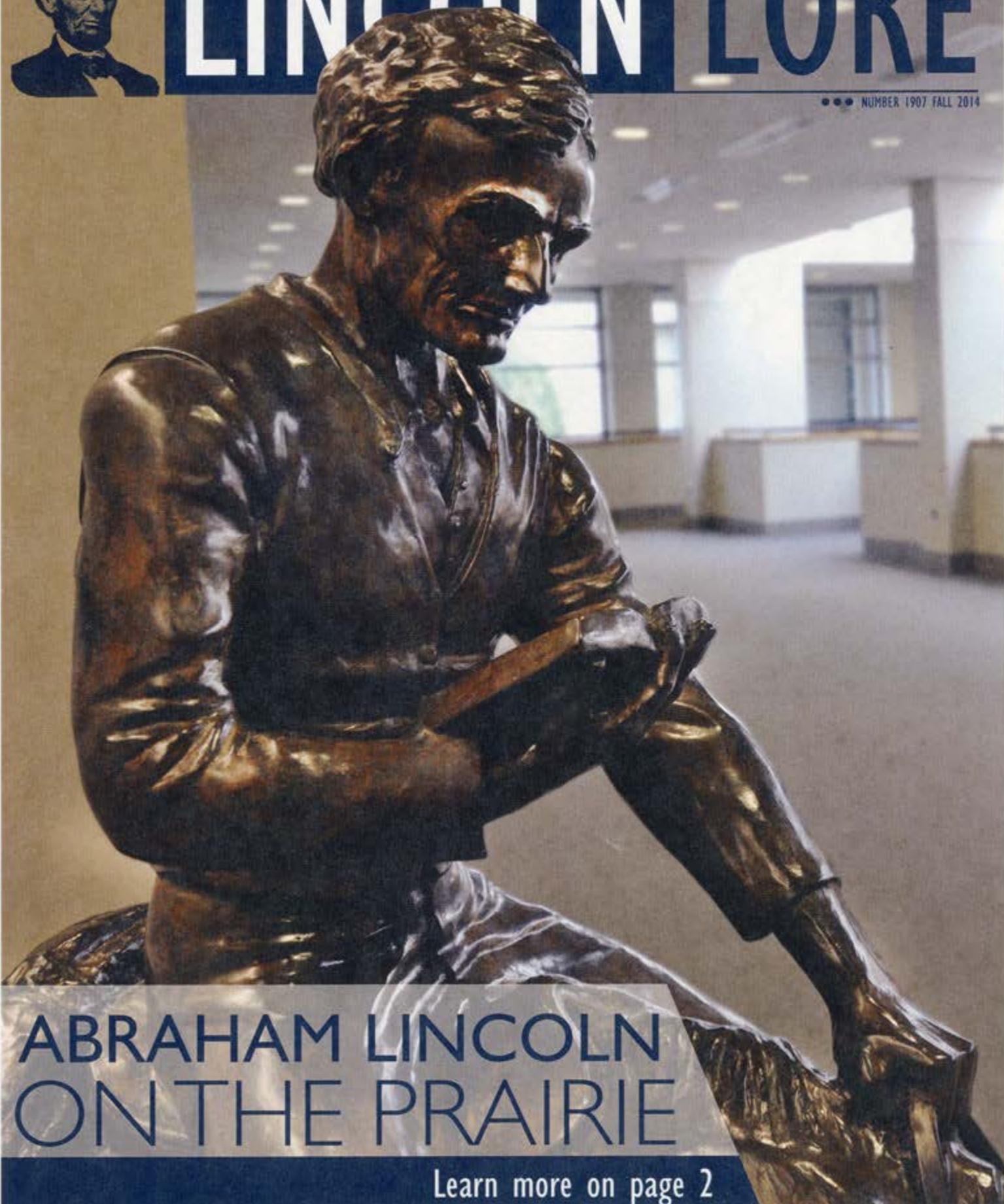




# LINCOLN LORE

NUMBER 1907 FALL 2014



## ABRAHAM LINCOLN ON THE PRAIRIE

Learn more on page 2

## Lincoln Lore

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## ABOUT THE COVER

ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
ON THE PRAIRIE

On July 28, 2004, Jack Hester donated his beloved statue to the Allen County Public Library, Fort Wayne, Indiana. It is on display at the entrance to the library's world famous Genealogy Department. In this photo Jack Hester is speaking and Jeff Krall, library director, is in the background.

Martha Ann Hester (1942-2000), in anticipation of her beloved husband Jack's retirement from Lincoln National Corporation, commissioned this posthumous cast of *Abraham Lincoln on the Prairie* by Anna Hyatt Huntington (1876-1973) at Modern Art Foundry, Astoria, New York, from the original (sometimes referred to as *The Cavalier Rider*) displayed in the Shipman Library at Adrian College, Adrian, Michigan. Martha presented Jack with this statue during the spring of 2000, knowing that she would not live to attend his retirement. Martha and Jack were married for 41 years. Their souls have been joined for eternity.

"...I am the left star that shines at night. Do not stand at my grave and cry.  
I am not there, I did not die." — Mary Faye

Photographs by Katie Harnacher



# An interview with Harold Holzer

regarding his newest book, *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion*. (Simon & Schuster, 2014)



Left to Right: James Gordon Bennett, Henry Raymond, and Horace Greeley

**Sara Gabbard:** You set the stage for Lincoln's understanding of the need to influence public opinion with a statement he made in 1858: "He who moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions." How had he developed this philosophy as an Illinois politician with relatively limited experience on the national scene?

**Harold Holzer:** As I learned in researching this book, Lincoln seemed amazingly aware of the power of the press even while still living in a log cabin with his parents. The fuzziest myth fueled by artist Eastman Johnson's famous painting—of Lincoln sitting by the fireside late at night reading a book—is only partly true. As contemporaries testified, he often read newspapers, too. And while still a young man, Lincoln began submitting editorials to local papers on subjects like education and temperance. Don't forget, too, that when he was village postmaster at New Salem, the local joke was that subscribers got their newspaper subscriptions late, and sloppily re-folded—because the postmaster had read them first. And meanwhile he was serving concurrently as the local agent of the *Sangamo Journal* and submitting unsigned editorials lambasting Democrats. Talk about combining press and politics! This was a young man clearly attracted to reading and influencing the press almost from the outset. And the task grew increasingly sophisticated as his professional sphere expanded. I

was fascinated by another aspect of Lincoln's early self-training. It seemed that whenever he visited a new Illinois town, whether on legal business or to make a political speech—even before the Lincoln-Douglas debates and that famous comment about "he who moulds public sentiment"—he took pains to visit the local Whig, and later, Republican newspaper, to make new friends and create new alliances. Sometimes the initial reception he got was indifferent or even hostile—who was this strange-looking guy trying to use my precious time to chat?—but Lincoln persisted, he won almost all of them over, whether from his passion for issues, his humor, or his amazing knowledge of local political trends. Using these new friendships as ballast, he began expanding his political reach—carried along the way by supportive editorials from new and old friends. But I think it all started at the family hearth—with the boy who loved to read, riveted not just by the Bible, Shakespeare, and Robert Burns, but by newspapers, too.

**SG:** Was Lincoln's relationship with Joseph Medill and the *Chicago Tribune* a factor in his developing sense of the importance of the press if one was to pursue a life in politics?

**HH:** I think wooing and winning Medill was certainly crucial in terms of Lincoln increasing his political influence and press support in tandem—but I think by this point in time Lincoln was already well aware of

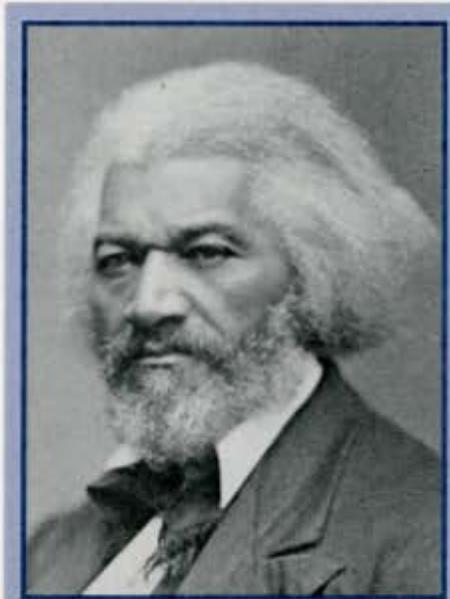
the power of the press—a veteran of the press wars, one might say, albeit mostly at the hometown level. To be sure, Medill was a "catch": he was a pro-Republican editor through and through, and Chicago was a fast-growing city in a progressive region of the state. What Lincoln knew was that he had to become the newspaper's favorite son before he could hope to become Illinois' favorite son. And despite the fractious nature of Chicago politics—yes, it was so even then—he got Medill strongly on his side, and later had the paper not only reporting and supporting him during those 1858 debates, but providing stenographic transcripts and editorial praise during the Lincoln-Douglas debates. The *Chicago Tribune* unabashedly combined the worlds of politics and the press, and I think Lincoln's friendship with Medill, Charles Ray, and others there, helped him see how easily the so-called "firewall" between reporting and campaigning could be breached. Who threw all their political and press power behind Lincoln's 1860 presidential hopes at Chicago? The *Chicago Tribune*—putting out special editions that lauded Lincoln while buttonholing delegates on the floor. Oh, Lincoln was still capable of underestimating those Chicago editors. As early as 1858, the Tribune wanted Lincoln to provide an autobiography detailing his inspiring rise from hardscrabble obscurity. The editors were sure it would win voter support for Republicans statewide that year and make Lincoln senator. But Lincoln ignored the request—didn't follow through until 1859 and 1860, when he provided just such an autobiographical sketch, twice. I think this was one of those rare occasions when Lincoln should have listened to an editor instead of the other way around.

**SG:** You specifically mention Lincoln's relationship with three major publishers: Horace Greeley, Henry Raymond, and James Gordon Bennett. Please elaborate on each, including their lives after Lincoln's assassination.

**HH:** What a trio—and they all knew each other, tried early on to work with each other, and ultimately came to hate each other—and it was not only personal, but political. Bennett was a racist conservative who tilted Democrat, but became more independent

when the Jackson administration failed to give him the political rewards he felt were his due—yet he had amazing business acumen and press instincts, and he once tried to make Greeley his partner in his *New York Herald*. Instead, Greeley went on to start his own anti-slavery daily, the *New York Tribune* (Bennett never forgave him and devoted years to making him a laughingstock). Greeley in turn employed Henry Raymond as an apprentice, then an associate editor. But Raymond found his boss too unorthodox, too easily wooed by crackpot causes, and left him eventually to start the party-line Whig *New York Times*. So by 1851 each had his own paper and his own political base. And they attacked each other as often as they attacked the politicians they opposed. All three hoped to combine politics and journalism from the start—maybe Bennett less so, at least in terms of his personal elevation. Raymond served as Speaker of the State Assembly, New York lieutenant governor, and congressman, all while working as an editor. Greeley wanted to be all of the above (he was briefly an appointed Congressman, filling a vacancy, during Lincoln's Congressional term in Washington)—plus a senator—and was repeatedly thwarted, which is why he broke with William Seward and never forgave him (Seward was Raymond's man). This is the tinderbox of complex New York press relationships Lincoln tried to unravel to his benefit in 1860 (and again when war started in 1861). That he managed, for the most part, with only occasional, albeit dispiriting and potentially dangerous bumps in the road, to keep all three of these egotistic, competitive geniuses in line and generally supportive of the Union cause throughout the war is perhaps the greatest example of Lincoln's superlative management of the press. Greeley went off the reservation after Bull Run, growing almost suicidal as he begged Lincoln to abandon the war. Raymond plotted to have his friend Seward seize power in a kind of unofficial *coup d'état* after Sumter (but was outsmarted by Lincoln). And Bennett questioned going to war until a mob threatened his headquarters, demanding he raise the American flag. All three changed course, and oddly, no one became more loyally pro-Union and pro-war than the finger-to-the-wind Bennett. Lincoln worked hard and successfully to soothe both Raymond and Greeley—and where Bennett was concerned, let the people bully him into supporting resistance to the rebellion.

What happened to these extraordinary men afterwards? First, they spoke nearly with one voice—in remarkably similar words, even—when Lincoln died. And with that, as if their entire *raison d'être* had died, too, they sort of went on the decline a bit. Oh, Greeley tried to ratchet up his influence by signing a bail bond for Jefferson Davis and running as a hopeless outsider against Grant's re-election bid in 1872. As usual, he lost, but this time lost his wife too, then



Frederick Douglass

had a nervous breakdown, and died. Raymond preceded him in death, broken, some said, by his ill-advised but predictably doctrinaire support of Andrew Johnson during the postwar impeachment imbroglio. And Bennett just lost interest, retiring early, handing the *Herald* over to his playboy son, who promptly began letting the paper run down. It was almost as if without Lincoln, the war, and black freedom to squabble over, all three lost steam and relevance at once.

