



Lincoln Lore

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GRANT'S IMAGE A HUNDRED YEARS LATER

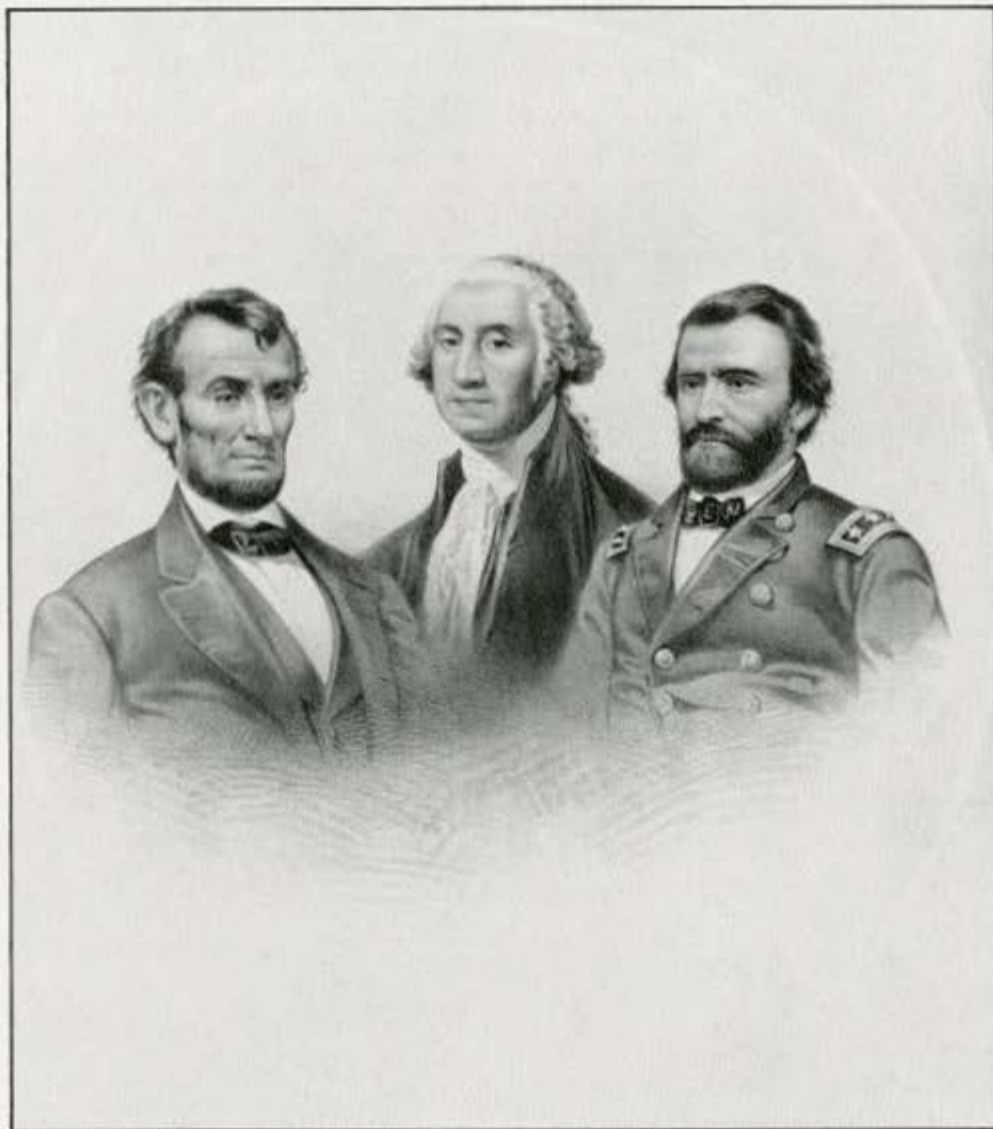
Nineteen eighty-five marks the centennial of the death of Ulysses S. Grant, and a number of events are meant to remind us that he has not been treated fairly by history. *Lincoln Lore*, for example, has not focused on Grant since July 1973, and neglect is almost as bad as criticism. Grant has received plenty of the latter in recent years, especially from professional historians. Although Warren G. Harding has a firm grip on last place in polls which ask historians to rate the presidents, Grant is often next to last. His most recent biographer, William McFeely, depicted Grant as good for nothing — except war.

An exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery in Washington, D. C., called "U. S. Grant: The Man and the Image," and a catalogue with the same title, attempt to revive his standing a bit. The catalogue succeeds in part, in particular in the introductory essay by John Y. Simon. Professor Simon depicts Grant as a man who did nothing to promote his image in print until the very end of his life when he wrote his famous *Memoirs* to save his family from financial ruin. He consistently refused to answer criticism, and he did not bother even to correct people who got his name wrong. One clear reason, then, that Grant's image is so poor today is

that he did so little in his own day to cultivate his public reputation.

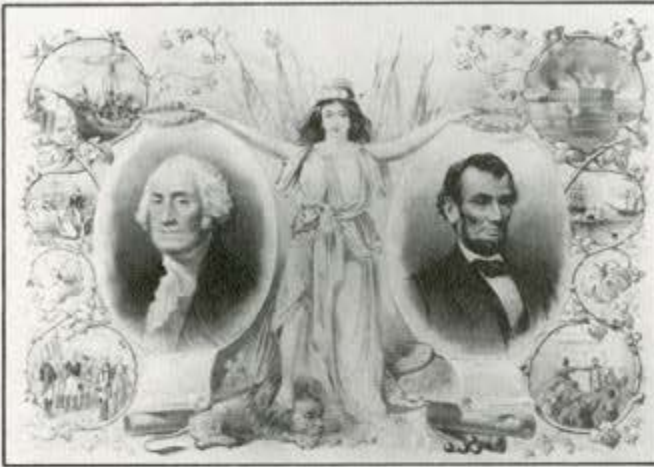
Alas, the other forces at work in creating Grant's image are not much illuminated by *U. S. Grant: The Man and the Image*. The catalogue, in fact, fails to grapple with the question of Grant's image in any significant way. Only a page separates Simon's essay from the catalogue proper, but it might as well be an abyss. What follows the introductory proof of Grant's indifference to his image is an abundance of images of Grant,

photographs, paintings, cartoons, and prints. And nowhere does the catalogue bother to ask the obvious question about Grant's image: why did a man so indifferent to his image accommodate so many image-makers? How did the photographs get taken? How did the signed photographs come about? Did this shy man carry piles of them with him to sign and give away? Did fans come to the tent of the general in chief and get him to sign pictures they had purchased in hometown galleries? Who commissioned the paintings? Who arranged the sittings? How long could the most powerful general in the world sit still for a painter? Did the painters use photographs instead of long sessions from life? What were



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FIGURE 1. *Our Three Great Presidents*, lithograph by Duff & Wettach.



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FIGURE 2. *Columbia's noblest Sons*, lithographed by Kimmel & Forster.

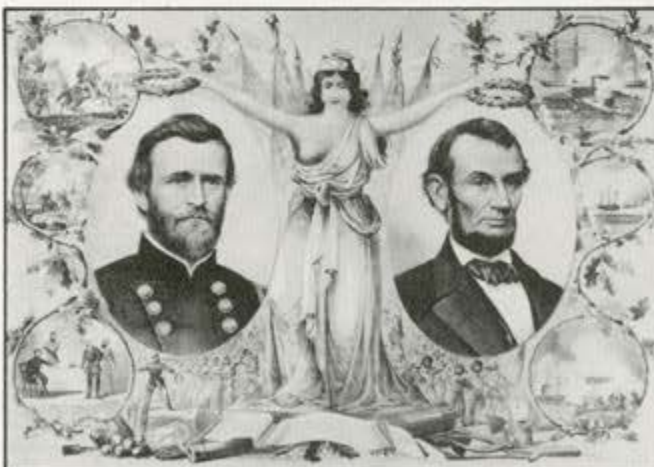
the paintings for?

