1877 is a more conventional end point—the end of a commitment by the federal government to intervene in the South to

protect the basic rights, now guaranteed in the Constitution, of black Americans. In a sense, there is a bit of a tension between the dates 1863 and 1877. 1863 is based on a definition of Reconstruction as a social process—the adjustment to the end of slavery—which does not end in 1877. 1877 is based on a political chronology. And, in fact, much recent work on Reconstruction has extended that time frame, carrying the story into the 1880s and even 1890s. One might say that the political history of Reconstruction doesn't end until the disfranchisement of black voters in the South around the turn of the century (and I did include a brief epilogue looking from 1877 to 1900). To some extent the chronological parameters were set by the New American Nation series in which the book appeared. I tweaked the beginning date backward from 1865 to 1863, but left the conventional ending date in place. Maybe I just ran out of space and energy.

**SG: I was struck by your quotation from W.E.B Du Bois that... "the slave went free; stood a brief moment in the sun; then moved back again toward slavery." Please comment.**

EF: Of course that is from Du Bois's monumental work, "Black Reconstruction in America," published in the mid-1930s. Du Bois, as you know, was challenging an entire edifice of historical interpretation deriving from the Dunning school, which saw Reconstruction as a time of unrelieved sordidness in political and social life, the lowest point in the saga of American democracy. The reason, according to that view, was the mistake of giving the right to vote to black men, who were inherently incapable of exercising it intelligently. DuBois placed blacks, their aspirations, activism, accomplishments, and eventual victimization, at the center of the story. He saw Reconstruction, as the quote suggests, as a time of positive achievement, and a key moment in American history, the first (and last, writing in the 1930s) time the U. S. had experienced an interracial democracy. As the quote indicates he was fully aware of the disastrous effects of the overthrow of Reconstruction, but he wanted readers to remember the effort rather than simply the end result.

Du Bois's book was ignored by the historical profession when it appeared, but it later helped to shape subsequent generations' view of Reconstruction, including my own. The "South Atlantic Quarterly" recently published a valuable special issue devoted to the book, edited by Thavolia Glymph.

**SG: At the end of *Reconstruction*, you make the comment: "Perhaps the remarkable thing about Reconstruction was not that it failed, but that it was attempted at all and survived as long as it did." Please comment.**

EF: I think I was trying here to counteract the sense one gets from some historians that because Reconstruction failed it has no lasting importance. The obstacles to success are easy to identify—entrenched racism, violence, a federal government that lacked the administrative structures that would enable it to intervene forcefully to uphold the law, a growing Northern retreat from the ideal of equality, and others one could name. And if one looks at other societies that abolished slavery in the nineteenth century, Radical Reconstruction stands out as an episode where former slaves, almost immediately after the end of slavery, exercise genuine political power in a democratic system, from the local level to the halls of Congress. As Du Bois argued, it was a remarkable moment and that is what I was trying to emphasize in that sentence and in my book more generally.

**SG: You have combined different careers, including writing and teaching. Did you usually write your many books at the same time that you were actively engaged in a regular teaching schedule, or did you try to avoid an "overlap"?**

EF: I generally am writing and teaching at the same time. I have developed a pattern over the years in which I write at home in the morning, then go over to the university (which fortunately for me is across the street) to teach, meet with students, serve on committees, etc., etc. I find that even a couple of hours each day of writing is essential to getting books finished.

I do not see teaching and writing as antithetical—quite the opposite. In both cases you are trying to convey historical ideas, historical information, to an audience of non-specialists. I try to bring to bear in my teaching what I am writing about—this forces me to sharpen my ideas and present them in a coherent manner. Writing makes your teaching better and teaching makes your writing better.

Also, I'm lucky in that I have never suffered from writers' block. Two things may help to explain that. First is an adage drilled into us by my PhD mentor Richard Hofstadter—ninety percent of writing is rewriting. In other words, don't agonize over your first draft—get it down on paper (or onto your

computer screen) knowing it is very imperfect. Then begins the real process of writing, worrying about word choice, sentence structure, use of quotations, etc., etc. Second, I was lucky enough after I graduated from college to have a scholarship to study at Oxford for two years. There they use the tutorial system. Each week I had to present an essay to my "tutor" on a subject he had assigned the previous week, and about which I generally knew nothing (I was studying English history, which I had never taken in the U. S.). You could not turn up without your essay. I learned to research and write to deadline—a very valuable skill.

**SG:** In the Preface to *Our Lincoln*, in commenting on the study of Abraham Lincoln, you state that: "In too many recent studies, however, the wider world slips from view. To understand Lincoln, it seems, one has to study only the man himself." In view of this situation, please comment on your selection of authors and topics for inclusion in the book.

**EF:** That book of essays was timed to appear for the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth in 2009. I felt that, while many valuable works on Lincoln had appeared in the past several years, too many seemed to operate on a kind of circular set of assumptions—to understand, say, Lincoln's policies relating to slavery, you should study his law career, or his philosophical development, or his view of the Constitution. All important, but the idea that Lincoln responded to and was influenced by his political environment was often ignored. Also, much work on Lincoln seemed unaware of relevant scholarship on the period, such as writings on the abolitionists (too often simply portrayed as fanatics as opposed to the supposedly sensible and pragmatic Lincoln). I wanted to contextualize Lincoln and as a result, while I asked a number of "Lincoln scholars"—like Richard Carwardine, Mark Neely, and Harold Holzer—to contribute, most of the essays were by scholars of nineteenth-century history who had not written much directly on Lincoln. These included, among others, Sean Wilentz, James Oakes, Manisha Sinha, David Blight, and myself. Lincoln had appeared in many of my works, but I had never written directly on him. I think the range of topics, from



*The Freedmen's Bureau/LC-USZ62-105555*

Lincoln's relations with black abolitionists to his use of language, is broader than in many such volumes.

**SG:** You state in *Forever Free* that "Ignorance of Reconstruction is unfortunate because, whether we realize it or not, it remains a part of our lives." Please comment on this statement.

**EF:** In my opinion, you cannot understand our own time without a knowledge of Reconstruction. Issues central to Reconstruction—the definition of American citizenship, the balance of power between the state and federal governments, the meaning of equality, the connection between political and economic freedom, the possibility of interracial political alliances, the proper response to terrorism—are as current as today's newspaper. Every session of the Supreme Court includes cases arising from the Fourteenth Amendment, enacted during Reconstruction, and that Amendment has spawned in our time a vast expansion of the legal rights of subordinate groups, most recently gay Americans.

Even more than slavery, however, Reconstruction is widely ignored or misunderstood. It barely exists in public history. It is slighted in most historical museums. There are almost no monuments to black leaders of Reconstruction. Of the 600 or so historical sites of the National Park Service, only one, the Andrew Johnson Homestead, deals centrally with Reconstruction (and in an antiquated manner).

Perhaps the impending sesquicentennial of Reconstruction will produce more public interest in Reconstruction. I certainly hope so.

**SG:** What were "Black Codes"?

**EF:** These were a set of laws enacted

in late 1865 and early 1866 by the southern states once new governments had been established under Andrew Johnson's plan of Reconstruction, which left political power solely in the hands of whites. The laws sought to establish the legal status of the former slaves. They recognized some rights—legalizing marriages, allowing them to own property—but essentially were an attempt to force blacks back to work for white employers. They varied from state to state, but they used vagrancy laws to criminalize not having a job

with a white employer. All blacks were required to sign year-long labor contracts. If they did not do so, they could be fined and, if they could not pay, would be forced to work for an employer who paid the fine. They could not leave the job until the year expired. Essentially, they gave blacks almost no civil rights, no political rights, and sought to use the power of the law to reestablish the plantation system with labor as close to slavery as possible.

These laws led to bitter denunciation from blacks and a backlash against Johnson's policies in the North. They led directly to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1866, which sought to establish racial equality in laws dealing with labor contracts and other matters, and to the Fourteenth Amendment, which placed the principle of equal citizenship regardless of race in the Constitution.

**SG:** What is your next Lincoln/Civil War and/or Reconstruction-related project?

**EF:** I am currently finishing a book on fugitive slaves and the underground railroad in New York City and, more broadly, how the fugitive issue affected the road to Civil War. It should be published in the spring of 2015. As a local study, although with national implications it is a little different than my previous books. But I always like to try something new.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Eric Foner

Eric Foner, the DeWitt Clinton Professor of History at Columbia University, will give the 2014 McMurtry Lecture on September 26 at the Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, IN.

# Annual McMurtry Lecture

## "The Emancipation of Abraham Lincoln"

presented by **Eric Foner**

DeWitt Clinton Professor of History, Columbia University  
*Author of Reconstruction: America's Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877,  
Forever Free, Our Lincoln, and Who Owns History?*

September 26, 2014 | 7:00 pm

Main Library Theater, Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, IN



## Lincoln and Religion

Interview with Richard Etulain

**Sara Gabbard: Why does the topic of Abraham Lincoln's faith continue to be discussed?**

**Richard Etulain:** I think all Americans are interested (even fascinated) with Abraham Lincoln. About four or five topics linked to Lincoln grab the most attention: Lincoln as husband and father; slavery and abolition; politics; leadership and ethical values; and religion. Those intrigued with Lincoln's religious ideas and experiences often take opposing positions. In the half century following Lincoln's assassination, William Herndon, his law partner, and Ward Hill Lamon, Lincoln's close friend, and writers Chauncey F. Black and Jesse W. Weik depicted Lincoln as a skeptic or "infidel." But Josiah Holland, a sympathetic biographer, fellow Illinoian Isaac N. Arnold, and artist Francis B. Carpenter touted Lincoln as a devout Christian. A similar division of opinion marked writings of the next fifty years, with most historians and biographers hesitant to label Lincoln a Christian but theologians William J. Wolf and Elton Trueblood pointing to several Christian-centric actions of the president. In the last two generations, more than a few scholars have discovered a series of steady steps in Lincoln's journey from skeptic to embracing a God-directed world, and some other elements of Christianity. Biographers such as Allen C. Guelzo, Richard J. Carwardine,

and Ronald C. White, Jr., found discernible connections between Lincoln's religiosity and his political decisions.

In the 150 years since Lincoln's assassination, most historians and biographers have been intrigued with Lincoln and religion. But in recent years, perhaps because many American scholars have themselves been less interested personally in strong religious affiliation, they have paid less attention to American religious life. But that has not been the case with Abraham Lincoln. Everything about Lincoln—his family, his thoughts, his actions, his leadership—has been nearly exhaustively covered. Although scholars in the past generation or two have paid most attention to Lincoln's political decisions, his reactions to slavery and abolition, and his racial attitudes, they have not overlooked his religious journey. As long as we continue to pay so much attention to and point out the strengths of Lincoln's life and career, we will continue to scrutinize his religious thoughts and actions.

**SG: Please tell the story of the "New Salem Infidelity Statement." Should it be significant in our study of Lincoln?**

**RE:** Lincoln's stay in New Salem, Illinois, from 1831 to 1837 was an important second stage of his religious journey. Reared in Hard-Shell or conservative (we might call them fundamentalist) Baptist churches

in Kentucky and Indiana, Lincoln never joined these churches, but his parents and older sister Sarah did. When he left home in midsummer 1831 for the New Salem village, not far from Springfield and perched on the Sangamon River, he broke with the past and embraced the new. He joined a debating club, read the books of Thomas Paine and C. Volney that challenged traditional Christianity, and conversed with several New Salem residents about religious ideas. Some, but not all, biographers contend that about 1834 he wrote a "lost book on infidelity" (perhaps a pamphlet of about 25 pages) challenging the Bible as inspired scripture and disagreeing with other orthodox Christian ideas. Those touting the "lost book" thesis add that a friend, knowing of Lincoln's political ambitions, threw the manuscript in the fire, saying its publication would sidetrack Lincoln's quest for office.

