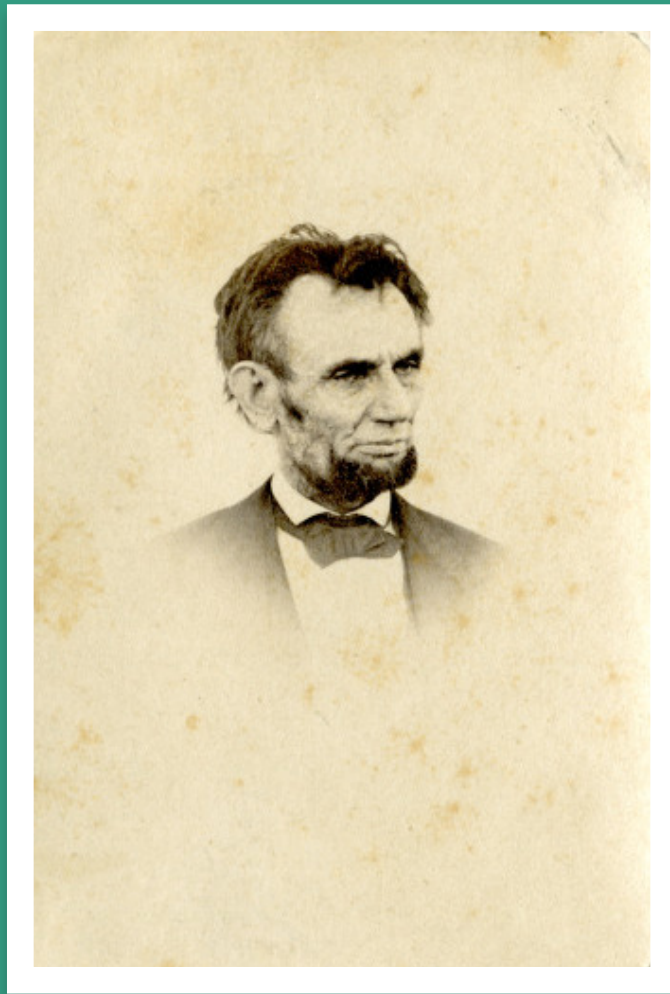

Lincoln

LORE

NUMBER 1937 SPRING 2023



Lincoln Lore is a publication of the Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana



Accessing Lincoln Lore's Archive

Visit www.FriendsoftheLincolnCollection.org/lore-archive

Select Years of Publication or Lincoln Lore Issue Number

Click "PDF" next to the specific Lincoln Lore and read, download, save, and share the PDF.

Want to Search Lincoln Lore?

Type your keywords into the Google Custom Search on the Lore Archive page to find specific topics.

Allen County Public Library

Jessie Cortesi, Senior Lincoln Librarian
Kayla Gustafson, Senior Lincoln Librarian
Chris Viel, Lincoln Lore Layout and Graphic Designer
Lincoln@acpl.info

Friends of the Lincoln Collection

Sara Gabbard, Editor
P.O. Box 11083
Fort Wayne, IN 46855

www.acpl.info
www.LincolnCollection.org
www.FriendsoftheLincolnCollection.org

Lincoln Lore®

ISSN 0162-8615
Unless otherwise indicated, all images are held by the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection (LFFC)

Member Discount

Members of the Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana receive a discount for books published by Southern Illinois University Press. To order, contact Chicago Distribution Center at:

1.800.621.2736 Phone
1.800.621.8476 Fax
Order online at www.SIUPress.com

Use promotional code **FLC25** to receive a **25% discount on your order.**

Table of Contents

The Unhappy Fate of Fitz John Porter

Allen Guelzo page 3

And There Was Light: Abraham Lincoln and the American Struggle Book Review

Phelps Gay page 10

Lincoln and Truman: Varied Expressions of the American Spirit

Max J. Skidmore page 14

Lincoln and the Franchise

M. Kelly Tillery, Esq page 20

Indiana State Museum

Influencing Lincoln: The Pursuit of Black Freedom

Indiana State Museum
March 18 – October 29, 2023

Explore the Black community's fight for freedom and equal rights during and immediately after the Civil War, both at the national level and in Indiana. Discover stories of how people and the communities they made created change and reshaped America, from influencing Lincoln to winning the right to vote.

For more information, please visit indianamuseum.org

Tribute to Sara Gabbard



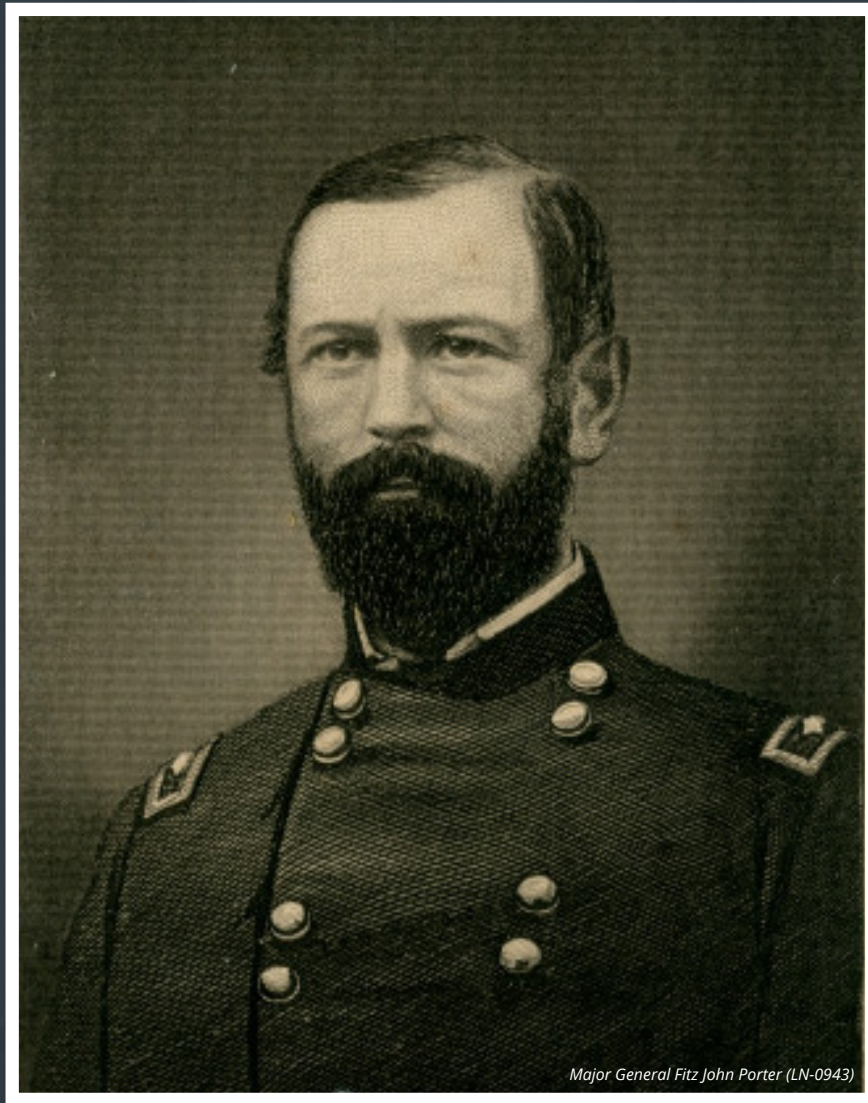
Please join the Board of Directors of the Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana in extending best wishes to Sara Gabbard, who has retired after over 20 years as Editor of *Lincoln Lore*. For the last 13 years Sara has also functioned as Executive Director of our organization.

