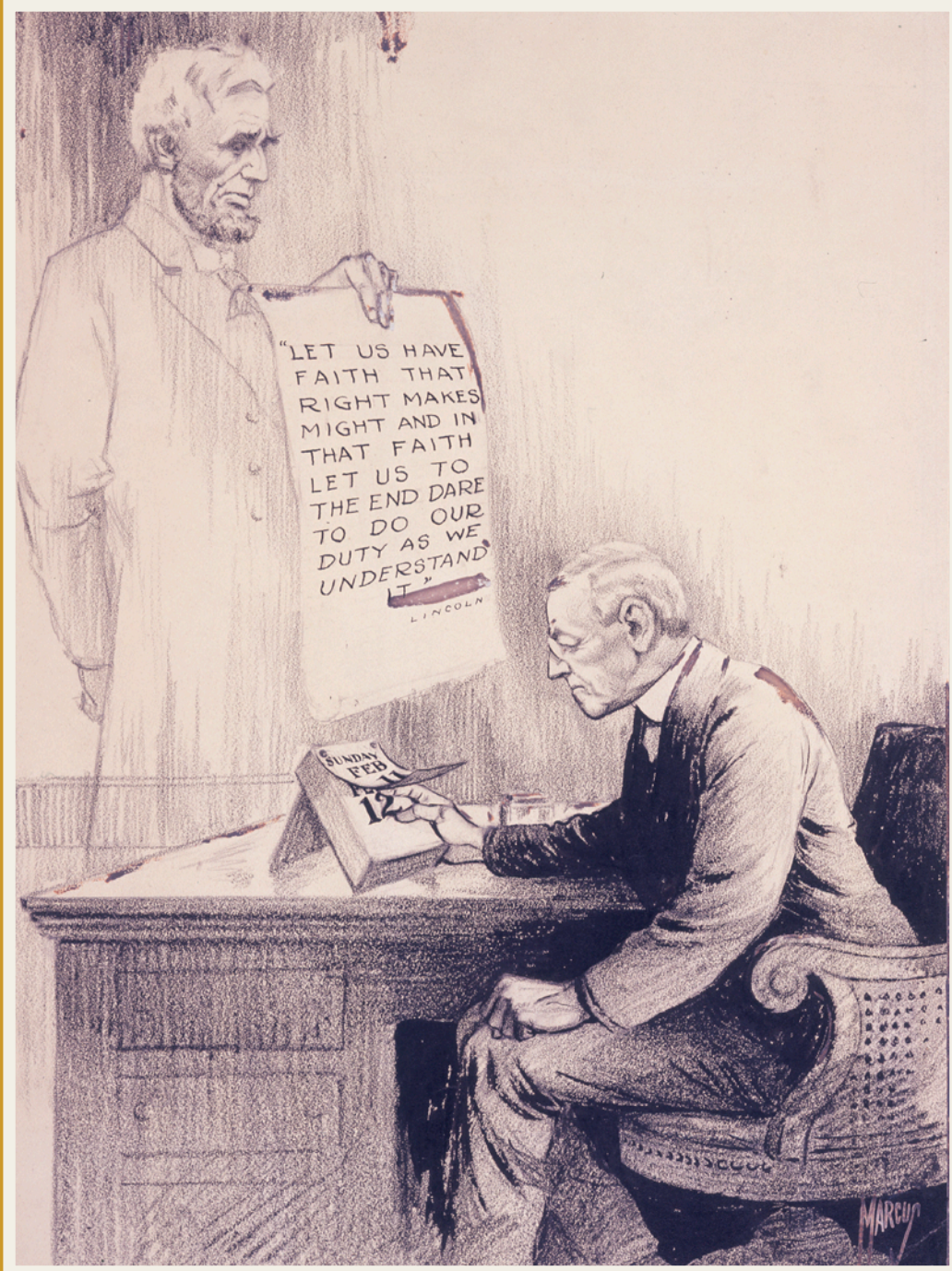


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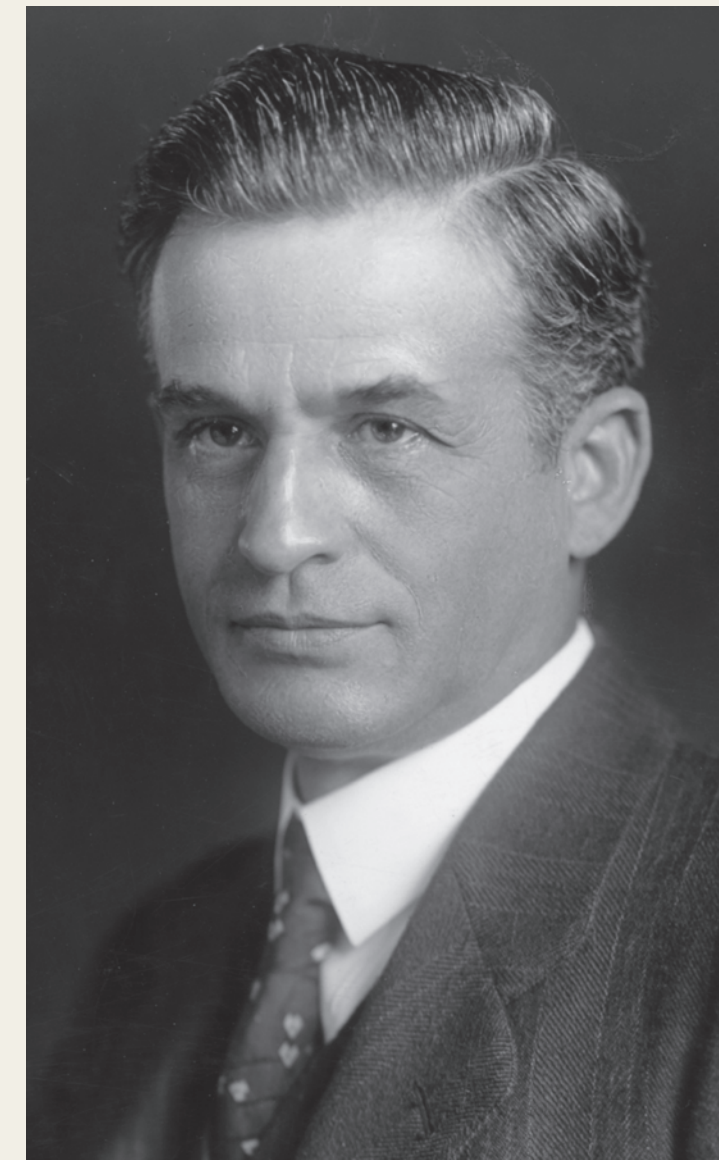
Frederick Douglass once remarked that Lincoln's "memory will be precious forever." But how we remember Lincoln has been a complicated matter. The articles in this issue give us new perspectives on how different generations have remembered the sixteenth president. In the first essay, Robert L. Dietle analyzes James G. Randall's writings and activities during World War I and World War II to help us better understand the antiwar views of Lincoln's first academic biographer. Next, Jason Emerson reviews books by two giants of the Lincoln field that survey myths and understudied aspects of Lincoln's life. In an article commissioned by former *Lincoln Lore* editor Sara Gabbard, Rob Kaplan reflects on the ways twenty-first-century Americans battle over the meaning of the Civil War. In a collections piece, Jessie Cortesi and Kayla Gustafson present artifacts from the Lincoln Collection related to the Battle of Gettysburg, that we may "never forget what they did" on that hallowed ground. Finally, as this is an election year, I selected a handful of ballots from the Lincoln Collection to display the partisan and artistic qualities of American ballots in the mid-nineteenth century.

As always, I thank Jessie Cortesi and Chris Viel for the hard work they do with each issue of *Lincoln Lore*.

—Jonathan W. White

On The Cover: In this cartoon titled "Lincoln's Birthday," President Woodrow Wilson sits at his desk on February 12, 1917, contemplating whether the United States should enter the Great War. Lincoln's ghost hovers above him with a sign repeating the rousing peroration of the Cooper Union address. (Library of Congress)

James Garfield Randall, circa 1935.
(Courtesy of the University of Illinois Archives, 0003332,
Record Series 26/4/1, Folder Randall, James G.)



James G. Randall and the Revisionists *The Great War, the Good War, and the Civil War*

by Robert L. Dietle

September 10, 1945

Mr. Darryl F. Zanuck
20th Century-Fox Film Corporation
Beverly Hills, California

Dear Mr. Zanuck:

On the off chance that it may in some way be useful, I am taking the liberty of sending to you a reprint of my article entitled "Lincoln's Peace and Wilson's." Some of the points of emphasis in this article might possibly be of value in working up a Wilson movie. From the great mass of Wilson's speeches a few selections have been made, as for example on page 231.

The trouble is that very few people today, even those who ought to be sympathetic to him, have a correct concept of Wilson. They speak of him as a failure, yet the more precise truth is that failure came because of departing from Wilson's program. This is all elaborated in the article, and I need not say more. I hope you will pardon me for attracting this much attention to my own bit of writing.

Yours sincerely,
J. G. Randall
Professor of History

This letter poses an interesting puzzle. Why would a professor of history think movie mogul Darryl Zanuck would be interested in either an article or a movie about Woodrow Wilson? Furthermore, why is James Garfield Randall—whose scholarly career was devoted to the Civil War and Abraham Lincoln—acting as a cheerleader for President Wilson?

In the world of academic historians, J. G. Randall's name is forever linked with the Civil War Revisionists, a group of scholars who, starting in the 1920s and 1930s, began to change the field of Civil War scholarship. When first published, the Revisionists' works upset a number of academic apple carts. The careers of James Buchanan and Stephen A. Douglas received far more positive treatment. The South was cast in a more favorable light. Slavery was no longer seen as the cause of the war and the abolitionists lost their luster.

Among the more controversial aspects of Revisionism was its insistence that the Civil War could and should have been avoided. The Revisionists rejected previous interpretations which assumed that the differences between North and South were irreconcilable. Avery Craven, for instance, argued that the conflict was the "work of politicians and pious cranks!" In a series of articles and books published between 1926 and 1953, J. G. Randall also questioned the inevitability of the war, attributing it to a "blundering generation" of politicians who had misled a peaceful nation into a horrible, senseless conflict. Underlying Randall's argument was a deep disgust with war. Throughout his career, Randall laced his scholarly writings and private correspondence with impassioned denunciations of warfare.



This drawing of Abraham Lincoln and James G. Randall appeared on the front cover of the November 17, 1945, issue of *The Saturday Review of Literature*. (Collection of Jonathan W. White)

In fact, an important portion of Randall's career was devoted to the debunking of war in general and of the Civil War in particular. He believed, "There is perhaps too much of a tendency to glorify the Civil War which was, in reality an ugly thing, in many respects a discreditable thing in American life and a thing which loses its glamour when studied in detail." In his published work, Randall stressed these ugly aspects of war. His "The Blundering Generation" (1940) article opens with a long passage in which Randall piles horror upon horror to remind the reader there was nothing romantic about the Civil War. "One does not often speak or read of the war in reality, of its blood and filth, of mutilated flesh, and other revolting things," he wrote. "In the sense of full realism war cannot be discussed. The human mind will not stand for it. For the very word 'war' the realist would have to substitute some such term as 'organized murder' or 'human slaughterhouse.'"

By the early 1950s, Revisionism began to be revised. Sparked by a reaction against the Revisionist orthodoxy, new issues and trends emerged in the field of Civil War scholarship and it seemed time to embalm the Revisionists in the textbooks of historiography. In their attempts to place Randall and his colleagues in context, the historians of history quite rightly linked Revisionism with reaction to the First World War. In *Americans Interpret Their Civil War*, originally published in 1954, Thomas Pressly found the explanation for Revisionism in the 1930s, a decade which displayed a widespread "disillusioned attitude toward war . . . [that] was rooted specifically in the reaction against American participation in the First World War." More recently, Peter Novick has also stressed the same link, arguing it was "manifest how disillusionment with World War I had led to the 'revised' version of the Civil War, indeed, the revisionists themselves avowed that this was true."