Even if Lincoln did not author the "lost book," he was clearly considering the ideas said to have been in that writing. Historical theologian William Wolf perceptively summarizes what we might take away about Lincoln's religious experiences in New Salem. Since no one ever claimed to have read or heard read the "lost book on infidelity," it is a story still unproven. But Lincoln certainly was questioning the idea of the Bible as infallible, as totally inerrant; he was also coming to believe in the universality



New Salem, IL #1773

of salvation, not in the Calvinist doctrine of Election, with God's saving some and casting out the rest. Obviously, too, Lincoln was upset with the vituperative warring among denominations, all claiming ultimate truth for their views and the "infidelity" of their competitors. The pastors Lincoln had met were largely untrained, almost glowing in their lack of education as being more godly than suspect seminary training. Meanwhile, Lincoln was reading the Bible himself, as he had since boyhood. He left New Salem

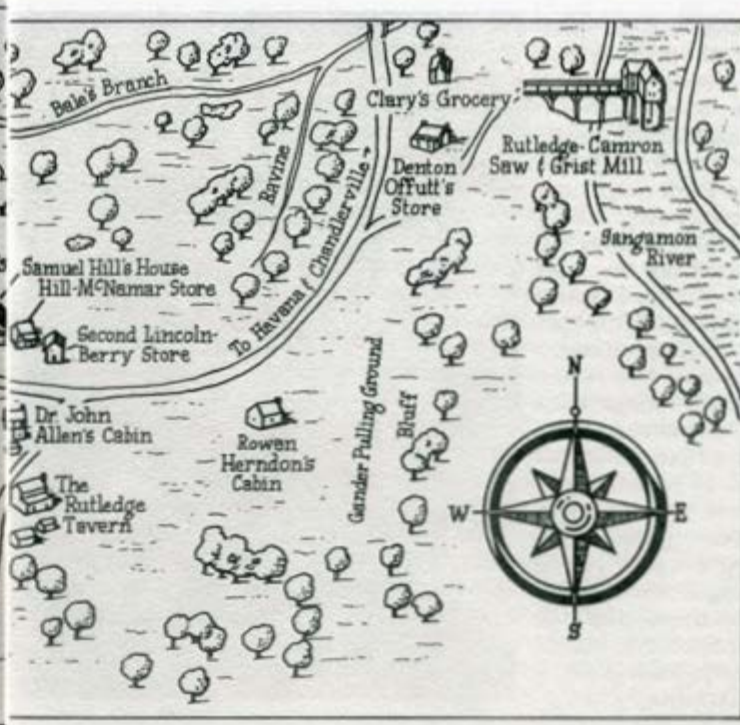
in 1837 for Springfield, still with many religious questions and no church affiliation.

**SG: What is your take on Mary Lincoln's statement that her husband wasn't a "technical Christian?"**

**RE:** When Mary Lincoln told William Herndon in September 1866 that her husband "was not a technical Christian," she probably meant that his theological views and church attendance differed from those of traditional Christians. She added that Abraham "had no hope and no faith in

the usual acceptance of those words." Even though "he never joined a church," Mary continued, "he was a religious man always, as I think." (Later, she asserted that all these words were not hers but ones Herndon put in her mouth.) The death of son Willie in 1862, the preparation of the Gettysburg Address in 1863, and additional Bible reading in 1864—Mary Lincoln thought—were signs of Lincoln's increasing interest in religion.

Mary, of course, had attended church since girlhood, had joined two Presbyterian



churches, and even tried Spiritualist meetings after the shocking death of Willie. Said positively, she undoubtedly would have called herself a Christian—technically so. When one remembers that three out of four Americans were not church members in 1860, Lincoln stood with the majority of his countrymen and women on church membership. But because he was not Trinitarian in his views, did not speak of Christ as the divine son of God, and questioned the infallibility of the Scriptures,

he would not have been an orthodox or "technical" Christian to most traditional believers in the mid-sixteenth century.

**SG: In the sense of the previous question, is there an opportunity to ask if "religious" and "spiritual" traits in an individual are the same thing?**

**RE:** If Mary Lincoln was invoking our religious terminology and not hers, she might well have described her husband as a "very spiritual man" rather than as "not a technical Christian." In the first half of the

sixteenth century, a full gamut of religious terms seems to have been less available than in our time. In Lincoln's era, to those of a conservative bent, questioning anything about the Bible's historical accuracy, challenging Moses's authorship of any of the Bible's first books, or asking about the creation of the Pauline Epistles, placed one in the liberal or even further-left category of "infidel." So, more than a few observers considered Lincoln an "infidel" because he did not join a church, was at best a nominal



church-goer until the 1860s, and questioned several of the bedrock beliefs of devout Christians.

In the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries many Americans have embraced the term "spiritual." They use this sometimes vague term for persons considered to be religious in their charitable attitudes toward others (including opponents), who display willingness to help the needy, who support moral and social justice measures, and who are usually committed to searching or questing for extra-human insights. Quite often "spiritual" is also employed to denominate those belonging to no church, following no specific religious creeds, and avoiding judgmental attitudes about both unbelievers and the faithful. As the United States has become increasingly less tied to specific denominations and traditional religious beliefs, the term "spiritual" has gained in popularity.

I prefer not to use "spiritual" because I find the term more hazy and slippery than "religious." But "spiritual" works for increasing numbers of people, and probably Abraham Lincoln would have been numbered among the "spiritual" had that word, with its contemporary connotations, been available during his lifetime.

**SG: Please comment on the Second Great Awakening and how it affected the world in which Lincoln lived.**

**RE:** I am convinced that the Second Great Awakening impacted Lincoln's life and career in ways he might not have recognized. The renewal of a more evangelistic, less rational approach to religious faith reached an early apex in such events as the Cane Ridge Revival, which took place in August 1801 in Lincoln's birth state of Kentucky. The camp meeting-revivalistic aura of the awakening helped spawn and expand Baptist congregations, especially in the South, and Methodist churches, more often in the North. Many of the pastors of these early frontier churches lacked much education and often were depicted as hell-fire and brimstone exhorters who shouted and gestured as if "they were fighting bees." There is good evidence that as a teenager Lincoln mimicked these emotional pulpитеers, alienating his more devout parents (especially his father) in doing so. Part of Lincoln's alienation from



Left: John Nicolay, Lincoln, John Hay/OC-1527

Right: Eliza Gurney, frontispiece to her book, *Memoir & Correspondence of Eliza P. Gurney*



the Hard-shell Baptist congregations the Lincoln parents belonged to in Kentucky and later in Indiana came from his distaste for the emotional approach to religion that the Second Great Awakening had helped generate.

But a legacy of the Great Awakening perhaps unclear to Lincoln, and also to many historians in the next century or more, was the movement's strong, enduring impact on social reform. As Timothy L. Smith reveals in his classic, still-valuable study, *Revivalism and Social Reform* (1957), evangelicals arising during and after the Great Awakening became spirited and strong advocates of social reforms such as prohibition, aid to the poor, and, particularly, emancipation for slaves. In roughly the first two generations of the nineteenth century, the antislavery stances of evangelicals provided a strong foundation for the abolitionism that increased markedly in the 1850s and captured the sixteenth president in his Emancipation Proclamation in 1862-63.

**SG: Did Lincoln ever refer to the Transcendentalist movement?**

**RE:** On first glance, it would seem that Lincoln, with his devotion to hard-headed rationalism, would have little to do with the idealistic Transcendentalists. But good evidence suggests he read the writings of Theodore Parker, William Ellery Channing, and perhaps Ralph Waldo Emerson. Lincoln's law partner William Herndon,

an ardent and enthusiastic acquaintance of Parker's, urged Lincoln to read his writings. Politician and promoter Jesse Fell, who pushed for Lincoln's Republican nomination in 1860, championed the writings of Channing and gave Lincoln a copy of "Channing's entire works." Fell was certain that Lincoln approved of, without becoming a disciple of, both Channing and Parker. What Lincoln actually thought about those Transcendentalist thinkers, including Emerson, is not clear because he did not comment on their writings or ideas.

But Robert Bray in his *Reading with Lincoln* (2010) and Richard Lawrence Miller in his four-volume *Lincoln and His World* (2006-12) are suggestive, particularly in their comments on what Lincoln might have found appealing in the writings of Parker and Channing. It is not their philosophical-religious ideas that would have attracted Lincoln, Bray and Miller contend, but their comments on the Union, politics, and their other nonreligious ideas. Indeed, one Lincoln contemporary speculates that Lincoln's phrase in the Gettysburg Address—"government of the people, by the people, for the people"—came directly, if "unconsciously," from Parker. As Bray puts it, Lincoln too "thought about thought," and thus would have been drawn to the provocative reflections of these writers. One might speculate, too, that Emerson's ideas on individualism and personal independence in essays such as "Self-Reliance" and "The

American Scholar" would have whetted Lincoln's interest.

**SG: Did Lincoln have a purpose in writing "Meditation on the Divine Will" in early September 1862?**

RE: I think the "Meditation on the Divine Will" provides another revealing yet hazy glimpse of Lincoln's increasingly complex views of the role of God in human affairs. The deaths of two sons, the perplexities of a horrendous civil war, and particularly the mounting load of his role as Commander in Chief drove Lincoln to ponder more and more about a Higher Power. Whether written in late summer 1862, or, as some think, in August 1864, the private meditation came during a down period in the Union's striving for victory. Lincoln's piece began with a widely held belief: "The will of God prevails," and followed with another accepted idea: "In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God." But if Lincoln thought, as he most surely did, that right was on the Union's side, he had to ponder why right, from the Union northern perspective, was not winning. Did God have other purposes in mind, those beyond the ken of Americans fighting one another? Even though the "human instrumentalities," like himself, were "the best adaptation to effect His purpose," the course of the war and God's purposes were puzzles. Trying to understand the puzzle, Lincoln was "almost ready to say...that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not yet end."

As biographers Allen Guelzo and Ronald White opine, this brief, unpublished meditation (it was given its title by Lincoln's secretaries John G. Nicolay and John Hay as they prepared their monumental ten-volume biography, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* [1890]), is exceptionally revealing about Lincoln's inner thoughts. Not meant for a speech or public letter, these reflections show Abraham Lincoln, well beyond most American presidents, attempting to understand God's role in His creation and subsequent human events. And if the meditation is considered alongside Lincoln's correspondence with Quaker Eliza Gurney and Kentucky editor Albert G. Hodges and the Second Inaugural Address, one sees Lincoln moving gradually away from a distant, uninvolved Deist God to a more involved, decision-making God possibly directing human events. But in the "Meditation," as later in Lincoln's Second Inaugural, what God's exact purposes were remained mysterious.

**SG: Who were Phineas Gurley and Eliza Gurney? Did they have a direct effect on Lincoln's viewpoint?**

RE: Thank you for asking about these two people. Their lives and ideas illustrate Lincoln's interactions with persons whose stronger faith seemed to influence the president's journey. The Rev. Phineas D. Gurley was the second and more influential of two Presbyterian pastors who helped the Lincolns through the grief of dying sons and nourished Lincoln as an increasingly thoughtful man about God's participation in people's lives. Dr. Gurley pastored the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church in Washington, D.C., where the Lincolns were pew-holders and frequently attended. But the president did not join the church, even though he clearly admired the minister. Gurley, although obviously antislavery and against secession, stayed out of politics in his sermons. Lincoln was drawn to Gurley's Old School Presbyterian preaching. Gurley also modeled the ideal, encouraging pastor when Willie died, spending time with the Lincolns, sustaining them, and encouraging the president in several talks about religious faith. Gurley markedly influenced Lincoln religiously through his learned, rational approach to religion and his warm, uplifting attention to the Lincolns in their time of unbounded grief. The supportive bridges Gurley had built with the president and Mary led to his being chosen to deliver Lincoln's funeral sermon on 19 April, 1865.

