



Lincoln Lore

February, 1984

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Ruth E. Cook, Editorial Assistant. Published each month by the
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WILKES BOOTH THE SECOND

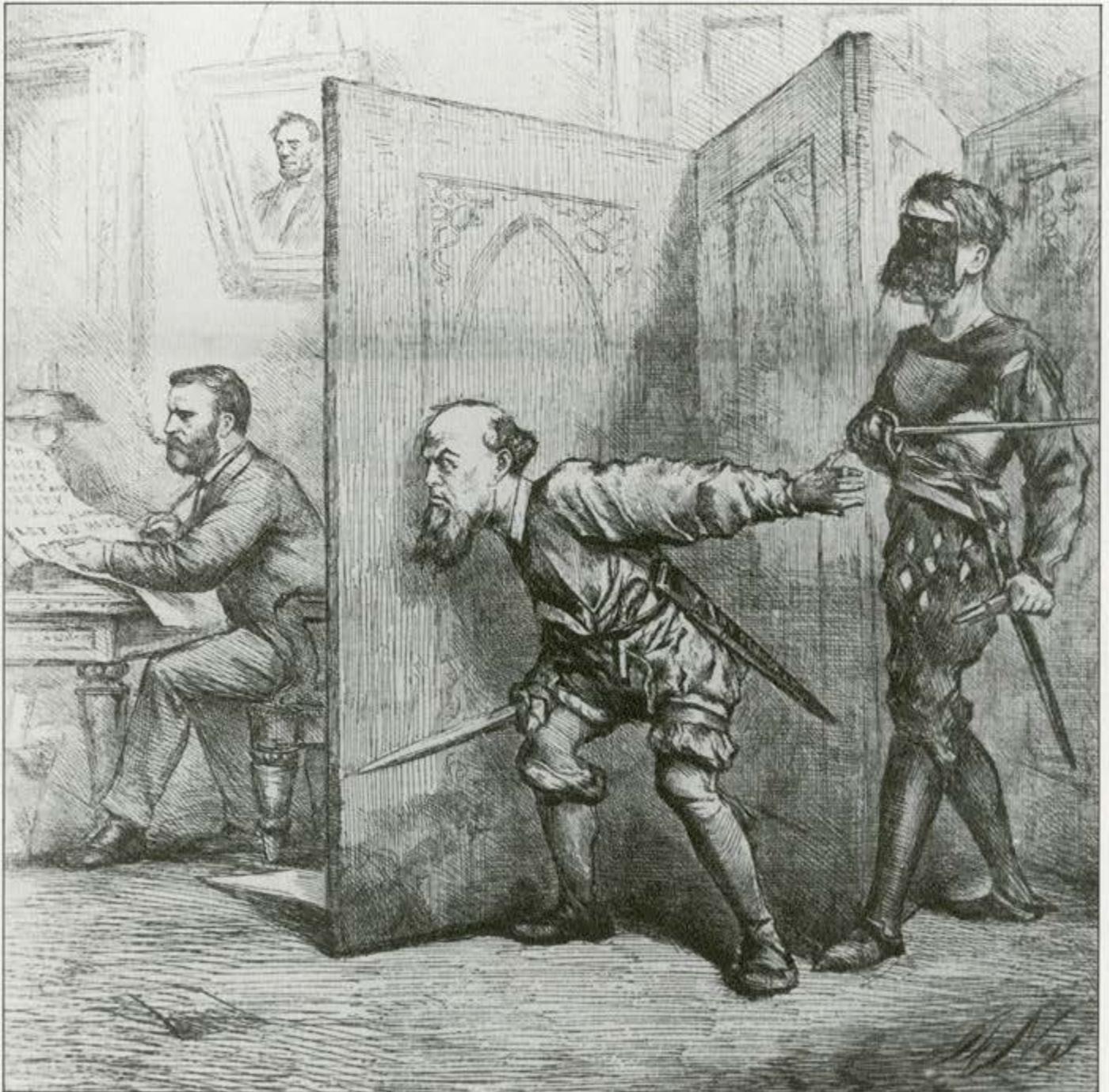


FIGURE 1. With the title, "Wilkes Booth the Second," *Harper's Weekly* featured this cartoon on the cover of its November 7, 1868 issue. Story inside.