During her tenure as Editor, Sara carried on the tradition of excellence established by her predecessors, authored many articles appearing in *Lore*, and conducted countless interviews with Lincoln scholars and authors. One of those recent interviewees was Jonathan W. White. We are pleased to announce that Jonathan has agreed to carry on the strong legacy established by Sara and her predecessors as the next editor of *Lincoln Lore*.

Many of you are already familiar with Jonathan's work as a respected Lincoln scholar and author, including his latest book *A House Built by Slaves: African American Visitors to the Lincoln White House*. Please look forward to hearing more about Jon in the next issue of *Lincoln Lore*.

The Board thanks Sara for her many years of dedicated service. We wish her well in her retirement.

On The Cover: *Last Photograph of Abraham Lincoln (OC-0220)*



THE UNHAPPY FATE OF FITZ JOHN PORTER

Allen Guelzo

The American Civil War was a political war. That should not matter hugely to those of us who study the art of command in the war, since it is one of the basic tenets of the American system of governance that the military remains in strict subordination to civilian authority, and leads apolitical lives in uniform. Military leaders who have forgotten the strictness of that subordination have, from Andrew Jackson to Stanley McChrystal, been reminded of it in some very unpleasant ways. But the American Civil War was different. It forced political decisions on American soldiers at the very beginning, and the gaping divisions those decisions created fostered an atmosphere of political mistrust and conflict that inhabited every nook and cranny of military command. This is not the way we would prefer to remember the Civil War; we would rather think of it strictly in strategic, tactical or logistical terms, as we usually do with the great World Wars. But we cannot. George McClellan, perhaps the most politically insubordinate general in American history, will not allow us, nor will the political leadership he railed against—starting with

Abraham Lincoln. And no one offers a more agonizing example of how politics elbowed its way into the art of command in the Civil War than Major General Fitz John Porter, whose court-martial and dismissal for his conduct at the Second Battle of Bull Run offers a painful example of the risks and follies of soldiering in a political war.

Fitz John Porter was the child of a military family, although it was not an association from which he derived much profit. His grandfather had commanded privateers in the American Revolution, but his reputation was clouded in the postwar years by rumors “to his prejudice . . . for keeping a Public house of Ill fame in Boston” and losing “a ship in such a way as to induce suspicions of his integrity.” His father, David Porter, yet another naval officer, managed to wreck his first command, and his career was plagued by quarrels, mismanagement, and alcoholism. His wife, Eliza Clark Porter, was the real head of the household, and it was Eliza Porter who was chiefly responsible for placing her second child, Fitz John Porter, as a cadet

in the U.S. Military Academy in 1841, graduating 8th in his class in 1845, in the same year as Charles Stone (another victim of Civil War politics) and a year ahead of George McClellan.

Porter was part of Winfield Scott’s great inland march to Mexico City in the Mexican War, earning two brevet promotions to captain and major, and returned to West Point as an assistant professor and temporarily (under the superintendency of Robert E. Lee in the 1850s) post adjutant. Oliver Otis Howard remembered Porter’s conduct as precise and competent in managing “the whole corps of cadets” on the parade ground, “and I was exceedingly pleased with his military bearing.” But if Porter was competent, he was also dull. His wife, Harriet, remarked that Porter was “shy and retiring,” and his daughter would recall that she had never once heard her father laugh. When Jefferson Davis, as secretary of war under President Franklin Pierce, created two new light cavalry regiments in 1855, Porter was passed over for a command in them, and only the urgent



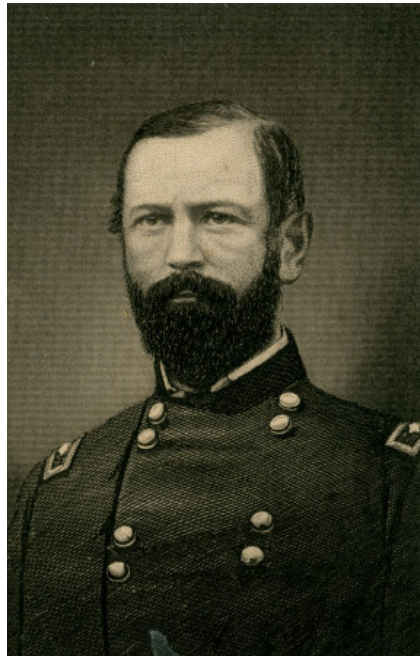
Second Battle of Bull Run (71.2009.081.2857)

intercession of Eliza Clark Porter won her son a belated posting to the West. Even then, it was only as adjutant to the Department of the West at Ft. Leavenworth, and the only serious action he saw was as adjutant for Albert Sidney Johnston's bloodless expedition against Mormon Utah.

The outbreak of the secession troubles after Lincoln's election saw Porter buzzing from pillar to post: reporting to the War Department on a flying visit to Charleston in November 1860, another flying visit to the Gulf coast in February 1861, to supervise the extraction of seven companies of U.S. troops from secessionist Texas, trying to manage the forwarding of Pennsylvania militia and the 2nd U.S. Cavalry to Baltimore and Washington, D.C., in April, then as adjutant to Major General Robert Patterson's half-hearted advance into Virginia in July.

Patterson's failure and subsequent shelving might have put a period to Porter's Civil War career. But on August 1, 1861, Porter wrote directly to George McClellan, who had just been called from his successful campaign in western Virginia to command the dispirited Union forces around Washington, D.C. "I can be of much use and render the country essential services," Porter pleaded. "I cannot bear" to "see my companions, my juniors, rising to distinction and position, while I must plod away in a beaten and sandy track." It is not clear exactly when Porter first became an intimate of McClellan's—there is nothing in their student record to suggest any connection, and only one stray reference to Porter in McClellan's Mexican War papers, but they did share quarters at West Point when both were on station there in 1850. Yet, they evidently knew each other well enough in the small confines of the pre-war Army that Porter could urge McClellan to resign from his civilian job in 1861 and re-enter the service, while McClellan would remember asking for Porter as an adjutant when he was first given command of the

Department of the Ohio. The plea worked. On August 7th, Porter found himself commissioned as colonel of the 15th U.S. Infantry; three days later, he was a brigadier general of volunteers. By the fall, he was commanding one of McClellan's divisions.