Lincoln's contact with Quaker widow Eliza P. Gurney impacted Lincoln's religious journey in other ways. In 1862 Gurney visited the White House to speak about the dilemmas which antiwar and pro-abolitionist Quakers faced. Before she left, Mrs. Gurney knelt and prayed a wonderfully eloquent prayer. The president replied, thanking her for the interview and telling her that he "desired that all my work and acts may be according to his [God's] will..." "We must believe," Lincoln added, "that He permits it [the war's continuance] for some wise purpose of his own..." Several months later Gurney wrote to Lincoln. She assured him of her "own earnest prayer" and those of thousands of others asking "that the Almighty...may strengthen thee to accomplish all the blessed purposes... he did design to make thee instrumental in accomplishing..." So taken was Lincoln with Mrs. Gurney's transparent religious fidelity and her support that he wrote her a letter stating he would "probably never ... forget" her interview and letters. Then,

hinting at views that became more explicit in the Second Inaugural Address, he told the Quaker lady that the "purposes of the Almighty are perfect, and must prevail, though we erring mortals may fail to accurately perceive them in advance." Lincoln was much "indebted" to the "good christian people of the country" who were praying for him, including "no one of them, more than...yourself." Lincoln's contacts with Pastor Gurley and Friend Gurney are illuminating glimpses into his persisting quest to understand God's will, especially in the final war-torn, emotionally upsetting years of his life.

**SG: President Lincoln did not quote Scripture directly in his Gettysburg Address, but, less than a year and a half later, his Second Inaugural Address relied heavily on Biblical references. Was this choice in both instances deliberate?**

RE: Actually, the Gettysburg Address contains at least one whiff of the Bible and an interesting reference to God. As Ronald White points out in his first-rate study of Lincoln's speeches and writings, *The Eloquent President* (2005), the first words of the address "four score and seven years ago" echo the "threescore years and ten" phrase of Psalm 90. And White adds, "the whole of his speech would be suffused with both biblical content and cadence." In addition, even though the reading texts do not carry the two words, all four of the newspaper copyists at Gettysburg heard Lincoln add "under God" in his final phrasing: "that the nation shall, under God, have a new birth of freedom, and the government of the people, by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

Nearly every person who has written about Lincoln points to the biblical sound, sense, and content of the Second Inaugural Address. One or two commentators have even called the March 1865 presentation Lincoln's Sermon on the Mount. Consider the specifics: in the 701 words of the speech, there are fourteen references to God, four biblical quotes, and three invocations to prayer. If a person had perused Lincoln's correspondence with Eliza Gurney in 1862, the "Little Speech" and letter to Albert G. Hodges (1864), and other bits and pieces along the presidential way, he or she would know the references to God and biblical images in the Second Inaugural were not something new. Lincoln had been wrestling with these issues all during his White house years—if not before.

The March 1865 address brought together several strands developing during Lincoln's presidency. Most significant here were Lincoln's ruminations about God and His possible role in the North-South conflict. Repeating what he had been iterating, Lincoln said both sides read the same Bible, prayed to the same God, and asked for God's aid against their opponents. He added, "the Almighty has His own purposes," but indicated those purposes were not yet clear. Yoked to these comments were Lincoln's convictions about the future, illustrating his nonvindictiveness: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right..." Already thinking about the next years of a reunited North and South, Lincoln clearly utilized loving kindness to call for forgiveness and acceptance in a restored Union. One could almost hear from the Mount "Blessed are the peacemakers."

#### **SG: Were the Lincoln sons baptized?**

**RE:** A good question that allows me to comment on the Lincolns' church-going. As biographer Ronald White notes, there's little information about the baptisms of the two older Lincoln boys, Robert and Eddie. One questionable source suggests Willie may have been baptized. Nearly all scholars who deal in depth with Tad, however, say he was baptized on his second birthday, 4 April 1855 (not 1856 as several mistakenly state). Tad's baptism may have been the outcome of Mary Lincoln's rejoining the Presbyterian Church, the church of her girlhood in Kentucky, on 13 April 1852. As a new wife and mother in Springfield, Mary had sporadically attended the Episcopal Church, the church of her sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth and Ninian Edwards. But when Eddie died in early 1850, Presbyterian Pastor James Smith warmly ministered to the grieving parents, and Mary joined Smith's church soon thereafter. Husband Abraham rented a pew at First Presbyterian but never joined the church and never attended regularly. But the Lincoln boys did attend the church's Sunday School.

When the Lincolns moved to Washington, D.C. in early 1861, they began attending the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, where Dr. Phineas Gurley was pastor. The president again rented a pew for his family. Of Old School Presbyterian convictions, Pastor Gurley preached a more traditional Calvinistic theology, and his rational, scholarly emphases appealed to Lincoln. He also proved a loving, caring pastor

following Willie's death in February 1862. The Lincoln boys attended Sunday School at the New York Avenue church, but sometimes they also went to the Fourth Presbyterian Church with their friend Julia Taft and her younger brothers. Willie and Tad thought Julia's church was "lots livelier" when a few southern sympathizers would hurry out of church, loudly banging their pew doors, when the pastor asked the congregation to pray for President Lincoln. Pastor Gurley, becoming a friend of the president's, often spoke to him about Christianity. It was Gurley who was called to the assassination site on 14-15 April to pray for the dying president and who preached the funeral sermon a few days later.

#### **SG: In some instances today, the religious beliefs (or lack of same) of a political candidate are considered to be "fair game" for voter approval or disapproval. Has this always been the case? Is it a valid consideration? In the election of 1864, was Lincoln's faith an issue?**

**RE:** The religious faith of political candidates has rarely played determining or near-determining roles in American presidential elections. Still, accusations of religious infidelity or off-key theological beliefs, often without much substance, have frequently appeared in such campaigns, but with little impact. A few have mattered, however. In 1800 attacks on Thomas Jefferson as a nonbeliever almost cost him the White House. In 1928, criticism of the Catholic faith of Democrat Al Smith hurt his run for the presidency. The election of 1960 included a strong anti-Catholic bias toward John F. Kennedy, who nonetheless eked out a very close victory over Quaker Richard Nixon. Of the recent presidential candidates only Barack Obama faced more than a little criticism as a supposed non-Christian, pro-Muslim believer. Ironically, in the election of 2012 many evangelicals who did not embrace Mormons as fellow Christians were forced to vote for Republican candidate Mitt Romney, a devout Mormon. Conversely, the strong religious faith of Presbyterian Woodrow Wilson and Southern Baptist Jimmy Carter probably added to their political strength.

Lincoln's run for re-election in 1864 faced much larger problems than any negative reactions to his murky religious faith. In August, three months before the 1864 vote, Lincoln was so dispirited about the future and thinking he would not be returned to the White House that he wrote a brief note, handed it to the cabinet members to sign

(without their having seen its contents), and sealed it, promising in the note he would work smoothly with his opponent for a smooth presidential transition after his apparent coming defeat. The fall of Atlanta on 2 September, and similar military victories soon thereafter, probably did most to bring about the re-election of Lincoln in November. Along the way, however, Lincoln did rally the Methodists and other church organizations to support the Union (Republican) Party, chiefly in the summer and early fall of 1864.

In fact, none of Lincoln's later election contests revealed as much about his personal beliefs as that in 1846 when he ran for the U.S. House of Representatives in Illinois against Methodist circuit-rider Peter Cartwright. Lincoln's opponent and his Democratic Party traveled a potentially ruinous rumor that Lincoln was "an open scoffer at Christianity." Realizing the derailing danger of such attacks, Lincoln quickly prepared a handbill admitting he was not a church member but also noting he had "never denied the truth of the Scriptures" or "spoken with intentional disrespect of religion in general, or of any denomination of Christians in particular." Thereafter Lincoln was extraordinarily careful not to bring religious issues into his political campaigns. Revealingly, Cartwright later became a strong political supporter of Lincoln.

#### **SG: Is there a discernible pattern in Lincoln's religious journey from his early years to 1865?**

**RE:** I think so. Full disclosure: as a lifetime evangelical, I want to see a journey ending in belief. But a careful historian, following the strongest evidence, must avoid such unwarranted conclusions. At best, Lincoln's religious pilgrimage is usually opaque and always complex.

The first stages of the journey seem less hazy: boyhood with devout Baptist parents, but adolescent hesitations and unanswered questions continuing into manhood. Wide reading and religious speculation follow in the New Salem and early Springfield years. Lincoln's wife Mary's growing religious commitments and the sorrowful death of son Eddie undoubtedly tested Lincoln's skepticism but did not set him on clear steps of faith. When Lincoln entered the White House, he retained a belief in God and seemed to approach faith more as a nonbeliever than a follower of orthodox Christianity.

Once Lincoln was president, the ascending and numbing weights of war caused him to

ponder increasingly and steadily the ways of God to man. The heart-shattering death of Willie added enormously to Lincoln's growing emotional load. His contacts with Pastor Phineas Gurley and his interview with and letters to Eliza Gurney illustrated his expanding search for meaning in a God-controlled world. Biographer Allen Guelzo perceptively shows Lincoln's stumbling gradually toward embracing other Christian concepts—without becoming a "true believer." Englishman Richard Carwardine, another insightful Lincoln biographer, links Lincoln's growing religious faith to his political decisions and statements, such as the Emancipation Proclamation and the Second Inaugural. A third biographer, Ronald White, Jr., is even more thorough and explicit in seeing Lincoln's steady but hesitant steps toward faith. On the final page of his sparkling biography White writes, "Lincoln underwent a religious odyssey that deepened as he aged, inquiring about everlasting truths until his last day."

So, yes, I see Lincoln's religious journey moving toward acceptance of much of Christianity. It would be a mistake to portray Lincoln as only a nonbelieving skeptic throughout his life, but it would be equally wrong to portray Lincoln as becoming a born-again Christian. Even if Lincoln was, as his Mary put it, not a "technical Christian," he had moved increasingly in that direction, particularly during his last years in the White House.

#### LINCOLN AND RELIGION: SUGGESTED READINGS

Leading Lincoln biographers David Donald, Michael Burlingame, and Richard Lawrence Miller, among others, deal illuminatingly with Lincoln and religion. But Allen C. Guelzo (*Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President*, 1999), Richard J. Carwardine

(*Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power*, 2006), and Ronald C. White, Jr. (*A. Lincoln: A Biography*, 2009) are even more expansive and emphatic in their treatments of Lincoln's religious journey. These three biographers not only trace Lincoln's stuttering steps in religious matters, they also illustrate how Lincoln's religious perspectives influenced his political decisions and statements, such as the Emancipation Proclamation and the Second Inaugural.

Scholars in other fields have added valuable insights on Lincoln's religious journey. In his book *Abraham Lincoln's Political Faith* (2003), political theorist Joseph R. Fornieri, speaking of Lincoln's "Biblical Republicanism," demonstrates how Lincoln's biblical knowledge, combined with his seasoned wisdom, helped shape his thinking. Historian Stewart Winger, in *Lincoln, Religion, and Romantic Cultural Politics* (2003), examines the Whig-evangelical alliances that influenced and marked many of Lincoln's political stances. Michael Burkholder's *Lincoln's Christianity* (2007) also provides much useful information on Lincoln's pilgrimage toward a Christian faith.