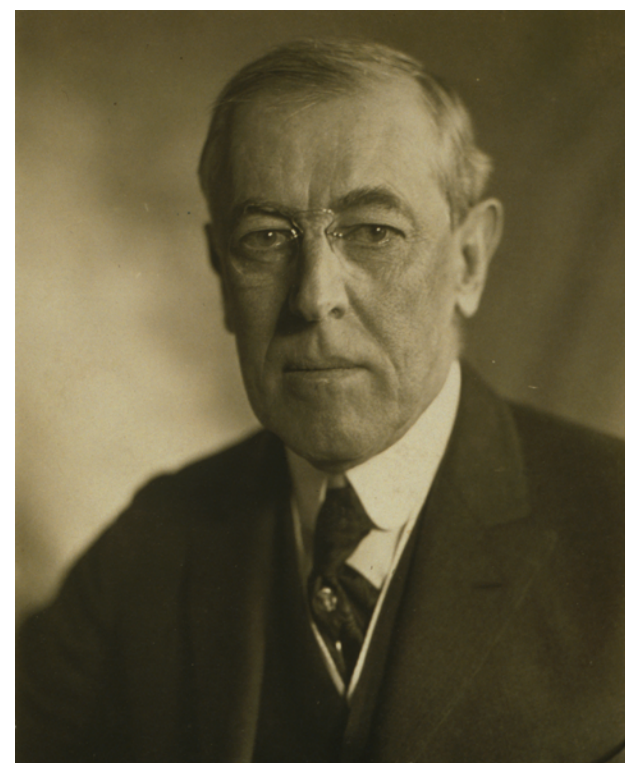
I have no desire to contest the link between the Revisionists and reactions to the First World War. Without question, Randall's reactions to the Great War did shape his scholarly treatment of the Civil War and Lincoln. My purpose here, however, is to complicate the story.

Randall's disgust with war did not result from the general disillusionment of the 1930s. Unpublished writings in Randall's papers at the University of Illinois make clear that Randall's

negative view of warfare predated America's participation in the Great War and his views did not change. His papers also reveal that, while Randall hated war, he was no pacifist. He seems never to have doubted the necessity of America's intervention in the First World War just as he supported America's participation in World War II, a conflict he preferred to call "The Nazi War." Whatever disillusionment Randall felt came not from the Great War but from the failed peace that followed. For Randall, the failure of the United States to accept Woodrow Wilson's League of Nations was a tragic mistake that only helped make future wars more likely. As a politically engaged individual in the 1930s, Randall battled against isolationism. As part of that fight, he struggled to correct popular misconceptions concerning Wilson, his ideals, and his accomplishments. Randall's revisionist impulse was not confined to the study of the Civil War era.



On April 6, 1917, President Woodrow Wilson announced to Congress and the nation that the United States was at war with Germany. For almost three years, Wilson had adhered to a policy of neutrality that was based on the assumption that U.S. interests were quite distinct from the interests of Europe. From the perspective of the early twenty-first century, we sometimes underestimate how greatly America prided itself on avoiding the corrupt politics of the 'old world.' As the British historian Frank Chambers, writing in the late 1930s, pointed out, "In the wisdom of afterknowledge we are sometimes too apt to regard the participation of the United States in a European war as something inevitable, and we forget too easily the revolution in national habit and sentiment which that participation represented." Randall's



President Woodrow Wilson, circa 1919. (Library of Congress)

reactions to the Great War present a case study of this 'revolution of habit and sentiment.'

Randall was thirty-six years old and was about to marry for the second time when the United States entered the Great War. Born and raised in Indianapolis, Randall had attended Butler College before earning his doctorate at the University of Chicago in 1911. As a young man, he taught Sunday School and gave uplifting talks to the Epworth League of the Methodist Church. Such activities suggest that Randall possessed a large dose of the earnestness and piety that are often assumed to be part of the Hoosier character. While completing his graduate studies and immediately after taking his degree, Randall taught in several Midwestern high schools and small colleges.

In 1913 Randall joined the faculty of Roanoke College in Salem, Virginia, where his duties included coaching the debate team. Among Randall's notes from this phase of his teaching career is a typed sheet with the heading, "Topics Pertaining to International Relations." While undated, the list was compiled sometime after early 1915 but before America's entry into the war. It includes such topics as "Resolved, that militarism caused the European War"; "Resolved, that the Monroe Doctrine makes for peace"; and "Resolved, that the course pursued by the United States during the Great War has been one of strict and absolute neutrality." Although it would be foolish to extract a political philosophy from a list of debate topics, the list does display an antiwar sentiment that was common at the time.

Randall's personal opinion of war is made much clearer in an unpublished piece entitled "An Outworn World-Idea." Though undated, this heavily revised typescript comes from the same period as the debate topics. The opening paragraph reads:

A train of soldiers sweeps westward across the rails through Belgium. Thousands of strong, picked men, the cream of the nation, are hurrying, equipped to the last shoe-string, to answer the call of the "Fatherland." They meet and pass another train moving in the opposite direction. It takes but a glance to see that these are broken, shattered human wrecks which the surging tide of war has thrust backward. Countless others to whom Fate has been more merciful lie dead in unmarked graves. For days and months similar trains continue to pass,

for human beings are cheap in Europe, and the blessings of life, health, and comfort are lightly sacrificed for “the honor of the flag.” If we ask what modern warfare means, let us answer that it is epitomized in these passing trains: the oncoming train of youths torn from their families and sweethearts, and the train of survivors who return, bleeding and mangled, to their homes. This is the sure fruitage of war. Its vaunted benefits are problematical; this misery and suffering is certain and inevitable.

Randall goes on to list the peaceful challenges that faced pre-war Europe: poverty to relieve, distress to heal, ignorance to dispel. Why, he asked, was it impossible for mankind to unite to solve these challenges of peace? Why can humans only unite for carnage? “To the same mind ‘war’ is too dignified and polite a term to apply to the raging fury of violence which is now abroad, killing and maiming millions, annihilating billions of accumulated treasure, increasing suffering a hundred-fold, multiplying poverty, propagating ignorant hatred, sowing the seeds of misery and discord.” Randall’s denunciation of war continues for seven pages before concluding, “May America do her part toward introducing Reciprocity and Arbitration as the great world-ideas that will ultimately cause wars to cease on the face of the earth.”

To anyone familiar with Randall’s later writings on the Civil War, this earlier piece will sound very familiar. A comparison of “An Outworn World-Idea” with his 1940 article in the *Abraham Lincoln Quarterly*, “When War Came in 1861,” reveals a number of similarities. While his prose style became more subdued, Randall’s arguments against war seem to have remained constant. “An Outworn World-Idea” makes it impossible to attribute Randall’s disgust with war to a general disillusionment of the 1930s.

Given the views in this piece, one might expect Randall to have opposed America’s entry into World War I. In fact, he appears to have supported wholeheartedly U.S. involvement even to the point of interrupting his scholarly career. During the summer of 1917, Randall began working for the Committee on Public Information (CPI), the propaganda agency created to mobilize public opinion behind U.S. participation in the Great War. The CPI drew upon the talents of a large number of scholars:

Carl Becker, Charles Beard, Wallace Notestein, and Sydney Fay were among the established historians who wrote for the committee. Randall’s assignment was to study the relationship between the press and the army. In a July 1917 letter to J. Franklin Jameson, editor of the *American Historical Review* and a member of the CPI, Randall described how he had “recently gone over a mass of unpublished material in the War Department files (War College Division) on the subject of press control.” He warned Jameson of how “German agents discover and transmit information that is disclosed either carelessly or maliciously in newspapers. I have noted a number of news leaks in the present war which indicate that our hundreds of editors are by no means to be relied upon to withhold information whose publication is detrimental to public safety.”

Randall’s contributions to the CPI were not confined to the study of news control. The CPI drew upon his experience as a public speaker and sent him to the Midwest to help create support for the war. The rough, rather telegraphic notes for several of Randall’s speeches have survived. One, entitled “Education for Citizenship,” was delivered at Buchanan High School in Indianapolis on May 16, 1918. While ostensibly extolling the value of a college education, Randall soon turned to the war effort, telling the high school students that the



Abraham Lincoln was a common symbol in the United States during World War I. This 1919 Red Cross poster for a student membership drive included portraits of George Washington and Lincoln along with Woodrow Wilson. (Library of Congress)

“Kaiser’s God” was “a tribal deity who uses sword vs innocent peoples—very far from [the] true Xn [Christian] God.” Later in the same talk, Randall again stressed the need for a college education but warned, “In this country we want to avoid the aggressive, combative attitude that one well known nation has toward culture—‘Kultur.’” In his conclusion, Randall referred to Wilson’s claim that this was a war for democracy. On the last page of his notes, Randall typed the message printed on the flyleaf of the Bibles given to the U.S. troops landing in France: “Hardships will be your lot, but trust in God will give you comfort; temptation will befall you, but the teachings of your Savior will give you strength. Let your valor as a soldier and your conduct as a man be an inspiration to your comrades and an honor to your country.” Randall then added his own comment, “These are the ideals of the Amer[ican] Army under P[ershing]’s leadership, and these are also the ideals which the American College is holding before the youth of the land, the picked men who are to be the world’s leaders in the new age.”

On June 19, 1918, Randall addressed the Westminster League of Salem, Virginia. This time his topic was the “Religious Bearings of the War.” Randall described how the war was strengthening the nation’s religious impulse. Unfortunately, the war had also helped unleash “forces alien to Xty [Christianity]. Nietchean [sic] philos[ophy]. Supermen. A few imperious masterful men developed as super-brutes, . . . rest of mankind subordinated to them. Morality = weakness.” He continued: “Supreme task of this war . . . discredit this negation of Xty [that] might is right. . . . My final word: The great world crisis is having its spiritualizing influence. Our young men are going thru an ordeal of fire. Out of all the pain and stress of this tragic time there will come a better type of manhood of Xty, a deepened spiritual sense. Already we realize it’s only the spiritual things that count. We should all catch this regenerating spirit in the air. None of us should fail in this time to experience a spiritual awakening.”

It is difficult to reconcile these talks, in which Randall sounds like Theodore Roosevelt extolling the manliness of war, with his earlier and later denunciations of all war. It is possible that Randall’s later emphasis upon how emotion-based war mentality easily overwhelms more rational views may stem from his own experience.



In this 1919 cartoon, a portrait of Lincoln gazes down from the wall as Uncle Sam tells President Wilson, “Cheer up Mr. President—it is not Congress which shows lack of confidence.” (Library of Congress)

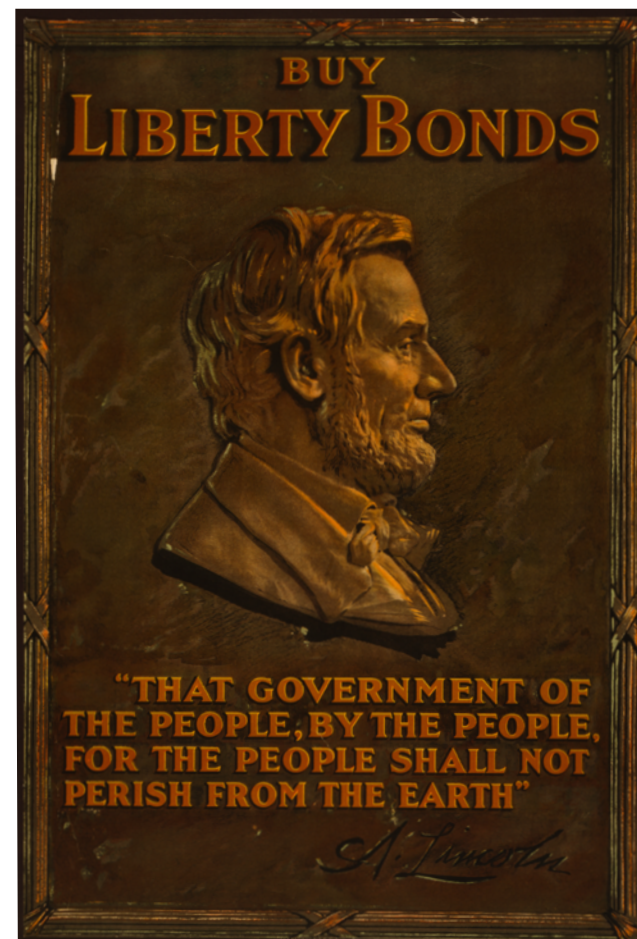
In September 1918, Randall moved from the CPI to the U.S. Shipping Board, where he served as the board’s historian. In a letter to a friend, Randall described his duties: “I am expected to maintain informational files of the activities of the Board and the Fleet corporation, to get out the annual reports and various special reports, to furnish material to the War and Navy departments for official histories, to write special articles and speeches (not all of which appear over my name), to handle many assignments from the offices of the chairman and secretary, and to do many other chores too numerous to mention.” As this letter suggests, Randall enjoyed his work in Washington, D.C., and he was proud of the part he played in the administration of the war. He even considered a career in government, but those plans ended abruptly when in early August 1919 he was told his position was about to be eliminated as part of a general postwar effort to reduce the size of government agencies. With a bureaucratic career no longer beckoning, Randall returned to academic life, teaching a year at Richmond College before accepting a one-year position with the University of Illinois in the fall of 1920. The temporary post became a permanent one and Randall would spend the rest of his career at the Urbana-Champaign campus.