**SG: Please comment on the influence of Frederick Douglass and his *Douglass' Monthly*.**

HH: So hard to know for certain. And it's important to resist the temptation to exaggerate or mythologize here. I mention in the book, I hope not too glibly, that back in the 1850s reading the African-American, even the abolitionist, press was tantamount, at least in Central Illinois, to reading pornography: middle of the road guys just didn't do so. Eventually Lincoln (through his law partner Billy Herndon) did take the anti-slavery *New York Independent*, and I could swear that he got his "right makes might" idea for the closing lines at Cooper Union from

Frederick Douglass's newspaper. Certainly Douglass came later to influence and partner with Lincoln during the White House years, when the two forged a remarkable relationship for the time—but, then, perfectly in keeping with the President's constant efforts to woo, and frankly, use, editors. For Douglass was an editor, that is before Lincoln urged him to become the nation's recruiter-in-chief for "colored" troops and Douglass finally closed his monthly. I like to point to an event in August 1864 as an example of how far their relationship came. During a simply terrible month for Lincoln in which both Greeley and Raymond (who by then was his campaign manager!) bluntly told him he couldn't possibly win a second term as president, ex-editor Douglass came to visit him and instead of complaining, worked out a plan with him to free as many enslaved people in the Confederacy as possible before George McClellan became president and in all likelihood rescinded the Emancipation Proclamation. What an extraordinary moment: the white editors turning on Lincoln, while a black ex-editor worked as a partner literally to free the people whose emancipation Raymond and Greeley had given lip service to, for years.

**SG: Many claim that Lincoln was masterful in manipulating the Press. Do you agree? If so please give some examples.**

HH: Oh, yes, manipulator-in-chief, to be sure. As president, he controlled many of them—maybe purchased their loyalty is a better phrase, harsh as it may sound to modern ears—by giving out political or military patronage to his friends. Greeley got jobs for some of his editors. Raymond sent dozens of names into the White House for appointments. Lincoln gave Bennett's son a naval commission. The new president won the undying loyalty of John Wein Forney—editor of papers in both Philadelphia and Washington—by pushing for him to get the plum job as secretary of the U. S. Senate. Such blatant exercise of political power to reward journalists was an ingrained part of the political culture, but Lincoln masterminded the tradition like the conductor of a philharmonic orchestra. As President, he mastered the pro-Republican Washington press as brilliantly as he had brought the Springfield and Chicago Republican press into line. Over the years he played one editor against the other, made sure his friends were rewarded and his critics denied, wrote anonymous column items on occasion to

get his views into the newspapers (presidents did not hold press conferences in those days), and welcomed editors and correspondents into the White House to hear his jokes and, occasionally, his well-timed leaks. The most famous example of manipulation is undoubtedly his response to Horace Greeley's "Prayer of Twenty Millions," in which he prepared white America for emancipation by hinting he wouldn't do what he had already determined to do—issue his proclamation—unless it helped save the Union. What's reported less often is *how* Lincoln issued his letter to the editor. Rather than send it to Greeley, to whom it was addressed but with whom he was annoyed for writing that editorial in the first place, he released it to a rather conservative Washington paper—and on a day Lincoln knew Greeley would not be able even to reprint it, for the next day was Sunday, when the *New York Tribune* did not publish! Now that is an "in your eye" response, and Greeley knew it. After trying to outfox Lincoln for weeks, for he was told a proclamation was imminent and wanted to get some credit for it by demanding it when he already knew it was coming—wow, this is complicated, no?—he reportedly sighed, "Old Abe is too smart for me."

**SG: Did any of his attempted manipulations ever backfire?**

**HH:** Occasionally. Lincoln tried to be a bit too cute with his famous, so-called "Conkling Letter"—really an 1863 speech to be read aloud back in Springfield—refusing to allow John Wein Forney to get an advance copy to prevent it from being published in Washington prematurely. But why *not* release it in the East first? It would have been smart to do so. Instead it was released first in the West, but in a garbled state, infuriating Lincoln, who thought he had the whole rollout beautifully planned (he got plenty of editorial praise for it anyway, once corrected versions found their way into the papers). Then in 1864, he kind of made a secret political deal with Bennett—Bennett would stop attacking him at the end of the presidential campaign, and in turn Lincoln would name the editor Minister to France: quite a reward for a longtime critic! In fact, while some historians have claimed that Bennett promptly stopped criticizing, even started supporting, Lincoln, the published evidence shows that he did nothing of the kind; he merely increased his attacks on Lincoln's opponent, McClellan. But maybe Lincoln had asked for no more, for he ended up offering the diplomatic post to

Bennett anyway, and then Bennett refused it. It seems he just wanted to be asked, and maybe Lincoln had the whole thing worked out in advance. Bennett had become so disreputable, to so many really a pariah, that it seems all he ever really wanted was social recognition, something Lincoln had denied him for three years (though Mary Lincoln wrote to and visited him—as her husband's secret emissary? That's another story I tell in the book).

**SG: When he began his national political campaign, did reporters usually give him a fair "hearing" or did they concentrate on such things as his appearance, voice, and frontier mannerisms?**

**HH:** Never a "fair" hearing—that wasn't the way it worked in Lincoln's day. Coverage, pro or con, depended on what political party the paper represented. The thing to remember is that nearly every newspaper in the country—probably four of five, were supportive of and bound to either the Republicans or Democrats, and sworn to character assassination and harsh political criticism of their rivals. So there was really no such thing as a "fair hearing" for Lincoln as he rose in political popularity and influence, and he didn't expect it. For example, the pro-Whig (and later pro-Republican) *Springfield Journal* lauded his every word and move, and if it commented at all on his appearance, it marveled at how he never lost his frontier-bred humility and sympathy for the common man. The *Springfield Register* labeled him a dangerous firebrand, and also a homely-looking bumpkin who lacked manners and dignity. And so it went, respectively, with the *Chicago Tribune* vs. the *Chicago Times*, with the *New York Tribune* and *New York Herald* and papers in Boston and Philadelphia all following suit—and on and on. That's why, for the new book, I concentrated on the internecine feuds between these otherwise rigidly partisan editors—especially Greeley fighting with Bennett, since they both published popular and influential national editions, though they both believed in Union and, to different degrees, an end to slavery. It's when party orthodoxy was challenged that the fun began, and Lincoln showed his real savvy by brokering deals, healing wounds, or simply letting the editors fight among themselves, or even with him, until they played themselves out and became, as Lincoln described Greeley late in his presidency, like an old shoe that had worn out and could no longer be repaired and be of use to anybody.

**SG: In your opinion, were the texts of speeches which were reported in newspapers basically accurate?**

**HH:** Oh, there could always be problems, even among friends, as Lincoln learned to his consternation when the local *Springfield Journal* mangled the opening paragraphs of his House Divided speech in June 1858—a blunder that wasn't really caught and corrected until historian Don Fehrenbacher sorted it out for the Library of America collected writings books in 1989. Surely the risk of typographical error explains why an exhausted Lincoln spent the wee hours of the night after delivering his Cooper Union address proofreading the typeset version in the *New York Tribune* press room before releasing it in final form to all the New York papers; he wanted it just right. But let's go back a bit—Lincoln had just begun his political career when newspapers first began to reprint any political speeches. It was considered a huge advance in the reporting of government news, much more timely than reading reprints in the *Congressional Globe* or in mailers that local Congressmen later sent (free) to constituents. During the Lincoln-Douglas debates, of course, we have the other side of the coin: Republican stenographers and editors cleaning up Lincoln's speeches and rebuttals and leaving Douglas's remarks rough, or maybe maimed; and Democratic journalists doing the same for (or was it against?) Lincoln. The issue of unfair transcripts became almost as big a story as the debates themselves in 1858—and here, of course, Lincoln the manipulator had the final word as usual: after he was defeated in the election, after licking his wounds for a bit, he assembled the Republican transcripts of his remarks, and the Democratic reports of his opponents in a scrapbook and had the debates published in a book. Douglas howled with indignation, because he charged that Lincoln had edited his own speeches one more time and failed to give him the same opportunity—true enough, though Lincoln changed his own transcripts very slightly. And so Lincoln won by losing. Douglas retook his Senate seat in 1858, but Lincoln made sure his own popularity spread nationwide by issuing the book, which became a best-seller, and oh-so-conveniently, just before the 1860 Republican convention that the dark horse candidate hoped to take by storm, and did.

**SG: Please "replay" the story of newspaper coverage of Lincoln's visit to Antietam in 1862. Did it**

**start with coverage by Copperhead papers? If so, was it eventually also carried by less opinionated sites?**

**HH:** Lincoln visited the front so often that reporters didn't always cover his travels, as they would a president at any battlefield today. There is no evidence that *any* journalist covered Lincoln extensively or authoritatively during his tour of the Antietam battlefield, but two years later in 1864 the Democratic *New York World* began "reporting," day after day, that the President had disgracefully desecrated that site at the time by asking his aide Ward Hill Lamon to sing a comic ditty while strolling past the dead and wounded still littering the field. Lamon was furious—it simply was not true; he had sung sad songs for Lincoln on their way back from the tour (he often did so to cheer up his melancholy friend), but certainly not on the Antietam battlefield among the dead and wounded. Lamon prepared an indignant reply for the press, but Lincoln thought it best to ignore the unfounded partisan attacks. Those attacks, however, intensified, and Republican readers began writing the White House begging for a denial and warning of the political fallout if the calumny was not rebutted. Finally, Lincoln drafted a beautiful letter of his own—to be sent over Lamon's signature—insisting that during his 1862 visit he had not seen a single dead body on the battlefield, or even a grave on which rain had not already fallen (what a phrasemaker Lincoln was). It might have been one of Lincoln's greatest letters to the editor ever, but in the end he got the anger and hurt out of his system just by writing it out, and in the end decided not to send it. If he hadn't built enough reputation for high character in three-and-a-half years as president, he told Lamon, it was useless to protest now. The calumnies continued—the Democrats wouldn't let the issue go. The *New York World* even added a vicious political cartoon to its arsenal of rebuke—but Lincoln (and even Lamon) held their tongues. And in the end, the President survived the campaign to discredit him, though he won New York State by a smaller margin in 1864 than he had in 1860.

**SG: You have mentioned Lincoln's understanding that, during the Civil War, it was especially important to use photography so that citizens could "connect" with him. Was this concept the same when it came to newspaper articles?**

**HH:** Absolutely. And as much as I've written over the years about Lincoln's

understanding of the power of images, his understanding of the power of the press was always much keener, and he always had far more faith in the power of words than in the capacity of his own homely face to move people to support his causes. And so to kind of sidestep the endless bickering of the political editors he began writing so-called "public letters" to go above the editor's heads and directly to readers. He did so time and again—with the 1863 Erastus Corning Letter that explained and defended his decisions to suppress free press and free speech, if it proved traitorous, in order to preserve the Union from rebellion; with his reply to Greeley on emancipation; with his letters defending black recruitment; and with the Conkling letter, too, to name the most justly famous examples. Did he believe their appearance in the press was important? In one instance we have the example of Lincoln writing to a Kentucky editor saying, well, why hasn't the letter appeared already? He knew he had developed a foolproof system of reaching his constituents from a perch above the discord of the squabbling editors and he was determined to keep the innovation alive and well. That's why Lincoln always used homespun language in these so-called letters: because they were not really intended for their recipients but for the broad public for whom they were really crafted. When, for example, the head of the U. S. Government Printing Office, John Defrees (a Republican editor Lincoln had rewarded with that job, of course) urged the President not to use the phrase "sugar-coated" in his July 4, 1861 message to Congress, Lincoln rejected the proposed edit. His explanation? To paraphrase it, as he put it to Defrees: I don't suppose we've come so far that plain people won't understand what sugar-coated means. Lincoln was very smart to issue these letters (the equivalent of modern presidents giving speeches from the Oval Office or East Room). He had learned from experience. For example, he may have expected major coverage for his Gettysburg Address, but he failed to get it—the press focused on Edward Everett's speech instead. Why bother to travel (he disliked being away from the war office telegraph) only to play second-fiddle to an elderly former senator (it took history's judgment to reverse that assessment) when he could far more profitably stay in Washington and send out public letters from the White House?

**SG: Did future politicians learn from Lincoln's relationship with the Press?**

**HH:** Oh, every president believes he masters the horrible, hypercritical press as ingeniously as Lincoln did, at least at the beginning of their terms, but few really do so—just look at the fights that Presidents from Andrew Johnson to Barack Obama have had after their so-called press "honeymoons." They (or their surrogates) have complained bitterly about enduring the slings and arrows of the opposition media, whether it was the *New York Tribune* during the Johnson impeachment trial, or Fox News during the rollout of Obamacare. Maybe the two great exceptions who really learned from Lincoln were both named Roosevelt: Teddy, as Doris Goodwin has so brilliantly shown in her latest book, *Bully Pulpit*, for befriending progressive journalists and taking them into his confidence; and Franklin, for suggesting he was taking journalists into his confidence by holding repeated press conferences *and*, Lincoln-like, going directly to the people with Fireside Chats. Bill Clinton did the same thing—alternately showing courage and contrition until he defeated press critics and became, arguably, the most popular man on earth. But the real storyline from Andrew Jackson all the way to Obama and Romney is much the same: they all chase press friendships and howl at press criticism. And notice one thing, party affiliation notwithstanding: there isn't a national political figure alive who doesn't believe the press is out to get him, or her. 'Twas ever thus. The answer is still to find a way around the partisan criticism. And just as Lincoln found new ways to evade the roadblocks, smart politicians now use TV commercials, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram to get their messages out unfiltered. Can you imagine how effective Lincoln would have been tweeting his succinct messages? As young, internet-savvy political groupies might say today: simply awesome!