Historians of American religion have added other viewpoints. Harry S. Stout concludes in his book, *Upon the Alter of the Nation: A Moral History of the American Civil War* (2006), that Lincoln "was becoming steadily more spiritual," as the Second Inaugural revealed. Another leading historian of American religion, Mark Noll, in his *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (2002), identifies many of Lincoln's acts as "generally religious" and his ideas about the providence of God as "distinctly theological." Stout and Noll also help readers to see the impact of Lincoln's religious views on his political decisions.

Two theologians have furnished valuable studies of Lincoln's religious thought.

Perhaps still the best examination of Lincoln's religious ideas, William J. Wolf's *The Almost Chosen People: A Study of the Religion of Abraham Lincoln* (1959) helpfully links Lincoln's beliefs, or unbelief, to specific happenings. In clarifying the connections between religious thoughts and actions Wolfe adumbrated the more recent conclusions of biographers Guelzo, Carwardine, and White. Quaker theologian Elton Trueblood, building on Wolfe's conclusions, elaborates on Lincoln's ongoing dilemmas and conflicts as a leader in his *Abraham Lincoln: Theologian of American Anguish* (1973). Trueblood focuses on Lincoln's difficulties in trying to fathom his and other men's roles in living out God's purposes through such actions as freeing the slaves and preserving the Union.

The most recent study of Lincoln's journey of faith is Ferenc M. Szasz with Margaret Connell Szasz, *Lincoln and Religion* (2014), Southern Illinois University Press. Using an anecdotal approach, the authors skillfully embed Lincoln in religious strains of thought and action in the first three generations of the nineteenth century. It is a brief, balanced, and smoothly written study showing both Lincoln's disbelief and his growing movements toward Christianity. In helpful additions to the volume, Sara Vaughn Gabbard appends a judiciously chosen selection of Lincoln's most important statements on religion, and Richard W. Etulain furnishes an abbreviated historiographical overview discussing the major interpretations, over time, of Lincoln and religion.

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### The Annual Lincoln Colloquium

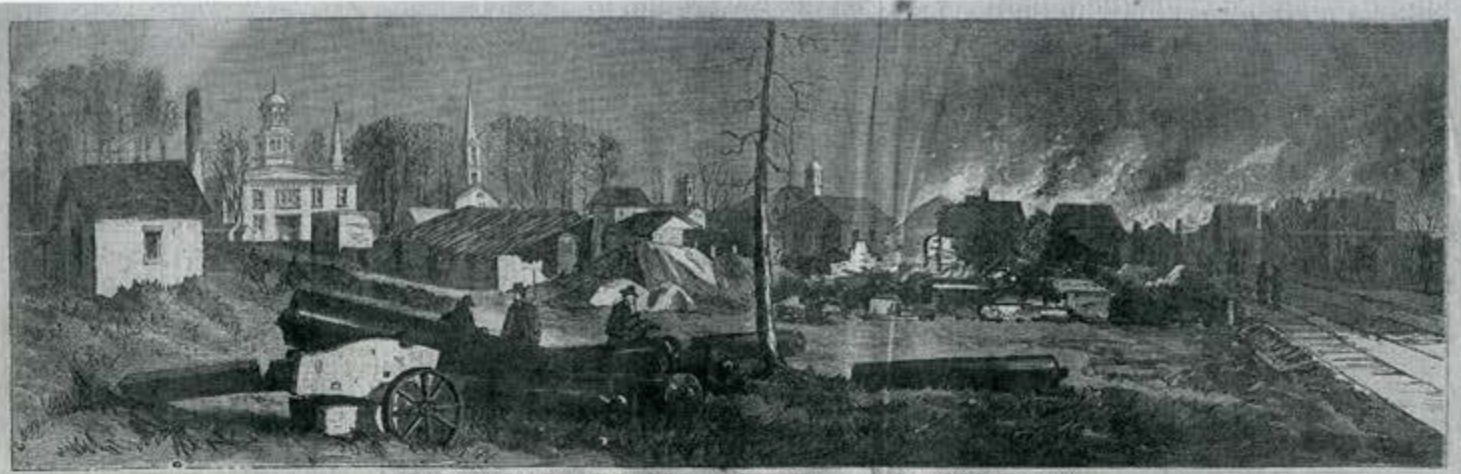
## Amid the Din of Arms: The Election of 1864

September 27, 2014 | 9:00 am–4:30 pm  
Allen County Public Library  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

#### Speakers:

Nicole Etcheson	"Sustaining the National Government: The Election of 1864 in Indiana"
Jeffrey J. Malanson	"The Founding Fathers and the Election of 1864"
Jennifer Weber	"The Summer Lincoln Lost the Election"
Jonathan W. White	"Emancipation, the Union Army, and the Relection of Abraham Lincoln"

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DESTRUCTION OF THE DEPOTS, PUBLIC BUILDINGS, AND MANUFACTORIES AT ATLANTA, GEORGIA, NOVEMBER 15, 1864.



THE FOURTEENTH AND TWENTIETH CORPS MOVING OUT OF ATLANTA, NOVEMBER 15, 1864.

*Atlanta Burning - Harper's Weekly/LC-USZ62-127598*

*Top: Destruction of the depots, public buildings, and manufactories at Atlanta, Georgia, November 15, 1864*

*Bottom: The Fourteenth and Twentieth Corps moving out of Atlanta, November 15, 1864.*

## An Interview with Frank Williams regarding 1864

### Part Two

**Sara Gabbard: What was the effect of the surrender of Atlanta?**

**Frank Williams:** On September 3, 1864, General William T. Sherman telegraphed Chief of Staff Major General Henry W. Halleck in Washington, "So Atlanta is ours and fairly won." Even though Confederate General Hood slipped away with his remaining badly beaten Confederate force, the capture of Atlanta was a shot in the arm for the North's morale and especially for increasing the chances of Abraham Lincoln's reelection. The city was considered the "second capital" of the Confederate States of America and was important as a railroad, industrial, and distribution center. On September 2, 1864, after Sherman's army flanked the Confederates south of the city, Mayor James Calhoun surrendered Atlanta. Sherman ordered the city's evacuation before beginning the destruction of railroads and all

war industries. Fires claimed between 4,000 and 5,000 buildings. General Sherman used the city as a staging area during his two-month occupation. So that in November 1864, his army left Atlanta on his famous March to the Sea with Savannah as its next objective. News of the city's surrender turned morale around in both North and South. Unionist George Templeton Strong wrote in his diary, "Atlanta taken at last!!!... It is (coming at this political crisis) the greatest event of the war." But the Richmond Examiner depicted the despair that "the disaster at Atlanta" came "in the very nick of time" to "save the party of Lincoln from irretrievable ruin... [It] obscures the prospect of peace, lights so bright. It will diffuse gloom over the South." The meaning of Atlanta's surrender meant, "Peace Through Victory," as described by Northern clergyman, Joseph T. Thompson

in his widely published sermon. Gone was the concern over emancipation as a precondition for peace.

**SG: Please discuss the promotion of Clara Barton and her legacy.**

**FW:** Relief work of Clarissa Barton found the Civil War to be reality in training. She had to muster the political skills to circumvent the obstacles put in the way of women, independent relief work and, at the same time, seek allies among the soldiers and government bureaucrats. During 1861 and 1862, Barton brought food and supplies to thousands who were wounded at the Second Bull Run, Antietam and Fredericksburg before the Army Medical Department and other philanthropic organizations had finally coordinated relief efforts. Known by the Army of the Potomac as the "angel of the battlefield," for her timely appearance to provide comfort, soldiers named their

daughters after her.

Despite her administrative skills, most had no idea that this resilient woman for good, suffered from depression and lack of confidence throughout the war.

As a child, she inherited a love of nation and the military. While skilled in the domestic arts, she learned to be a marksman and rider, nursing her brother David for two years after he was injured in a fall.

She became a charismatic educator but wanted to move beyond teaching. She took one of the few positions open to women in the United States government, as a Patent Office copyist in Washington in 1854. She was terminated when the James Buchanan administration came into power in March 1857. She spent the next three years nursing her ailing father in Massachusetts, but returned to the Patent Office under the Lincoln Administration.

She worried about being a relief worker but solicited supplies from friends in North Oxford, Massachusetts, where she had taught, and began distributing them among Massachusetts troops stationed in Washington. She stockpiled the goods in her 3-room flat at Seventh and Pennsylvania. At his deathbed, her father encouraged her to engage more actively in work at the front. Enlisting the help of the Quartermaster's Office, she had wagons carry her supplies to Culpeper Court House after Second Bull Run in August 1862.

Less than three weeks later, Barton brought provisions toward Sharpsburg, Maryland, on the eve of the Battle of Antietam. She worked on a line of wounded that extended for five miles from a farmhouse, and stopped only for a short nap in four days. She assisted

army surgeon James Dunn in performing amputations with bullets passing through the sleeve of her dress, killing a man she was assisting. Barton developed typhoid and returned to Washington after six weeks of arduous duty. In December, she was with IX Army Corps, as General Burnside tried to outflank Lee at Fredericksburg. With more than 12,000 dead and thousands more wounded in bitter weather, she ended her most meritorious year of the war. She would never again have the opportunity or the authority to act on soldiers' behalf, as the United States Sanitary Commission, which was highly sexist and having little regard for women, put Barton and other independent relief workers out of business by the end of 1862.

She tried her hand at the Sea Islands during the siege of Charleston, South Carolina, but was made to feel like an outsider in an area already contested by U.S. Sanitary Commission agents, Freedmen's Relief workers, and uncooperative officers. Even the surgeons were displeased at using civilian help and female nurses.

Returning to Washington, she became severely depressed but was relieved by an invitation to join the Army of the Potomac in spring 1864. Present at the battles of the Wilderness in May 1864 and the slaughter of 7,000 Union troops at Cold Harbor in June, she assisted as best she could and worked in a "flying" or mobile field hospital staffed by nurses of equal responsibility.

In early 1865, Barton came up with a new plan with former Union prisoners of war. She wanted to create a bureau of missing soldiers to provide frantic relatives with information about their sons, brothers and husbands. She sought President Lincoln's help, having no funds herself, but she learned that Captain James Moore had been appointed head of the U.S. Burial Bureau. A man had been chosen to do what Barton knew that she could do better, and Moore had preempted her in identifying missing soldiers at Andersonville Prison. She was devastated, especially when she learned of the death of her brother Steven and her 24-year-old nephew.

From 1866 to 1868, Barton gave more than 300 lectures through many towns in the North, earning sometimes \$100 for an appearance. The American Red Cross recognized Barton's organizational genius for relief, as she retired as its head after 23 years. She was a household name by the 1880s through her work with the Red Cross and always kept her keenest sense of connection with the soldiers she had cared

for. She retired to Glen Echo, Maryland, in 1904, where she promoted disaster relief, women's suffrage, and pay equity until her death at age 91.

She was a true American hero.