Like many academic historians, Randall’s teaching duties took in a far broader range of topics than his field of research in U.S. constitutional history. Upon his arrival at the University of Illinois, he spent a great deal of time and effort preparing an undergraduate course titled, “The United States in the Great War,” writing to government agencies for publications, and compiling an annotated bibliography

and list of suggested research topics. He continued to offer this course well into the 1930s.

Randall's first book, *Constitutional Problems Under Lincoln*, appeared in 1926. At that time Randall identified himself as a constitutional historian rather than a Lincoln scholar. Not until 1927 did he begin seriously to pursue the "Lincoln theme" that gained him a national reputation. The 1930s were the years in which Randall began to study the Civil War and Lincoln in exhaustive detail, laying the scholarly foundation for his *Civil War and Reconstruction* (1937) and his volumes on Lincoln that appeared in the late 1940s. During these years, however, Lincoln was not the only president on Randall's mind.

In 1926, Randall received a letter from his brother-in-law Archie Throckmorton thanking him for a copy of *Constitutional Problems Under Lincoln*. Reading about the war president from Illinois evoked memories of a more recent war administration. Throckmorton wrote, "And some of these days, somebody is going to write a book comparing Wilson's handling of the Great War with Lincoln's handling



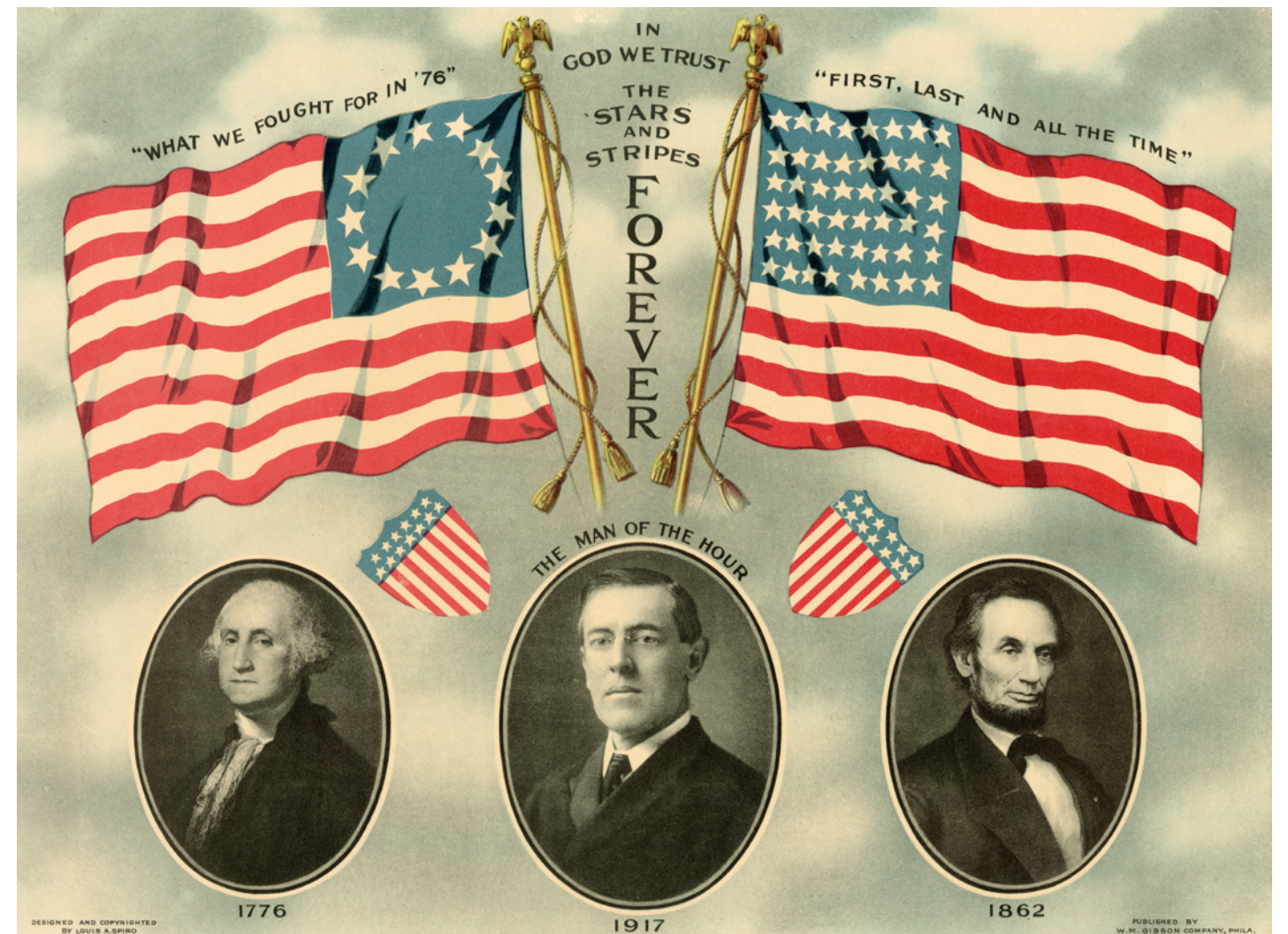
The Treasury Department hoped that Lincoln's portrait and immortal words at Gettysburg would inspire Americans to "Buy Liberty Bonds" in 1917. (Library of Congress)



This 1918 chromolithograph titled "True Sons of Freedom" depicts African American soldiers defeating the Germans in World War I as Abraham Lincoln looks down from above. (Library of Congress)

of the Civil War. Perhaps the time has not yet come for the writing of this book, but I want to live to read it, for I have a notion that if the work is honestly done, it won't do the fame of Woodrow Wilson any harm."

There is no way of knowing whether this specific letter planted the seed of an idea, but in 1930 Randall did publish an article in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*, "Lincoln's Task and Wilson's," in which he made explicit comparisons between the two war presidents. After identifying six "outstanding" presidents—Washington, Jefferson, Jackson, Lincoln, Theodore Roosevelt, and Wilson—Randall focused on Lincoln and Wilson because "far-reaching matters of historic fate and development are bound up with the contrast between these two men in their personalities and their tasks of wartime leadership." The article is a brief but thorough comparison of the personalities, policies, and achievements of the two presidents. From the perspective of Randall's later career, we are prone to place the emphasis on Lincoln. But a careful reading suggests that, like his brother-in-law, Randall thought the comparison did Wilson's fame no harm.



This 1917 lithograph featuring portraits of Washington, Wilson, and Lincoln sought to inspire Americans of the World War I generation. Wilson is depicted as "The Man of the Hour" just as Washington and Lincoln had been before him. (71.2009.081.1379)

In the article, Randall used the comparison of Lincoln and Wilson to correct popular misconceptions about Wilson. Randall stressed Lincoln's difficulties with Congress—while highlighting Wilson's firm leadership of the legislative branch. Far from accepting the image of Wilson as an impractical idealist, Randall emphasized how Wilson's close cooperation, even domination of Congress during his first term, led to a number of impressive legislative accomplishments. In terms of their respective war efforts, Lincoln's administration was an ad hoc affair, held together by Lincoln's loose style of leadership. "Nothing," writes Randall, "under Lincoln matched the staggering complexity of the Wilson regime. . . . [T]here was nothing in [Lincoln's] administration comparable to the elaborate boards and administrations by which the government under Wilson took over vast enterprises pertaining to transportation, industry,

finance, labor, food, fuel, shipping, and trade." Randall also compared the failed peace plans of Lincoln and Wilson. Assassination ended any chance that Lincoln's plan for reconstruction would be implemented. According to Randall, Wilson's physical breakdown in 1919 was the major factor in his failure to win acceptance of the peace treaty and the League of Nations.

In the late 1930s, as the possibility of a new European war became apparent, Randall continued to uphold the Wilsonian ideal of peace through international cooperation. In letters to congressmen, senators, editors, and colleagues, Randall argued for U.S. membership in the World Court and denounced appeasement in Europe and isolationism at home. He embarked on a personal crusade, even attacking the fundamental text of isolationism—Washington's supposed warning against "entangling alliances." In lectures and letters, Randall pointed out that it was Jefferson, not Washington, who had coined the phrase. Furthermore, Jefferson had never suggested America turn its back on the world. Instead, Jefferson had "envisaged a liberal internationalism, advising that our policy should be that of pursuing the paths of industry, peace, and happiness, cultivating general



In addition to being the preeminent Lincoln scholar of his generation, James G. Randall was also a talented artist. On November 16, 1951, he made this pencil sketch of fellow Lincoln scholar Wayne C. Temple. (Illinois History and Lincoln Collections, University of Illinois)

speech.” By the spring of 1941, Randall saw American involvement in the war as inevitable. In a letter of support he sent to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, he wrote, “Having failed to check aggression the peaceful way (by promoting international solidarity), the United States must take the hard way. Hitler can be stopped, and it must be done.”

Randall accepted America’s involvement in the Second World War as a cruel necessity. Arguing that the war be named “The Nazi War” since “they planned it and started it,” he also suggested a slogan for the war: “The War for Total Peace.” Almost immediately upon U.S. entry into the war, Randall began to look beyond the fighting to the peace. In a 1942 letter Randall drafted but did not send to Shepard Jones of the World Peace Foundation, he argued that “in shaping the coming peace nothing is more important than an intelligent reappraisal of Wilson’s formula, preferably in a form of such a nature that it will be widely read.” Randall discussed the need for “a little book that would give the essence of Wilsonism for its present significance. . . . Some of Wilson’s speeches should also be included to make them more accessible than they now are. With senators up for re-election, the subject is most timely.”

At the end of the letter Randall admitted that “some years ago I had prepared a manuscript of about five solid chapters on Government under Wilson, but I never got around to publishing it as a book.” While these “five solid chapters” are not among Randall’s papers in the University of Illinois archives, there does survive a typed, one-page outline of a book to be titled *Wilson Restudied*. Part One was to consist of eight chapters on such topics as: “Wilson and International Security,” “For and Against the League,” “Anti-League Stereotypes,” “The Concept of Isolationism” (which Randall labeled “muddled or faulty thinking”), and “Wilson’s Program and the Coming Peace.” Part Two was to consist of speeches by Wilson.

On the back of this outline, Randall wrote in pencil, “Add: Analogy of W[ilson] & Lincoln.” The comparison of Lincoln and Wilson became the only part of the project Randall completed. In 1943 he delivered a paper at the Mississippi Valley Historical Association on “Lincoln’s Peace and Wilson’s,” which was soon after published in the *South Atlantic Quarterly*. The article brings together all of Randall’s previous arguments concerning the importance and relevance of Wilson’s belief that international cooperation was the only hope for achieving a lasting peace. Randall thought the revival of Wilsonism so vital that he paid for 150 offprints of this article (and later tried to buy more) and mailed them to individuals whom he saw as having influence on public opinion; among those on his list was movie producer Darryl Zanuck. “Lincoln’s Peace and Wilson’s” was Randall’s attempt to draw upon the lessons of the past to construct a better future. Admittedly, there is something quixotic in Randall’s belief that offprints or movie producers could help solve a world crisis, but there is also something noble about his deep desire to help ensure a “just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all the nations.”

Robert L. Dietle is associate professor of history at Western Kentucky University.

friendship, and ‘bringing collisions of interest to the umpirage of reason rather than of force.’” Randall seems to have envisioned Jefferson as a Wilsonian before the fact.