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Harold Holzer

Harold Holzer is the Roger Hertog Fellow at the New-York Historical Society and the chairman of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation. He is also the author, coauthor, or editor of 47 books on Lincoln and the Civil War, including *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech that Made Abraham Lincoln President* and *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*.

# An interview with David S. Reynolds

regarding his newest book, *Lincoln's Selected Writings* (W.W. Norton, September 2014)



Artist's rendering of Abraham Lincoln speaking in Peoria, Illinois in 1854.

**Sara Gabbard:** I think that your division of the book into three parts was a perfect way to present the subject. Please explain to our readers your "game plan."

**David S. Reynolds:** When planning this book, I realized there had never been a Lincoln volume that brought together three kinds of writing: a broad sampling of Lincoln's own works, a range of comments on him in his own time, and modern views of him. So colossal a figure as Lincoln, I think, can be understood only if we understand various perspectives: his own, that of his contemporaries, and that of more recent commentators. By representing these different views of him, my book tries to capture Lincoln's ample spirit and his profound impact on history.

**SG:** Was it terribly time-consuming to decide which items to use in each of your three parts? It seems as if you would have had to go through mountains of material in order to make your final selections.

**DSR:** Mountains of material, yes! The challenge here was to make selections from three enormous bodies of writing: the eight volumes of Lincoln's collected works; the countless responses to him by his contemporaries; and the more than 14,000 books and numerous articles and book chapters that have been written on Lincoln since his time. With regard to Lincoln's writings, I started with the classics—the First and Second Inaugurals, the Gettysburg Address, the Cooper Union speech, the Emancipation Proclamation—and worked outward to lesser-known but still fascinating and important writings by him, including speeches, letters, poems, proclamations, and excerpts from his debates with Senator Stephen A. Douglas. In making these Lincoln selections, I made sure to include everything that was contained in other single-volume Lincoln anthologies and to add other significant works that these anthologies omit. When choosing works by Lincoln's contemporaries, I tried to represent different genres—news reports, editorials, campaign songs, poems, and fictional works—and varying attitudes toward him, from the hagiographic to the hostile to the moderate. An especially daunting task was making

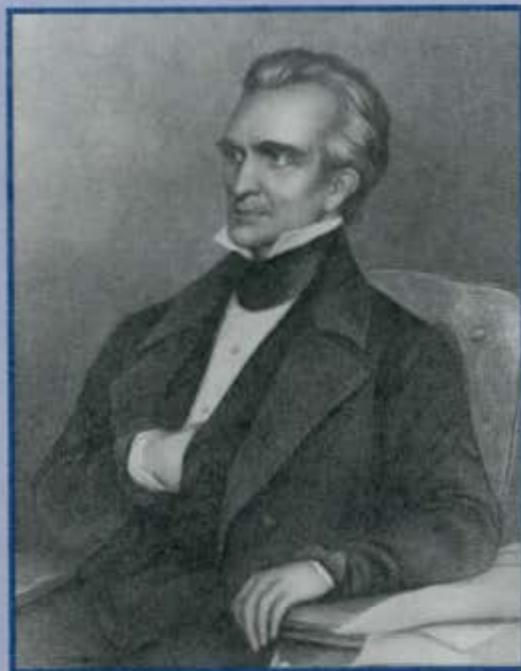
choices from the many superb writings on Lincoln that have appeared since his death. Here, I strove to bring together works by leading historians and critics who explore different themes related to Lincoln—including race, the law, politics, writing style, military leadership, literary culture, and global influence—in order to provide a rounded picture of America's greatest president.

**SG:** I've always been fascinated by the 1838 Lyceum Address, mainly because it seems so unlike most of his later concise, lawyer-like speeches. What is your "take" on this Address?

**DSR:** The lyceum address typifies Lincoln's early speeches, which tended to be rambling and discursive, as opposed to his later ones, like the Gettysburg Address and the two Inaugurals, which were pithy and eloquent. But a similar theme runs through all of Lincoln's major speeches, from the lyceum address onward: that is, the need for Americans to devote themselves to what he calls "the preservation of our political institutions." Both early and late in his political career, Lincoln feared that these institutions were threatened by lawless, revolutionary passions. The lyceum address was delivered during what historians have called "the turbulent decade"—a time of race riots, violence against abolitionists, church burnings, and so on. In his lyceum speech, Lincoln gives instances of such violence—the lynching of a black man in St. Louis and race-related vigilante violence in Mississippi—and decries this "mobocratic spirit," which, he contends, erodes America's governmental and legal framework. He calls upon his countrymen to rise above anarchic, revolutionary passions and to observe laws and the governmental process as established by the founding fathers. This same reverence for the Constitution and the founders undergirds his later, more famous speeches.

**SG** You chose to include the 1846 Handbill Replying to Charges of Infidelity. Please comment on both the handbill itself and the background which caused Lincoln to issue the statement.

**DSR:** In 1846, Lincoln ran for Congress in the Illinois Seventh District against the Democrat Peter Cartwright, a famous Methodist preacher. Cartwright, trying to rally his Christian base, accused Lincoln of being a skeptic or even an atheist. In response,



President James Polk

Lincoln published a handbill stating that although he belonged to no church, he had never denied the truth of the Scriptures or had spoken with intentional disrespect of religion. He distributed his handbill among influential friends and later sent it to a local newspaper, which printed it. Lincoln's handbill was ambiguously worded. Although Lincoln read the Bible, believed in God, and sometimes attended church, he never became a church member or expressed a definite faith in Christ's divinity or the Bible as God's revealed word.

**SG:** Please explain the 1847 "Spot Resolutions." Do you see any current support for this type of reasoning in international affairs?

**DSR:** Like many antislavery Northerners, Lincoln opposed the Mexican War, launched by President James Polk, because it seemed to be a Southern ploy to extend slavery into new western territories that would be acquired from Mexico. Trying to show that the war had not originated on U. S. soil—and was therefore an act of American aggression—Lincoln in December 1847 proposed a resolution before the House of Representatives requesting President Polk to identify the exact spot (the geographical location) where the war began. Lincoln's spot resolutions got nowhere and had a temporarily damaging effect on his career, for it made him appear unpatriotic and nitpicking. Derogated by opponents as "spotty Lincoln," he later defended himself by insisting

that, while he had spoken out against the war, he always voted for bills financing American troops. Territorial disputes and questions about American imperialism, which informed Lincoln's spot resolutions, surround modern wars too, as we see in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and elsewhere.

**SG:** Do historians give the 1854 "Peoria Speech" the attention it deserves?

**DSR:** Most historians recognize its importance, but it is still not as celebrated as it should be. The speech is significant for several reasons. Responding to Senator Stephen Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act, which made possible the expansion of slavery into the western territories, Lincoln made a careful historical argument to support his view that America's founders had placed slavery on the road to extinction and that now this principle was in danger of being violated.

Also, for the first time publicly, Lincoln firmly expressed his moral opposition to slavery. He declared, "I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world." The speech also outlined Lincoln's views on race. Unlike most people in his day, Lincoln believed that African Americans were human beings, not property. In the speech, Lincoln affirmed the humanity of blacks, even though he conceded that black people would never be accepted as equals in America, due to widespread racism and therefore should be deported to Liberia. Finally, the Peoria speech is noteworthy for its charitable attitude toward the South. Southerners, Lincoln declares, are exactly what Northerners would be in their situation, and vice versa. This compassionate outlook anticipates his famous pronouncement about "malice toward none" and "charity for all" in the Second Inaugural Address.

**SG:** Please comment on the 1859 letter/autobiography to Jesse Fell.

**DSR:** This letter contained the first autobiographical sketch written by Lincoln. Jesse Fell, an old friend, had been asking for information about Lincoln's life because of growing interest in the possibility of a Lincoln candidacy for the presidency. After refusing Fell's request several times, Lincoln finally responded with this autobiographical letter. Lincoln introduced this "little sketch" of himself with the self-effacing comment, "There is not much of it, for the reason, I

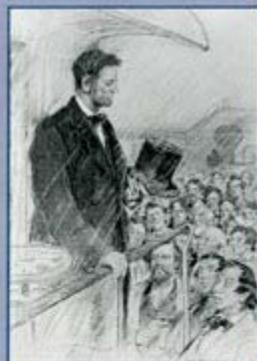
suppose, that there is not much of me." In the letter, Lincoln emphasizes his humble beginnings: his birth on the Kentucky frontier, his childhood in a "wild region" of Indiana "with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods," and his simple education, which amounted to a short time in school studying "reading, writing, and ciphering" to the Rule of Three, after which he educated himself, studied for and practiced the law, and entered politics intermittently. "I was losing interest in politics," he confessed, until the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, which "aroused me again." In the letter Lincoln described himself as nearly six feet four inches tall, "lean in flesh, weighing, on an average, one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair and gray eyes."

**SG:** You cover several of the speeches which President-elect Lincoln made in 1861 during his trip from Springfield to Washington. Did he have a specific purpose in mind for these presentations? Were they effective?

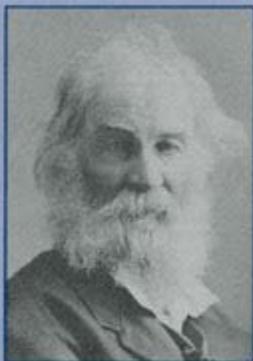
**DSR:** President-elect Lincoln made this trip east at a perilous historical moment. As a result of the election of an anti-slavery Republican president, seven Southern states had already seceded from the Union; four more would follow. Lincoln's speeches on his trip east were intended to communicate his deep commitment to the Union and his disavowal of hostile intentions against the South. Pointing out what he saw as the impossibility of secession, he declared that the rights of a state did not nullify the Union and the Constitution under which all the states were created. He insisted that he did not want war but that he would firmly defend federal property in the South, such as forts—which indeed he did in April 1861, when he called up 75,000 volunteers after the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina.

**SG:** Please compare Lincoln's First and Second Inaugural Addresses. Can we assume that he had a different goal in mind for each?

**DSR:** The First Inaugural was intended to prevent the outbreak of civil war by assuring the South that the North would not interfere with slavery where it already existed. The only dispute between the sections, Lincoln



Left to right: Lincoln leaving Springfield, Walt Whitman, Carl Sandburg visiting the Lincoln Museum with R. Gerald McHenry, museum director, Ralph Waldo Emerson



said, was that one believed that slavery was right and ought to be extended, while the other thought it was wrong and ought not to be extended. The Union, Lincoln declared, was perpetual and could not be dissolved by a state or a group of states. Lincoln concluded by telling the South, "We must not be enemies." He reminded Southerners that they were tied to Northerners by "the mystic chords of memory" that connected all Americans to the Revolutionary generation. In the Second Inaugural, Lincoln again encompassed both the Northern and Southern points of view, but this time with the goal of healing the nation's wounds after the war. The war, he said, had originated because of a disagreement over slavery. During the war, both sections read the same Bible and prayed to the same God. It was now time, he declared, to put aside malice and exercise charity. The Second Inaugural had the tone of a sermon; only 750 words long, it mentioned God fourteen times, contained three Biblical quotations, and invoked prayer three times. But Lincoln took no definite religious position. Instead, he communicated his long-standing conviction that God's ways remain unknowable to humans.

**SG:** You quote from "The Wisdom of the First Inaugural Address." Please describe this piece.

**DSR:** This article, which appeared in the

Republican newspaper the *New York Tribune*, praised the Inaugural for "its sagacity as well as its courage." The essay took note of Lincoln's judiciousness, candor, and decisiveness, exemplified by his unshakable fidelity to the Constitution and the Union and his gracious but firm attitude toward the South.

**SG:** Describe Emerson's "The President's Proclamation."

**DSR:** Ralph Waldo Emerson, America's leading philosopher, described the Emancipation Proclamation as "a poetic act," one of the rare "jets of thought into action" that happen once as a century or so, a crucial "step forward in the direction of catholic and universal interests." Like everything virtuous, Emerson wrote, the freeing of millions of enslaved blacks was aligned with nature, "because Nature works with rectitude, and 'the virtues of a good magistrate urdo a world of mischief.... as one midsummer day seems to undo a year of war.'" For Emerson, both the war and emancipation were inevitable, since principled justice, as embodied in Lincoln, naturally brought about the North's sacred struggle for freedom.

**SG:** As required for historical accuracy, you include several anti-Lincoln diatribes. Please comment on "Lines on the Proclamation Issued by the Tyrant Lincoln" and "Lincoln as Absolute Dictator: A Copperhead's Perspective."



**DSR:** "Lines on the Proclamation," a poem written by "a Rebel" and published in a Confederate newspaper, was a bitter response to Lincoln's 1863 "Proclamation Appointing a National Fast Day," one of several proclamations of prayer or thanksgiving that Lincoln issued during the war. The poem rails against Lincoln, describing him as a "maria-tyrant" who encouraged his people to pray for the success of the Union Army, which, says the author, was only a "cosmic hilling band" that brought "murder, rape, blood" into "the noblest, fairest land on earth" (the South), "a more Christian clime" than the North. The poem reminds us that the Confederacy, which, unlike the North, mentioned God in its Constitution, considered itself truly Christian, as opposed to the "infidel" North, with its allegedly secular leader. The other piece, "Lincoln as Absolute Dictator," expressed the common view on the part of Copperheads—Northern Democrats who opposed the war—that Lincoln used his presidential war powers in what the writer calls a "despotic and atrocious" manner.