Major General Fitz John Porter (OC-0893)

It was not clear, either, what Porter's politics were—at first. Like so much of the old Army, Porter cultivated a studied distance from politics, partly from the principle of subordination to civilian authority, but partly from the example of what happened to soldiers like Winfield Scott when they crossed politicians like President James Polk. But the outbreak of the Civil War brought a tremendous influx of new volunteer officers into the service, in command of the new volunteer regiments. Their appointments were the plaything of Northern state governors and they often made little secret of their hostility to slavery and the Democratic Party. When Porter discovered that one of his volunteer colonels, John Pickell of the 13th New York, had assisted a slave in taking flight from his master, Porter ordered the slave

expelled from his camps. "Slavery existed" by law, Porter explained (as though this was supposed to deal with any objections), "and we were in a slave state and the owner was entitled to his servant and no officer had the right to use his rank to take property from a loyal" owner.

This tone-deafness to the volatility of the slavery question might have stymied any further advancement for Porter in what became known as the Army of the Potomac, had not the Army's commander been George McClellan, who suffered from more than a little tone-deafness of his own on the subject. Instead, Porter grew closer and more confiding to McClellan, and McClellan played Porter more and more as a favorite. McClellan cultivated New York Democratic politicians, and encouraged Porter to do likewise; he also cultivated New York Democratic newspapermen like Manton Marble of the *New York World*, and—unwisely—Porter also did so.

None of this went unnoticed in Congress or the Executive Mansion. President Lincoln warned McClellan in May that it had become all-too-well known that "you consult and communicate with nobody but General Fitz John Porter." When Lincoln mandated a reorganization of the Army of the Potomac into French-model corps d'armée, Porter's name was not among the division officers promoted to corps command.

Not that this seemed to matter once the Army of the Potomac finally embarked on its great Peninsula Campaign in the spring of 1862. McClellan appointed Fitz John Porter director of the siege of Yorktown, and with his usual methodical precision, "the operations were conducted with skill." But McClellan's favoritism infuriated pro-administration officers, including Porter's own corps commander, Samuel Heintzelman, who grouched that "McClellan is giving great dissatisfaction in this Army, particularly about Gen. Porter." No matter: on May 18th,

McClellan decided to subdivide the existing corps of the Army of the Potomac, and handed one of the new commands, the Fifth Corps, to Porter.

The Peninsula Campaign did not end well for McClellan, for whom the Seven Days' Battles in June concluded with the Army of the Potomac backed into a tight perimeter around Harrison's Landing on the James River. Porter, however, did remarkably well in corps command, "gallantly standing off" a savage attack by Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia at Gaines Mill on June 27th, and mowing down Lee's Confederates from the commanding height of Malvern Hill on July 1st. McClellan evidently planned to cross to the south side of the James and, at Porter's urging, renew his advance. Lincoln was having nothing of it.



General George McClellan (LN-0827)

Lincoln was clearly offended during a visit to Harrison's Landing on July 8th by McClellan's arrogant declaration that the president must abandon any thought of emancipating Southern slaves lest the Army of the Potomac disintegrate—as though McClellan would bear no responsibility for such disintegration. Two weeks

later, Lincoln appointed a new general-in-chief, Henry Wager Halleck, to put a bit in McClellan's mouth.

McClellan was too much the darling of the Democratic opposition for Lincoln to risk an outright dismissal. Instead, in late June, Lincoln created a new Army of Virginia (from pieces of units that had been pummeled that spring in the Shenandoah Valley by "Stonewall" Jackson) under Major General John Pope. In August he ordered the withdrawal of the Army of the Potomac piece-by-piece from the Peninsula, and fed those pieces into the structure of the Army of Virginia. Pope's official qualifications for command in the east rose from his success that April in forcing the surrender of the Confederate post at Island No. 10 in the Mississippi River, which pried open the river to federal gunboats as far south as Vicksburg. But his real qualifications were political: the son of the one-time presiding judge over Lincoln's old court circuit in Illinois and one of the four officers who formed Lincoln's personal bodyguard for his inaugural trip to Washington, Pope was solidly anti-slavery and hence regarded as "the Coming Man . . . of the army."

John Pope was everything McClellan was not, and Porter did not mind saying so. In late July, after Pope had assumed command of the Army of Virginia, Porter described him as "what the military world has long known, an ass...and will reflect no credit on Mr. Lincoln." As July turned to August, Porter turned up the heat in his letters, describing Pope to *New York World* editor Manton Marble as a "fool," and—still worse—wishing that McClellan "was in Washington to rid us of [the] incumbents ruining our country." By the time Porter and the Fifth Corps had, by road, boat, and rail, reported to Pope on August 27th, Porter was earnestly "wishing myself away from" Pope "with all our old Army of the Potomac," and begging Ambrose Burnside, "if you can get me away, please do so."

Porter's opinion of Pope had not been improved by the beating which elements of the Army of Virginia received at the hands of "Stonewall" Jackson at Cedar Mountain on August 9th, nor by the disastrous raid Jackson and J. E. B. Stuart staged on Pope's communications and supplies at Manassas Junction on August 27th. The next day, Jackson drew off to the old Bull Run battlefield, luring Pope after him under the delusion that Jackson's portion of the Army of Northern Virginia was sufficiently isolated that Pope's army could destroy it. Marching through the ruins of Manassas Junction, Porter and the Fifth Corps were ordered to take position southwest of the Sudley Springs-Warrenton Turnpike crossroads (at the center of the 1861 battlefield), under the impression that Porter would be able to turn Jackson's right flank. But the orders Pope issued for Porter's movement "at once on the enemy's right flank" on August 29th were vague, confusing, and—above all—late (the order for Porter to attack Jackson was written by Pope at 4:30 in the afternoon, but did not reach Porter until 6:30, when dusk was coming on). Porter also was beginning to realize what Pope did not: that the balance of the Army of Northern Virginia, under James Longstreet, was moving into position on Jackson's right, and ready to strike a devastating blow at Pope. Apprehensive, Porter ordered a pull-back of his skirmishers.

A copy of Porter's pull-back order crossed Pope's 4:30 attack order, and Pope promptly sat down at 8:50 that night and wrote out yet another order, demanding that Porter appear before him for an explanation. Porter did the next morning, August 30th, and tried to convince Pope of the trap waiting to spring on him. Pope would hear nothing of it. "I am positive, that at 5 o'clock on the afternoon of the 29th General Porter had in his front no considerable body of the enemy," Pope later insisted. "Every indication during the night of the 29th and up to 10 o'clock on the morning of the

30th pointed to the retreat of the enemy from our front." He could not have been more wrong. "No orders of this campaign," Porter later remarked, "more erroneously stated the attitude of the opposing forces or led to more serious disaster." That afternoon, Longstreet's "twenty-five thousand braves moved in line by a single impulse" over the Fifth Corps and everything else that composed Pope's left flank; by that evening, Longstreet and Jackson had crushed the Army of Virginia and sent it fleeing in disarray toward Washington.