The outbreak of the long-dreaded European war in 1939 saddened Randall. He opened his 1940 article “When War Came in 1861” with a lament over “this bedeviled age when general war has incredibly come to a Europe whose every normal instinct and every memory since 1914 cries to heaven against it.” What is striking about this article is the ease with which it can be misinterpreted. When I first read this piece, having not yet looked through Randall’s private correspondence, I wrongly assumed that Randall was arguing from an isolationist position and that he had followed an intellectual trajectory similar to that of Charles Beard. Randall’s letters make clear that, despite his views on war, Randall had no patience for those who argued that the European conflict was not America’s concern. Among Randall’s papers is a printed copy of one of Robert Maynard Hutchins’ antiwar speeches. On the cover Randall scrawled, “The Nazis ought to like this

BOOK REVIEW

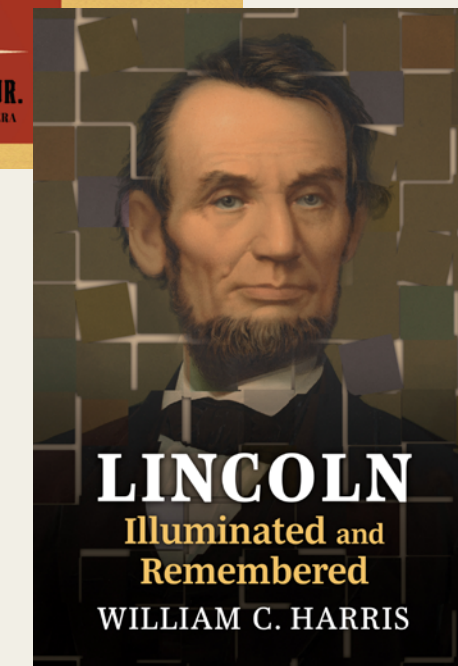
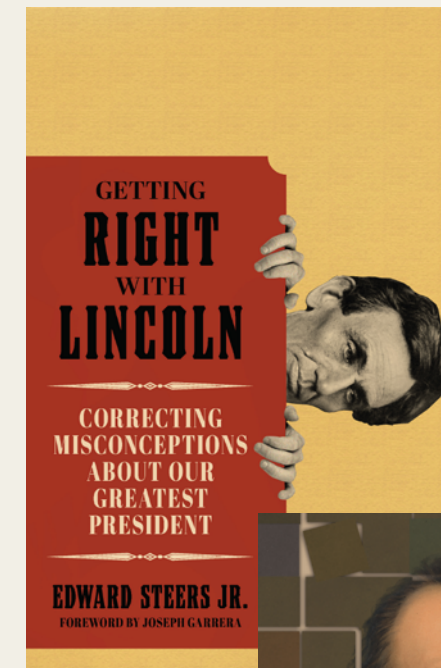
Getting Right With Lincoln: Correcting Misconceptions About Our Greatest President

by Edward Steers Jr.

Lincoln Illuminated and Remembered

by William C. Harris

Review by Jason Emerson



There’s always something new to learn about Abraham Lincoln despite the abundance of books and articles about him. He remains a popular and top-selling subject because he is not only fascinating, but complex. While unique and unknown aspects of his life continue to be discovered, what is already known about this iconic American can still be further explored, reexamined, illuminated, and even rediscovered. Sometimes the best way to achieve this is to focus on singular aspects of his life through essays, or books of essays. Two recent books on Lincoln by William C. Harris and Edward Steers Jr. do exactly this by offering up collections of essays that dig deep into individual areas that are ripe for reconsideration.

In *Lincoln Illuminated and Remembered* (University Press of Kansas, 2023), Harris “seeks to fill in some of the gaps and misunderstandings in the story of Lincoln” by offering “fresh material” about Lincoln’s leadership and his handling of the slavery issue. Harris, an emeritus professor of history at North Carolina State University and the author of ten other books on

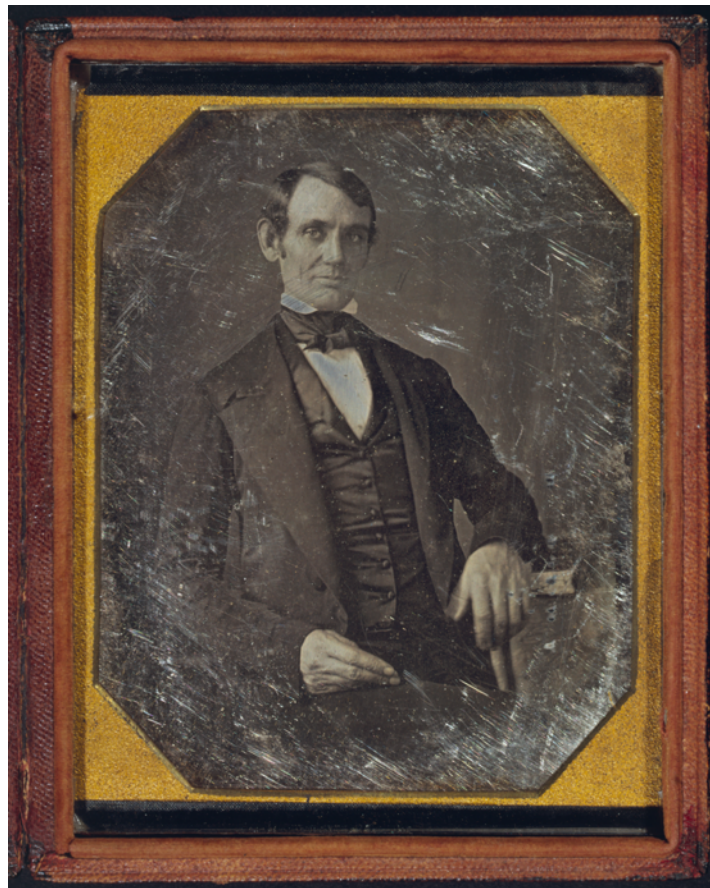
Lincoln and the Civil War, is no stranger to peeling back the outer layers of our greatest president and exposing deeper issues. In fact, he’s examined the subjects of Lincoln’s leadership, the law of war, and maintaining a hold on the Border States in his previous books, particularly in the Lincoln Prize-winning *Lincoln and the Border States: Preserving the Union* (2011).

As with all of Harris’s books, *Lincoln Illuminated and Remembered* is erudite, well thought out, impressive, and offers a great deal for readers to think about. While his chapters on Lincoln’s leadership and his dealings with Confederate guerillas are interesting, the real gems are in chapters 2 and 3: “The Influence of the Mexican-American War on Lincoln” and “Compensated

Emancipation: A Lincoln Plan to Abolish Slavery and End the Civil War.” Both topics are lesser-known aspects of Lincoln’s political career and are in need of fresh examination.

Lincoln’s experience as a congressman, specifically his opposition to the Mexican War, is an area ripe for further scholarship. Harris previously delved into this subject in his 2007 book, *Lincoln’s Rise to the Presidency*, but in his latest work he focuses more on the impact Lincoln’s time in Congress had on his actions as president over a decade later rather than a general overview of events in the late 1840s.

Lincoln’s single term in Congress is often viewed as a failure by historians, as it was by Lincoln’s contemporaries. The Illinois Whig did not distinguish himself in Washington as he’d planned. He opposed the Mexican War for being a blatant landgrab by President Polk that was not only immoral and illegal, but would further inflame the slavery issue in the United States. This opposition led Lincoln to be criticized, lampooned, and rejected by his own party. Not only did he fail to get renominated for his House seat, but his successor lost the next election, mainly because the constituency was so offended by Lincoln’s response to the war. But failures in life often bring the most meaningful learning opportunities, and such was the case for Lincoln.



Abraham Lincoln, circa 1846. (Library of Congress)

As a member of Congress, Lincoln learned that a president must take responsibility for his actions and respect the majority sentiments of his constituents, that “in pursuing principle, public opinion could not be wisely ignored,” as Harris states. Lincoln learned that wars should not be fought for partisan or dubious reasons, and that, if the necessity for war arose, “the president should forthrightly explain the national interest or stakes in the conflict and also the war’s objectives.” Lincoln took this to heart throughout his presidency, never changing his message that he fought to preserve the Union; the destruction of slavery became a means to that end. Whenever others attempted to twist or pervert his stated purpose, Lincoln immediately corrected the record, such as in his August 1862 letter to Horace Greeley and even his last annual message to Congress in December 1864. As Harris states, “In his purpose and management of the war against secession, Lincoln sought to ensure that America would not suffer the disastrous consequences of another ill-advised war with its changing and unfortunate objectives.”

And yet, there was no denying that the Civil War began because of the slavery issue, and likewise, Lincoln made clear his opposition to the institution. But his actions regarding slavery are often misunderstood and misinterpreted even today. Some of his actions, in fact, remain relatively unknown. One such is Lincoln’s plan for compensated emancipation, which Harris characterizes as his “greatest surprise” in his years of studying the Great Emancipator. “Historians have not given due credit to Lincoln’s efforts to secure compensated emancipation as both a means to end the war and to secure emancipation,” Harris states. And in this impressive chapter, he shows exactly how Lincoln constantly tried (and failed) to do so.

Readers may be surprised to learn that Lincoln often argued that compensating slaveholders for their “property” (to the tune of tens or hundreds of millions of dollars) would require only about one-third of the cost of one year’s worth of war. (And by eliminating the cause of the war he would quickly bring the war to a close.) Of course, this idea failed in all ways except the tiny patch of Washington, D.C., where compensated emancipation actually occurred (the Border States rejected Lincoln’s offer), but Lincoln never gave up the hope, even as late as 1865, as Harris shows.

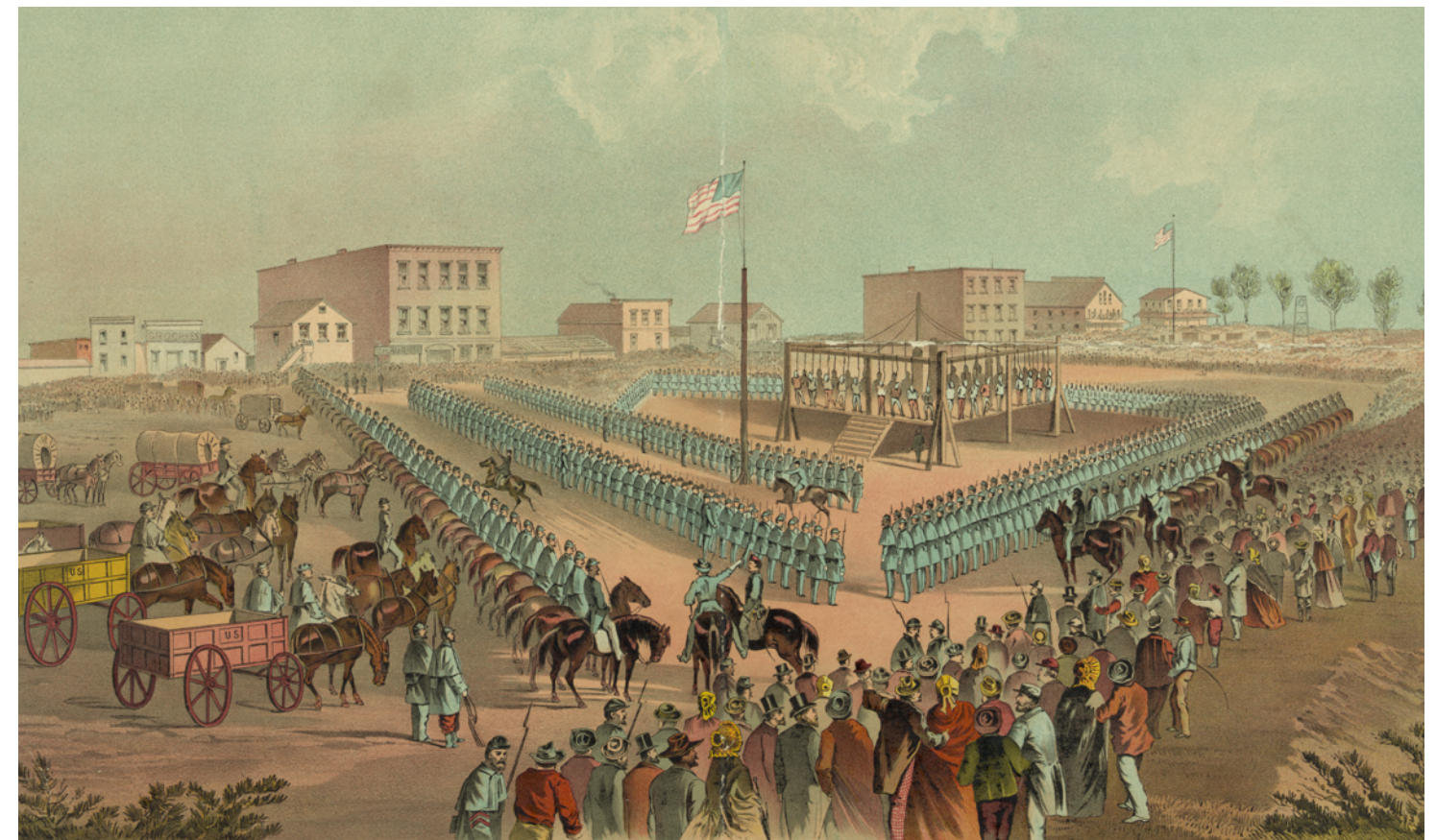
While this is an impressive book that is recommended for any Lincoln bookshelf, it can be criticized for its readability. *Lincoln Illuminated and Remembered* appears to be primarily aimed at other scholars. It is a work of erudition that should be read slowly and carefully, taken in pieces, and not rushed through. This is not necessarily a fault—it will certainly offer enlightening insights for Lincoln enthusiasts. But its likely intended audience should be taken into consideration by potential readers.