**SG:** Your book *Walt Whitman's America* is not only my favorite book about Whitman but my favorite for the picture you give of 19th-Century America in its totality. Please comment on Whitman's reaction



to the assassination, including your own chapter titled "My Captain."

**DSR:** There was good reason that Walt Whitman gave a speech on "The Death of Abraham Lincoln" over and over again in the last dozen years of his life. He was fixated on what he called "the tragic splendor of [Lincoln's] death, purging, illuminating all." The assassination, he declared, had unequalled influence on the shaping of the Republic. Many violent, contradictory cultural elements Whitman had tried to harness and redirect in his poetry volume *Leaves of Grass*—tensions over slavery, sensationalism, crowd participation at theaters, acting style, and mob violence—found their outlet in the murder of Lincoln in Ford's Theatre by the white-supremacist actor John Wilkes Booth, and the appalling of confusion and grief that followed. In Lincoln's death, Whitman declared, "there is a cement to the whole people, subtle, more underlying, than any thing in written constitution, or covenants or armies." The reminiscence of Lincoln's death, he noted, "belongs to these States in their entirety—not the North only, but the South—perhaps belongs most tenderly and devotedly to the South." Whitman had been born in Kentucky, so that Lincoln called him "a Southern contribution," and he had shown kindness to the South during the war—Whitman noted, for instance, that

he avoided the word "merit" in his speeches. In death Lincoln became the Martyr Chief, admired by many of his former foes. In life and death Lincoln had, in Whitman's view, accomplished the cleansing and unifying mission he had designed for his own all-encompassing poetry.

**SG:** How reliable is Carl Sandburg in his treatment of Abraham Lincoln?

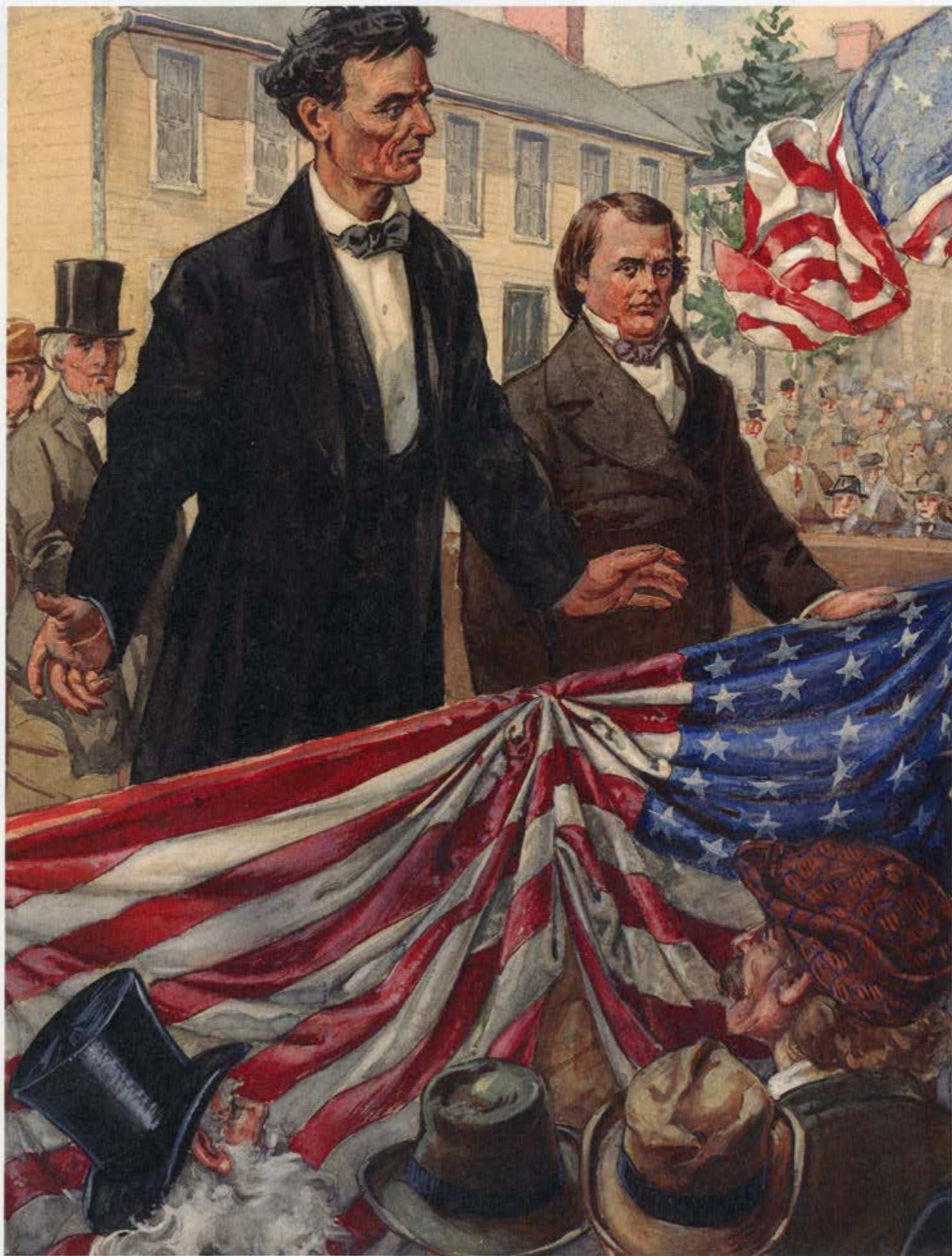
**DSR:** Like Whitman, Sandburg was a poet responding to Lincoln. Both poets wrote colorfully and passionately about this figure who, for them, embodied America's highest democratic ideals. Sandburg produced a full-scale Lincoln biography—his two-volume *The Prairie Years* appeared in 1926, followed by his four-volume *The War Years* in 1939. Sandburg's biography won a Pulitzer Prize and had a lasting influence on popular views of Lincoln. Sandburg renders Lincoln's life in a lively, encyclopedic narrative that is based on fact but, at times, is sentimental and embellished. Some of his sources are unreliable or unidentified. Historians today fault him with occasional inaccuracy. Nonetheless, Sandburg's books remain a landmark in Lincoln biography.

**SG:** Allen Guelzo subtitled his book on the Lincoln/Douglas Debates as "The Debates that Defined America." Please comment.

**DSR:** Guelzo points out that Lincoln in his debates with Stephen A. Douglas raised the possibility that there could be a moral core to American democracy. For Douglas, slavery was a neutral institution that was condoned by the Constitution and that could be voted up or down by individual states. For Lincoln, slavery was a gross injustice that contradicted America's egalitarian ideals. Lincoln's moral redefinition of America, Guelzo suggests, guided the North during the Civil War and influenced American policy in later periods, such as the Cold War and the Age of Terror.

**SG:** Richard N. Current refers to Abraham Lincoln as "The Master Politician." Do you agree?

**DSR:** I certainly agree. As a politician, Lincoln skillfully built the Whig Party in Illinois before navigating his way to the Republican nomination for president in 1860. Although he did not campaign for



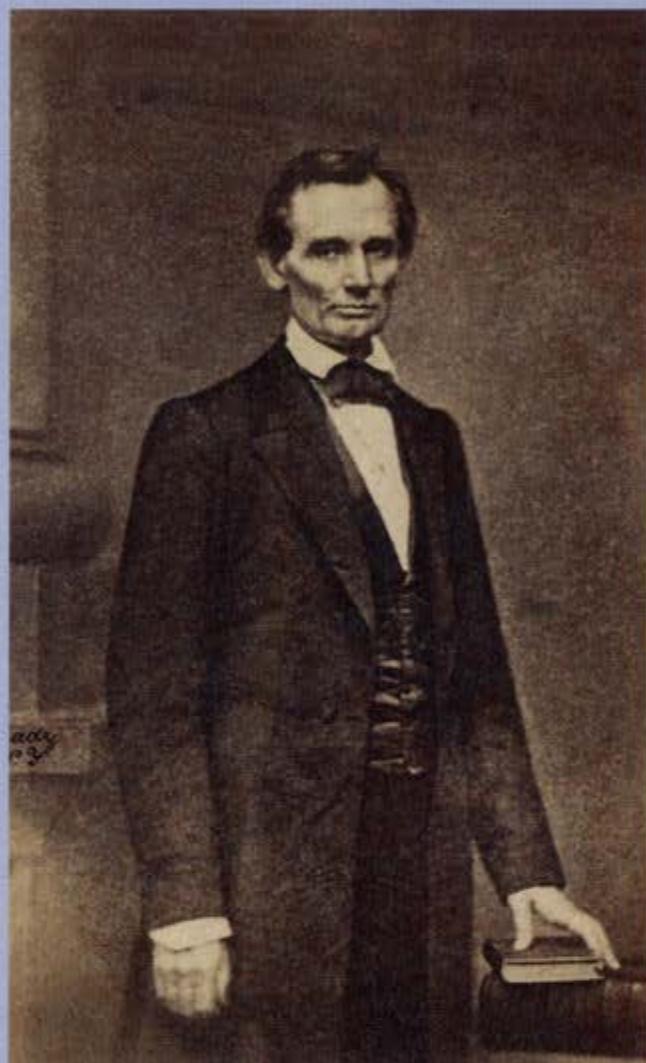
himself—presidential candidates did not do that then—his backers made much of his image as the rough-hewn Illinois Railsplitter, the quintessential self-made American. Besides having populist appeal, Lincoln was an adroit wire-puller and party manager. He regularly rewarded supporters, real or potential, with offers of government jobs. He avoided extreme statements, and he knew how to manipulate others unobtrusively.

**SG: Language is so important in the Lincoln story. For so long, I think that the story of the Address at Cooper Union was generally given only a cursory glance until Harold Holzer described the Address as the speech that made him president. Please comment.**

**DSR:** Holzer argues convincingly that the address that Lincoln delivered at New York's Cooper Institute on February 27, 1860, led to his becoming president. Lincoln electrified the New York audience of 1,500 with his speech, in which he presented historical evidence that America's founders, whom he identified as the signers of the Constitution, stood opposed to the westward expansion of slavery. By making this case persuasively, Lincoln demonstrated that the Republican Party, labelled by its opponents as dangerously revolutionary, was actually conservative in its adherence to the nation's fundamental principles. Stylistically, the Cooper Union speech was direct, logical, and forceful, with dramatic rhetorical flourishes, such as its peroration, in which Lincoln, having declared slavery to be morally wrong, said, "Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it." Like many of Lincoln's great statements, this one combines firmness ("right makes might," "let us... dare"), religious resonance ("Let us have faith...and in that faith"), and humility ("let us...do our duty as we understand it").

**SG: How do you present Eric Foner's writing on Lincoln and Race?**

**DSR:** My book contains selected passages



*Left page: Artist unknown, Lincoln Douglas debate  
Right page: Lincoln in New York City in February 1860, where he gave his speech at Cooper Union. Photo by Mathew Brady.*

from different sections of Eric Foner's *The Fiery Trial* that reveal an evolution in Lincoln's views of race. Lincoln never fully overcame the racial attitudes prevalent among whites of his era. In conversation, he used the words "nigger" and "darky," and he enjoyed blackface minstrel shows. But Foner points out that Lincoln's pronouncements on race became more progressive as time passed. Early on, in the 1850s, though he voiced his opposition to slavery, he spoke quite conservatively about alleged differences between whites and blacks that he thought would prevent them from living on equal terms in America. He also publicly endorsed colonization, or the movement to ship blacks to Liberia or elsewhere. But after issuing the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, Lincoln ceased his public support of colonization, a plan he had come to regard

as unfeasible. In his private relations with African Americans, he did not exhibit racism. Frederick Douglass, who met with Lincoln often during the war, said, "In all my interviews with Mr. Lincoln, I was impressed with his entire freedom from popular prejudice against the colored race." Shortly before his death, Lincoln wrote that he believed the right to vote should be extended to blacks who were "very intelligent" or who had served in the Union army—the first endorsement of African-American suffrage by a U. S. president.

**SG: What was James McPherson's view of Lincoln and the Strategy of Unconditional Surrender?**

**DSR:** McPherson demonstrates that although Lincoln wanted peace, he knew it could be achieved only through a hard war. Lincoln was a hands-on commander-in-chief. He read books on military strategy and kept a vigilant watch on developments on the battlefield. He spent more time in the telegraph office sending and receiving military dispatches, than anywhere else except the White House. He shaped the aggressive tactics of Generals Grant, Sherman, and Sheridan, whose campaigns destroyed the Confederacy and brought about its unconditional surrender.

**SG: What is the subject of your next book?**

**DSR:** I'm working on a book for Penguin in which I place Lincoln in his times by discussing unexplored connections between him and his cultural and social contexts.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### David S. Reynolds

David S. Reynolds is the Distinguished Professor of English and American Studies at the City University of New York Graduate Center. He is the author of *Walt Whitman's America: A Cultural Biography*, *Waking Giant: America in the Age of Jackson*, and *John Brown, Abolitionist*.