General John Pope (LN-0935)

Pope, his army a shambles, at once flailed around for excuses, and found his principal target in Porter. "I think it my duty to call your attention to the unsoldierly and dangerous conduct" manifested "by officers of high rank," Pope wrote to Henry Halleck early on September 1st, and he was particularly incensed at "one commander of a corps who . . . fell back to Manassas without a fight." There was no mystery about who Pope had in mind. Pope had his acolytes in the Army of Virginia fully as much as McClellan had in the Army of the Potomac. Robert Milroy, an Indiana abolitionist who commanded one of Pope's brigades, exploded that the defeat at Bull Run was caused

by the "treachery and incompetency . . . of the Generals in the interest of McClellan," and "especially was Gen. Fitz John Porter most roundly berated." George Templeton Strong, the New York lawyer and treasurer of the U.S. Sanitary Commission, hinted at what would emerge as a continuing theme, that "McClellan, F. J. Porter and others" had long been "personally friends, allies and political congeners" with "Jackson, Lee and Joe Johnston," and were looking for an opportunity to "agree on some compromise or adjustment, turn out Lincoln and his 'Black Republicans' and use their respective armies to enforce their decision north and South." The *New-York Tribune* was more direct in who it fingered for blame. "I was with Pope's army as a correspondent," wrote Nathaniel Paige, and "Porter did not intend to help Pope win that battle."

Pope submitted a preliminary report on September 4th. The next day, Lincoln suspended Porter from command and ordered the convening of a court of inquiry into Porter's conduct at Bull Run.

That should have spelled the end of Porter's military career. It didn't, because the crisis that prevailed in the wake of Pope's Bull Run disaster was so grave that Lincoln felt he had no choice but to recall George McClellan, first to supervise the defense of Washington on September 2nd and then on September 6th to resume direction of the Army of the Potomac, with all of Pope's fragments securely under his control. Lincoln explained this volte-face as a recognition that McClellan "is a good engineer . . . [and] there is no better organizer," and "he can be trusted to act on the defensive." But behind that rationale was Lincoln's fear that although "there has been a design, a purpose in breaking down Pope . . . there is no remedy at present. McClellan has the army with him." And with the restoration of the Army of the Potomac, McClellan demanded—and got—the re-instatement of Porter, first for command of the

capital fortifications on the south side of the District, and then for the Fifth Corps again on September 11th.

Lee had no intention of challenging the Washington fortifications. Instead, he crossed into Maryland in hopes of rallying slaveholding Marylanders to take their state out of the Union, and then planning to venture brazenly into Pennsylvania, where he could inflict political damage on the Northern will to continue the war. The good news for Porter was that McClellan succeeded beyond almost every expectation in frustrating those plans. In just two weeks' time, McClellan rallied a beaten and disorganized army's morale, resupplied and re-organized it with new leadership at the corps level, integrated an ill-trained and ill-prepared wave of recruits into his existing forces, and then set off in pursuit of Lee's Confederates through Maryland. McClellan, in fact, moved so fast that Porter only caught up with McClellan on September 14th, with two divisions under General George Morell and General George Sykes. On that day, McClellan won a significant victory over Lee at South Mountain, and then won (at least) a victory at Antietam three days later.

The bad news was that none of this was sufficient to dispel the clouds of mistrust generated by Second Bull Run, over either McClellan or Porter. McClellan fell under immediate suspicion in Washington for not pursuing Lee after Antietam with sufficient verve, as well as for showing noticeably little enthusiasm for Lincoln's issuance of the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation on September 22nd. If anything, Porter (who was even more explicit in his criticism of the Proclamation to Manton Marble on September 30th) fared even worse. Throughout the entire day at Antietam, McClellan held Porter and the Fifth Corps in reserve at his headquarters at the Pry House, and the optics of that reserve looked like nothing so much as a conspiratorial

repeat of Second Bull Run. David Strother, a staff officer, noticed that Porter spent the day “with a telescope,” surveying the battlefield and speaking to McClellan “in words so low-toned and brief that the nearest by-standers had but little benefit from them,” as though the battle was “a drawing-room ceremony.”

This arrangement was not as palsied as it looked. Through the day, pieces of the Fifth Corps were detached to prop up General Edwin Sumner’s Second Corps, to support a tentative movement across the Middle Bridge over the Antietam Creek, and to cover the army’s trains and reserve artillery, so, that by the close of the fighting, Porter’s command was “not then 4000 strong” and perhaps “but little over three thousand men.” Nevertheless, hostile newspaper correspondents saw only typical Porter inaction. When “Burnside is pressed,” wrote the *New-York Tribune’s* correspondent, George Smalley, McClellan turned to Porter, whose “15,000 troops are lying . . . fresh and only impatient to share in the fight.” But Porter only “slowly shakes his head and one may believe that the same thought is passing through the minds of both generals. They are the only reserves of the army; they cannot be spared.” Even the *Times* of London’s correspondent, Francis Charles Lawley, sang the same damning song, that “General Fitz John Porter, with 15,000 men in reserve” became “the only body of men on the Federal side which was not engaged.” Nor did it help Porter that, on September 20th, the Fifth Corps was given the job of treading on the retreating Confederates’ heels across the Potomac at Shepherdstown, only to receive a humiliating brush-back.

This was only the beginning of sorrows for Porter. McClellan’s failure to chase Lee down after Antietam heated Lincoln’s ire to a hot pitch, and on November 7th, once past the danger line of the off-year congressional elections, Lincoln dismissed McClellan once and for

all. McClellan bade his farewells to the Army of the Potomac on November 10th, and the uproar of protest nearly crossed the boundaries of mutiny. “As General McClellan passed along its front, whole regiments broke and flocked around him, and with tears and entreaties besought him not to leave them, but to say the word and they would soon settle matters in Washington.”

Porter did not imagine he would do any better—“You may soon expect to hear that my head is lopped,” he wrote to Manton Marble on November 9th—and he was right. Two days after McClellan’s departure, Porter was once again relieved of command of the Fifth Corps. “The troops gave proof of their grief in many ways at the loss of the honored and beloved commander, who had, by his heroic bravery in battle, and by his kindness of heart in camp, endeared himself to them,” remembered the historian of the Fifth Corps, William H. Powell. But there was nothing like the demonstrations that had tried to persuade McClellan to defy Lincoln’s orders. “We are not aware,” remarked the laconic chronicler of the Pennsylvania Reserve division, “of there being any particular amount of ‘weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth’ at the event.” The engines of the post-Bull Run court of inquiry began turning once more, and on November 17th Porter was placed under arrest and “confined to the limits of his hotel” in Washington. On November 25th, the inquiry was reconstituted as a court-martial.