These are all tough questions which the documentary record often fails to answer. No one could fairly fault the catalogue for not finding the answers, but not asking the questions seems unforgivable. And they are not consistently asked of the works exhibited in the catalogue. Some examples will perhaps prove the point.

A signed *carte-de-visite* photograph of Grant has as its accompanying text merely a piece of a bland biographical sketch of the general. Nothing is said about the photograph's origins or the circumstances of the signing.

A lithograph depicting the surrender at Appomattox, published by Major and Knapp in 1867, has a genuinely useful text which explains several curious details in the print. The lithograph erroneously shows General Wesley Merritt copying the surrender terms in ink, a task actually performed by Colonel Ely S. Parker. And Grant's face looks very curious because in copying the likeness from a photograph the artist reversed the image so that Grant's left eye, markedly lower than his right, becomes the higher one. That the print was commissioned by the man who owned the house where the surrender took place, that he was strapped for cash and desperately needed somehow to capitalize on the fame of the event, and that the enterprise failed — these facts about the lithograph are nowhere noted despite being readily available in a National Park Service pamphlet of mass distribution. If the Appomattox print illustrated in the catalogue was not chosen from the many lithographs depicting the surrender because the print's history could be clearly explained, then why was it chosen?

John Sartain's mezzotint engraving of *Genl. Grant & His Family*, also one of several depictions of a popular group scene, receives similar treatment. The text tells the reader who the family members were and what their future occupations were. It does not tell us why the print exists. It does not explain the



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FIGURE 3. *The Preservers of Our Union*, lithographed by Kimmel & Forster.



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FIGURE 4. *The Council of War*, lithograph by Peter Kramer.

origins of the painting on which the print was based. It does not speculate on the symbolic importance of such pictures in an age which revered the family.

It is, admittedly, a lot easier to criticize than to create. And the ultimate blame for the shortcomings of the catalogue does not rest with the National Portrait Gallery or the author or the exhibition's other sponsors. The ultimate blame rests with the *genre*. Catalogues tend to be too quickly written for inflexible deadlines (the opening of the exhibit) by persons with too many other administrative responsibilities to give proper attention to writing and research. The purpose of such volumes seems never to be clear. Are visitors supposed to carry them around the exhibition itself as guides? If so, then they need not duplicate the information in the labels on the gallery walls. Are they check lists for collectors? If so, then they ought to explain their criteria for selection more carefully, that is, whether the images constitute the first, the last, the best, the only, or the most representative. Are they scholarly contributions to art history? If so, then they ought not to include, as catalogues for exhibitions on historical figures so often do, routine summaries of the biography of the subject. Are they mere souvenirs? If so, then could they not be less expensively produced? The fact is that the poor harassed curators who must produce catalogues usually do so without a clear sense of their purpose — beyond having them ready for the opening of the exhibition.