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In *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies*, William Hanchett states that "the assassination seldom arose as an issue in national election campaigns" even immediately following the Civil War. Democrats railed against the "judicial murder" of Mary Surratt, and Republicans complained that the Democratic press had criticized Lincoln in terms bitter enough to encourage John Wilkes Booth's act. But, Hanchett argues, both parties' interests (and not any spirit of fair play in politics) quickly dictated silence on the issue.

Professor Hanchett is essentially correct, but he did overlook at least one startling instance of partisan exploitation of the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. On the cover of *Harper's Weekly* for November 7, 1868, appeared a cartoon showing two assassins in Shakespearean theatrical garb lying in wait behind a screen to murder Ulysses S. Grant. The assassins included the Democratic nominee for vice-president, Francis P. Blair, Jr. Horatio Seymour was the Democratic presidential nominee, and Grant, of course, was the Republican presidential candidate. A portrait of Lincoln hung behind Grant in the cartoon, while Grant penned his own peaceful motto beneath Lincoln's "with malice towards none and charity to all." The link with the recent presidential assassination was made complete by the cartoonist, Thomas Nast, who supplied the assassins, despite their sixteenth-century garb, with pistols that looked like John Wilkes Booth's infamous Deringer.

Republicans pointed the finger mainly at Blair, who was so beleaguered by the political opposition's distortions of his speeches that he took to reading them carefully from prepared texts in order to be able to produce the texts later to refute the inevitable charges. According to *Harper's Weekly*, Blair did not say in so many words that Grant would be assassinated if he won the election, but he did suggest that Grant would never leave the White House alive because he would establish a military despotism and meet the inevitable fate of tyrants. "Now in every country," *Harper's Weekly* argued, "there are plenty of men who consider it right and praiseworthy to assassinate tyrants; and when, speaking to a crowd of which the most considerable element was that of the rebels who rejoiced in the murder of Mr. LINCOLN, General BLAIR paints General GRANT as a despot who will subvert the government, and establish himself permanently in the White House, he can no more escape the responsibility for the kind of interpretation that will inevitably be placed upon his words than Mr. SEYMOUR can shuffle off the responsibility involved in saying to a mob in the city of New York . . . that a mob may urge the plea of military necessity as well as a government." The reference to Seymour recalled a controversial speech he made in 1863 to calm the draft rioters. *Harper's Weekly* also quoted a statement from the *New York Democrat* of October 13, 1868: "If he [Grant] is elected by unfair means, or use of illegal power—if he does not receive a majority of the three hundred and seventeen votes of the Electoral College fairly cast—if he seeks to override a majority in America, he dies before his term of office shall one-fourth expire, and the party that would unjustly elevate him to power shall be strangled in the blood it cries for."

Unlike his more circumspect and politic brother Montgomery, who had served in Lincoln's cabinet, Frank Blair (as he was called) was explosive and quickly gained a reputation as an advocate of political violence. On June 30, 1868, he had written a letter to James O. Broadhead, saying that the only way to stop Radical Reconstruction was for a Democratic "President-elect to declare these [congressional Reconstruction] acts null and void, compel the army to undo its usurpations at the South, disperse the carpetbag State governments, allow the white people to reorganize their own governments and elect Senators and Representatives." Presidents, of course, have no power to void congressional acts, and presidents-elect have no powers whatever. The letter was, justifiably, regarded widely as incendiary.

When, on the strength of the Broadhead letter, Republican journalists termed the Democratic party "the party of violence," they accomplished much for their cause. They called to mind Blair's alleged hints at assassination, they reminded



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FIGURE 2. Seymour's speech to New York's draft rioters in cartoon.

voters of Seymour's alleged pandering to the draft rioters, and they took the focus off Grant as a man whose profession was, in fact, violence. They appealed to the most fundamental longing of the war-weary American people after the Civil War: their longing for peace.

The assassination charge was what we would call today a political "dirty trick," sprung, as such tricks usually are, so near election day that the victim had no time in which to refute the charge. Such events remind modern Americans of the era when political mud-slinging knew no gentlemanly bounds and the violence of political rhetoric was unbridled. The campaign tactics of 1868 also reveal how doubtful the outcome of that campaign really was. Despite Grant's apparently enormous popularity as the military savior of the Union, he polled less than 53% of the popular vote. The politicians must have sensed the odds and therefore pulled every trick out of their bag.