Those looking for a less academic but just as interesting book on the sixteenth president will find it in another collection of essays: Edward Steers Jr.’s latest work, *Getting Right with Lincoln: Correcting Misconceptions About Our Greatest President* (University Press of Kentucky, 2021). This book is the type of fun, accessible, eminently readable history that we need more of today. As Steers shows, to understand Lincoln is to understand not just the facts and expert interpretations of his life, but also the various errors and misconceptions written about his life. Was Lincoln killed by a cabal of rich northerners whose pockets Lincoln emptied? Did he really not want to free the slaves? Did he suffer from cancer, Marfan syndrome, or some other fatal disease that would have killed him anyway soon after John Wilkes Booth’s bullet did? These are some of the topics Steers covers.

Steers is a longtime Lincoln scholar best known for his landmark book, *Blood on the Moon: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (2001). *Getting Right with Lincoln* can really be seen as a continuation of his

previous book, *Lincoln Legends: Myths, Hoaxes, and Confabulations Associated with Our Greatest President* (2007), a collection of essays that seeks to separate fact from fiction in Lincoln’s life and legacy. As Steers asserts, “myth often replaces reality” in Lincolnland, sometimes through poor sourcing, sometimes through exaggeration to enliven the narrative, and sometimes through a writer’s biases or desire to revise history for personal or political reasons. This book is Steers’s reaction to what he calls “the wrong side of revisionist history”; it is his attempt to correct the fallacies that have somehow become canon.

There is a lot to unpack in this book, and a few of the best chapters are on Lincoln’s actions regarding the execution of 38 Dakota warriors in 1862, Lincoln’s role in the creation of the state of West Virginia, and Steers’s excellent summary of Lincoln’s physical health and all the potential illnesses writers have claimed for him through the years.



“Execution of the Thirty-Eight Sioux Indians at Mankato, Minnesota, December 25, 1862,” Hayes Litho. Co., 1883, was commissioned by a Mankato newspaper owner John C. Wise. (Library of Congress)



Sculptor Fred Torrey's "Lincoln Walks at Midnight," which was inspired by Vachel Lindsay's 1914 poem, stands in front of the West Virginia state capitol in Charleston to commemorate Lincoln's role in the creation of the thirty-fifth state in 1863. (Photograph by David B. Wieggers)

While Abraham Lincoln's entire presidency focused on the Civil War, there were still other major events that occurred. One of those was the 1862 Dakota War in Minnesota, during which some six hundred white settlers, including women and children, were killed, kidnapped, or raped. The military was sent to restore order and ended up capturing 1,500 Dakotas. Almost 400 were tried before a military tribunal, most of whom were sentenced to death for acts of murder, rape, and robbery. Just as he did with so many courts-martial

of Union soldiers during the war, Lincoln suspended the executions until he could personally review the trial transcripts and approve or reverse the findings. In the end, he approved only a fraction of executions for the Dakotas who committed the most heinous of crimes. And, as was typical in cases involving his justice and magnanimity, Lincoln received both praise and criticism. This is a fascinating incident in Lincoln's presidency, as is his view of Native Americans in general and his plans to improve the country's relations with all tribes once the Civil War ended (which, of course, Lincoln never got to bring to fruition).

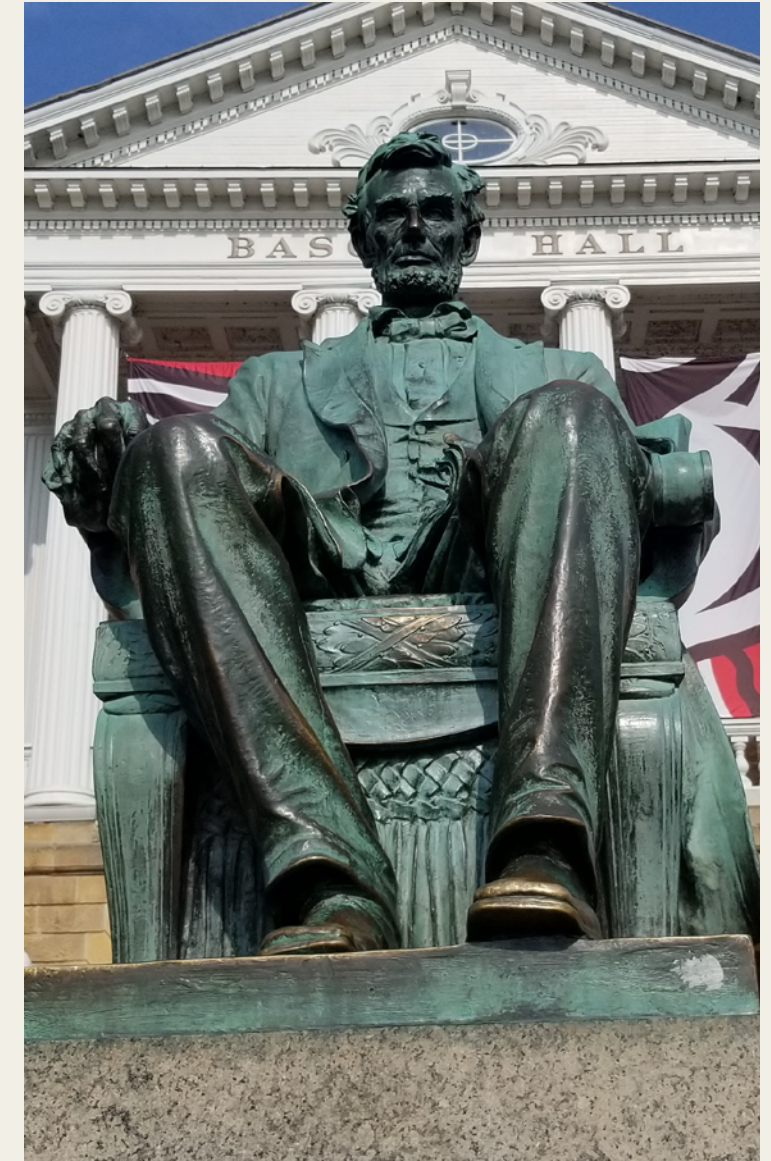
Like his Indian policy, Lincoln's role in supporting and allowing the pro-Union residents of Virginia to break away from the commonwealth and form their own state is another obscure aspect of Lincoln's presidency. "The legality of the admission of West Virginia is still debated among historians and constitutional scholars, and the state is referred to as 'Abraham Lincoln's illegitimate child,'" as Steers states. Was the acceptance of the new state constitutionally legal or an act of usurpation by Lincoln? The U.S. Supreme Court had previously declared this sort of question a political one rather than a legal one, which should have made the decision easy. But, as Steers demonstrates, Lincoln still harbored concerns over the constitutionality of dismembering Virginia. Did the state's secession from the Union allow a new government to be formed that superseded the old, or was the pro-Union government merely an interim expedient? In the end, Lincoln opted for statehood, believing it not only constitutional, but necessary to the war effort. "As with so many important issues decided during this turbulent period of history, might made right," states Steers. This chapter is so unique in Lincolniana, and rightfully interesting, that many readers will undoubtedly flip to Steers's bibliography and set out to learn more on their own.

For as enjoyable as this book is, it is disappointing to see that Steers recycled four chapters from *Lincoln Legends* for use in *Getting Right with Lincoln*: those on the character of Lincoln's father, on the nature of Lincoln's relationship with Ann Rutledge, on the fake Lincoln-Rutledge letters published in the 1920s, and on the authorship of the famous 1864 letter to the widow Lydia Bixby. Considering the vast number of Lincoln myths that circulate in the internet age, Steers surely could have examined other, new topics rather than resort to rehashing chapters from his most recent book. Indeed, readers who purchase his latest book may be frustrated to find that they already own half a book's worth of the material. But of course, every new book gets new readers who have not read the previous work.

Minor criticisms aside, both Steers's and Harris's recent works are solid additions to the Lincoln bibliography and will give readers multiple insights and pieces of new and impressive information they did not know about their favorite president.

Jason Emerson is an independent historian and freelance writer who is the author or editor of seven books about Abraham Lincoln and his family, including *Lincoln the Inventor* (2009), *The Madness of Mary Lincoln* (2007), and *Giant in the Shadows: The Life of Robert T. Lincoln* (2012).

In recent years, some students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison have called for the removal of this statue of Lincoln on their campus because of his complicated history with Native Americans. (Photograph by David B. Wieggers)



THE USES & ABUSES OF PRESENTISM

by Rob Kaplan

"The past is a foreign country: They do things differently there," wrote L. P. Hartley in his novel *The Go-Between*. For good or ill, we cannot literally travel to that foreign country. But if we could, as thoughtful visitors we would presumably endeavor to learn something of the local customs and practices, and, so as not to give offense, emulate them to the greatest extent possible. Failing that, we could at least be expected to be cognizant of them. To be sure, if we did not go too far back in time, many if not most of the practices of that other country would be familiar to us. Even so, there would in all likelihood be at least some that made us

uncomfortable, and possibly others that would outrage us. This is a situation in which many people find themselves today. That is, when visiting the past, by whatever means possible, they are offended by some of the practices they find there, largely because those practices do not conform to our modern sensibilities. This, in essence, is what is referred to as presentism.

Notwithstanding the apparent modernness of the word itself, the philosophy of presentism, even if not by that name, has been practiced in one form or another for at least 200 years. In his book *Historians' Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought*, David Hackett Fischer identified the "classic example" of presentism as "Whig history," citing several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century British authors who presented the past through the lens of their own political beliefs rather

than placing it in historical context, and then used that history as validation of those beliefs. The first citation for the word “presentism” in the latest edition of the *Oxford English Dictionary* is from 1916, but it may have been used in the same sense as early as the 1870s. Its meaning has, in any case, remained essentially constant, and is defined by the *OED* as “a bias towards the present or present-day attitudes, esp. in the interpretation of history.” Somewhat more expansively, *Oxford Languages*, the modern offspring of the *OED*, defines it as “uncritical adherence to present-day attitudes, especially the tendency to interpret past events in terms of modern values and concepts.”

All History is Revisionist History

Much as we might sometimes wish it were possible, we cannot change the past. We can, however, and do, change our interpretation of it, and have always done so. As James M. Banner points out in his essay “All History is Revisionist History” (2021), “At the very dawn of historical inquiry in the West, historians were already wrestling over the past, attacking each other, debating the purposes and uses of historical knowledge, choosing different subjects to pursue, and arguing about how to pursue them. That is, in the infancy of their intellectual pursuit, historians were engaged in what we call ‘revisionist history’—writing coexisting, diverse and sometimes sharply clashing accounts of various subjects, accounts that challenged and sought to alter what had been written about them before.” Moreover, all historians are products of their times and cannot be otherwise.

Every period in human history has been one of change, but the last 150 years, and particularly the last fifty, have seen changes in virtually every field of human endeavor that go far beyond what occurred in any comparable period in the more distant past. One of the most important of these changes is in the appreciation of the value of human beings and, accordingly, the way in which they are treated. This can be seen most clearly in the United States in the way we now think of people—both in the present and the past—who until quite recently were thought of, and as a result treated, as second-class citizens. This change can even be seen in how our society approaches the teaching of history. As late as the 1970s—and later in many parts of the country—American history was still being taught as almost entirely about white men of European extraction, and the contributions of other members of society were only slightly, if at all, taken into account.