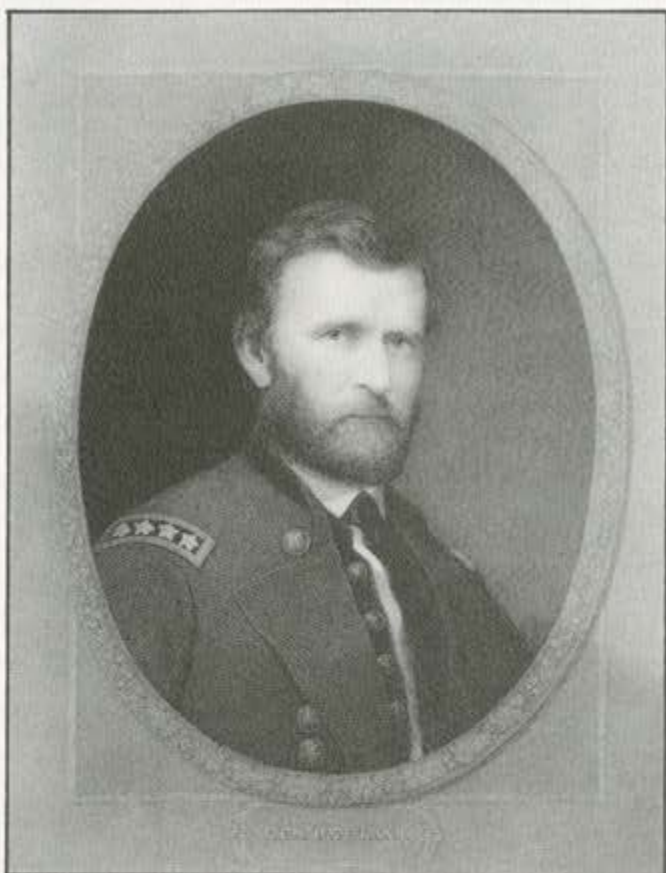
What, then, of creating instead of criticizing? By looking at prints which featured Grant and Abraham Lincoln, one can glimpse the rich possibilities that lie in the nineteenth century's popular images.

Like Cavour and Garibaldi in Italy, Abraham Lincoln and Ulysses S. Grant together became inseparable from the idea of American nationhood. Lincoln held the premier symbolic position by virtue of being president and thereby Grant's superior in the chain of command. Nor did Grant's biography



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FIGURE 5. *Grant and His Family*, engraving by William Sartain.



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FIGURE 6. Gen. U. S. Grant, engraving by William E. Marshall.

in 1865 contain anything which equalled the Emancipation Proclamation or Lincoln's martyrdom. The lieutenant general was nevertheless a hero of tremendous popularity, widely

regarded as a saviour of the Union and for many good reasons closely associated in the American mind with the works of Abraham Lincoln.

In pictorial presentations Lincoln's fame rubbed off on Grant, as the saying goes. Kimmel & Forster's lithographs provide vivid proof of this. *Columbia's noblest Sons* (Figure 2), published in New York by Manson Lang and copyrighted by Henry and William Vought in 1865, associated Lincoln with George Washington. *The Preservers of Our Union* (Figure 3), copyrighted and published as well as lithographed by Kimmel & Forster in 1865, substituted Grant's portrait for Washington's, altered the vignettted events on the margins, and allowed Columbia's neckline to dip daringly. As early as 1865, then, Grant's image seemed destined to close iconographic association not only with Lincoln but also with Washington.

Sometimes the printmakers altered the viewer's focus by changing the title of the print. Peter Kramer's lithograph of an imaginary conference of President Lincoln with Generals Grant, William T. Sherman, Philip Sheridan, and others was called *Lincoln and His Generals* when printed by Alphonse Brett and published by Jones & Clark in New York and C. A. Asp in Boston. When N. P. Beers copyrighted the same lithograph in New York in 1865, he transformed it into a Grant print by changing the title to *The Council of War* (Figure 4) and adding as a subtitle in bold print "I Propose to Fight It Out on This Line if It Takes All Summer" along with a facsimile signature of U. S. Grant. Thus shared fame could be tilted to favor one figure or the other.

Lincoln receded far into the background in William Sartain's *Grant and His Family* (Figure 5), a mezzotint engraving published by Bradley & Co., in Philadelphia in 1867. Lincoln had been portrayed in the bosom of his family with similarly reassuring appeal only after his death in 1865. Grant's image benefited from depiction as a good family man when he was a presidential hopeful in 1867 and a candidate in 1868 and 1872. Such pictures must have played a role in defusing traditional American fears that men on horseback might become Caesars or Bonapartes in the political realm. Grant still wore his military uniform in Sartain's print, but the portrait of Lincoln shown on Grant's wall in the print constituted a promise of greatness in civil affairs.