The court-martial required no crystal ball to predict its outcome. Porter was charged with nine violations of the Articles of War, all of them centering on his alleged disobedience of John Pope’s orders on August 29th and 30th. McClellan, called as a witness on January 2nd, testified to Porter’s “loyalty, efficiency and fidelity,” but from McClellan, those accolades were almost the kiss of death. When John Pope appeared as a witness, he

was so confident of himself that he declared that “had General Porter fallen upon the flank of the enemy” on the night of August 29th, “we should have destroyed the army of Jackson.” From there, it was only a short distance to the testimony of Pope’s aide, Thomas C. H. Smith, that he had been “certain that Fitz John Porter was a traitor,” and that Smith was ready to “shoot him that night, so far as any crime before God was concerned, if the law would allow me to do it.” The law did not, but it also did not prevent the court-martial from finding Porter guilty of all but two of the specifications on January 10th. Curiously, the *New York Times* had predicted that the trial would “unanimously” acquit “Gen. Porter of the charges brought against him,” and even the *New-York Tribune* conceded that “outside public opinion acquits the General.” But not the court. And above all, not Abraham Lincoln, who not only approved the verdict on January 21st (which dismissed Porter from the Army) but was convinced that Porter’s “disobedience of orders and his failure to go to Pope’s aid” at Bull Run had “occasioned our defeat and deprived us of a victory which would have terminated the war.” Lincoln told his confidante Leonard Swett that he had “read every word in that record, and I tell you Fitz John Porter is guilty and ought to be shot . . . He was willing the poor soldiers should die while he from sheer jealousy stood within hearing of the guns waiting for Pope to be whipped.” Porter’s inaction at Antietam only made matters worse, and Lincoln told his son, Robert, that “the case would have justified, in his opinion, a sentence of death.”

Fitz John Porter set to work almost at once to obtain a reversal of the verdict, and his chief counsel at the court-martial, Reverdy Johnson, published a vigorous condemnation of the court-martial’s proceedings, raging that “a greater injustice was never done through the forms of a judicial proceeding, than was done by the sentence of the Court Martial in the case of that gallant officer.” And indeed, the entire

trial can only be read (and was so read by Emory Upton in 1879) as a kind of star-chamber proceeding in which Porter became the American version of Admiral Byng, *pour encourager les autres* who might show insufficient enthusiasm for emancipation. Wheeled into action on only two days' notice, by a general (namely, John Pope) whom few people—even among those who condemned Porter—were unembarrassed enough to praise or promote, Porter may have been unimaginative in his decisions. But, those decisions were neither decisive in the outcome of Second Bull Run—that judgment belongs on Pope's and Irvin McDowell's heads—nor treasonous to the Union cause. And his supposedly baleful influence on McClellan at Antietam owes most of its force to the scandalous irresponsibility of the journalists who had already conceived a narrative to which Porter was made to fit.



Major General Fitz John Porter (LN-0943)

It would, however, take years for Porter to get the re-hearing he demanded. He found employment in mining and civil engineering—even, in 1871, assuming the job of cleaning-up the corruption

left behind by "Boss" Tweed as Commissioner of Public Works in New York City. It was not until 1878 that Porter's case was finally re-opened by the War Department, and, even then, unburied partisanship denounced "General Porter's conduct...at the second battle of Bull Run" as "essentially traitorous." Jacob Dolson Cox, one of the rare abolitionist general officers in McClellan's army (and who served as governor of Ohio immediately after the war), wrote a particularly vindictive review of the Porter case in 1882, which declared that Porter's "disaffection to Pope had led him beyond the verge of criminal insubordination." It was not until 1886 that President Grover Cleveland—the first Democrat president since the war—signed a bill restoring Porter to his original U.S. Army rank of colonel. Porter officially retired from the Army four days later. Weakened by the ravages of diabetes, he died on May 21, 1901.

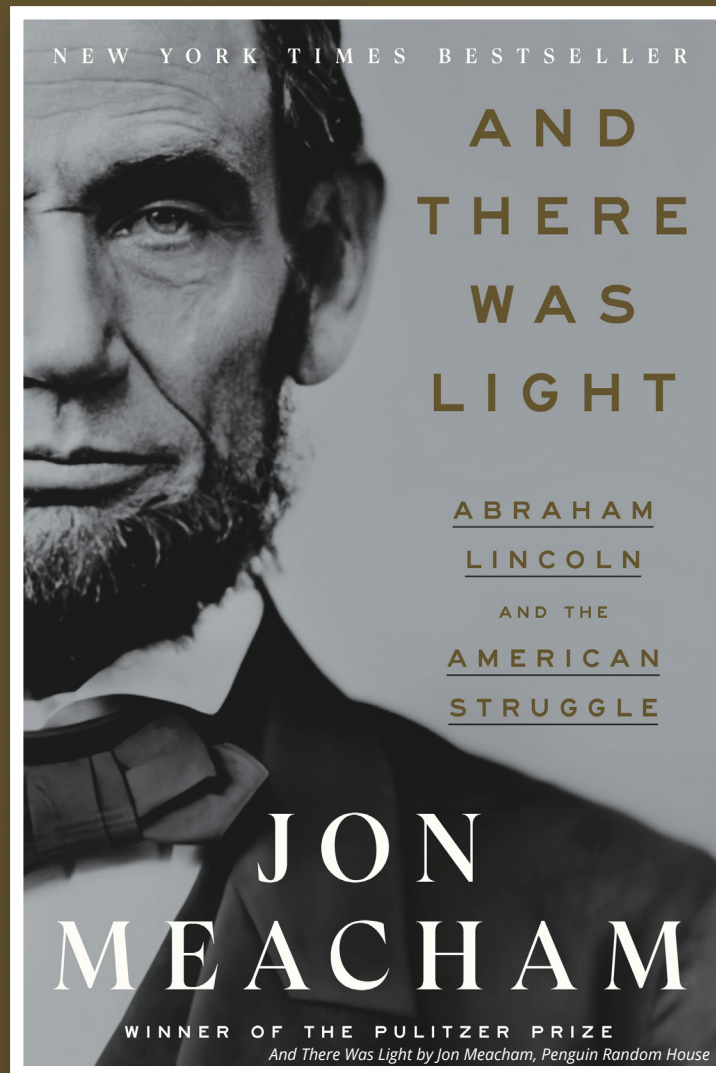
The unhappy fate of Fitz John Porter is a story of unfairness, even cruelty, meted out to a soldier whose only military crime had been the same myopia in the fog of war that afflicts all but the most acute possessors of the *coup d'œil*. It may be difficult to say more than that about him, too. Porter "departed... with the sincere regrets of all of his soldiers," but not near-mutiny. His humiliation, recorded one Massachusetts soldier, was "enough to move a heart of stone," but "by this time the old army had become a heart of stone," and Porter did not move it much. He was neither a traitor nor an idol, nor was he (as Otto Eisenschiml wanted to portray him) "an American Dreyfus," so, in the end, his condemnation says less about him than it does about the frailty of his condemners, even the frailty, in this case, of a man as ordinarily lacking malice as Abraham Lincoln.