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FIGURE 3. The man behind the Ku Klux veil: Frank Blair.

AN IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT

James M. McPherson, Edwards Professor of American History at Princeton University, will present the eighth annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture on Thursday, May 9, 1985. Professor McPherson's subject will be "How Lincoln Won the War with Metaphors."

Professor McPherson is among the foremost authorities on the Civil War and Reconstruction. Symbolic of this status is his designation as the author of the forthcoming volume covering the period 1846 to 1865 in the distinguished Oxford History of the United States.

Born October 11, 1936, in Valley City, North Dakota, James McPherson received his B.A. in 1958 from Gustavus Adolphus College. He earned his Ph.D. in American history at Johns Hopkins University in 1963. He has taught at Princeton University since 1962 and has been a full professor there for thirteen years.

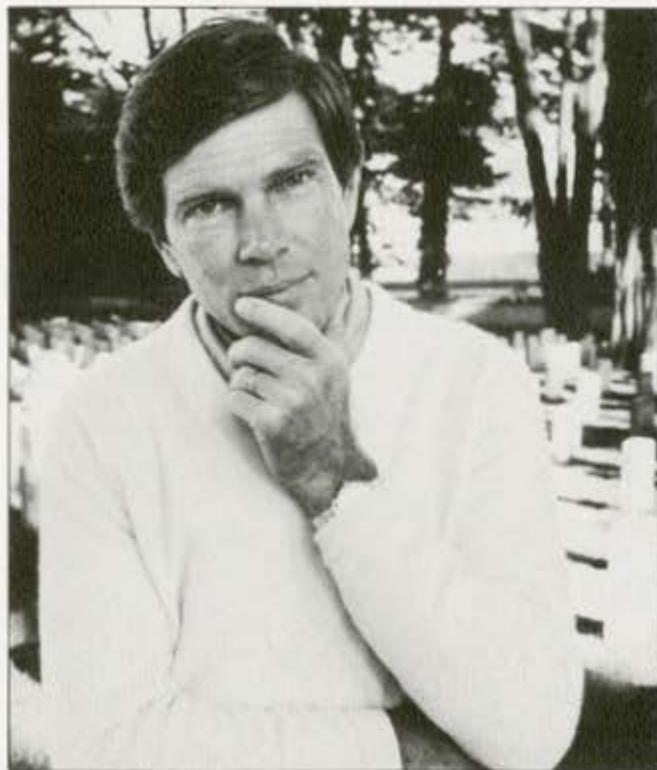
Professor McPherson is the author of five books. *The Struggle for Equality: Abolitionists and the Negro in the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Princeton University Press, 1964) won an Ansfield-Wolf Award in race relations. *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Thought and Felt during the War for the Union*, first published in 1965, was released in a second edition by the University of Illinois Press in 1982. *Marching Toward Freedom: Negroes in the Civil War* (Knopf, 1968) was followed by *The Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (Princeton University Press, 1975), a sequel to his first book. *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (Knopf, 1982) is a superb text book.

Professor McPherson is also coauthor or co-editor of *Blacks in America: Bibliographical Essays* (Doubleday, 1971) and *Region, Race, and Reconstruction: Essays in Honor of C. Vann Woodward* (Oxford University Press, 1982), and he has written dozens of articles for journals.

All of Professor McPherson's works are noted for their clarity in style and argument, their depth of research, and their

generally judicious nature—traits which have made for durability and genuine influence.

The lecture will be held at 8:00 p.m. in the Pike Room of the Grand Wayne Center, 120 West Jefferson Boulevard, Fort Wayne, Indiana (within easy walking distance of the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum). For information, please call Ruth Cook at 219-427-3031.



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FIGURE 4. Professor James M. McPherson.

THE TRUSTEES OF THE GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY LIBRARY ASSOCIATES

invite you to the opening of an exhibition

THIS ONE MAD ACT

with a lecture by John K. Lattimer, M.D.