Grant's image may have been boosted for the nineteenth-century print buyer as well by tacit stylistic comparison with Lincoln. William Edgar Marshall's large engraving of Abraham Lincoln, published in 1866, proved to be immensely popular.



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FIGURE 7. General Grant at the Tomb of Abraham Lincoln.

When he produced an engraving of *Gen. U. S. Grant* (Figure 6) in identical format in 1868, he offered handsome prints that could be paired in iconographic greatness.

Currier & Ives associated the Republican presidential candidate of 1868 with the Republican president martyred in 1865, in a lithograph entitled *General Grant at the Tomb of Abraham Lincoln Oak ridge Cemetery Springfield Illinois* (Figure 7). General Grant became President Grant the next year, rising a step nearer parity with Lincoln. By 1872, when Grant ran for reelection, at least one printmaker, the lithography firm of Duff & Wettach in Pittsburgh, proved willing to make the association which seemed almost inevitable back in 1865. In *Our Three Great Presidents* (Figure 1), Grant, still depicted in military dress, shared the focus with Abraham Lincoln and George Washington.

Though seemingly historically inevitable in Grant's time, this association now seems incongruous. Modern polls measuring presidential reputations generally rank Lincoln and Washington the highest and Grant among the lowest. Besides providing a striking visual reminder of changes in presidential reputations over time, *Our Three Great Presidents* perhaps provides a small clue to Grant's precipitous fall from national favor. Expectations for his presidency were very high, perhaps impossibly high. Lincoln won comparison with Washington only posthumously, as a martyr who could no longer be criticized in the way that ordinary living politicians inevitably are. Grant, on the other hand, had to withstand comparisons with Lincoln and Washington while he was still a living, breathing maker of political choices.

Some of those choices proved wrong, and after his presidency Grant's reputation no longer permitted close symbolic association with American nationhood. But his role in forging the American nation should not be neglected. The events marking the hundredth anniversary of Grant's death will help us remember. The most important of these by far is the publication of the last of the volumes covering the Civil War period in *The Papers of Ulysses S. Grant*. Masterfully edited by John Y. Simon and handsomely printed by Southern Illinois University Press, this series of books makes possible a fair assessment of the man Abraham Lincoln chose to lead his armies.

And *The Papers* may help solve the mystery of the shy man's many pictures. Volume Thirteen of *The Papers*, for example, reveals the difficulties under which photographers labored. Late in 1864, the able photographer Alexander Gardner ran afoul of army regulations which forbade photographing "any portion of forts or military defenses." Army chief of staff Henry W. Halleck instructed Grant to seize Gardner's photographs and negatives of Fortress Monroe. Grant and a subordinate reported that the photographs in question showed groups of men, their quarters, and one cannon at the fort. The negatives were beyond immediate military control, being at Gardner's Washington studio, but Grant said he would prevent the taking of similar photographs in the future.

Strictly interpreted, the regulation would have effectively banished photographers from United States military installations. Grant seems not to have been upset by this incident. After all, he had accommodated photographers who had taken his photograph against the backdrop of some United States "military defenses." And he would accommodate more of them in the future.

HOSTAGES IN THE CIVIL WAR (Conclusion)

On May 17, 1864, President Lincoln began drafting a letter to Stanton on the Fort Pillow question, which ordered:

That with reference to said massacre, the government of the United States has assigned and set apart by name insurgent officers, theretofore, and up to that time, held by said government as prisoners of war.

That, as blood can not restore blood, and government should not act for revenge, any assurance, as nearly perfect as the case admits, given on or before the first day of July next, that there shall be no similar massacre, nor any officer or soldier of the United States, whether white or colored, now held, or hereafter captured by the insurgents, shall be treated other than according to the laws of war, will insure the replacing of said insurgent officers in the simple condition of prisoners of war.