These issues have now been recognized and are finally being addressed, even if not as completely as many would like. Presentism, whether we choose to see it as such or not, is both a cause and an effect of these changes. It is a cause in that it has encouraged us, as Abraham Lincoln suggested in his second annual message to Congress in

December 1862, to “think anew and act anew,” to look at the past through new eyes and recognize the many injustices that have been visited upon some of our citizens. And it is an effect in that it has resulted in our making efforts to eliminate those injustices to the greatest extent possible. But in the same way that individuals who have become converts to a new way of thinking—whether it be religious, philosophical, political, or otherwise—sometimes become overzealous in their efforts to remedy what they consider past errors, some people have taken presentism to such an extreme as to require a remedy itself. This is a form of negative presentism.

Varieties of Presentism

An example of negative presentism is the 2019 publication of *The New York Times*’s “The 1619 Project” and the publication of the material two years later in book form under the title *The 1619 Project: A New Origin Story*. The project was developed by journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones and writers from *The New York Times* and *The New York Times Magazine*, and was intended to “reframe the country’s history by placing the consequences of slavery and the contributions of Black Americans at the very center of the United States’ national narrative.” Publication of the material was followed by a podcast, live public events, a film on Hulu, and the development of lesson plans for schools, all of them advocating the idea that the history of America is essentially the history of slavery. In 2020, the Pulitzer Committee gave its imprimatur to the project by awarding Hannah-Jones its prize for Commentary for the project’s introductory essay.

Reaction to the project came quickly—and vehemently—from historians on the right as well as on the left. James M. McPherson, Sean Wilentz, Gordon S. Wood, Victoria E. Bynum, and James Oakes, among others, jointly wrote a letter that was published in *The New York Times* in December 2019 expressing their “strong reservations” about the project, requesting

corrections of what they considered factual errors, and accusing its creators of replacing “historical understanding by ideology.” The *Times* eventually made some changes, albeit reluctantly, leading some proponents of the project to complain that the paper was backing away from some of its more controversial positions.

Politicians also expressed opinions about the validity of the project’s claims. Then-Democratic senator Kamala Harris praised it, saying that it was “a powerful and necessary reckoning of our history,” but there was considerably more reaction from the right than from the left. Former Speaker of the House Newt Gingrich and Republican senators Mitch McConnell, Ted Cruz, and Tom Cotton all roundly condemned the project; Florida governor Ron DeSantis signed a bill outlawing the teaching of Critical Race Theory, specifically including any materials from the project; and then-President Donald Trump established a “1776 Commission” whose purpose was to develop a “patriotic” curriculum, presumably to counteract the one offered by the project. The commission was terminated by Joe Biden on his first day as president in January 2021, but the controversy continues.

A more recent example, if one that attracted less attention, occurred in January 2021 when the San Francisco school board voted to change the names of 44 of the district’s 121 schools. Three years earlier it had established a commission to consider renaming schools in order to “condemn any symbols of white supremacy and racism,” according to the board’s president, Gabriela Lopez. The commission, in turn, had suggested renaming any school named after an individual who had “engaged in the subjugation and enslavement of human beings; or who oppressed women, inhibiting societal progress; or whose actions led to genocide; or who otherwise significantly diminished the opportunities of those amongst us to the right of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”

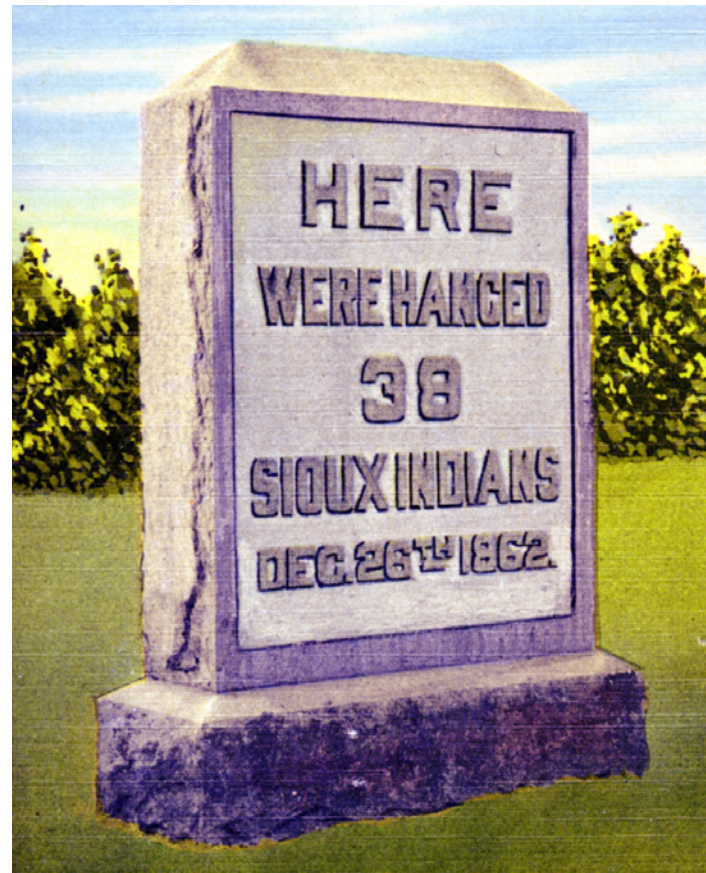
The list of the schools to be renamed was made public, along with very brief explanations of why they had been selected. A number of names on the list must have come as a considerable surprise to some of its readers. They included, for example, naturalist John Muir, for being “Racist and responsible for theft of Native lands”; American patriot Paul Revere, who “served as commander of land artillery in the disastrous Penobscot Expedition of 1779 . . . in connection to colonization”; poet James Russell Lowell, because “His commitment to the anti-slavery cause wavered over the years, as did his opinion of African-Americans”; and English politician Edward Hyde, First Earl of Clarendon (1609–1694), after whom the street on which the school was built is named, who “was impeached by the House of Commons for blatant violations of Habeas Corpus,” and “for having sent prisoners out of England to places like Jersey and holding them there without benefit of trial.” The list also included several American presidents, among them Thomas Jefferson, for being a “slaveholder”; George Washington, for being both a “slaveholder” and a “colonizer”; William McKinley, because “at the conclusion of the Spanish American War in 1898” he “decided to annex the Philippines”; Franklin D. Roosevelt, because he “refused to support anti-lynching bill[s] . . . and [held] other racist policies/views”; James A. Garfield, because “Thirteen years before he took the office of president of the United States” he “predicted the extinction of American Indians”; and, not least of all, Abraham Lincoln.

The reasoning behind Lincoln’s name being on the list is perhaps particularly instructive in regard to how decisions are sometimes made in such cases. The commission’s explanation was that “Abraham Lincoln is not seen as much of a hero at all among many American Indian Nations and Native peoples of the United States, as the *majority* [emphasis added] of his policies proved to be detrimental to them.” These included, among others, “the Homestead Act [which provided free land in the West to those willing to settle it] and the Pacific Railway Act of 1862” which “helped precipitate the construction of the transcontinental railroad, which led to the significant loss of land and natural resources, as well as the loss of lifestyle and culture, for many indigenous people.” Lincoln was also criticized on a number of other counts, including being “responsible for the Dakota 38+2, the largest mass hanging in US history.”

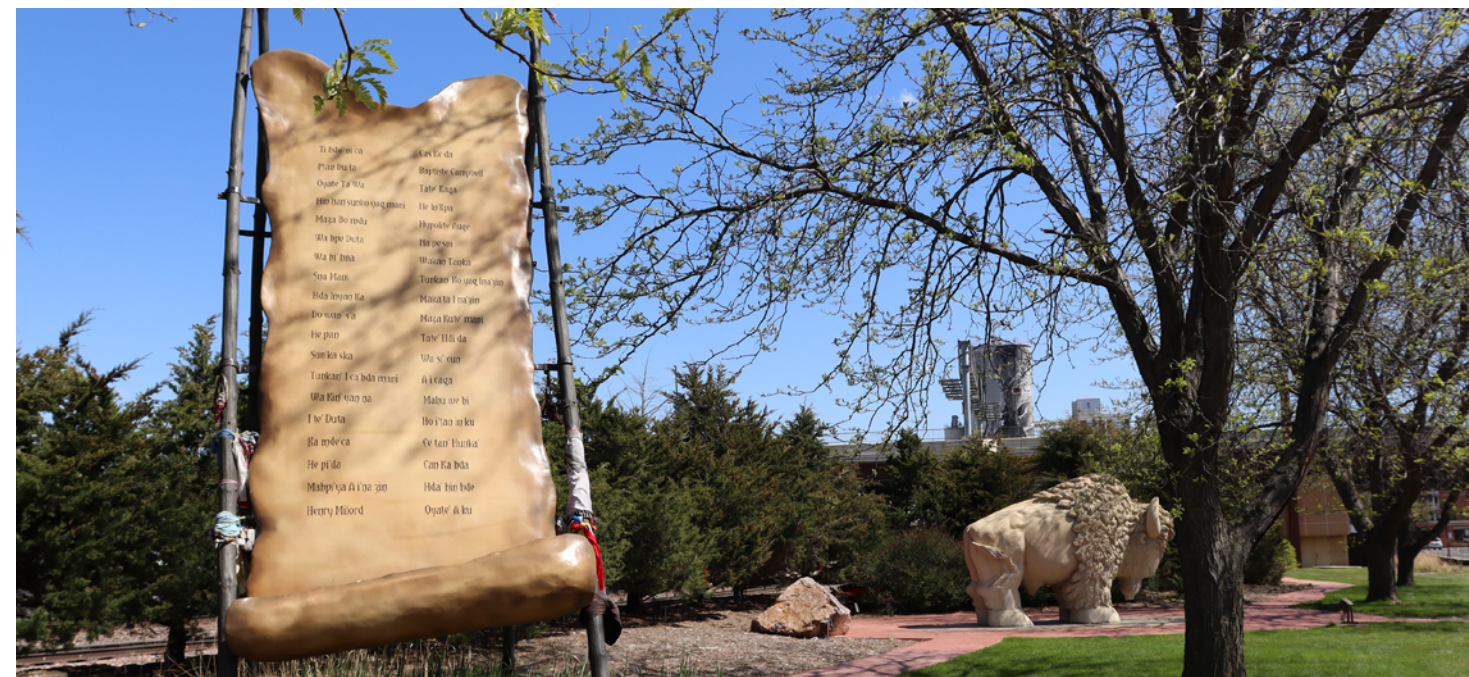
It is true that Lincoln signed these two acts into law, and that he was responsible for allowing 38 Dakota warriors to be hanged in 1862. However, taking into account the unequaled achievements of the Lincoln presidency, selecting any three events—much less these three—as being representative of the majority of his policies is at best of questionable validity. More importantly, the commission’s report neglects to include several other significant factors. It’s true

that both the Homestead Act and the Pacific Railway Act caused considerable harm to some Native American groups, including displacing them from their traditional tribal lands, but they also represent landmark legislation that was instrumental—one might even argue vital—in the settlement of the West. And the truth about the “Dakota 38+2” is even more complicated.