Left to Right: Henry Halleck, William Sherman, Ulysses S. Grant and wife, Julia

## Lincoln and His Commanders: Grant, Sherman and Halleck

by John F. Marszalek

As Abraham Lincoln completed what was to be his first inaugural address that March 1861, the tension around the event was palpable. Beginning in December 1860, southern states had seceded from the Union, one by one, and in February they had established a government of their own in Montgomery, Alabama. Jefferson Davis became president, and war quickly followed. Lincoln had practically no military experience unless being blooded by mosquitoes in the Black Hawk War qualified him for leading a nation in a desperate civil conflict.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, Jefferson Davis was a West Point graduate and one of the most successful secretaries of war of the 19th century.

Yet Lincoln became a marvelous military leader, while Jefferson Davis proved wanting. Historians have almost universally considered Lincoln highly superior to Davis in military leadership, although few agree with celebrated historian David M. Potter who said that Davis “cared more about proving he was right than about gaining success.”<sup>2</sup>

But Lincoln did not do it alone. It was the generals he appointed who led Federal armies to military victory, so his choice of army commanders was crucial. He had a difficult time finding the right people for

the right job. He tried McClellan, Frémont, Pope, Burnside, Hooker, and others, but he did not find the right generals until he settled on Halleck, Grant, and Sherman—in the right combination.

Lincoln did not know these men when he became president. Of the three, only Halleck had any name recognition.<sup>3</sup> He had written the most famous American book on military tactics and strategy, and Lincoln came to know it intimately when he borrowed it from the Library of Congress and read it from cover to cover. Grant and Sherman were both West Point graduates (1843, 1840), but the public knew little about them. In fact, they could both be considered failures in the ante-bellum period, the two men barely scratching out an existence for themselves and their families. Sherman and Grant had political supporters, however: Sherman, his senator brother and his leading Whig father-in-law, Thomas Ewing, and Grant, fellow Galena, Illinois resident and congressman, Elihu Washburne. These politicians bent Lincoln’s ear about their charges, and their support certainly helped Grant’s and Sherman’s reputation in Lincoln’s mind.<sup>4</sup>

Although Lincoln did not have a per-

sonal acquaintance with any of these men, he shared some common experiences with them. All four men looked disheveled in their appearances, their clothes always seeming not to fit. Lincoln, Sherman, and Halleck had been lawyers, although Sherman hardly made a success of that profession, while Lincoln and Halleck were eminently successful. Lincoln and Halleck had both lost senatorial races in the 1850s, while Sherman and Grant could not stay far enough away from politics. Sherman even said that he would prefer going to the penitentiary than to the White House.<sup>5</sup> Lincoln and Sherman had difficult assertive wives, while Halleck’s wife is virtually unknown, even today, and Grant’s wife’s entire life was focused almost exclusively on her husband.

Grant, Sherman, Halleck, and Lincoln also shared other similarities. They were each born into old-line families. Grant was able to trace his lineage back to Matthew Grant in the 17th century. Sherman was related to the Shermans and Hoyts of Colonial Connecticut, and Halleck’s kin were the Hallecks of early New York. They all came from English stock. Lincoln’s lineage was nowhere near as impressive as the other three men. His family was poor rather than substantial.

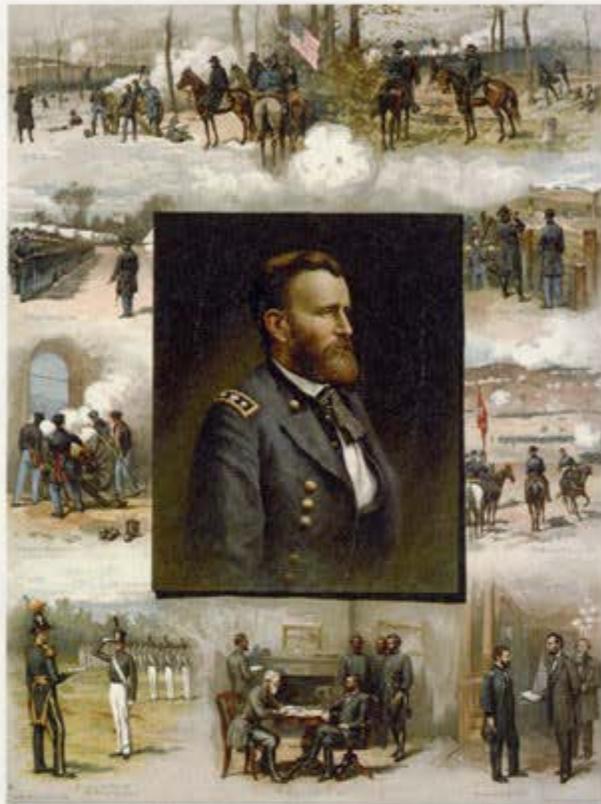
The relationships the four men had with their fathers were also unhappy. Sherman lost his father at the age of nine, and he never felt comfortable with his impressive foster father, Thomas Ewing. Lincoln and Halleck both had distant relationships with their fathers, and neither even attended his sire's funeral. Halleck, in fact, ran away from home at the age of fourteen and never saw his father again, nor ever corresponded with him. Grant's father took good care of him as a child, but he had difficulty seeing any good in him during his troubled early adult days. Once U.S. Grant became a success, however, then his father tried to take advantage of him.

The four men also had different levels of achievement. Halleck was indeed one of the most famous military men of his generation. His volume, *Elements of Military Art and Science* (1846) was a textbook for many officers of that age, and those who were aware of it may also have known that he had excelled in small unit Mexican War combat. His book on international law was published just when the Civil War was beginning, and it remained in college classrooms far into the 20th century.<sup>6</sup> Because of his successful legal and business career in 1850s California, he was one of the wealthiest men in the nation. He can also be rightly called the father of California statehood, because of his leadership in the 1850 state constitutional convention. Near the end of the decade he became military commander of the California state militia.

When the Civil War began, Halleck was only forty seven years old and in excellent physical shape. Winfield Scott and Dennis Hart Mahan thought that Halleck should be Scott's replacement as commanding general,<sup>7</sup> but because he was so far away in California, Lincoln chose George B. McClellan instead. Yet, Lincoln gave Halleck an important post too, head of Union military operations in pivotal Missouri.

Grant was hardly as well known or as successful. He graduated from West Point in 1843, entered the Army, served in a variety of army posts, and fought well in the Mexican-American War. While on the Pacific Coast away from his wife and children, Grant developed depression and, like most army men of that age, he took to drinking.

Unable to hold his liquor like most of his compatriots, he unfairly gained the reputation of being a drunkard. His martinet commanding officer made matters worse, so Grant resigned his commission.<sup>8</sup> He tried a variety of civilian tasks in Missouri and failed at all of them until he took a position in his father's leather goods store in Galena, Illinois. It was while Grant was at this boring and unhappy job that the war began.



*Ulysses Grant surrounded by nine scenes of his career from West Point graduation in 1843 to Lee's surrender in 1865*  
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Sherman's life before the Civil War was an unsatisfying one, too. He graduated from West Point in 1840 and served at a variety of military posts, almost all of them in the South. He missed the main theater of the Mexican-American War and was sent instead to Monterey, California, where he spent his time trying to survive the high inflation of that gold rush state. He quit the army to become a banker in San Francisco and then in New York, only to have both financial institutions collapse beneath him, through no fault of his own. Then, like Grant, he joined a family business. He worked with several of his Ewing foster brothers as an attorney and real estate agent in Kansas, and once again financial failure dogged him. Thanks to old army friends in the South, however, he gained the position of superintendent of the Louisiana Mili-

tary Seminary, the forerunner of the modern Louisiana State University. He loved working with the young cadets, but when the war came and Louisiana became part of the Confederacy, his belief in the Union caused him to return North. He became president of a St. Louis street railway company, a position he held for the first several months of the war.

Lincoln far surpassed Grant and Sherman, but not Halleck in his monetary success. He became a well-to-do attorney, even working for one of the nation's leading railroads. In 1856, he came close to receiving the Republican vice presidential nomination, and he lost his campaign for US Senator from Illinois in 1858. By the late 1850s, however, he was a leading figure in the fledgling Republican party and was frequently mentioned as a possible presidential candidate. In fact, he won election to the presidency in 1860, his success helping push the South into secession.

In reality, it was the circumstances of war rather than pre-war experiences or similarities/differences which set the relationships among the president and his three generals. Lincoln's first meeting with each of these military leaders is enlightening in itself.

Lincoln met Sherman in 1861 just before the war exploded, and he sloughed off Sherman's concern that the Union was not taking the South seriously enough. Lincoln assured Sherman that all would be fine. Sherman, who was on his way home from

Louisiana, was appalled at what he considered to be Lincoln's nonchalance. He saw him again later when on his way to Kentucky, but then he did not see him again until the war was practically over. Conversely, Halleck and Grant both met Lincoln for the first time when they came to Washington to take overall command of Union armies, Halleck in July 1862 and Grant in March 1864. In short, Lincoln knew Sherman, Halleck, and Grant only incidentally throughout most of the conflict.

Yet, these were the generals on whom Lincoln came to depend to win the military victories he needed to save the Union. Thus their attitudes toward him and his attitudes toward them were crucial to the Union war effort. With the benefit of hindsight, modern scholars know that all did not always go well between Lincoln and these individuals.

However, historians do not always indicate how the relationships: president towards generals, and vice versa, and generals among each other, affected the war effort.

The three men's pathways toward military stardom were all different. They were not acquainted with one another before the war or during its early days, except in passing, yet they came to know each other intimately during the conflict, and their relationships helped form their roles in the war.

When the conflict began, Grant was living in Galena, Illinois, working unhappily for his demanding father in a leather goods store and hardly a leading figure of his community. Lincoln's call for troops vaulted Grant into public recognition, at least in his home town. The men of Galena, Illinois, looked to Grant for leadership, calling on him to lead their public meeting in support of Lincoln because he was the only West Pointer available for such duty. Grant disliked public speaking, and he was impressive only because of his military background, not his physical appearance or stature. He led the town meeting well enough for Galena's people to want him to become captain of the company they raised for the war effort.

Grant refused the offer. He believed that his military experience gave him the right to expect more: the colonelcy of a regiment. He

took the Galena military unit to Springfield, the state capital, but then he looked for a higher position. No one seemed interested in him, until the governor of Illinois asked him to help make sense out of a muddled military paper system in Springfield. He reluctantly agreed because nothing better seemed likely. Finally his chance came. There was a recalcitrant regiment that needed a firm hand to make it an effective fighting force, and Governor Richard Yates asked him to take on the task. Fearing that this might be his last opportunity, Grant took the post and soon had the troublesome regiment militarily organized and on the march.

Grant then gained a national name for himself. At Belmont, Missouri, he won and then almost lost the battle at the site across the Mississippi River from Columbus, Kentucky. His dramatic ride on horseback onto a troop ship, while Confederate bullets whizzed around him, helped him gain some early notoriety.

However, it was his victory at Fort Donelson in February, 1862 that truly thrust him into national prominence. Once again he came close to losing a battle that seemingly he had already won, but his determined resolve saved the day. Confederate commander, Simon Bolivar Buckner, an old friend from West Point days, commanded

Confederate troops at the fort, and Grant demanded his surrender. When Buckner asked what terms Grant was offering, the Federal commander said "unconditional surrender."<sup>10</sup> U.S. Grant was no longer Ulysses Simpson Grant, he was now "Unconditional Surrender" Grant and a burgeoning Federal favorite.

While Grant was achieving such success, William T. Sherman was moving in just the opposite direction. In 1860-1861, the nation hurtled toward national disruption. At that time, Sherman was superintendent of the Louisiana Military Seminary and determined to maintain the Union. Unhappy at Louisiana's actions, he sadly resigned his position and moved north. He found the Federal side, under Abraham Lincoln, sadly deficient in preparation for future conflict. When he participated in the second battle of Bull Run (Manassas) in July 1862, he recognized how right he was. He was appalled at the performance of troops under his command and those to either side of him during the battle. Once again he was convinced that the northern war effort, for which he had given up his successful career in Louisiana, would only crash and burn.

Moving to Kentucky to be second in command to Robert Anderson, he witnessed, once again, what he saw as certain failure.



THE PRESENT LAW OFFICE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN, THE PRESIDENT ELECT, IN FIFTH STREET, WEST SIDE OF THE PUBLIC SQUARE, SPRINGFIELD, ILL.—FROM A SKETCH BY O.C. SPENCER. —SEE PAGE 74

*Abraham Lincoln Law Office*



Left: Bull Run, Kurz & Allison, *Battles of the Civil War*



Right: Fort Donelson, Kurz & Allison, *Battles of the Civil War*

When Anderson, the hero of Fort Sumter, grew ill, Sherman had to take over command of the state, and this led to great despondency and anticipatory anxiety. He was sure there was no hope for the Federal cause, and soon newspaper reporters, whom he had come to consider spies and threatened to hang if they stayed around his camps, called him crazy. The Cincinnati *Commercial* headlined a December 1861 column, "General William T. Sherman Insane."<sup>11</sup> Things grew so bad that the red-headed general found himself relieved of his command and stationed in the backwater of the war, training recruits at Benton Barracks, Missouri.