That the insurgents having refused the exchange, or to give any account or explanation in regard to colored soldiers of the United States captured by them, a number of insurgent prisoners equal to the number of such colored prisoners supposed to have been captured by said insurgents will, from

time to time, be assigned and set aside, with reference to such captured colored soldiers, and will, if the insurgents assent, be exchanged for such colored soldiers; but that if no satisfactory attention shall be given to this notice, by said insurgents, on or before the first day of July next, it will be assumed by the government of the United States, that said captured colored troops shall have been murdered, or subjected to Slavery, and that said government will, upon said assumption, take such action as may then appear expedient and just.

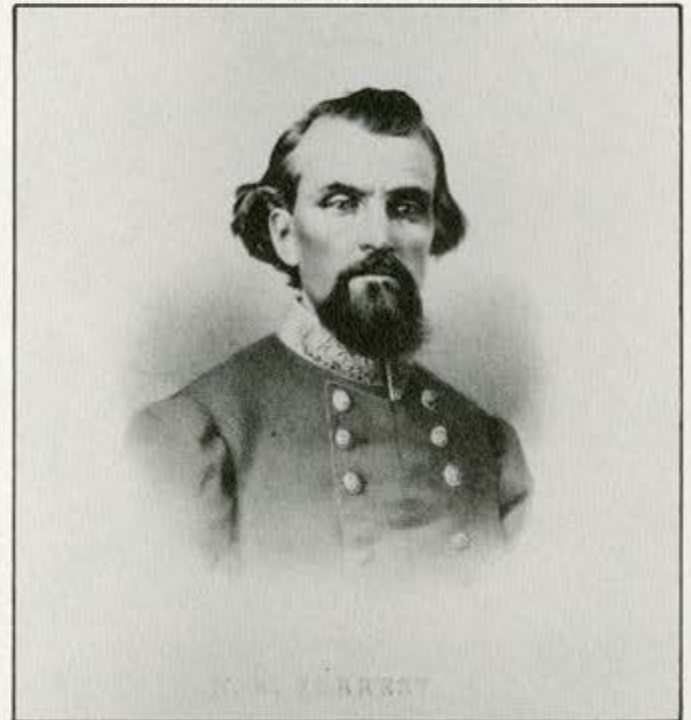
Lincoln never signed the order, and nothing came of it. The affair was simply forgotten in the anxiety over Grant's Wilderness campaign.

* * *

Taking civilian hostages in time of war was not outlawed until 1949, when Article 34 of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War (Geneva Convention IV) forbade the practice. The Regulations Respecting the Laws and Customs of War on Land adopted by many leading nations at The Hague in 1907 had not mentioned hostages and thereby tacitly perpetuated the laws and customs regnant during the American Civil War. But the Hague Regulations' Article 50 did forbid inflicting on the population of occupied territories collective penalties for acts of individuals for which that population could not be regarded as collectively responsible. Whatever room that provision left for hostages, and it was surely not much, was eliminated at Geneva in 1949. Taking hostages to ensure against unlawful enemy acts, to guarantee adequate treatment of the sick and wounded left behind by retreating armies, to protect the lives of prisoners of war in the hands of irregular soldiers, to shield lines of communication by placing hostages on vulnerable vehicles, or to ensure fulfillment of requisitions was outlawed.

The Geneva Conventions are now thirty-six years old, and those regulations for modern warfare themselves merely codified rules already widely observed by civilized nations — making obsolescent practices like taking hostages obsolete at last. And yet, some of those practices — even the taking of civilian hostages in wartime — are not remote in time from our own era.

In a surprising decision at the famous Nuremberg Tribunal after World War II, a judge ruled that "Hostages may be taken to guarantee the peaceful conduct of the populations of occupied territories and when certain conditions exist and the necessary preliminaries have been taken, they may, as a last resort be shot." Collective responsibility could be assumed "provided it can be shown that the population generally is a party to the offense, either actively or passively." Morris Greenspan's *Modern Law of Land Warfare* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), on which this discussion of the law of hostages is based, much prefers the view taken by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1941: "Civilized peoples long ago adopted the basic principle that no man should be punished for the deed of another."



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FIGURE 8. General Nathan Bedford Forrest.