In the summer of 1862, several bands of Dakota Indians in Minnesota rose up and killed more than 600 white settlers in response to their gross mistreatment by traders and Indian agents. Defeated by an army led by Col. Henry Hastings Sibley, the Dakota warriors were tried by a military commission which sentenced 303 of them to death. By all accounts, Abraham Lincoln was appalled at the thought of executing so many individuals. He accordingly reviewed the records of all the trials, and, except in 39 cases, commuted the sentences. One other individual was subsequently reprieved, but 38 were executed, the hangings constituting the largest mass execution in the history of the United States, as well as the largest mass commutation. And Lincoln did it in the face of white Minnesotans who wanted all 303 Dakota warriors hanged. In fact, when one Republican told Lincoln that the Republican Party would have done better in an election if he had executed more men,



This controversial and “gruesome monument” to the mass hanging at Mankato, Minnesota, stood on several locations near the execution site from 1912 until 1995, when it mysteriously disappeared. Its whereabouts remain unknown. (Blue Earth County Historical Society)

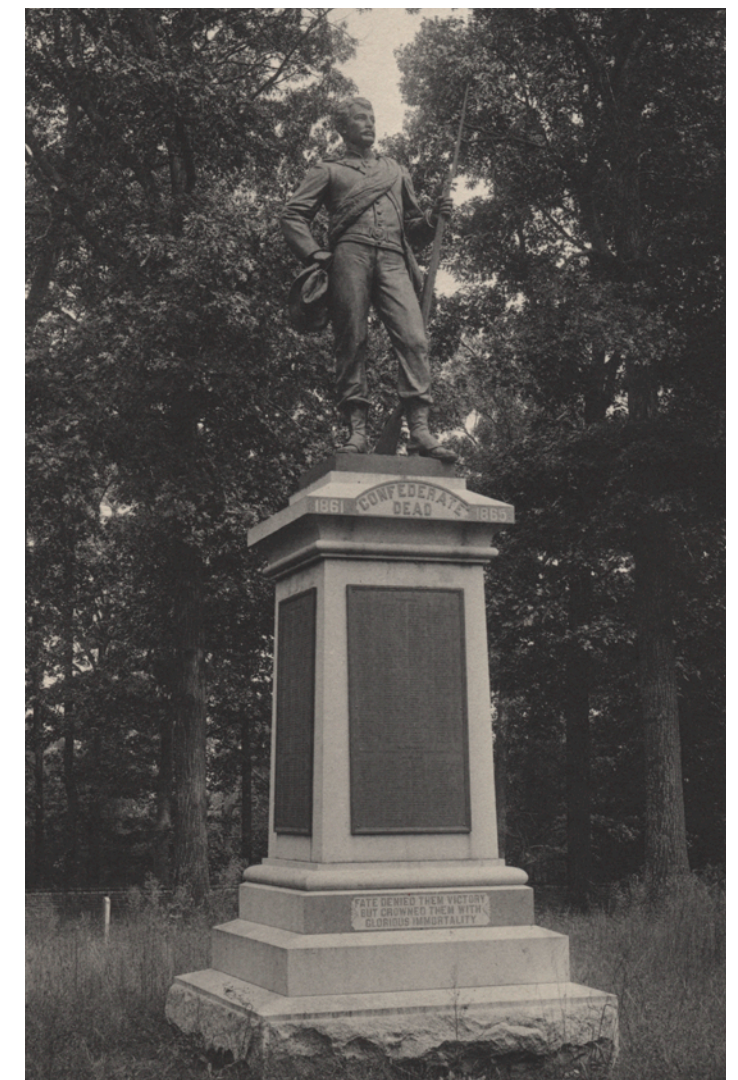


Located across the street from the site of the 1862 hanging, Reconciliation Park is dedicated to promoting reflection and healing between Dakota and non-Dakota peoples. A large memorial scroll inscribed with the names of the 38 executed Dakota warriors was dedicated in 2012—the 150th anniversary of the hanging. (Blue Earth County Historical Society)

Lincoln replied, “I could not afford to hang men for votes.” So while the information included in the commission’s report was not inaccurate, the whole story puts Lincoln’s actions in a considerably different light.

These stories represent examples of negative presentism, that is, instances in which reevaluating the past using a very narrow focus—one that does not seek to truly understand the historical context—results in clouding rather than clarifying the issue at hand. There are, however, positive examples as well. One of the first applications of presentism to attract the public’s attention was the movement to remove monuments and memorials commemorating the civil and military leaders of the Confederate States of America. According to a 2019 report issued by the Southern Poverty Law Center, “Whose Heritage? Public Symbols of the Confederacy,” there were 780 such monuments in the United States. Some of them were in northern and western states, including California, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Montana, New York, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin. The majority, however, were put up in the South, mostly during the Jim Crow era from the late nineteenth through the early twentieth century, and then again during the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s. Although efforts to remove them had begun several years earlier, the movement was spurred by the murder of nine African Americans in the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina, in June 2015. It was further stimulated by the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, that was organized to protest the proposed removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee in 2017, and the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota, in 2020. As of April 2023, according to the Southern Poverty Law Center, a total of 482 Confederate symbols have been removed, renamed or relocated from public spaces since 2015, some of them by state or local governments and some by protesters.

Those who advocated taking down the statues argued that, as presented in a statement issued by the American Historical Association (AHA) in August 2017, the purpose of doing so was “not to remove history, but rather to alter or call attention to a previous interpretation of history.” According to the AHA, erecting the monuments was intended not just to commemorate “the Confederacy, but



This monument to University of Virginia students who died while fighting for the Confederacy was erected in the university’s cemetery in 1893. Monuments to common soldiers still dot the landscape in both the North and the South. (Albert and Shirley Small Special Collections Library, University of Virginia)

also the ‘Redemption’ of the South after Reconstruction,” and was “part and parcel of the initiation of legally mandated segregation and widespread disenfranchisement [of African Americans] across the South. Memorials to the Confederacy were intended, in part, to obscure the terrorism required to overthrow Reconstruction, and to intimidate African Americans politically and isolate them from the mainstream of public life.” Moreover, the AHA argued, “Decisions to remove memorials to Confederate generals and officials who have no other major historical accomplishments does not necessarily create a slippery slope towards removing the nation’s founders, former presidents, or other historical figures whose flaws have received substantial publicity in recent years. George Washington owned enslaved people, but the Washington Monument exists because of



On April 20, 1861, more than 200,000 people gathered at Union Square in New York City to affirm their commitment to the Union. Maj. Robert Anderson brought with him the flag from Fort Sumter, and during the rally it hung on the 1856 equestrian statue of George Washington. The New York Herald proclaimed that this “united demonstration . . . will live forever in the world’s history.” Images of the flag atop the monument, such as this one from Harper’s Weekly (71200908408087), inspired Americans throughout the North. This photograph (New-York Historical Society) depicts the massive crowd around the monument to Washington. Today, sculptor Henry Kirke Brown’s historic statue is at risk of removal because of Washington’s status as a slaveholder.

his contributions to the building of a nation. There is no logical equivalence between the builder and protectors of a nation—however imperfect—and the men who sought to sunder that nation in the name of slavery.” While this is all unquestionably true, the philosophy behind removing the statues clearly fits the definition of presentism, even if in a form that many—if not most—people would consider a good cause. (Regrettably, in some instances these efforts have been carried to extremes: A statue of Thomas Jefferson was removed from New York’s City Hall and the fate of the equestrian statue of George Washington in Union Square is currently being debated.)

Interestingly, historians, at least at the time, appeared to be divided on the question. For its July 2017 issue, *Civil War Times* magazine solicited a number of historians’ thoughts on the subject, and published them in an article titled “Empty Pedestals: What Should Be Done with Civil Monuments to the Confederacy and Its Leaders?” While none of them argued that the monuments be left standing without adding something to provide context, some were adamant about tearing them down. For example, Michael J. McAfee, then-curator of history at the West Point Museum, argued that the leaders of the Confederacy were traitors who “turned their backs on their nation, their oaths, and the sacrifices of their ancestors in the War for Independence. . . . They attempted to destroy their nation to defend chattel slavery and from a sense that as white men they were innately superior to all other races. They fought for white supremacy. That is why monuments glorifying them and their cause should be removed.” On the other hand, James J. Broomall, director of the George Tyler Moore Center for the Study of the Civil War at Shepherd University, was against destroying them. “Make no mistake,” he wrote, “the bronze sentinels and stone plinths . . . offer an incomplete, even dangerous message if they remain silent. . . . Confederate monuments are at once symbols of white supremacy, works of art, affirmations of the Lost Cause, and tributes to white Southerners. Yet, public history and preservation suggest that Confederate monuments can be used as tools for education, deliberation, and even protest.” Megan Kate Nelson, author of several books on American history, took a very different approach. “Confederate memorials,” she wrote, “should neither be retained nor removed: They should be destroyed, and their broken pieces left in situ.” She offered the possibility that “Historians could put up

a plaque next to the fragments, explaining the memorial’s history” but added that “These textual explanations may be unnecessary” because “the ruins of Confederate memorials in cities across the nation would suggest that while white supremacists have often made claims to power in American history, those who oppose them can, and will, fight back.”

Determining the Parameters of Presentism

The controversies cited here constitute only a small percentage of the many instances of presentism. In fact, barely a week goes by without a new one becoming a subject of public discussion. The question of how to deal with what members of today’s society regard as misdeeds by individuals from the past is extraordinarily complicated. To compound the problem, American society is both a fractured and a contentious one, and presentism is just one among many issues that divides its people. To be sure, there is no single solution, and even if such a solution were readily available, implementing it would be, at the least, very difficult. Nevertheless, as has been demonstrated, there have been both positive and negative examples of presentism, and attempting to develop at least some guidelines for fostering the former and eliminating the latter might be of some value.

For example, in considering if, and if so to what extent, an individual from the past who was previously considered worthy of being commemorated should be condemned for their beliefs or actions, there are several questions we could ask ourselves. First, “What did this individual do in their lifetime to warrant being remembered?” Second, “To what extent were their now-questionable views related to the reason for which we remember them?” Third, “Were these views or behaviors out of keeping with the general views or behaviors of the majority of people in the country at the time?” Fourth, “Provided that this individual’s questionable views were exposed, and assuming those views were not the primary reason for their being remembered, is there significant evidence to suggest that their continuing to be favorably remembered is likely to do harm to anyone in the future?”

It is essential that in answering these questions we take into account the fact that people from the past who are favorably looked upon today are so because they contributed something considered to be of value to society.



Despite Robert E. Lee's aversion to the public use of Confederate military symbols after the Civil War, battle flags of the Army of Northern Virginia were installed at his burial site in Lee Chapel at Washington and Lee University in 1930. (Special Collections and Archives, James G. Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University)

Asking these questions, for example, about Thomas Jefferson, should accordingly be instructive. In regard to the first question, we can say that he is remembered, among other achievements, for having written the Declaration of Independence, the founding document of the United States, without which the nation may very well have never existed. He was also the third president of the United States, and in that capacity was responsible for the Louisiana Purchase, which doubled the size of the country. Second, although when he wrote "All men are created equal" Jefferson may not have intended to include anyone other than white men—and there is some debate about that—it does not detract from the value of the idea he was expounding. Third, although he was politically in the vanguard in his time in expressing such democratic views, he did nevertheless speak for many people in the country in making such statements. In addition, the fact that he was a slaveholder, while now justly considered reprehensible behavior, was to a great extent the norm in his own time—not only in the United States, but around the world. Fourth, and finally, although it is perfectly appropriate to make his shortcomings known, as they have been, there is no clear evidence that continuing to revere his words and the philosophy they express would cause any damage in the future.

By contrast, if we were to respond to these same questions in regard to Jefferson Davis, the answers, and the effect of those answers, would be significantly different. As regards the first question, Davis

is remembered because he was the president of the Confederate States of America. This was a nation, as noted by Confederate Vice President Alexander H. Stephens, in his "Cornerstone Address" of March 21, 1861, that was founded "upon the great truth that the negro is not equal to the white man; that slavery, subordination to the superior race, is his natural and moral condition." Moreover, Stephens continued, the Confederacy was "the first [nation], in the history of the world, based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth." In fact, this "great truth" is no truth at all, and accordingly undermines the entire underpinnings of the Confederate cause. The answer to the second question, then, is that Davis is ultimately remembered only because of his beliefs, and would not be remembered except for those beliefs. As to the third question, while many, if not most, people in the United States in Davis's time believed that Black people were inherently inferior to white people, the majority—at least in the more populous northern states—was not in favor of keeping them enslaved. Finally,



In 2014, students at Washington and Lee successfully pressured the university to remove the Confederate flags. (Special Collections and Archives, James G. Leyburn Library, Washington and Lee University)

because the Confederacy was founded on a pernicious lie, continuing to honor its president in any way would appear to endorse his beliefs, and could cause considerable damage to a great many people.