Grant was thus becoming successful while Sherman was failing. The third member of the military triumvirate became commander over them both. Halleck was in California when the war broke out, and it took him a while to reach the East where he became commander of Federal troops in Missouri. And so, while Grant and Sherman entered the war as colonels, Halleck entered as a major general. His relationship with them proved strange. He praised Sherman, the military failure, and criticized Grant, the military success. Halleck saw hope in Sherman. He considered Grant only a hopeless loser.

Halleck handled Sherman carefully — moving him from Kentucky to Missouri — working with him to overcome his deep pessimism. It is true that Sherman had a politician brother (Senator John Sherman) and a politician foster father (Thomas Ewing), and Halleck was careful not to alienate them. Still he could have been sterner with Sherman than he was. He could have fired him on the spot, but instead he brought him along slowly so Sherman could grow in personal confidence. By February 1862, Sherman was in command of troops at Paducah, Kentucky, pushing soldiers and supplies forward to

Grant in his movement against Forts Henry and Donelson.

At the same time that Grant was winning victories in the West, Halleck was finding further fault with him. Halleck was not jealous of Grant because of the victories, but he was convinced that the Illinois general was a sloppy officer, incapable of following proper procedure or instilling appropriate discipline in his men. The fact that he was winning military victories was not as important to Halleck as the fact that he was not administratively proper. Halleck suspended Grant from command of his, by then, large army, for his supposed administrative failures.<sup>12</sup>

It was at this point that Lincoln entered the picture. Sherman's wife traveled to Washington to meet with the president and complain because she believed that her husband was not receiving a fair shake. Lincoln promised nothing, but he so charmed Ellen Sherman that she never blamed him for any problems that her husband encountered. Like Halleck, Lincoln realized the power of the politicians supporting Sherman, and he carefully avoided antagonizing him, his wife, and most importantly his political backers.

Surprisingly, Halleck had no compunction about attacking Grant, despite his patron Congressman Elihu Washburne. Halleck's unhappiness with Grant's alleged unprofessionalism, overcame any political fears he might have felt. Lincoln intervened to rescue Grant from military oblivion by writing Halleck to ask for an explanation. He liked Grant's aggressiveness. Halleck quickly put Grant back in command, clearly not willing to oppose his commander-in-chief.

It was as early as this, mid-1862, that the three generals came together. After Halleck, Grant, and Sherman had broken Confederate Albert Sidney Johnston's defense line in the West, the Confederates moved to Corinth, Mississippi, to protect the north-

south and the east-west railroads which intersected there. Halleck, by then the commander of the western theater, planned a strike on Corinth to capture that crucial city. He ordered Grant, the commander of the Army of the Tennessee, with Sherman one of his division commanders, to find a place where these troops might camp until Don Carlos Buell's Army of the Ohio was able to mass with them. It was Sherman who found Pittsburg Landing, a steamboat stop on the Tennessee River; Grant and all the generals agreed that it was an excellent spot to await Buell. It was flat land high above the river, where the Federals would be safe from the spring rain and flooding. Once Buell arrived from Nashville and Halleck himself came from St. Louis, the armies would be merged and move on to capture Corinth. Halleck insisted that no one of his generals commence a battle until he was on the site, ready to lead the 100,000 men of the massed army.<sup>13</sup>

Unfortunately for the Federals, the Confederates did not remain behind entrenchments at Corinth waiting for a Federal assault. Albert Sidney Johnston decided to attack the Federals where they were, with the hope that he could catch them off guard and push them into Shiloh's swamps.

The Unionists were indeed surprised when the attack came before Buell or Halleck had arrived. The battle was fierce and bloody, and the Confederates pushed the Federals back until their backs were against Pittsburg Landing and the Tennessee River. The next day, buttressed by Sherman, Grant responded. Fortified by Buell's troops, he forced the Confederates to retreat back the twenty-two miles into the Corinth entrenchments. Union troops were too bloodied to make an effective pursuit, however, so the end of the battle found both sides in the same position they had occupied at its start.

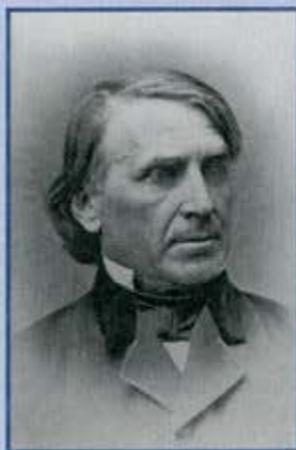
Halleck arrived soon after the battle was over and quickly castigated Grant (but not Sherman) for the losses the Federals had endured. He reorganized his armies, and, in the process, he made Grant second-in-command of the massed force and then promptly ignored him. Grant was so upset that he seriously considered resigning from the army. Sherman heard of this possibility, rushed to Grant's side, and convinced him to stay.<sup>14</sup>

Lincoln asked for more information on what had happened, but otherwise he took little action. What happened soon after indicated that he was happy with events in the West. He named Halleck as commanding general of all his armies. Grant stayed in the West and so did Sherman.

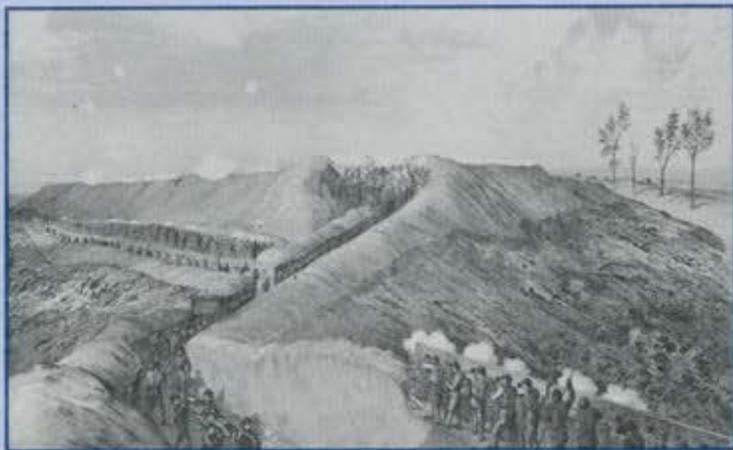
Early in the war, therefore, Lincoln and the three generals had come to a sort of agreement. While Lincoln was firing commanders in the East, he was supporting generals in the West. The reason was clear; Lincoln saw hope in his western generals. Grant was winning important battles, and Sherman was an important subordinate. The leader of them all was Halleck, however, and thus it was to Halleck that Lincoln looked for success in the war as a whole. To put it briefly, Lincoln looked to Halleck to do in the East what he had done in the West. Win victories.

When Halleck reached Washington in July 1862, the nation saw him as a conquering hero. Meanwhile Grant became the military leader in the West, with Sherman his top lieutenant. Unfortunately for Lincoln, this configuration did not solve his military problems. Halleck proved to be a general who shied from leadership, arguing vociferously that his task as commanding general was to encourage and advise generals in the field but not tell them what to do. The result was that Lincoln agonizingly watched George McClellan, Ambrose Burnside, and Joseph Hooker stumble before Robert E. Lee's Confederates, while Halleck refused to intervene.

Grant did not demonstrate much success either. He held the superior position in the West, but he was not using it effectively against the attacking Confederates. Sherman spent time in Memphis as military governor encouraging Unionists and upsetting Confederates. As he administered the city and the soldiers under his command,



Left: Elibu Washburn



Right: The siege of Vicksburg, the fight in the crater of Fort Hill, after the explosion, June 25 63/LC-DIG-ppmsca-35360

he developed his animosity toward civilian guerrillas firing on his soldiers and on Union civilians. He leveled a village along the Mississippi River in retaliation for nearby guerrillas firing on military and civilian boats plying the waterway. It was in Memphis that Sherman came to view the war as a conflict between opposing societies, not simply opposing armies.

Now Lincoln realized that even his western generals were disappointing him, with Halleck a particular failure. Halleck refused to command, threatening to quit should Lincoln insist on forcing him to make decisions for generals in the field. Grant similarly did not demonstrate sterling qualities of leadership at the battles of Iuka and Corinth.

Lincoln desperately wanted Vicksburg<sup>15</sup> taken so that the Federals would gain complete control of the Mississippi River from source to mouth. Grant began the movement to deliver this city to his president, but clearly Lincoln was not impressed. He allowed an old friend, John McClernand, an Illinois political general, to go back home to southern Illinois and recruit soldiers for an expeditionary force against Vicksburg. Lincoln told McClernand that he could command the soldiers he recruited and use them against the Mississippi Gibraltar.

This political threat against the West Point military triumvirate of Halleck, Grant, and Sherman caused a swift reaction. The administratively precise Halleck, uncharacteristically, told Grant that as soon as McClernand's recruited soldiers reached Memphis, he could take command over them or have Sherman do so. No matter what Lincoln had said to McClernand, Halleck was ready to have the army act on its own. To make sure that McClernand did

not beat him to an offensive, Grant ordered Sherman then in Memphis to sail down the Mississippi River and attack Vicksburg from the water. Meanwhile Grant would move through central Mississippi to a position east of Vicksburg and attack the city from that direction at the same time.

The plan proved to be a bust. Confederate General Philip Van Dorn burned Grant's supplies at Holly Springs, Mississippi, and Grant decided he better not move forward without a secure supply line. Meanwhile, an unknowing Sherman sailed down the Mississippi River to a position north of the city. He attacked at Chickasaw Bayou, but he was soundly repulsed.

McClellan now arrived and became enraged that his troops had been taken from him. By dint of seniority over Sherman, he took command of the entire Federal Army in the area. Even before McClernand's arrival, Sherman had already decided that he should capture Arkansas Post on the Mississippi River to make up for his loss at Chickasaw Bayou. He did not get going fast enough, however, so the victory went to McClernand's credit.

Grant now became outraged at McClernand. Already deeply distrustful of the political general, he rushed south to take command away from him. As 1862 came to an end, therefore, Lincoln could see little hope in the military situation. He was terribly disappointed in Halleck, while Grant and Sherman gave him but little more to feel optimistic about.

Halleck's refusal to command did not change in 1863, but the successes of Grant and Sherman protected him from Lincoln's disappointment. Grant orchestrated one of the great military campaigns in all of mil-

itary history, when he overcame numerous geographical and weather barriers and maneuvered his army to capture Vicksburg. Sherman played a major role in the effort, not only providing personal support to Grant but also playing an integral part in the military effort. Most significantly, Grant and Sherman completed the bond that they had forged at Shiloh, and their friendship and trust would play an important role in the eventual outcome of the war. Halleck's role in keeping troops out of McClernand's hands and providing excellent support for Grant and Sherman also tied him to the two men as never before. Lincoln was absolutely thrilled with the results at Vicksburg (capture of the city and the defending Confederate army), especially because General George G. Meade allowed the Confederate army to escape despite his victory over them at Gettysburg, that same July.

In the late fall of 1863, Grant and Sherman (with a major role played by General George H. Thomas) drove the Confederates out of Chattanooga, Halleck's Washington planning providing significant support. Lincoln could not have been happier.<sup>16</sup>

It was not long after this victory in Tennessee that Lincoln, vigorously encouraged by anti-Halleck sentiment in Washington and elsewhere, brought Grant to Washington, and named him lieutenant general, the first one in American history since George Washington. He also tapped him to be commanding general of all federal armies replacing Halleck. Sherman took Grant's place in the West, and Halleck happily took an office never before a part of the American military—chief of staff. The plan was for Grant to travel with General George G. Meade's Army of the Potomac and issue orders to it through Meade, while Sherman commanded all the armies between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River. Halleck was stationed in Washington and, along with Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, took care of the logistical and administrative duties of the vast Federal military.

Lincoln had now settled on the three generals whom he had come to see as the greatest hope for Federal victory. At the same time, he created a modern military command structure to use their talents most effectively. It was this configuration which won the war. Grant pounded Lee in Virginia; Sherman outflanked General Joseph E. Johnston's Confederate army out of Atlanta and then ravaged the interior of the Confederacy from

Atlanta to the Sea and north through the Carolinas. Halleck made sure that all the armies were properly supplied, and he filed all the necessary paperwork.

Abraham Lincoln had experienced hard times with his army, but he never stopped trying to find the right combination of military leaders to accomplish his Union-saving task. The general who loved administration and paperwork joined with the general whose determination to continue pressing forward no matter what and the general who saw war as one between societies not merely armies produced what Lincoln had been searching for since he became president. These four men were not the only ones who ensured Union victory, but without them and their cooperation with one another, it is difficult to imagine a preserved Union.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> July 27, 1848, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. by Roy P. Basler (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953-1955, 1974, 1990), 1:509-10.

<sup>2</sup> David Potter, "Jefferson Davis and the Political Factors in Confederate Defeat." In David Donald, ed. *Why the North Won the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1960), 106.