Yet Fitz John Porter was also a man very much mistaken about the nature of the war he was fighting. He had imagined that he could

make pronouncements on civilian policy (and about a rival general charged with implementing those policies) that no one would notice, that he could ally himself with anti-administration associations without consequences, and that he did not need to concern himself over whether tactical decisions were liable to be understood as political malingering. Although Americans have liked to imagine that the principle of separation-of-powers organizes the civil-military relationship as much as it organizes the branches of government, the truth of that relation is a one-way street. American soldiers may not dally in politics, a lesson taught as early as George Washington's confrontation with his officers at Newburgh; however, American politicians may—even must—exercise a controlling influence over the military, and the military must submit to that one-way conundrum. Sixty-five years ago, Samuel P. Huntington warned that "the essence of subjective civilian control is the denial of an independent military sphere." Fitz John Porter, and the American Civil War, may be our most enduring reminders of that reality.

Dr. Allen C. Guelzo is the Director of the Initiative on Politics and Statesmanship in the James Madison Program at Princeton University.

Editor's note: All citations for this article will be included in the online version of *Lincoln Lore* at www.FriendsOfTheLincolnCollection.org



AND THERE WAS LIGHT: ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE AMERICAN STRUGGLE

Book Review by Phelps Gay

Not just another cradle-to-grave biography setting forth well-known facts of Lincoln's life, *And There Was Light* offers us a fresh look at his intellectual, moral, and spiritual development culminating in his decision to resist the voices of compromise and bring an end to American slavery. Over a brisk 421 pages, Jon Meacham weaves together a compelling narrative firmly grounded in—though not weighed down by—meticulous research. From the first sentence of the prologue to the last of the epilogue, we are in the hands of a skillful storyteller who knows how to elucidate and entertain. The result is a book Lincoln aficionados will not want to miss.

For those who believe Lincoln did not seriously engage with anti-slavery ideas until Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, Meacham offers a corrective. Married by an antislavery clergyman named Jesse Head, Lincoln's parents became "steeped full of Jesse Head's notions about the wrong of slavery and the rights of man as explained by Thomas Jefferson and Thomas Paine." In Kentucky, Thomas and Nancy Lincoln belonged to an emancipation group called the Baptist Licking-Locust Association Friends of Humanity, which declared that "every enlightened citizen abhors slavery . . . as a sin against God."

In Indiana, Abraham served as sexton in the Little Pigeon Creek Baptist Church. As we know, after services Lincoln would go out to work in the field, get up on a stump, and repeat verbatim a sermon he had just heard. But Meacham dives deeper, telling us these sermons were preached by two antislavery ministers, William Downs and David Elkin, offering vivid profiles of each. He also traces "the roots of religious antislavery convictions" on both sides of the Atlantic, from the work of Rev. John Newton (who wrote "Amazing Grace") to the teachings of Methodist John Wesley to the preaching of David Barrow, a Baptist minister who helped found the Licking-Locust Association in Kentucky.

Thus, later in life, when Lincoln described himself as "naturally antislavery," Meacham notes "he was not manufacturing a useful past for political purposes. He was reporting the fact of the matter."

At the same time, something in Lincoln's questing mind resisted strict adherence to religious orthodoxy, particularly the Baptist notion of predestination. Meacham ends his chapter on Lincoln's religious upbringing with a remark Lincoln reportedly made as a young man: "Probably it is to be my lot to go on in a twilight, feeling and reasoning my way through life, as questioning, doubting Thomas did."

Question and doubt he did, becoming "voraciously curious" during his New Salem years. He was particularly influenced by Constantin Volney's *The Ruins, or, Meditation on the Revolutions of Empires* and Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* because of "their insistence on the individual interpretation of reality rather than the blind acceptance of tradition." As Paine put it, "My mind is my own church." Under this spell Lincoln prepared "an extended essay" against Christianity, contending Jesus Christ was not the son of God. According to his law partner and biographer, William Herndon, this essay was "read and freely discussed" in New Salem circles.

Enter Samuel Hill, a friend of Lincoln's who "snatched the manuscript and thrust it into the stove." As Herndon recalled, "the book went up in flames and Lincoln's political future was secure." In recent remarks at the annual symposium of The Lincoln Forum, Meacham observed: "If not for Samuel Hill, we wouldn't be here."

According to Lincoln's friend Jesse Fell, "no religious views with him seemed to find any favor except of the practical and rationalistic order," but, he added, if "called upon to designate an author whose views most nearly represented Lincoln's on this subject, I would say the author was Theodore Parker."

A major theme of this book is that conscience is divinely inspired. Over time Lincoln's struggle to find "the right thing to do" became bound up with his effort to discern the will of God. Meacham tells the story of Parker's inclination as a boy to "poke a little spotted tortoise sunning himself in the shallow water" of a stream, when he heard a voice say: "It is wrong!" He asked his mother: "What just happened?" His mother replied, "Some men call it conscience, but I prefer to call it the voice of God in the soul of man. If you listen and obey it, then it will speak clearer and clearer, and



Pigeon Creek Church (71.2009.083.1986)

always guide you right, but if you turn a deaf ear and disobey it will fade out little by little and leave you all in the dark without a guide."

For the reform Unitarian minister and abolitionist Parker (as for Lincoln) the Bible was not "the end of the conversation, but the beginning." To ground a claim about reality "solely on scripture absent reason and conscience" was, for Parker, "risible and wrong." God gave us mind and conscience, both of which were to be "engaged in guiding the lives of individuals and of nations." Principles of justice and good were "of divine origin," and "people could discern those principles through reason and interpret them through conscience."

Meacham provides Parker's precise words regarding the "arc of the moral universe," words later shortened by Martin Luther King, Jr., and Barack Obama. In an 1853 sermon called "Of Justice and the Conscience," he said:

"I do not pretend to understand the moral universe, the arc is a long one, my eye reaches but little ways. I cannot calculate the curve and complete the figure by the experience of sight; I can divine it by conscience. But from what I see I am sure it bends towards justice."

In the 1850s Parker corresponded with William Herndon, and a sermon Parker delivered in Boston to the New England Anti-Slavery Convention resonated with Lincoln. Extolling the "American idea" that all men are created equal and have inalienable rights, Parker said that "government is to be established and sustained for the purpose of giving every man an opportunity for the enjoyment and development of all these inalienable rights." Foreshadowing a certain address later delivered by Lincoln, Parker said this idea "demands...a democracy, that is, a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people; of course, a government after the principles of eternal justice, the unchanging law

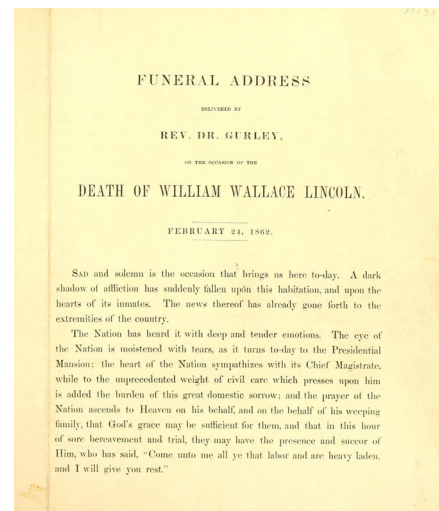
of God."