**SG: Sherman's "March to the Sea." Was it necessary? Was it strategically well planned, or did it simply develop on the spot? How did Northern and Southern newspapers treat the March?**

**FW:** General William T. Sherman's strategy following the fall of Atlanta, September 1864, was one of destruction rather than battle. It was, in his words, to "make Georgia howl." Sherman had plenty of experience fighting the Florida Seminoles in the early 1840s and believed that destruction or confiscation of Southern property was necessary to cripple Confederate logistics and morale. The actions, while causing few deaths among Southern civilians, did not prevent wanton acts of violence and devastation which Sherman tolerated. Sherman estimated that his rage had inflicted \$100 million worth of damage including saw mills, cotton gins, foundries and warehouses, with more than 90,000 bales of cotton, 13,000 head of cattle, and some six million rations of bread and beef. His troops destroyed more than 200 miles of Confederate railroad track and deprived starving Confederate soldiers in Virginia and elsewhere of much-needed rations. Sherman's 60-mile-wide path of destruction, stretching 285 miles across Georgia from Atlanta to Savannah, affected the morale of Southerners as it demonstrated the area's vulnerability. Now Southerners, who had heretofore been very resilient, came to realize that the North was going to engage in vast destructiveness. Was his March to the Sea an example of total modern warfare? Sherman, with Grant and others, understood the relationship that linked strategy, logistics and morale. As such, they attempted to hurt the Confederacy's psychological will and its material capability to fight. In addition to mobilizing the North's populace, industry, and natural resources, it was necessary to wage an assault on the Confederacy's populace, industry, and resources. This comprehension evidences a modern view of warfare. Sherman also understood that the Civil War was waged by opposing militaries as well as opposing societies. So, morale, patriotism, and loyalty, both on the front and at home, were crucial to military success. Thus, civilian property, if not the civilians themselves, became objectives. It is also



Clara Barton  
LC-USZ62-75827



Sherman's March to the Sea/LC-USZ62-116520

axiomatic that war between whole societies is an indication of modern and total war. Notwithstanding, the Civil War did remain limited because the North did not wage an unrestricted war against the Southern people themselves as Sherman's campaign concentrated on destroying property—not the Southern people. It was, at least, part of the transitional stage in anticipation of total and modern war in the 20th century.

**SG: Please comment on the two unsuccessful attempts to end the war in 1864.**

**FW:** During the summer of 1864, Copperheads—the peace wing of the Democratic Party who had opposed the war as a means to restore the Union—shouted “Stop the War!” in Copperhead newspapers. Some believed that the Confederacy could never be beaten.

By July 1864, the cry for peace went well beyond the Copperheads. Horace Greeley injected himself in the furor. In July he launched a quixotic failed peace initiative with great consequences. Greeley said he believed that two of the Confederate agents in Canada were commissioned by Jefferson Davis to negotiate a peace settlement. Greeley passed this on to President Lincoln on July 7. While not believing that the Confederate agents had any authority for negotiating peace, but due to Northern despondency, the President could not appear to rebuff any peace initiative. By playing along, Lincoln could honor Northern opinion by demonstrating that peace could only be obtained through military victory. Lincoln sent Greeley a telegram authorizing

him to bring to Washington “any person anywhere professing to have any proposition of Jefferson Davis in writing, for peace, embracing the restoration of the Union and abandonment of slavery.” Greeley was now on the hot seat because it made him look like he was warranting the agents’ credentials as well as acting as witness to Abraham Lincoln’s good faith willingness to negotiate. Greeley hesitated, but Lincoln forced him into action by sending his private secretary John Hay to join Greeley at Niagara Falls, Canada, to meet with the Confederates. Lincoln was compromising his principle of refusing to acknowledge officially the existence of the Confederate government, by insisting on restoration of the Union as a prerequisite for negotiations. Hay brought a letter from President Lincoln addressed “To Whom It May Concern,” indicating that “Any proposition which embraces the restoration of peace, the integrity of the whole union, and the abandonment of slavery, and which comes by and with an authority that can control the armies now at war with the United States will be received and considered by the Executive government of the United States, and will be met by liberal terms on other substantial and collateral points.” This would frame all discussions of peace for the remainder of the war. By setting forth his own conditions, Lincoln expected to elicit and then publicize what would be the Confederacy’s unacceptable counteroffer. So he thought! The Rebel agents outmaneuvered him even though they admitted to Greeley and Hay that they had no authority to negotiate peace. They released to the press Lincoln’s letter to Greeley accusing Lincoln

of undermining negotiations by setting forth conditions he knew would be unacceptable to the Confederacy. The Confederate agents expressed “profound regret” that the Confederacy’s sincere desire for “peace, neutrally just, honorable, and advantageous to the North and South” had not been met with equal “moderation and equity” by President Lincoln. The *New York Times* saw it as “an electioneering dodge on a great scale” intended to damage Lincoln “by making him figure as an obstacle to peace.” And it worked, too. The Southern agents urged all to vote Lincoln out of office in November. Confederate agent Clement C. Clay, working in Canada, wrote to Richmond that Northern Democratic newspapers “denounced Mr. Lincoln’s manifesto in strong terms and Republican presses (among them the *New York Tribune*) admitted was a blunder ... From all that I can see or hear, I am satisfied that this correspondence is tended strongly toward consolidating the Democracy and dividing the Republicans.” The affair gave the Copperheads a boost and the Confederates had a triumph in the propaganda battle—if not on the battlefield.

Lincoln tried to marginalize this affair by allowing James R. Gilmore, a journalist, and Colonel James Jaquess of the 73rd Illinois to meet, on July 17, with President Jefferson Davis under flag of truce. Gilmore and Jaquess informally stated the terms Lincoln had offered in his amnesty proclamation the previous December—that is, reunion, emancipation, and amnesty. Davis responded angrily, “Amnesty, Sir, applies to criminals. We have committed no crime. At your door lies all the misery and crime of this war... We are fighting for Independence—and that, or extermination, *we will have...* You may emancipate every negro in the Confederacy but *we will be free*. We will govern ourselves... if we have to see every Southern plantation sacked, and every Southern city in flames.” Lincoln approved Gilmore’s account for publication in the *Atlantic Monthly*, as it was the President’s effort to move the burden of refusing to negotiate from himself to Davis. There would be one final effort at peace negotiations aboard the *River Queen* in February 1865 with President Lincoln, Secretary of State William H. Seward, and Confederate Commissioners, Vice President Alexander Stephens, President Pro Tem of the Confederate Senate Robert M.T. Hunter, and Assistant Secretary of War John A. Campbell, former United States Supreme Court Justice. This would fail, too.

**SG: Please comment on President Lincoln's plans for Reconstruction that he was developing at this time.**

**FW:** Abraham Lincoln's Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction issued on December 8, 1863, did result in a flurry of Reconstruction activity in Federal areas without completion until after the war. Louisiana became the centerpiece of the President's new initiative. In early 1864, a loyal government was elected, mainly representative of the Union-occupied New Orleans area, and it provided for an election of delegates for a state constitutional convention. After the convention assembled, a delegation of prominent New Orleans blacks went to Washington and presented a petition to President Lincoln asking for the right to vote for members of their race. Lincoln indicated that he could not order a suffrage requirement upon the people of Louisiana. However, ten days later, he raised the issue with the new governor, Michael Hahn, in a letter marked "Private." "I barely suggest for your private consideration," he wrote, "whether some of the colored people may not be let in—as, for instance, the very intelligent, and [soldiers]... But this is only a suggestion, not to the public, but to you alone." When the convention met, Hahn showed the letter to leading delegates, but they rejected the President's plea. However, as required by Lincoln, they ended slavery in the new state constitution. When the war became stalemated during the summer of 1864, Lincoln's political stock plummeted not only in the nation but also within his party. That is when radical Republicans, joined by other Lincoln opponents, secured the passage of the Wade-Davis Reconstruction bill designed to substitute a stringent Reconstruction policy for the President's lenient plan. Lincoln pocket vetoed the measure. After winning reelection, he directed his efforts toward securing an early peace on his mild terms—the surrender of the rebel armies, restoration of the Union, and emancipation.

**SG: Salmon Chase became Chief Justice after the death of Roger Taney. What were the short and long term ramifications?**

**FW:** First, the new Chief Justice, Salmon P. Chase, ceased being a political thorn in Lincoln's side as he had now been sidelined by the appointment from seeking the presidency. Chase knew even before Chief Justice Roger Taney's death that he would have a new role of influence, and Lincoln

reluctantly agreed. The President realized that the constitutional changes regarding finances and racial policy of the war years might be solidified by a Supreme Court under Chase's leadership. In fact, Chase continued to reveal both political ambition and commitment to racial equality after the war during his years as Chief Justice. As he was not always in agreement with Republican leaders in Congress, he nonetheless avoided an open confrontation between the Supreme Court and Congress. Although he opposed efforts to establish military rule in the defeated states of the Confederacy, he endorsed legislation that granted civil and political rights to African-Americans. He clashed over Senate efforts to deny him a prominent role in the impeachment trial of Andrew Johnson in 1868 and, when Republicans chose Ulysses S. Grant as their candidate for President, Chase sought the Democratic nomination instead. His efforts failed because Democrats rejected his policies of racial equality. Despite his ability and desire, his ambition was not matched by political savvy. His arrogant, stuffy, and pompous nature further alienated party leaders and voters alike. When Lincoln considered Chase for Chief Justice, Ohio Senator Benjamin Wade caustically commented, "Chase is a good man, but his theology is unsound. He thinks there is a fourth person in the Trinity." Even if denied what he sought most, the presidency, Chase can be remembered for his commitment to racial justice and equality. His moral courage was at least as great as his unending ambition to be president.

**SG: How active were the Copperheads in 1864?**

**FW:** Copperheads, who were Democrats, seriously questioned the way the war was being waged, as well as its impact on Northern society, believed in states' rights, limited government, and anti-monopolistic ideas. Although they emerged in every Northern state, the most prominent was former Ohio Congressman Clement L. Vallandigham who was arrested and banished in 1863. He ran an unsuccessful campaign for governor of Ohio. Others included Fernando Wood, mayor of New York City, Daniel W. Voorhees of Indiana, and George Woodward of Pennsylvania. Union victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg in July 1863 stunted the growth of Copperhead support and led to the eventual defeat of Copperhead gubernatorial candidates Clement Vallandigham in Ohio and George Woodward in Pennsylvania. The

Union military situation in the summer of 1864 led to a temporary revitalization of Northern Copperheadism. Peace advocates within the Democratic Party dominated the committee that drafted the party's platform, adopting a plank that denounced the war as a failure. However, two prominent factors conspired to defeat the Copperheads. First, Democratic presidential candidate General George B. McClellan repudiated the peace plank. Second, the improving Union military situation, especially the fall of Atlanta, made military fortunes seem more promising. The triumph of the Republican (National Union) Party in the 1864 elections and subsequent military victory would stamp Republican ideas on government, economics, and race over the conservative, individualistic and agrarian ideology of the Copperheads.

**SG: What were the main points in the platforms of each party in the election of 1864?**

**FW:** Appealing to the crucial conservatives, the party billed itself as a National Union (not Republican) Convention. The convention seated representatives from Lincoln's reconstructed governments in Louisiana, Arkansas and Tennessee. The party also acknowledged radicals in its platform, blaming slavery for causing the war; praising the Emancipation Proclamation as well as African-American soldiers; and pledging itself to a constitutional amendment completing the abolition of slavery. An attempt to condemn conservatives in Lincoln's cabinet, such as former Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, was transformed into a call for party harmony. Looking beyond the war, the convention praised immigration, homesteads, and Pacific railroad subsidies as well as condemned France's interference in Mexico.

The Democrats were factionalized but reached a compromise at their convention in Chicago in late August 1864. They nominated former General George B. McClellan who clearly favored the war and, for vice president, George Pendleton, a congressman who favored peace. The platform declared the war a failure and called for an armistice followed by a peace convention, which it asserted (but of course could not prove) would lead to reunion. McClellan, in his letter of acceptance, stated his opinion that peace could not be permanent without reunion. Some Democrats regarded this as a repudiation of the platform, and Republicans were quick to exploit the party's indecision. As the war



faction had feared, Republicans also rushed to portray the Democrats as disloyal.