<sup>3</sup> The modern biography of Henry W. Halleck is John F. Marszalek, *Commander of All Lincoln's Armies, A Life of Henry W. Halleck* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> An excellent analysis of Grant's role in the Civil War is in his own words, Ulysses S. Grant, *Personal Memoirs of U.S. Grant* (New York: Charles L. Webster, 1885). The most complete biography of U. S. Grant is Jean Edward Smith, *Grant* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2001). The most detailed account of Grant's Civil War service is Brooks D. Simpson, *Ulysses S. Grant, Triumph and Adversity, 1822-1865* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2000). An excellent brief biography and thorough study of the development of Grant's reputation is Joan Waugh, *U.S. Grant: American Hero, American Myth* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009). The leading biography of William T. Sherman is John F. Marszalek, *Sherman, A Soldier's Passion for Order* (New York: Free Press, 1993) and paperback edition by Southern Illinois University Press, 2007. There are numerous other Sherman biographies which have been published in the last twenty years.

<sup>5</sup> B. H. Liddell Hart, *Sherman: Soldier, Realist, American* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1929), p.313.

<sup>6</sup> Henry W. Halleck, *Elements of Military Art and Science* (New York: D. Appleton, 1846); Halleck, *International Law, or Rules Regulating the Intercourse of States in Peace and War* (New York: D. Van Nostrand, 1861).

<sup>7</sup> Marszalek, *Halleck*, p. 105.

<sup>8</sup> The myth about Grant being a drunkard is a long standing one, although its factual basis is questionable. A recent discussion of this mythology may be found in Michael B. Ballard, *Grant at Vicksburg, The General and The Siege* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2013), Chapter 3, "River of Lies," pp. 43-63, 182-84.

<sup>9</sup> The number of books and articles about Abraham Lincoln is enormous. Rhode Island Chief Justice (ret) Frank J. Williams has long been compiling a bibliography of these writings and plans to publish it in the near future.

<sup>10</sup> The complete text of this letter is as follows:

"Yours of this date proposing Armistice, and appointment of commissioners, to settle terms of capitulation is just received. No terms except an unconditional and immediate surrender can be accepted."

"I propose to move immediately upon your works."

Ulysses S. Grant to Simon B. Buckner, February 16, 1862, *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*, ed. by John Y. Simon and John F. Marszalek, 32 vols. (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972), 4:218.

<sup>11</sup> Cincinnati *Commercial*, December 11, 1861. For a discussion of Sherman's mental state in the early months of the Civil War, see: John F. Marszalek, *Sherman's Other War, The General and the Civil War Press*, rev. ed. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1999), pp. 63-107.

<sup>12</sup> Marszalek, *Halleck*, p. 116-20.

<sup>13</sup> The battle of Shiloh has been studied by a large number of historians including Larry Daniel, James Lee McDonough, and Wiley Sword. A major new monograph by Timothy B. Smith will soon provide further detail and analysis on this pivotal battle.

<sup>14</sup> William T. Sherman, *Memoirs of William T. Sherman*. 2 vols. (New York: New American Library, 1990), 1:275-76.

<sup>15</sup> The most complete study of the Vicksburg Campaign is Michael B. Ballard, *Vicksburg, The Campaign That Opened the Mississippi* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> Peter Cozzens, *The Shipwreck of Their Hopes: The Battles for Chancellorsville* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### John F. Marszalek

John F. Marszalek, executive director of the U. S. Grant Presidential Library at Mississippi State University, is the editor of *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant* and the author of many books, including *Sherman: A Soldier's Passion for Order* and *Lincoln and the Military*.

# An interview with Joseph R. Forniari

regarding his new book *Abraham Lincoln: Philosopher Statesman* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2014)

**Sara Gabbard:** Please explain your statement that Lincoln was bound by the "dead constraints" of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

**Joseph Forniari:** This question gets to the crux of Lincoln's statesmanship and the role that both moral principle and constitutional duty played in it. Lincoln's leadership was informed by two sources of obligation: 1) the guiding principles of the Declaration, and 2) the rule of law in the Constitution. He regarded both documents as integrational sacred texts or covenants that bound the American people to moral and legal norms or national standards of justice and right. Moreover, he saw these two charters as complementary, though not identical. The lofty ideals of the Declaration were imperatives whose realizations were necessarily constrained under the rule of law in the Constitution. Lincoln expressed the

mutual relationship between these two covenants through the use of a biblical metaphor from *Proverbs 25* that likened a word that is "lightly spoken" to an apple of gold framed by a picture of silver. The self-evident truth of equality in the Declaration was the "apple of gold" safeguarded by the Constitution as "the picture of silver." Lincoln makes clear that the picture of silver was made for the apple of gold, not the other way around. In other words, the Constitution was framed to assure the principles or broader ends of liberty and equality in the Declaration. Thus, according to Lincoln, the Constitution should be read, as much as possible, through the lens of the Declaration and in view of its guiding principles. Lincoln parlayed company with those whose vision of the Union considered either the apple of gold or the picture of silver to the exclusion of the other. He rejected the idealism of the radical abolitionists who considered moral principles in their abstract purity (the apple of gold to the exclusion of the picture of silver) without prudent regard for the inherent limits of politics.

the constraints of the rule of law, and the prevailing customs and mores of the time. The desirable is not always practicable. Efforts to treat it as such, regardless of political realities, may have unintended consequences that thwart the very good that one is trying to achieve. On the other hand, Lincoln also rejected the views of those who interpreted the Constitution without recourse to the self-evident truths of the Declaration. These pragmatists, like Stephen A. Douglas, saw the Constitution simply as a set of procedural rules that placed no principled moral limit on the will of the people. That is to say, they considered the picture of silver without regard to the apple of gold. Lincoln, on the contrary, sought to reconcile his moral obligation to "the laws of nature and nature's God" in the Declaration with his equally binding commitment to the rule of law under the Constitution. This explains why he sought to attack slavery through constitutional means before the war and through his expanded power as a commander in chief in wartime. He believed that the Union's ordered liberty would be impeded by considering only the apple of gold or the picture of silver alone to the exclusion of the other. His statesmanship always considered both.

**SG:** How did Lincoln make the connection between philosophy and statesmanship in the debate in Altoon, Illinois?

**JF:** How Lincoln asked, "But where is the philosophy or statesmanship which assumes that you can quiet that disturbing element in our society [slavery] which has disturbed us so for more than half a century...based on the assumption that we are to quit talking about it, and that the public mind is all at once to cease being agitated by it?" The context was in response to Douglas's doctrine of popular sovereignty, which claimed to be morally neutral in regard to the inherent goodness or evil of slavery. Popular sovereignty sought to resolve the dispute over slavery by suspending moral judgment and allowing the territorial settlers to decide the question of whether or not to have slavery for themselves, without the interference of the federal government. In effect, popular sovereignty treated justice as relative to the decisions of the territorial settlers. Lincoln inveighed against this effort to evade the fundamental question of slavery's inherent goodness or evil. It bears mentioning that the connection between philosophy and statesmanship was a connection that Lincoln himself made in demanding that policy be informed by wider consideration of moral principles, especially in the territories that were under federal control. The Federal Government, according to Lincoln, should not provide slavery with a national imprimatur by remaining indifferent to its "obnoxious impurity." Lincoln regarded the pretense to moral neutrality in the case of popular sovereignty as a sophisticated ruse to avoid confronting the great injustice of slavery. Two years later, at New Haven in 1860, in his race to gain the Republican nomination, he would further underscore the extent to which public opinion must be anchored upon an ultimate philosophical foundation for its permanence and legitimacy. "Whenever this question of slavery shall be settled," he declared, "it must be settled on some philosophical basis. No policy that does not rest upon some philosophical public opinion can be permanently maintained."

**SG:** What is "philosophical patriotism"?

**JF:** Patriotism, or love of country, is often viewed with suspicion by today's intellectuals and elite who, in the name of tolerance and mutual understanding, preach conse-

politization. Critics of patriotism correctly point out that patriotic ideologies like nationalism, ethnocentrism, jingoism, and imperialism are rooted in an irrational and overwhelming national pride. However, by including patriotism amongst these ideologies, they "paint with too broad a stroke." One can point to thoughtful expressions of love and gratitude for one's country, as well as discerned and irrational manifestations. Indeed, the Founders thought that patriotism was an indispensable virtue in maintaining our republican government. In addition, the historical and philosophical lineage of patriotism and nationalism are quite different. The former has its origins in the Greco-Roman world of republicanism and the regard for ordered liberty of free and equal citizens under the rule of law. It is epitomized by Cato of Utica's resistance to Caesar. The latter, nationalism, grew out of the French Revolution and emphasizes racial and ethnic homogeneity and mystical Union between the people and a great leader or Führer. I show that Lincoln provides an example of an ordered, thoughtful and self-reflective love of country that inspired selfless service to the common good and, even dissent when the nation betrayed itself. It should be remembered that Lincoln opposed nativism, manifest destiny, and sectionalism as irrational and unjust forms of allegiances. He invoked the Puritan notion of mission or America as an exemplar in providing hope and inspiration to the world, not through armed intervention and empire, but by living up to its stated principles. America was a safe haven (an asylum) for freedom, democracy, and opportunity. The Civil War was a test that would demonstrate the viability of democracy as a form of government in the world. The failure of democracy in America through the triumph of slavery and division would reverberate throughout the globe, discouraging the friends of freedom at home and abroad. While Lincoln's patriotism affirmed an American exceptionalism under God's providence, it also self-consciously guarded against self-righteousness by referring to Americans as "an almost (then) people." In sum, he attempted to reconcile love of one's own country with universal principles. Contrary to a blind shellfishness, his reflective patriotism demanded that he challenge his government when it betrayed itself, as he believed it did in regard to slavery and the Mexican War. In speech and deed, his actions coincide with Edmund Burke's view that "to be loved a country must be

lovely." Like the patriotic statesmanship of Burke who believed that Great Britain had betrayed herself in flawed policies toward the American colonies, Ireland, and India, Lincoln's reflective patriotism demanded a critical engagement with his country when it pursued unjust and imprudent policies.

**SG:** You state that the term "statesmanship" has "become increasingly passé." When/why did this happen?

**JF:** I was referring to both the theory and practice of statesmanship. I believe that the two are related. The failure to understand and cultivate statesmanship as the pinnacle of political greatness contributes to a deficit of statesmen and stateswomen. In the book, I discuss a number of cultural, political, and intellectual causes for the decline of statesmanship. The traditional view of statesmanship as a moral enterprise concerned with the common good and defined by virtues like prudence and magnanimity has been replaced by a "culture first" social science that rejects such standards as vague and meaningless or that denigrates them as wishful thinking or propaganda used to prop up the dominant racial, ethnic, economic, or gender group. Statesmanship has been replaced by generic leadership classes that view governance in terms of managerial expertise and cost-benefit analysis. This managerial approach overlooks not only the importance of deep seated habits of mind and character to statesmanship, but it also fails to recognize statesmanship as a distinct kind of political leadership from business leadership and other transactional forms of leadership. Unlike a CEO or even a radical reformer like Frederick Douglass, a statesman is duty bound to the rule of law, represents the nation as a whole, and is accountable to the public and voters. We need to bring back the great books and histories that speak the moral imagination of young people to strive for greatness. Finally, statesmanship has been further undermined by the doctrines of historicism and relativism, which I will discuss below.

**SG:** How do you define moral relativism and how does the term apply to the study of Abraham Lincoln?

**JF:** Relativism is the fashionable doctrine that there are no universal standards or timeless truths in politics; that all standards of competition or judgment are relative to time, place, culture, interest, or power. Relativism often springs from the well-intended endeavor to appreciate human diversity and



Continuation of the Original Draft of the Declaration of Independence, National Archives

to tolerate differences amongst peoples and cultures. While these are noble goals, the effort to treat all practices equally is misguided. Lincoln certainly did not view the practice of slavery and freedom as morally equivalent. He repudiated the doctrine of popular sovereignty for its moral relativism in teaching that “the good” or “bad” of slavery was relative to the interests of the territorial majority. Equality was a “self-evident” truth, not a suggestion.

**SG: In the same manner, what is historicism and how does the concept apply to Abraham Lincoln?**

**JF:** Historicism is a version of relativism that reduces thought and action to historical context of time and place. Historicists are particularly suspicious of “great man theories” implicit to the study of statesmanship because, as they claim, such approaches overlook the extent to which all ideas and actions are historically determined by forces beyond the leader’s control. It is not the “reflection and choice” of individual human beings that make history, but primarily social, economic, and ideological conditions that determine their thought and action. Historicism denies a fixed human nature and emphasizes that all human beings are “a product of their time.”



Map of the Missouri Compromise

In effect, we are all imprisoned by our times and can’t think beyond the limits of these times. The historicist rejects timeless truths and sees human nature and consciousness as plastic and variable over time. Instead of universal principles, the historicist looks to the doctrine of progress and historical inevitability—that history is divided into progressive stages of improvement with their own set of standards. It is one thing to acknowledge the role of circumstances and context in interpreting the past; however, it is quite

another to reduce greatness of thought and action to time and place. One may recognize that as a statesman Lincoln had to accommodate to the prejudices of his time without conceding that his thought or action were determined by these same prejudices. The greatest minds and leaders possess the vision to consider things as much as humanly possible, “*sub species aeternitatis*”—under the aspect of eternity. Indeed, the power of Lincoln’s statesmanship was found in his appeal to the self-evident truths of the Declaration, which, he believed, applied, in the abstract, to all people at all times. Contrary to the historicist denial of a fixed human nature, Lincoln affirmed the existence of enduring truths about human nature, when he exclaimed after his victory in the 1864 election: “Human-nature will not change. In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak, and as strong; as silly and as wise; as bad and good. Let us, therefore, study the incidents of this, as philosophy to learn wisdom from, and none of them as wrongs to be revenged.” Here Lincoln makes clear that politics must take its bearings not from changing economic or social circumstances of time and place, but from a fixed human nature.