What Meacham charts in this book is Lincoln's progression from a young skeptic to an "art-of-the-possible" politician to a president determined to discern and follow the will of God. Tempered by tragic experience—including the unspeakable death and suffering caused by the Civil War and the death of his son Willie—Lincoln embraced the idea of a living God who acts in human history. In his "Meditation on the Divine Will" he wrote, "In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party." Visiting with Chicago ministers in September of 1862 (pre-Antietam), he assured them he was considering whether to issue an emancipation proclamation with these words: "Whatever shall appear to be God's will, I will do."

Here I would add that Meacham also portrays Lincoln's relationship with Rev. Phineas D. Gurley, pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, as significant in his spiritual development during the Civil War years. As an "articulate proponent of a doctrine of Divine Providence that held the world was charged with theological import, even if the purposes of the Almighty remained mysterious," Gurley offered Lincoln "a worldview that acknowledged the invisible while simultaneously investing humankind with the responsibility of bringing the visible and the tangible into closer accord with an ideal of justice."

After Willie's death, Gurley counseled: "God's ways are not our ways." "What we need in the hour of trial," he said, "is confidence in Him who sees the end from the beginning . . . let us hear His voice and inquire after His will." Meacham hastens to add that Lincoln's experience with Gurley "did not amount to a conversion"; instead, it was an "immersion in a Presbyterian theology in which God was an active participant in the affairs of the world."

In the Second Inaugural, which to Frederick Douglass "sounded more like a sermon than a state paper," Lincoln emphasized that while North and South "pray to the same God," the "prayers of both could not be answered," and "neither has been answered fully." Instead Lincoln suggested that "the Almighty has his own purposes," and that as punishment for the "offense" of American Slavery a "Living God" gave to both North and South "the woe due to those by whom the offense came." Writing to Thurlow Weed eleven days later, Lincoln observed that "men are not flattered by being shown there is a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however, is to deny that there is a God governing the world."



Rev. Gurley's Funeral Address for William Lincoln (71.2009.084.05451)

For this reader *And There Was Light* shines brightest when the author focuses on Lincoln's intellectual and spiritual development. An Episcopalian currently serving as Canon Historian at the Washington National Cathedral, Meacham is deeply knowledgeable about religious history and takes care to explain the source and meaning of all Biblical references, whether made by Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, Theodore Parker, or others. At the same time, he is a gifted journalist and Pulitzer Prize-

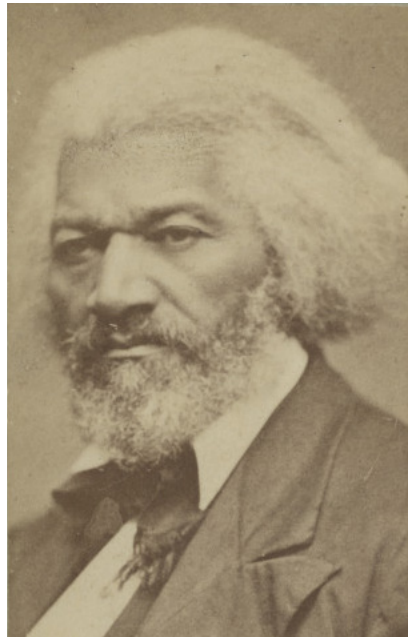
winning historian, so that the story of Lincoln's life flows forward in crisp, graceful prose spiced with erudition and wit.

In fairness, those looking for a full factual account of Lincoln's life might look elsewhere. There is little here regarding Civil War battles, not very much on the Lincoln marriage or law practice, and no reference to his near-duel with James Shields or the Lincoln-Berry store, aside from a glancing reference to its "winking out." For such thoroughness one must turn to Michael Burlingame's indispensable two-volume *Abraham Lincoln: A Life*. On the other hand, Meacham does an excellent job within the space allotted (or chosen), working in acute observations and pithy quotes from a wide variety of sources, all of which are scrupulously documented in 153 pages of source notes. Such concision gives the book a certain momentum and allows it to stay focused on its theme.

In tracing the course of Lincoln's moral development, Meacham is careful not to characterize him as a saint or martyr. As shown in his remarks at Charleston, Illinois, during the Lincoln-Douglas debates, Lincoln was not above pandering to racial prejudice in his quest for political advancement, and he was slower than contemporaries like Charles Sumner and Salmon Chase to suggest equal rights for African Americans such as voting and jury service. Still, Meacham convincingly demonstrates that at critical junctures—such as resisting the proposed Crittenden Compromise in 1861; adhering to emancipation as a precondition of peace in August 1864, despite the prospect of defeat in the upcoming presidential election; and pressing forward with House passage of the Thirteenth Amendment in January 1865—Lincoln stood fast, guided by conscience.

Hovering over these pages is the stentorian voice of Frederick Douglass, who alternately criticized and praised Lincoln's actions as

president, not always appreciating that a wise political leader must sometimes move slowly to get great things done. Looking back in 1876, Douglass registered his appreciation for what Lincoln had accomplished: "Viewed from the genuine abolition ground," he said, "Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined."



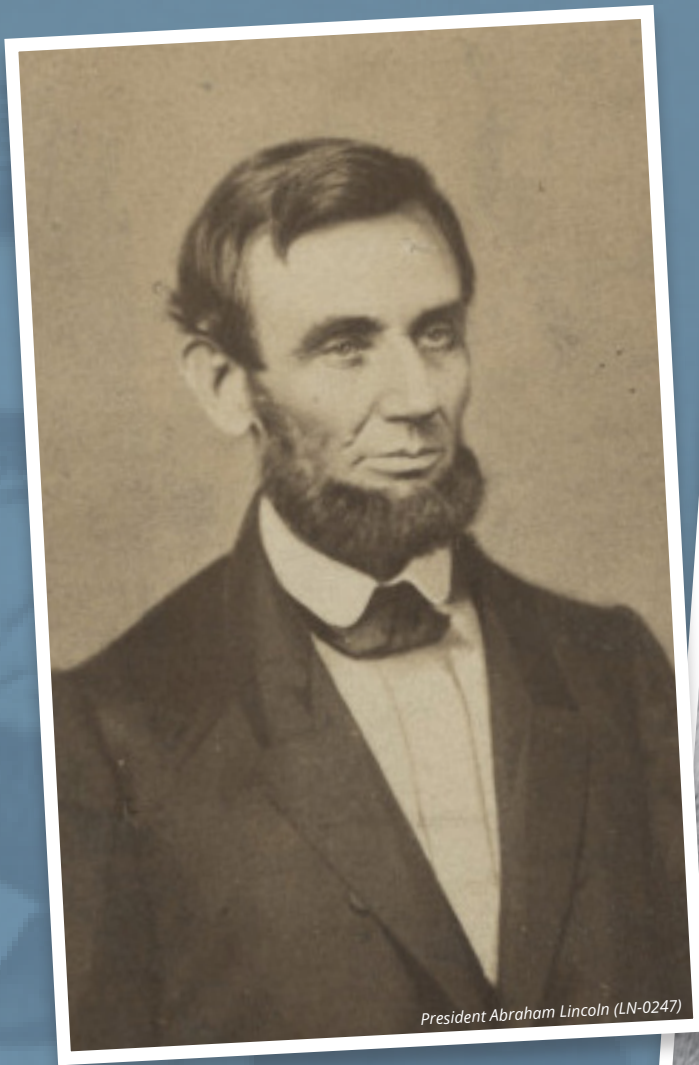
Frederick Douglass (LN-0512)