**SG: Please describe the different ways in which states arranged for voting by soldiers. How significant were their votes?**

**FW:** Republican losses in the 1862 elections taught the Republican administration about the importance of securing and managing the soldiers' vote. Many states did not provide for the voting of soldiers in the field. In fact, prior to the Civil War, there was no mechanism to allow soldiers to vote in the field. By 1864, a number of states adopted measures to remedy this situation. If the states did not allow soldiers to vote by absentee ballot, Republican governors made liberal provisions to furlough soldiers so they could return home to vote. These Republican officials were rewarded with overwhelming support for Lincoln's reelection.

On election day, November 8, 1864, 150,000 soldiers' ballots were cast with about 78% of them for Lincoln (compared to 53% of the civilian vote). In New York and Connecticut, the soldiers' vote was critical to Lincoln's victory in those states.

Soldiers' letters indicated that their shared experiences of combat were perhaps the strongest factors framing political choices, but in some instances there was excessive pressure from above, reinforced by active partisans in the ranks. One Democratic soldier reported that his company had been compelled to vote for Lincoln. There were many ways in which the Union Party's control of the apparatus of state governments over most of the North pushed up their majorities among Union troops.

**SG: Please discuss both Senate and House of Representatives votes on the 13th Amendment in 1864.**

**FW:** The proposed amendment traveled a rocky road. In January 1864, a draft antislavery amendment was introduced by Congressman John Henderson—probably at Lincoln's prodding. Senator Charles Sumner, for the abolitionists, submitted their version which included broad language banning insidious discrimination. The Senate Judiciary Committee drafted the eventual language of the amendment by borrowing the phrases from the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 which had banned slavery from federal territories north of the Ohio River. This is the version that passed the Senate but died in the House in June 1864 as Democrats rallied in the name of states' rights to kill the measure, despite Lincoln's championing

the proposal. The 1864 presidential election would decide the amendment's fate as the Democratic Party's platform supported states' rights—meaning that it was the right of states to maintain slavery if they so chose. But Lincoln's Republican Party or National Union platform called for the "utter and complete extirpation" of slavery which meant passage of the 13th Amendment.

After reelection, Lincoln used his personal prestige and vast patronage in political powers to prod the House into passing the amendment. He not only believed in the morality of the proposed amendment but thought its passage would further erode the Confederate war effort, as well as sanction the Emancipation Proclamation which the President had issued as a war measure under "military necessity" for only those areas still under Confederate control. Even though the 1864 election gave his party a sufficient majority to break the deadlock in the House, the new session would not begin until December 1865 and Lincoln wanted the sitting Congress to approve the proposal.

So Lincoln authorized and supported Secretary of State William Henry Seward's massive lobbying effort in New York and elsewhere. Lincoln's influence, in addition to the Democrats' recognition that opposition to the amendment cost them votes, led to its passing the House on January 31, 1865 when it was then submitted to the states.

**SG: Please discuss President Lincoln's Annual Message to Congress on December 6, 1864. Did he have a specific purpose when drafting this speech? If so, did he achieve that purpose?**

**FW:** Lincoln believed that the differences between him and General McClellan during the 1864 election were less than they had been made to appear to the voters. As he put it in his Message to Congress on December 6, 1864, "There has been much impugning of motives, and much heated controversy as to the proper means and best mode of advancing the Union cause; but on the distinctive issue of Union or no Union the politicians have shown their instinctive knowledge that there is no diversity among the people."

Lincoln was also eager to see the proposed 13th Amendment pass for submission to the states and wrote in his message, "At the last session of Congress a proposed amendment of the Constitution abolishing slavery throughout the United States, passed the Senate, but failed for lack of the requisite two-thirds vote in the House of

Representatives. Although the present is the same Congress, and nearly the same members, and without questioning the wisdom or patriotism of those who stood in opposition, I venture to recommend the reconsideration and passage of the measure at the present session. Of course the abstract question is not changed; but an intervening election shows, almost certainly, that the next Congress will pass the measure if this does not. Hence there is only a question of *time* as to when the proposed amendment will go to the States for their action. And as it is to so go, at all events, may we not agree that the sooner the better? It is not claimed that the election has imposed a duty on members to change their views or their votes, any further than, as an additional element to be considered, their judgment may be affected by it. It is the voice of the people now, for the first time, heard upon the question. And a great national crisis, like ours, unanimity of action among those seeking a common end is very desirable—almost indispensable."

So Lincoln was appealing to the Democratic members of the then current Congress, especially the numerous lame ducks among them. In addition to recommending reconsideration and passage of the proposed amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery, he indicated to the last session of the thirty-eighth Congress that Arkansas and Louisiana had organized loyal state governments. Even in the midst of war, he said, the nation's material resources and manpower are more complete and abundant than ever. He also indicated that no attempt at negotiation with the insurgent leader could result in any good based on available evidence. "The war will cease on the part of the government, whenever it shall have ceased on the part of those who began it." So it was to be a military victory and not peace through negotiations. There would be no peace without victory.

He certainly achieved both final freedom with the 13th Amendment as well as peace with victory at Appomattox.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Frank Williams

Frank Williams recently retired as Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court. He co-founded The Lincoln Forum and is author of *Lincoln As Hero* and *Judging Lincoln*. He co-edited (with Michael Burkhalter) *The Mary Lincoln Enigma*.

# War Time Presidents: Lincoln, Wilson, FDR

LINCOLN  
LORE

An interview with Richard Striner  
Part Two

**Sara Gabbard: How did each president handle relationships with top military commanders? With civilian officials?**

**Richard Striner:** As T. Harry Williams argued so persuasively years ago, Lincoln had a better strategic sense than any of his military commanders with the possible exception of William Tecumseh Sherman. Lincoln thought in Clausewitzian terms before Clausewitz had even been translated into English, let alone taught at the military academies. Lincoln waged total war and he thought holistically about the power assets of each side, his own and the Confederates'. He strove to use the massive Union superiority in manpower, weapons, and materiel to overpower the enemy, and he regarded the Confederate armies as targets to be destroyed rather than as obstacles to be avoided. It was difficult for Lincoln to find commanders who shared his strategic vision because the doctrines that were taught at the military academies were stodgy compared to Lincoln's gift for waging total war. Besides, some of the most talented men in the officer corps were serving the Confederacy. So Lincoln faced the unenviable task of assessing his commanders based upon their track record—the task of “separating the sheep from the goats”—a task that was made more daunting by the fact that the results of battles were sometimes as much a matter of good or bad luck as they were commentaries on the skill of the general entrusted with field command. Lincoln always tried to share his ideas with his commanders as strategy was formulated, and he kept close watch on his generals' performance, sometimes deciding to approve of their plans and sometimes ordering them to adopt a different course of action. He would sometimes put up with incompetent field commanders for a while as he tried to find suitable replacements. But when the performance of a general was obviously wretched, he would sack the man right away. The most infuriating task that he confronted was the task of making over-cautious or recalcitrant generals take action when they offered excuses for delay. To some extent, this was Lincoln's problem with generals such as George McClellan, Don Carlos Buell, William S. Rosecrans, and George Gordon Meade. With other generals, such as John Pope, Ambrose Burnside, and



Top Left: Sheridan/OC-0944

Top Center: Sherman/OC-0953

Top Right: General Douglas MacArthur/LC-DIG-hec-18381

Bottom Left: General John J. Pershing, U.S.A. First Division/LC-DIG-hec-12859

Bottom Right: General Dwight D. Eisenhower gives the order of the day, “Full victory—nothing else” to paratroopers somewhere in England, just before they board their airplanes to participate in the first assault in the invasion of the continent of Europe/LC-USZ62-25600

Joseph Hooker, Lincoln faced the opposite problem: commanders who were heedless of risk. The commanders who were closest to Lincoln in terms of sheer astuteness and measured audacity were William Tecumseh Sherman and Philip Sheridan. Ulysses S. Grant, though an excellent strategist at the height of his powers, was uneven sometimes in his performance, since he gave short shrift to defensive considerations at certain times in the war. After Lincoln had appointed Grant general-in-chief, Grant proposed some schemes that would have opened up invasion paths for the enemy. So Lincoln vetoed his ideas. In his big campaign against Lee in Virginia, Grant withdrew too many men from the defense perimeter of Washington, D.C., thus leaving the nation's capital vulnerable to the Confederate attack led by Jubal Early in July 1864.

With civilian officials—whether cabinet officers, members of Congress, or state and local leaders—Lincoln was brilliant in estimating their potential to help or to hinder his plans. He dealt with almost all of them

shrewdly, showing patience when it seemed to be called for and peremptory anger when it seemed to be appropriate.

Woodrow Wilson was almost the reverse of Lincoln when it came to his ability to lead. After appointing General John J. Pershing as commander of the American Expeditionary Force, Wilson chose to defer to Pershing to the point that might be called abdication. Granted, the delay in preparation for war—and in part this was Wilson's own fault—prompted Pershing to take his time before committing men to battle, since he felt that draftees should receive the necessary training before being sent into harm's way. Granted also that the performance of certain British and French commanders—particularly the British field commander, Douglas Haig—had been so questionable that Pershing was reluctant to entrust American lives to the decisions of foreign commanders. Even so, when the great German onslaught of 1918 was unleashed in France, Pershing dragged his heels in committing American forces when the British and French faced the

prospect of utter defeat. Pershing insisted on taking his time to build up a separate American force under his own command. The British and the French kept pleading with Wilson to send preemptory orders to his field commander, but Wilson could never summon up the confidence to do so. In early June, as the Germans began to shell Paris, the French were beside themselves with resentment of Wilson and Pershing. As military historian S.L.A. Marshall once related, "the French government was packing for Bordeaux. Thousands of terrified refugees came streaming through the city ... Foch was having his worst hour... Clemenceau bridled at the Americans, railing that though they had three quarters of a million men in France, they were contributing only dribbles to the battle; trenchant criticism, beyond answer."

Wilson's inability to perform basic oversight and coordination of his subordinates' actions was shown on another occasion when the allies began to develop armistice terms as the German position fell apart in the autumn of 1918. Wilson had called for a "peace without victory"—a non-vindictive peace—but as Pershing conferred with the British and the French regarding armistice terms, Wilson failed to send any orders that would bind his commander to the terms that he deemed essential. As it was, the terms of the armistice were sufficiently severe as to make the Germans almost helpless during the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. For example, the armistice maintained the naval blockade of the Central Powers, thus using the force of sheer hunger to make the Germans accept whatever terms were handed down in the Treaty of Versailles.

Wilson's interactions with civilian officials varied greatly. Sometimes he made capable appointments and worked effectively with those he put in office: Secretary of War Newton Baker, for instance, was a capable leader and Wilson used his services well. But in other cases, the president made extremely bad appointments and declined to exert much oversight as his agents went haywire. Wilson's postmaster general, Albert Burleson, was given sweeping powers under the Espionage Act of 1917, and as Burleson abused those powers—prompting many thoughtful people whom Wilson respected to complain—Wilson hid from the problem and dithered. The same thing occurred with Attorney General Thomas Watt Gregory and his successor A. Mitchell Palmer. Some of the worst abuses of civil liberties in American history occurred on Wilson's



*Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Fireside Chat/LC-DIG-bes-47251*

watch. And as Wilson spoke of a war to make the world safe for democracy, he let the norms of American democracy lapse to a deplorable extent.