Toward a New American Tradition

For many years America's Puritan tradition dictated that our politicians had to have impeccable morals to even be considered for government office. And in those cases in which they did not—and there certainly were such cases—the people who were aware of it conspired to keep it secret from the public. Recent events, however, suggest that this may no longer be the case. And perhaps at least partly because of that, we are now retroactively applying the same thinking to politicians as well as other well-known individuals from our past. Of course, no one is above reproach, but L. P. Hartley was right when he wrote "The past is a foreign country," and it is well that we remember it. This is not to suggest that we should blind ourselves to the faults of those who came before

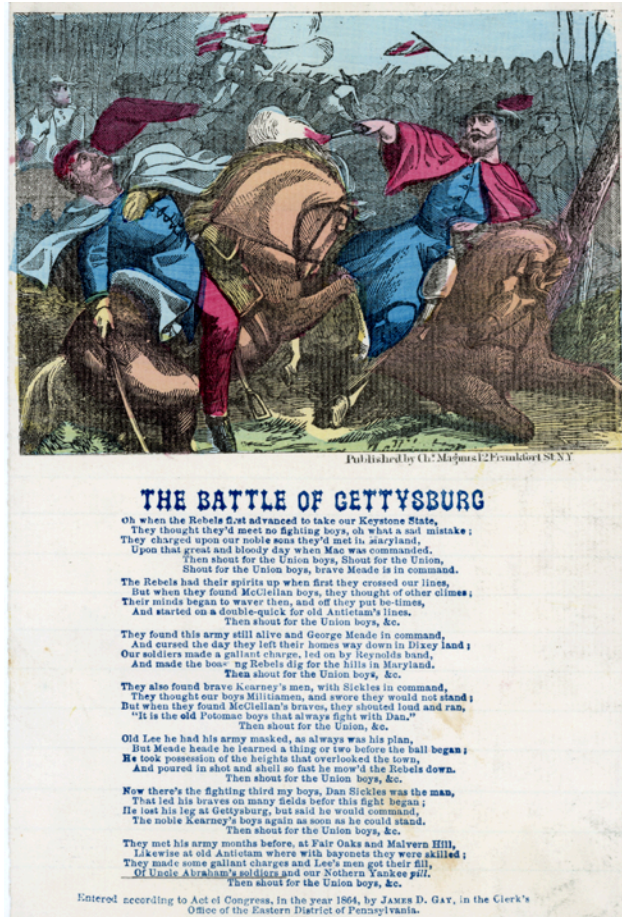
us, but rather that we should remember them, and to whatever extent they deserve it, honor them despite those faults. As W. E. B. DuBois wrote about our sixteenth president in *The Crisis* in 1922, "The foibles and contradictions of the Great do not diminish but enhance the worth and meaning of their upward struggle. Of all the great figures of the 19th century, I love Lincoln not because he was perfect but because he was not and yet triumphed." It is equally important to recognize that there can be benefits to presentism, that many of the strides we've made—and they are considerable—are a result of presentism, as we have reconsidered the practices of the past and, when appropriate, changed them to conform to presumably more enlightened modern sensibilities. Implementing thoughtful, well-considered, and carefully chosen applications of presentism will help us ensure that what we say about the past will be as true as we can determine it to be. At the same time, we must recognize that while we can pass our understanding of the past on to those who follow us, they will inevitably interpret that past according to their own lights, just as we have according to ours.

Rob Kaplan, a former book editor and writer, is president of The Lincoln Group of New York and editor of its newsletter, *The Wide Awake Bulletin*. He has been reading *Lincoln Lore* since he was a teenager in the 1960s.

From the Collection GETTYSBURG

by Jessie Cortesi & Kayla Gustafason

By the time the Battle of Gettysburg took place on July 1–3, 1863, the Civil War had been raging for two years. Stopping the Confederate advance into the North at Gettysburg was a critical development of the war. The items featured here from the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection tell just a few of the stories surrounding the battle and its aftermath.



“The Battle of Gettysburg” Broadside (71200908500205)

“The Battle of Gettysburg” song was published in 1864 to commemorate the Union victory. Its lyrics included: “Oh when the Rebels first advanced to take our Keystone State / They thought they’d meet no fighting boys, oh what a sad mistake. . . . They made some gallant charges and Lee’s men got their fill / Of Uncle Abraham’s soldiers and our Northern Yankee pill.”



“The Soldier’s Children” (LN-0745)

One of the most poignant items in the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection relating to Gettysburg is this carte de visite of Union sergeant Amos Humiston’s children. After this image was found in his hands as he lay dead on the battlefield, the sale of reproductions (such as this one) went to support children orphaned by war.



Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, July 25, 1863, p. 284 (71200908409502)

On July 3, the third and final day of the battle, Confederates under General George Pickett attempted to advance to the top of Cemetery Ridge at the center of the Union line. Pickett’s Charge proved disastrous for the Confederates; they faced close-range Union fire and artillery bombardment, leading to a forced retreat.



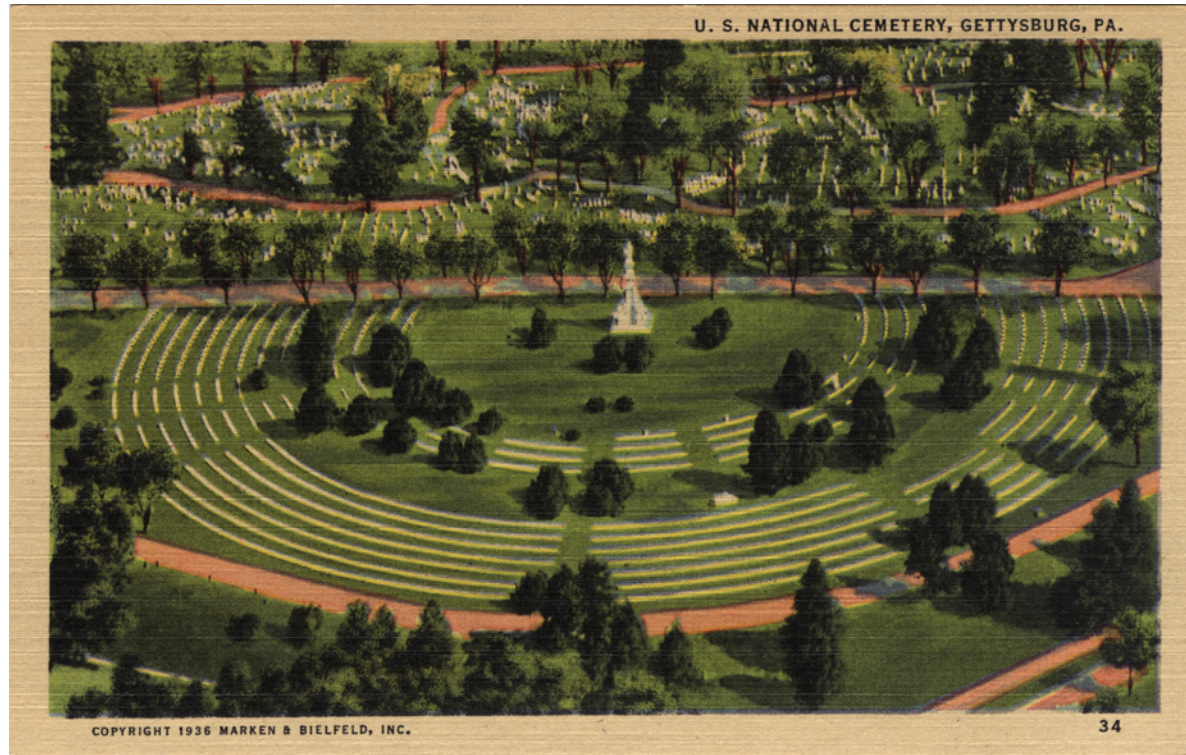
Camp Letterman General Hospital (OC-1150)

The Battle of Gettysburg was the bloodiest battle of the war, with over 50,000 total casualties—dead, wounded, captured, and missing. The carnage left the battlefield strewn with corpses and dying men. The Union army and local citizens worked together to set up a field hospital, Camp Letterman (shown here), and to begin burying the dead.

Lincoln Ballots

FROM THE ELECTION OF 1864

In the Civil War Era, political parties were responsible to design, print and distribute their own ballots. When Lincoln ran for reelection in 1864, Republicans utilized pro-Union words and symbols to appeal to voters. Patriotic slogans were common, including phrases like “For the Union,” “E Pluribus Unum,” “In God We Trust,” and “No Compromise with Treason!” A few ballots even included lyrics from popular songs like “The Battle Cry of Freedom.” Included here are several examples of 1864 election tickets from the Lincoln Collection.



“U.S. National Cemetery, Gettysburg, Pa.” Postcard (ZPC-500)

After the Battle of Gettysburg, the eighteen northern states purchased seventeen acres of land and presented it to the federal government for a national cemetery for the soldiers who died there. Construction began on the cemetery’s Soldiers’ National Monument in 1865, and four years later, on the sixth anniversary of the battle, the monument was dedicated. In 1872 construction of the cemetery was completed and administration of the cemetery was transferred to the federal government.



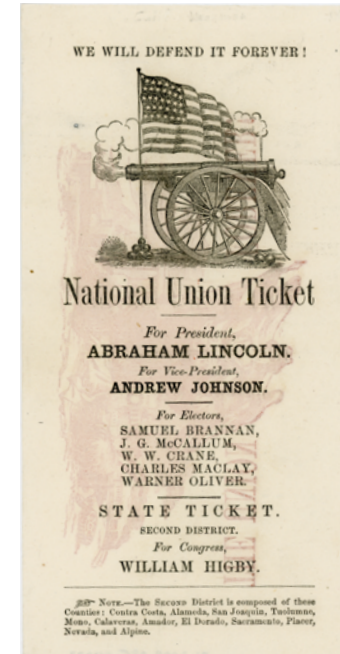
“Lincoln’s Address at Gettysburg” Postcard (ZPC-056)

Abraham Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address has become one of the most famous speeches in American history. The efforts that he had begun with his Emancipation Proclamation were articulated at Gettysburg: turning the war into one not only to preserve the Union, but one also to ensure freedom for all Americans. Some 15,000 spectators attended the dedication ceremony. This postcard was printed in England as part of a series honoring the centennial of Lincoln’s birth.

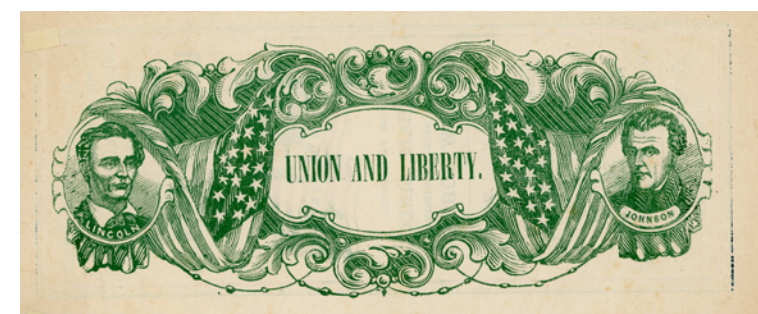
Jessie Cortesi is Senior Lincoln Librarian and Kayla Gustafson is a former Senior Lincoln Librarian with the Rolland Center for Lincoln Research at the Allen County Public Library.



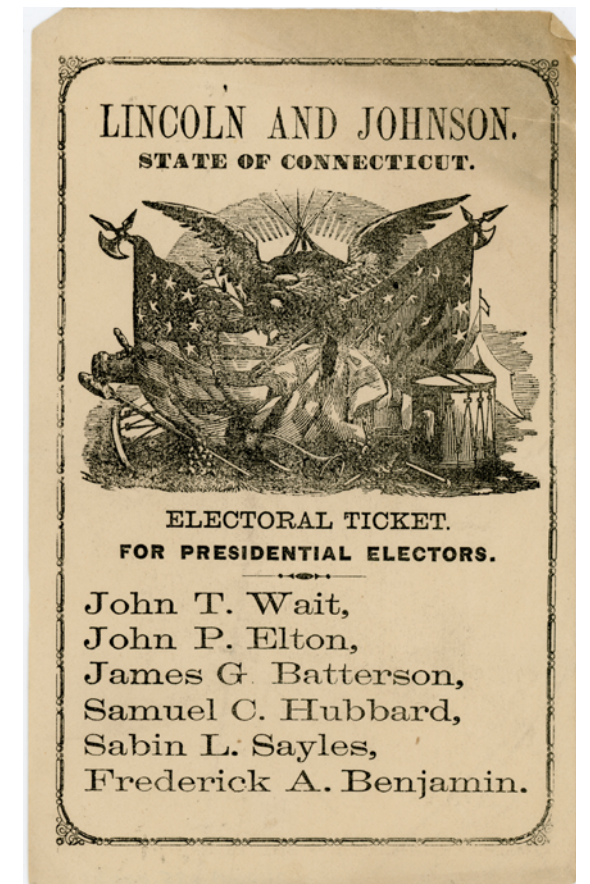
The Grant Club of San Francisco celebrated the victory of the USS Kearsarge over the CSS Alabama off the coast of France on June 19, 1864, on the back of a ballot they produced. (71200908500481)



The front of this California ticket features a cannon and flag, while on the back, the goddess Columbia stands near an American flag, the White House, and the Capitol, with symbols of agriculture and industry at her feet. (71200908500023)



While Lincoln had grown his beard by early 1861, Republicans in one California jurisdiction depicted him without his trademark whiskers. (The image of Andrew Johnson also bears little resemblance to the vice presidential candidate.) (71200908500008)



American eagles, flags, drums, and swords commonly appeared on ballots during the Civil War, as with this Connecticut ticket. (71200908500037)

Lincoln LORE

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