THE LINCOLN ASSASSINATION: A REAPPRAISAL

Sunday, April 14, 1985 at 2:30 p.m.
in the auditorium of the Intercultural Center
Georgetown University Campus

The Special Collections Division will open a major exhibition to commemorate the 120th anniversary of the assassination of President Abraham Lincoln. Original documents and artifacts—many never before exhibited—will be shown, including items drawn from private collections as well as from the Library's own noted holdings. Among the featured objects are two of the nooses used at the execution of the conspirators; the key to Box 7 of Ford's Theatre; and a remarkable letter by Secretary of War Edwin Stanton declining to deliver an address to the memory of Abraham Lincoln.

The exhibition will be inaugurated by a slide-illustrated lecture by John K. Lattimer, M.D., Professor Emeritus at the College of Physicians & Surgeons of Columbia University. A distinguished speaker, Dr. Lattimer is author of *Kennedy and Lincoln: Medical and Ballistic Comparisons of Their Assassinations* (1980).

A reception will follow in the administrative suite of Lauinger Library (fifth floor), and the exhibit will be held in the adjacent Gunlocke Room.

R.S.V.P. by April 10th if attending.
Phone 625-3230 (9 a.m.-5 p.m. Monday-Friday).

Parking is available in the Prospect Street parking lot beyond 37th Street.

CIVIL WAR INSTITUTE AT GETTYSBURG COLLEGE, 1985

For information write to G. S. Boritt, Director, Civil War Institute, Box 442, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania 17325. Telephone: 717-334-3131, ext. 384 or 717-334-6416.

PROGRAM

Sunday, June 30

Evening Registration
Reception: Lyceum, Pennsylvania Hall

Monday, July 1

Morning James M. McPherson: "Antietam in Perspective: The Civil War to the August of 1862"
Afternoon Robert L. Bloom: "Antietam: Then and Now"
Evening Francis Lord: "The Influence of Weapons Development on Civil War Tactics"

Tuesday, July 2

Morning and Tour of Antietam - Dennis Frye, John C. Frye, and William Frassanito
Afternoon
Evening William Frassanito: "Antietam: The Photographic Legacy of America's Bloodiest Day"

Wednesday, July 3

Morning Lt. Col. Neal Meier: "The Language of Civil War Tactics: Focus on Offense"
Afternoon Free
or
Tour of the Gettysburg Battlefield, or "a portion of that field," with Col. Jacob Sheads and/or others
Evening Edwin Bearss: "Lee at Antietam"

Thursday, July 4

Morning John V. Murfin: "McClellan at Antietam"
Afternoon Free
Evening Free or Film

Friday, July 5

Morning John W. Schildt: "Lincoln at Antietam"
Afternoon Peter Maslowski: "From Antietam to Appomattox"
Evening Party at the Boritt farm, James Reston, Jr.: "Sherman's March and Vietnam"

Saturday, July 6

Morning Students depart

LECTURERS

EDWIN C. BEARSS, Chief Historian of the National Park Service, is the author of *Forrest at Brice's Cross Roads* (1979).

ROBERT L. BLOOM has taught Civil War history at Gettysburg for more than three decades.

WILLIAM C. FRASSANITO, a graduate of Gettysburg College, whose books include *Antietam: The Photographic Legacy of America's Bloodiest Day* (1978).

JOHN C. FRYE and DENNIS FRYE, father and son, are historians for the National Park Service stationed at Antietam.

FRANCIS A. LORD's many books include *Civil War Arms* (1963).

PETER MASLOWSKI, Professor of History at the University of Nebraska, is the co-author of *For the Common Defense: A Military History of the United States of America* (1984).

LT. COL. NEAL MEIER commands the Tactics Division of the Amphibious Warfare School of the United States Marines Corps at Quantico, Virginia.

JOHN W. MURFIN's books include *The Gleam of Bayonets: The Battle of Antietam* (1965).

JAMES M. MCPHERSON, Edwards Professor of History at Princeton University, is the author of *Ordeal by Fire: The Civil War and Reconstruction* (1982).

JAMES RESTON, JR. is the author of *Sherman's March and Vietnam* (1985).

COL. JACOB SHEADS, M.A., Gettysburg College, is a renowned battlefield guide who has been affiliated with the Gettysburg National Military Park for 47 years.

JOHN W. SCHILDT, is the author of *Four Days in October* (1978).

GABOR S. BORITT, Director of the Civil War Institute, teaches at Gettysburg College. He is co-author of *The Lincoln Image* (1984).