FDR was a very canny leader who would show great skill when at his best. But though his wartime leadership was vastly superior to Wilson's, it lacked the virtuosity of Lincoln's. FDR showed laudable astuteness in appointing Gen. George C. Marshall as army chief of staff and he wisely sought Marshall's advice, which was usually excellent. FDR also made a very wise choice in appointing Dwight D. Eisenhower as supreme commander of Operation Torch and Operation Overlord. But at times FDR over-ruled both Marshall and Eisenhower. In 1942, when the U.S. high command was almost unanimously in favor of a cross-channel invasion of Nazi-held France at the earliest possible moment, FDR deferred to the judgment of the British, who favored postponement. Perhaps the British were right in their preference to take their time in preparing for D-Day: on the eve of the invasion of Normandy, Eisenhower felt such trepidation in regard to the dangerous contingencies that he composed a message of defeat in which he took full responsibility for failure if the amphibious landings went wrong. In any case, FDR had to broker international disagreements regarding strategy on many occasions. He also had to broker disagreements among the members of his own high command. In the Pacific theatre, for instance, FDR met with General Douglas MacArthur and Admiral Chester Nimitz in Honolulu during the summer of 1944 because the general and the admiral

disagreed completely regarding the merits of liberating the Philippines from the Japanese. FDR deferred to MacArthur, in part because the general had political connections that might have been troublesome if Roosevelt had angered him. FDR's strategic instincts regarding the post-war world could succumb to wishful thinking. He hoped to use Russia and China in a "big five" arrangement for supporting the post-war work of the United Nations. But his instincts regarding Joseph Stalin were too optimistic, and his hope that Chiang Kai-shek could lead a powerful and unified China proved illusory. (The American commander in the China theatre, Gen. Joseph "Vinegar Joe" Stilwell, tried to warn the civilian policy-makers about the weaknesses of Chiang, but to little avail, since Chiang and his wife were well-connected in Washington via the so-called "China lobby.") It bears noting that FDR's wishful thinking regarding the chances of post-war Russo-American cooperation was hardly unique: Wendell Willkie, FDR's Republican opponent in the 1940 election, was as hopeful as Roosevelt regarding the prospects for Russo-American accord.

**SG: Did each president give tacit approval to various policies which stretched constitutional authority?**

**RS:** Since the federal Constitution makes no provision for secession or Civil War, Lincoln construed the secession bid as a gigantic insurrection that justified the calling up of state militia units to supplement the regular army in restoring proper national authority within the southern states. The underlying issue as to whether the federal

union was permanent or impermanent was endlessly debatable, with cogent interpretations of the background events in the 1770s and 1780s invoked on either side of the question. In any case, Lincoln interpreted his war powers broadly, justifying them in cases ranging from suspension of habeas corpus to emancipation and confiscation. Supreme Court Chief Justice Roger Taney, whom Lincoln detested, denounced some of Lincoln's executive actions, and Lincoln ignored him. Lincoln was nonetheless anxious regarding denunciations of the Emancipation Proclamation as unconstitutional, and he urged Congress to amend the Constitution, beginning in December 1862. His intervention on behalf of the Thirteenth Amendment is currently famous due to Stephen Spielberg's film. But before the amendment was passed, Lincoln pushed his broad interpretation of the Constitution to the limit. In 1864 he told one correspondent that in his opinion, "measures, otherwise unconstitutional, might become lawful, by becoming indispensable to the preservation of the constitution, through the preservation of the nation." A spectacular example of Lincoln's willingness to stretch the Constitution was his proposal early in 1865 to have Congress offer to pay all the slave states to ratify the Thirteenth Amendment. This was quintessential Lincoln, who acted (admittedly with great audacity) in the well-established tradition of "broad construction" endorsed by George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, John Marshall, Henry Clay and others: the principle that if the Constitution does not forbid a given action by Congress or the President, the nation's elected leaders should feel free to use their own discretion.

Woodrow Wilson also approached constitutional issues with flexibility, especially in light of the fact the federal Constitution was amended several times in the early decades of the twentieth century. During his gubernatorial days in New Jersey, he sometimes sardonically bragged that he wished to be an "unconstitutional governor," meaning he would stretch the powers of state government as far as necessary. One of the biggest constitutional issues concerning Wilson's wartime leadership was the suppression of free speech that Wilson and Congress perpetrated through the 1917 Espionage Act and the 1918 Sedition Act. But though significant numbers of Americans protested that these acts were passed in violation of the First Amendment, the Supreme Court ruled otherwise in the case of *Schenck v. United States*. One of

Wilson's most grotesque proposals in the aftermath of his stroke in 1919—when he was clearly in the grip of dementia—was his proposal that if the opponents of the Versailles treaty in the Senate would resign and run for re-election, he would offer to resign himself if a majority of them were re-elected. There is of course no provision for such a procedure in the Constitution.

Like Lincoln and Wilson, FDR stretched his constitutional powers as far as he dared. His feud with the Supreme Court regarding constitutional interpretation during the New Deal is well known. In regard to the events leading up to World War II, he used his powers as commander-in-chief to the hilt to push back against the isolationist restrictions of the 1935 Neutrality Act. In 1940, having secured an opinion from his attorney-general, he struck a deal with Winston Churchill to swap some "surplus" American destroyers for the use of British bases in the western hemisphere. Isolationists excoriated him for this supposed abuse of authority. After being elected to a third term he got Congress to pass the Lend-Lease Act to give assistance to Britain. But while Congress was still debating the measure, FDR took secret action to get the Lend-Lease convoys ready. The instant that Congress passed the law, the convoys were at sea. Then FDR used his discretion as commander-in-chief to order naval escorts protecting the Lend-Lease convoys. Critics charged that he was hoping to provoke an incident on the high seas that would trigger hostilities with Nazi Germany, a nation with which the United States was still legally at peace. It bears noting that during the 1940s the constitutional provision for declarations of war was still taken seriously. With the advent of the Cold War, that provision fell into disuse, and we are all accustomed to the use of American forces in "police actions," sometimes unilateral, sometimes under the aegis of NATO, in which Congress may or may not have given its assent through legislation that falls far short of a full-fledged declaration of war. It is an interesting open question as to whether the United States will ever again declare war upon another nation.

**SG: Did each president attempt to influence public opinion? Were they successful?**

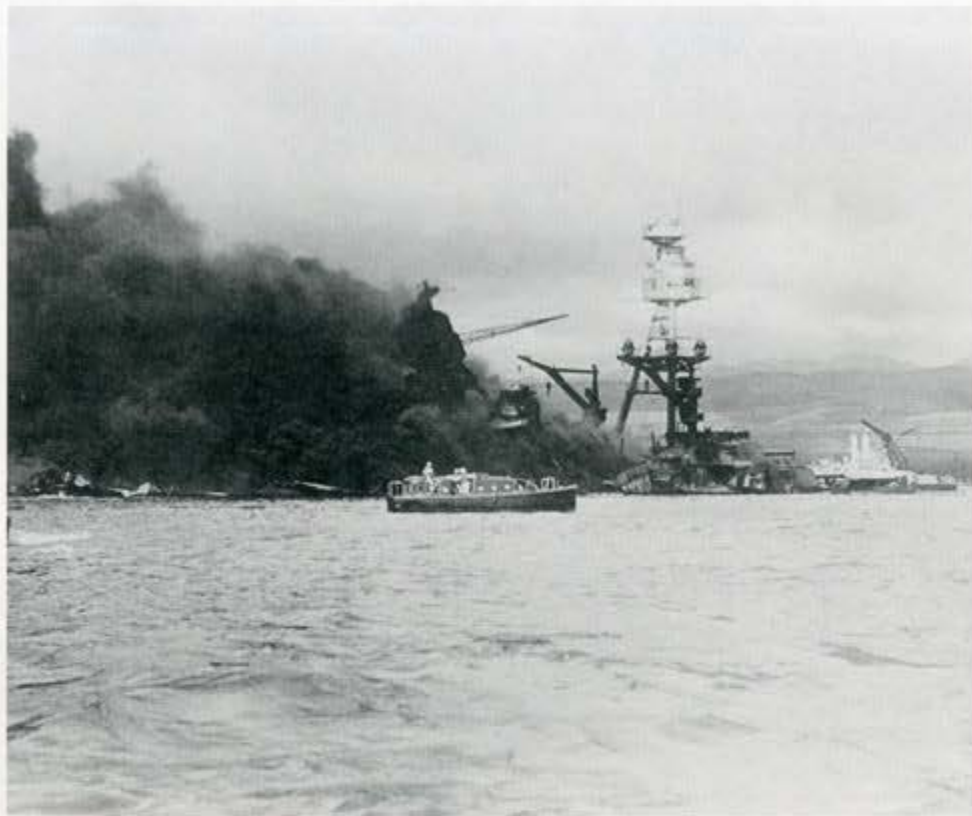
**RS:** All of these presidents attempted to influence public opinion, and all of them succeeded to some extent. Wartime politics forced Lincoln to tone down the anti-slavery content of his message, especially

during the first years of the war, since the Democrats could plausibly claim that he and his fellow Republicans had pushed the slave states over the brink by refusing to permit any further expansion of slavery, thereby causing an unnecessary war. To counteract this view, Lincoln strove to emphasize that his goal of preserving the Union came first and that whatever he did (in his capacity as president) regarding slavery was done within the constitutional and legal context of stopping the rebellion. To a large extent, his statements to this effect—in his messages to Congress, in his letters to the editor, in his letters to private individuals that he knew might be released to the public, in his Gettysburg Address and kindred speeches—indeed created the impression he intended to create in the minds of enough swing voters to keep the Democrats from taking over Congress and also to sustain a general consensus for continuing the war until victory was achieved (as opposed to negotiating a settlement that would be favorable to the slave states). But he also used many of these statements to advance his anti-slavery mission by emphasizing that the slavery issue had caused the war, that Republicans had promised not to interfere with the institution of slavery where it existed, that the Confederate rebels therefore had no justification for their actions, and (from 1863 to 1865) that African Americans who were fighting for the Union (especially emancipated slaves) were national heroes. On the most inspirational level, he sought to invoke the Declaration of Independence in ways that he hoped would make the war a redeeming and transformational crusade to make good upon the proclamation that all men were entitled—equally entitled—to liberty and the pursuit of happiness. As the war progressed, such statements became increasingly religious.

Wilson's attempts to influence public opinion shifted several times as his policies shifted due to the exigencies of war. In 1914, he tried to emphasize the necessity of being neutral in thought as well as deed, so that the United States would not be sucked into a war that was an international tragedy. He also tried to persuade Americans that "keeping cool" in this way would increase the chance that the United States would be called upon to end the war through mediation. In 1916, when he admitted that he had been mistaken in his initial aversion to preparedness measures, he made a whirlwind speaking tour of the Midwest in which he advocated sensible measures to increase the military

strength of the United States in order to increase the nation's international leverage. These speeches were adroit and intelligent, though their effect upon public opinion was (and is) hard to measure. Wilson also sought to give the war religious meaning by invoking the providence of God and the possible destiny of the United States in ushering in an epoch of global peace. Though there can be little doubt that these efforts were successful in stimulating like-minded people (the Wilson papers are replete with letters to Wilson from admirers who praised him as a latter-day prophet), his religiosity bred resentment among those who continued to oppose his policies as well as those who found his personality repellent. After the 1917 war declaration, Wilson sought to inculcate a mood of stern patriotic unity, especially in justification of the wartime measures cracking down on dissent. These efforts succeeded (all too well) with the superpatriots—those who had zero toleration of wartime dissent—but they naturally alienated the dissenters themselves as well as supporters of civil liberties. Finally, Wilson's efforts on behalf of the Versailles Treaty and the League of Nations Covenant—including the speech-making tour that he made in September and October 1919—are hard to assess since the available evidence suggests that a majority of Americans might already have been willing to consider U.S. membership in the League but that many Americans found it hard to understand why Wilson could not reach an acceptable compromise with congressional critics such as Henry Cabot Lodge.