**SG: You chose six categories under which you define Lincoln’s philosophy. Please comment on each.**

**JF:** I view these six dimensions as essential to understanding and appreciating statesmanship as the apex of political greatness. I hope that my approach as a political philosopher will stir dialogue about the meaning, purpose, and ends of statesmanship and will

contribute, in some small way, to its revival. The framework attempts to provide a standard to consider and judge past, present, and future leaders.

## WISDOM

Wisdom is the gift of insight and vision about human nature and government. The ancients divided wisdom into two kinds of virtues or excellences: 1) theoretical, and 2) practical. The former, theoretical wisdom, refers to one’s comprehensive vision

of human nature and government and the corresponding ability to provide a rational account of this vision, as Lincoln did with democracy. Practical wisdom or prudence, as discussed below, is the virtue of realizing this vision as much as possible under the circumstances. Put another way, prudence applies principles of right reason under the prevailing customs, laws, and habit of the time. I regard Lincoln as a philosopher statesman because he possessed both kinds of wisdom. His greatness united thought and action. His practice was informed by theory as when he explained, “The theory of our government is Universal Freedom. ‘All men are created free and equal,’ says the Declaration of Independence. The word ‘Slavery’ is not found in the Constitution.” Lincoln should be considered alongside the great philosophers of democracy such as Plato, Aristotle, Tocqueville, Rousseau, and John Stuart Mill. Consider, for example, how he defined our national ordeal in philosophical terms as a clash over the meaning of first principles of self-government. Pondering the elusive meaning of liberty, he observed: “The world has never had a good definition of the word liberty, and the American people, just now, are much in want of one. ‘We all declare for liberty; but in using the same word we do not all mean the same thing. With some the word liberty may mean for each man to do as he pleases with himself, and the product of his labor; while with others the same word may mean for some men to do as they please with other men, and the product of other men’s labor. Here are two, not only different, but incompatible [sic] things, called by the same name—liberty. And it follows that each of the things is, by the respective parties, called by two different and incompatible names—liberty and tyranny.’ In sum, Lincoln’s theoretical wisdom equipped him to do intellectual battle with the proslavery apologists of his time. Through this struggle, he articulated an ultimate moral justification of self-government that continues to define us as a people.

## PRUDENCE

Prudence is the virtue of practical wisdom, of acting according to rules of right reason in the realm of ethics and politics. It involves applying moral principle under the circumstance and harmonizing means and ends. Lincoln’s leadership has often been described as “pragmatic.” I do not like this term because it connotes that he was unprincipled and acted on the basis of expediency

and interest alone. Though sometimes the term pragmatic is used to refer to a flexible style of leadership that is the opposite of dogmatic, more often than not it suggests someone who is short on vision and seeks to resolve questions through "horse-trading," short-sighted deals that work for the time being. Lincoln's prudence is most readily seen in extending the principle of equality through the Emancipation Proclamation. Here his policy considered a variety of contingencies such as the reaction of the border states, the potential response of the Supreme Court, the constitutionality of the measure, its effect on the army, the reaction of public opinion and foreign countries. He chose the policy that best addressed these variables. Anyone who thinks Lincoln was a mere pragmatist unconcerned with principles in politics should read his instructions prior to his election where he discouraged any compromise on the core principle of the Republican Party: "Prevent, as far as possible, any of our friends from demoralizing themselves, and our cause, by entertaining propositions for compromise of any sort, on "slavery extention[.] There is no possible compromise upon it, but which puts us under again, and leaves all our work to do over again. Whether it be a Mo. Line, or Eli Thayer's Pop. Sov. it is all the same. Let either be done, & immediately filibustering and extending slavery recommences. On that point hold firm, as with a chain of steel."

## DUTY

The parameters of statesmanship are defined by duty. Unlike other kinds of leaders, statesmen and stateswomen act in an official capacity and should be judged by how well they perform their oath-bound duty as elected officials sworn to uphold the Constitution. A consideration of statesmanship thus involves an understanding of the duties that pertain to office and whether or not a leader has acted cowardly, corruptly, or incompetently in carrying them out. Duty both empowers and restrains leaders. Empowerment without restraint is a license for tyranny, while restraint without empowerment is a recipe for impotence. I show how Lincoln's oath-bound duty both empowered and constrained his statesmanship and how it differed from competing views of duty invoked by the radical abolitionists, southerners, and popular sovereigns. Lincoln's example can be contrasted to that of his predecessor James Buchanan who shirked his duty in allowing the Union

to be dismembered. On the contrary, the sixteenth president saw his office as binding and authorizing him to preserve the Union: "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict, without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect and defend' it."

## MAGNANIMITY

This character trait is the defining virtue of statesmanship!! The term comes from the ancient Greek word meaning greatness of soul and was described by Aristotle as "the crown of the virtues; for it makes them greater, and it is not found without them." Magnanimity is "the virtue that disposes us to do good to others on a large scale." The magnanimous leader is concerned with great honors that accrue to the achievement of great deeds. He or she is possessed of an honorable ambition. In the thirteenth century, St. Thomas Aquinas revised this virtue to include the Christian norms of humility and charity. Greatness, for Aquinas, involved a charitable servant leadership, modeled after the example of Christ. For Aquinas, magnanimous leaders are both great and humble. I believe that this most accurately describes the core of Lincoln's leadership. True, Lincoln was conscious of his superiority over others, but he also humbly recognized the existence of a higher power, his dependence upon God, and the gulf between the human and Divine will. One need not prove that Lincoln had read Aquinas, only that there are timeless truths to show how Aquinas's profound teaching applies to Lincoln and is perhaps the most reliable tool for understanding the sixteenth president's rare combination of humility and greatness.

## RHETORIC

Rhetoric, the art of public persuasion in politics, is a crucial element of statesmanship. Though wisdom is also essential to statesmanship, on its own accord, it rarely prevails in politics. It is all too easily silenced through the shouts of demagogues or distorted through the wiles of sophists. The voice of wisdom in politics is made audible through the art of public persuasion, or what the ancients called rhetoric. Particularly in democracies, the statesman's success depends not only on a clear and profound understanding of human nature and politics, but also on the ability to communicate this

noble vision through a philosophic rhetoric that ennoble the public. Speaking of the statesman's rhetorical task in a democracy, Lincoln explained: "In this and like communities, public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed. Consequently he who moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes or pronounces decisions. He makes statutes and decisions possible or impossible to be executed." Rhetoric is the art of "moulding" public sentiment. However, as Lincoln well recognized, public opinion was not infallible. It was susceptible to manipulation by demagogues and sophists whose false doctrines dehumanized an entire race or stirred rebellion against the government. Thus, he emphasized that although "public opinion settles every question . . . [it must be in] accordance with the philosophy of the human mind as it is." That is to say, legitimate policies must correspond to the truth of reality and human nature, rather than to the selfish interests, distortions, or delusions of the persuaders. In my book, I seek to reveal both the substance and style of Lincoln's philosophic rhetoric in providing an ultimate moral justification of self-government and in inspiring devotion to the Union and the principles for which it stood. Lincoln's mastery of the English language enabled him to communicate his vision and policies in simple and plain terms that inspired his listeners and that have defined us ever since as a nation. Consider his rhetorical feat at Gettysburg in defining the meaning of the Civil War and distilling the essence of our American creed. Unfortunately, the term rhetoric has a bad name today. We associate it with "spin" and verbal manipulation. Granted, there are base and noble forms of persuasion. The ancients distinguished between a noble rhetoric and sophistry and demagoguery. Sophistry is the clever manipulation of language for the sake of self-interest without regard to truth and justice. Indeed, Lincoln used the term sophistry in its ancient sense to describe the twisting of the truth for unjust and harmful purposes. In particular, he repudiated the moral relativism of popular sovereignty as a deceptive sophistry that dehumanized the African American. Its feigned moral indifference was a clever ruse to make the institution perpetual and national. In sophistic fashion, popular sovereignty evaded the question of slavery's inherent evil or goodness. Lincoln thus warned: "Let us be diverted by none of those sophis-

tical contrivances wherewith we are so industriously plied and belabored—contrivances such as grouping for some middle ground between the right and wrong: vain as the search for a man who should be neither a living man nor a dead man; such as a policy of ‘don’t care’ on a question about which all men do care.” Lincoln also used the term “sophistry” in describing pro-secession doctrines that incited rebellion against the Union. Demagoguery, in contrast to sophistry, refers to a popular leader’s pandering to the people by stirring up the crowd’s base emotions of fear, hate, and envy. Lincoln famously warns about the threat of demagoguery in the Lyceum Address. The poverty of our political discourse today would benefit by reviving these terms and recognizing their role in debasing public opinion.

## PATRIOTISM

Much has been said about Lincoln’s ambition, and even his melancholy, as a spur to his greatness. Scholars often point to William Herndon’s statement that his law partner’s ambition was a “little engine that knew no rest.” Yet Herndon also testified to his law partner’s patriotism. He recollected him saying in 1851: “How hard—oh how more than hard it is to die and leave one’s Country no better for the life of him that lived and died her child.” Such expressions of gratitude and service are characteristics of the true patriot. Unfortunately, modern efforts to uncover the subconscious springs of Lincoln’s political motivations have too often overlooked love of country. I devote a chapter in the book to explore the role that love of country or patriotism likewise played in inspiring the sixteenth president and in rallying support for the Union cause during the war.

Because Lincoln’s love of country involved a critical self-reflection on the success, failures, and promise of the American regime, it may be described as a reflective or philosophical patriotism as discussed above. The essence of Lincoln’s reflective patriotism is found in his eulogy to Henry Clay, his “beau ideal” of a statesman. Lincoln admired Clay for placing national interest above sectional interest and for reconciling the love of his own country with the good of humanity. “Mr. Clay’s predominant sentiment,” he explained, “from first to last, was a deep devotion to the cause of human liberty—a



*Asbland, Henry Clay's home*

strong sympathy with the oppressed every where, and an ardent wish for their elevation. With him, this was a primary and all controlling passion. Subsidiary to this was the conduct of his whole life. He loved his country partly because it was his own country, but mostly because it was a free country; and he burned with a zeal for its advancement, prosperity and glory, because he saw in such, the advancement, prosperity and glory, of human liberty, human right and human nature. He desired the prosperity of his countrymen partly because they were his countrymen, but chiefly to show to the world that freemen could be prosperous.” To be sure, in praising Clay, Lincoln was describing those virtues he sought to develop in himself as a young statesman. Finally, it is worth comparing similarities between the Athenian leader Pericles’ view of statesmanship in the fifth century BC and the six dimensions of statesmanship embodied by Lincoln. According to Pericles, it is the mark of a statesman: “To know what must be done and to be able to explain it; to love one’s country and to be incorruptible.”

**SG: When Lincoln described himself as an “instrument of God,” what did he mean and how did this concept set him apart from others?**

**JF:** He was speaking of his experience of being called by God to play a providential role in the war. Today, if someone were to call himself an “instrument of God,” it would rightly give us pause. The person would seem to be either self-righteous or a fanatic. Our more secular culture avoids such religious expressions. One thinks of terrorists and suicide bombers who invoke God before they slaughter. Even in Lincoln’s time, fanatics like John Brown considered themselves as “an instrument of God” commissioned to punish slaveholders for their sins. Con-

trary to these unbalanced expressions of faith, Lincoln does not claim to know God’s will. His self-understanding is that of a humble and faithful servant who acknowledges the distance between the Divine and human will and yet still seeks to fulfill his part in Providence. God’s will cannot be known with certainty. He has given us “the light of reason” to work out his purposes, however imperfectly, as best we can. This tension between human striving and Divine providence is the paradox of faith. We see through a glass darkly yet do our best to remain faithful to God’s purposes, even in the face of

suffering. Some have mistakenly described this experience as “fatalism,” when, in fact, it represents a profound, mature and thoughtful expression of faith. It is worth quoting Lincoln’s reply to Mrs Gurney, a Quaker Woman who came to the White House to provide spiritual consolation to the president, as a testimony of his living faith: “In the very responsible position in which I happen to be placed, being a humble instrument in the hands of our Heavenly Father, as I am, and as we all are, to work out his great purposes, I have desired that all my works and acts may be according to his will, and that it might be so, I have sought his aid—but if after endeavoring to do my best in the light which he affords me, I find my efforts fail, I must believe that for some purpose unknown to me, He wills it otherwise.”

**SG: What is your next Lincoln-related project?**

**JF:** My former professor and collaborator Ken Deutsch and I are editing a book entitled, *The Renewal of American Statesmanship*, which will be published by Kentucky University Press. Our large scale work will include primarily American presidents, as well as other significant American leaders, who demonstrate both the strengths and weaknesses with reference to the normative principles of American statesmanship. We have some great contributors.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Joseph R. Fornieri is a professor at Rochester Institute of Technology. His books include: *Abraham Lincoln’s Political Faith*, *The Language of Liberty*, and *Lincoln’s America: 1809-1865*. He serves as Director of the Center for Statesmanship, Law, and Liberty at RIT.