FDR, largely through his radio addresses and his speeches, sought to create the impression in the years before Pearl Harbor that he was sincerely averse to war and that he hoped the United States could avoid involvement if another world war should erupt. But he also tried to make the case that the threat of war emanated from fascist and militarist aggression, wherefore the United States might have to take ACTIVE steps to keep war away from our shores. This was the essence of his "quarantine" speech of October 5, 1937. By 1940, with the fall of France and the Battle of Britain, FDR sought to modify his earlier message as follows: since the Axis partners seemed drunk with the notion of global victory, the best way to keep their aggression away from our shores was to help the British fend it off. He made a number of radio speeches ("fireside chats") to this effect in 1940. After his election to a third term in 1940, he amplified the message as



*USS Arizona, at height of fire, following Japanese aerial attack on Pearl Harbor, Hawaii  
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he tried to make the case for "Lend Lease." After Pearl Harbor, he sought in a multitude of speeches and announcements to justify total war and raise hopes for a redemptive peace, often paraphrasing (and sometimes directly quoting) Lincoln as he did so. He had laid the groundwork already for such transformational visions in his "Four Freedoms" speech (to Congress) on January 6, 1941, which in some ways drew upon the instincts that had motivated Wilson. FDR's attempts to modify public opinion were successful enough to elect him to third and fourth terms and to sustain the wartime policies that he advocated. But his very success made many of his old isolationist foes more bitter—and skeptical—than ever.

**SG: Did each president have a "most trusted" adviser? Please elaborate:**

**RS: Lincoln**

Lincoln kept his own counsel; though he sometimes solicited the views of others and was always eager to receive information (sometimes sending secret agents to get it, as he did in the Sumter crisis), he seldom called cabinet meetings and trusted his own judgment, for good reason: he was a strategic genius, and there's little doubt that he knew it.

**Wilson**

Definitely: that person was Colonel

Edward M. House, at least until Wilson became disillusioned with him in the spring and summer of 1919. House was a very strange character, a businessman with a taste for influencing events behind the scenes. He ingratiated himself with Wilson early in the latter's presidency and he quickly eclipsed all others as Wilson's chief adviser on foreign policy (and, sometimes, domestic policy), as well as Wilson's confidential diplomatic emissary and representative with foreign governments. House was an obvious flatterer, and Wilson was a sucker for flattery, at least when it was couched in his own presuppositions. House exerted an ambiguous influence on Wilson. At times he gave Wilson very sound strategic advice, and he recorded his disgust in his diary when Wilson didn't take it. But at other times, House gave Wilson advice that was arguably and even demonstrably foolish. Given Wilson's own weakness when it came to strategic thinking, his near-exclusive reliance on House for advice was in all probability far more harmful than good.

**FDR**

Unlike Wilson, FDR's modus operandi was to surround himself with a large coterie of advisers who represented different viewpoints. Though this was obviously a wise practice in a great many ways, it could sometimes hinder the formation of policy



*Pearl Harbor naval base and U.S.S. Shaw ablaze after the Japanese attack.  
LC-USZ62-16555*

when FDR himself was ambivalent, which he sometimes admitted. Like Lincoln, FDR had a very strong gut-level strategic sense, and he liked to reserve all options, sometimes playing off advisers to give himself maximum maneuvering room, both behind the scenes and in public. But in my judgment, FDR never reached Lincoln's level of virtuosity in holistic and architectonic thinking. Despite the fact that some similarities can be seen in the leadership methods of Lincoln and FDR, the case can be made that FDR needed advice far more than Lincoln did.

**SG: Please comment on the concept of a "just" or "moral" war in each instance.**

**RS:** The concept of a "just" or "moral" war is notoriously relative since judgments flow inevitably from one's own moral code. In the case of the Civil War, I regard the Confederate cause as wicked: the formation of a militarily aggressive nation dedicated to perpetuating and spreading slavery, based upon master race theory. Apologists for the Confederate cause have little basis for arguing otherwise in light of the fact that the secession proclamations almost invariably stated that the main reason for secession was to safeguard slavery, and in light of the fact that the Confederates had definite plans for conquest in Central America. As to master race theory, Alexander Stephens

in his notorious "cornerstone" speech of 1861 said explicitly that the Confederacy was the first nation in the history of the world to base its existence in the "great truth" of race inequality. Granted, he was to some extent speaking for himself, but he was obviously speaking for a great many others as well, since white supremacy doctrine was the fundamental method that slave owners used to justify human enslavement. Inasmuch as Lincoln's goal was to stop the spread of slavery and prevent the formation of the Confederacy, I find the Civil War on the Union side to be one of the most righteous endeavors in history.

As to World War I, the situation was—to say the least—different. World War I was a historical catastrophe of the first order, a war that started through a chain reaction in which the assessment of "war guilt" leads to two scenarios that are equally devoid of moral force: (1) the war could be construed as a chain reaction in which guilt cannot be clearly ascertained, or (2) the war could be portrayed as a chain reaction in which the elements of guilt must be shared to some extent by all of the European participants, thus robbing the conflict of any clear-cut moral meaning. Wilson and America were placed in a thankless position, and Wilson—like others, such as Sir Edward Grey, the British foreign minister in the early years of

the war—was hoping to convert the slaughter into a moral crusade to make certain that such a disaster would never happen again. Wilson's hopes to mediate the war came to nothing. His hopes to establish a peace-keeping League of Nations (hopes that were shared by others such as William Howard Taft and Lord Grey) bore fruit, though his visions of the organization's future influence came close to being utopian and his strategic blunders prevented the United States from joining the League in any case. Specifically, there was nothing in the key "reservation" of Henry Cabot Lodge (concerning the Versailles Treaty and the League Covenant) that was incompatible with the positions that Wilson himself had taken. But Wilson killed all chances for a compromise out of peevishness, stubbornness, egotism, spite, and—after the stroke in October 1919—dementia. The vituperation and bitterness of the League fight helped to usher in the isolationist backlash of the 1920s. So much for any hope that a morally empty war might lead to a visionary peace.

The moral meaning of World War II was extraordinarily clear-cut: global Axis victory would have turned this planet into the living equivalent of hell. It would have ushered in the "new dark age" of which Winston Churchill spoke in his "finest hour" radio address. Axis violence could only have been stopped by counter-violence. Non-violent or pacifist resistance was useless, as was proven by the student protest in 1944 at the University of Munich. The leaders of this non-violent expression of conscience—a brother and sister named Hans and Sophie Scholl—were quickly put to death, and that was that. Non-violent tactics such as those of Gandhi and Martin Luther King are of no avail against Nazis. The moral clarity of World War II does not, of course, preclude moral disagreements in regard to subsidiary issues, such as the bombing of cities and the use of nuclear weapons. The issue of "war crimes" is one that can apply to any nation. But in a total war of the sort represented by World War II, there may be moral situations with no good choices at all—tragic choices involving civilian casualties that cannot be averted, such as the devastation in the city of Manila that was necessary to wrest control from the Japanese—who fought to the bitter end. And so the fighting proceeded inexorably block by block, house by house, room by room.

**SG: What was each president's greatest strength during wartime? Greatest weakness?**

RS: Lincoln's greatest strength was his strategic mastery, which included: (1) an uncanny ability to think holistically, relating all parts to the whole; (2) the audacity to visualize and comprehend the meaning of all forms of power and to use the kinds of power that he could summon to the limit whenever it was necessary; (3) the ability to juxtapose sincerity of purpose with the uninhibited use of deception when the circumstances made it necessary; and (4) unflinching stamina. His greatest weakness was his tendency in the last few years of his life to take insufficient steps to protect himself against assassination.

Wilson's greatest strength—his eloquence—could also be a weakness, since it often led to the intoxicated sense that he was God's chosen agent. Convinced that this was so, he would frequently neglect—or even ignore—strategic issues since his sense of revelation had convinced him that the Providence of God would provide. What need for any worst-case contingency planning if the Millennium seemed to be at hand? Wilson's greatest weakness was his tendency toward arrogance, immeasurably worsened by a mental condition that was caused by arterio-sclerosis.

FDR's greatest strength was his power—akin to Lincoln's—to practice moral strategy, to frame moral issues in eloquent terms and then to follow up using Machiavellian methods. His greatest weakness, perhaps, was his failure to provide for a smooth succession. He was clearly in denial with regard to his own deteriorating health in 1944. If he had been emotionally strong enough to face the medical facts, he might have kept Harry Truman far better informed, thus providing for a smooth succession. As it was, one of Truman's greatest achievements was the speed with which he rose to the occasion after FDR's death.

**SG: Not fair questions, but: Would Reconstruction have been less traumatic and divisive if Lincoln had lived?**

RS: On the one hand, this can never be proven since it constitutes contra-factual history. On the other hand, there is simply no doubt about it. Andrew Johnson, Lincoln's successor, was not even a member of Lincoln's party; he was put on the ticket when Republicans were running so scared that they were ready to try some rather desperate bids for bipartisan coalition politics. After Lincoln's re-election, he started working right away with a number of radical Republican leaders to develop a consensus plan for Reconstruction

that included some radical possibilities such as land redistribution and black voting rights. Lincoln signed the radical Republicans' bill establishing the Freedmen's Bureau. When the existence of the Bureau was due for renewal in 1866, Johnson claimed that the agency that Lincoln had approved was unconstitutional. This is merely one of many illustrations of the contrast between Lincoln and Johnson: Hyperion to a satyr. In my own view, the civil rights revolution could have happened a hundred years earlier—in the 1860s instead of the 1960s—if Lincoln had lived. He was a master politician, he endorsed the incremental grant of black voting rights, his party had a super-majority in both houses of Congress, and there were four long years to pull it off. I don't believe in the existence of hell, but I would love to believe that it exists when I think about John Wilkes Booth. Eternal punishment would be far too brief a consequence for the soul of Booth to experience in light of what he did. He robbed the American people of an alternative future, one in which a huge amount of suffering and human misery might have been averted.

**SG: What international ramifications would have resulted if the United States had joined the League of Nations?**

RS: It would have depended on whether the isolationist backlash of the 1920s had taken place. The League was no stronger than its strongest members, and political culture in each of the victorious allied powers was turbulent after the war. Even if the United States had joined the League, its policies might have been just as weak and ineffectual as the policies of France and Great Britain in confronting Nazi aggression in the 1930s. Collective security via League enforcement was dependent on political will. The western democracies lacked sufficient will by the 1930s.

**SG: Is there an obvious difference in how Truman handled the post war situation as compared to what FDR would have done?**

RS: I don't think so. Of course it's obvious that these very different men would have handled the DETAILS of various situations quite differently. But as to the decision to bomb Hiroshima, the reluctant recognition that Soviet ambitions would have to be contained, the development of something like the Marshall Plan for war devastated Europe—it's impossible for me to imagine FDR arriving at drastically different conclusions from those of Truman, though



Harry S. Truman/LC-USZ62-98170

the willingness to accept the onset of the Cold War might have come more slowly under FDR than it did with Truman. But who knows? Perhaps FDR would have remained determinedly optimistic in regard to the prospects for taming the harsher aspects of Stalinism. That was certainly the case with Truman's predecessor in the vice presidency, Henry Wallace, who, when he ran for the presidency as a "Progressive" in the election of 1948, called for easing tensions with the Russians.

**SG: What is the lasting legacy of each president?**

RS: Lincoln's legacy is an America purged of slavery. Wilson's legacy is a garbled mixture of idealistic visions and bungled policies—policies bungled so badly as to give a bad name to idealism in many quarters after World War I. FDR's legacy, apart from the triumph of defeating the Axis, is nothing less than superpower status for America. This status must include to some extent the New Deal's safety net programs, which to this day mitigate the worst socio-economic weaknesses of our society. Above all, FDR's leadership in World War II served to prove for all time what a fully mobilized America can truly achieve. And we could use that legacy today, though few people know it.

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

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