Throughout, Meacham's writing is polished—indeed, often dramatically "novelistic," as in this first sentence: "The Storm had come from the South." Vivid and sometimes surprising details crop up, such as Lincoln's high regard for English politician and reformer John Bright, whose portrait (one of only two) Lincoln hung in his White House office, and a near-cinematic account of Frederick Douglass's persistent and ultimately successful attempt to get past security to congratulate Lincoln on his Second Inaugural. Mining all possible sources—letters, diaries, speeches, newspaper accounts, and "recollected words"—Meacham condenses them into a highly readable narrative. Much like

his subject, he enjoys telling stories, and he does it well.

The book is also handsomely put together, with well-chosen epigraphs, color portraits of persons mentioned in the text, and drawings of places Lincoln lived, wrapped in a stylish dust jacket. In this age of PowerPoint, where one is expected not just to tell but show, Meacham and his editors have met all expectations.

In sum, from his perch as a public intellectual and popular historian, one whose image we often see on television and whose books routinely shoot to the top of the bestseller list, Jon Meacham doesn't merely recount Lincoln's well-known story. Through lively prose, fresh analysis, and painstaking research, he enriches our understanding of Lincoln's intellectual and spiritual journey. As Harold Holzer has observed, this book "instantly takes its place at the forefront of Lincoln literature."



President Abraham Lincoln (LN-0247)



President Harry Truman (LOC 96523444)

LINCOLN & TRUMAN

Varied Expressions of the American Spirit

Max J. Skidmore

There is, to be sure, an element of unfairness in a comparison of any other president with Abraham Lincoln. It's a rare presidential ranking that fails to put Lincoln at the top of the list as America's most outstanding president. Admittedly – although I have participated in many of them, and certainly they are interesting – the value of rankings is highly questionable.

First, is it reasonable to ask what could we learn from comparing chief executives who served in extremely varied circumstances? For example, consider comparing two quite able, very successful, popular, Republican presidents – such as, say, Eisenhower and McKinley – and concluding that one ranks so many points above the other. Can such a comparison tell us anything significant? These presidents were in office separated considerably in time, in expectations, in external conditions, in powers, and in visibility.

Second, nearly all rankings are developed from questionnaires that historians or political scientists who generally have some expertise regarding the presidency fill out. Yet it is unusual to find people in either field who have much knowledge of all the presidents. It is especially rare to find people who have in-depth knowledge of each of them. In any case, the questionnaires seeking information for ranking do not examine the qualifications of those asked to supply that information.

Moreover, now that there has been a flood of presidential rankings since the initial one that Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., pioneered in 1948, they have certainly influenced subsequent rankings. Nearly all who participate would be at least somewhat familiar with rankings and are likely as a result to go along with their predecessors in placing presidents about whom they know little.

Off the tops of their heads, how many of those contributing to

rankings can honestly speak meaningfully about, for example, Millard Fillmore, Zachary Taylor, Chester Arthur, or Benjamin Harrison? Also to the point, how can anyone think it reasonable to rank James A. Garfield, who was effective only for about four months until an assassin shot him, causing him to die after a couple of tortured months later? From the viewpoint of rankings, isn't it even more egregious (and unfair to him) to include William Henry Harrison, whose presidency lasted all of one month? Even if rankings in general have enough value to be taken seriously, how can anyone believe that it is fair to compare a president who was in office only a month with others who had far longer to make their mark?

Having begun with such a criticism, I certainly concede that it would be the rare observer who could take issue with any placement of Lincoln at the top, with Washington and FDR following, or with Pierce, Buchanan, Andrew Johnson, or Trump far below the others. Truman's reputation was at a low ebb when he left office, but has risen through the years to rank him as at least among the near-greats.

A comparison between Lincoln and Truman in this respect would point to consistency: Lincoln's consistent position at the top, and Truman's consistent rise, boosted by popular culture. Truman's down-to-earth qualities wore well, and the partisan sniping that plagued him while in office dwindled afterward, while at the same time the public's affection for him grew.

At the risk of reaching, I suspect each of these outstanding presidents, Lincoln and Truman, would be skeptical of rankings. It may be reaching even more, but I believe also that each, despite their widely varied circumstances and talents, would be appreciative of the other; certainly, each deserves appreciation. We do know that Truman thought highly of Lincoln. In Merle Miller's remarkable oral

history, Truman numerous times praised Lincoln. Referring to Lincoln's comment that it is possible to fool some of the people some of the time, Truman said, "Old Abe was right about that as he was about most other things." "If Lincoln said it, the chances are ninety-nine out of a hundred that I would agree with it." "Lincoln was a great president." Both presidents came from modest backgrounds; in Lincoln's case, the poverty was severe. He was born on the frontier, virtually in the wilderness, on February 12, 1809. He made his way by determination, intellect, and a sense of justice. He had, to put it mildly, a strained relationship with his harsh father who had either no understanding of, or possibly no concern for, his exceptional son. He was close to his mother, Nancy Hanks, from whom he believed he had received his mind. Tragically, she died when Lincoln was nine. Fortunately, his father married again.



Young Abraham Lincoln Driving a Team of Oxen
(71.2009.081.0703)

Lincoln's stepmother was Sarah Bush Johnston, or "Sally." She "soon loved Abraham as if he were her own son." Lincoln, similarly, "adored" her, and she encouraged him to read everything he could find. Both she and Lincoln mentioned, years later, how determined he was to understand everything that adults were saying, and never to permit himself to rest without fully comprehending anything to which he was exposed. That characteristic was, however subtly, to characterize him throughout his life.

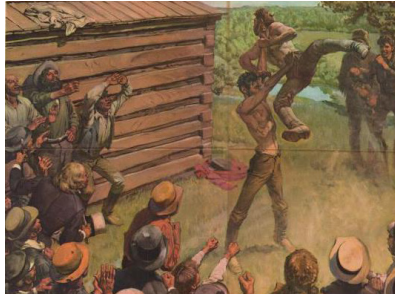
There is less detail available about Truman's boyhood, but he was born

in Lamar, Missouri, a small village in a rural area. There is no information regarding his brief time in Lamar, and the family moved several times during the first few years of his life. The birthplace home, though, today is a historic site that the state of Missouri owns and maintains. The town of Lamar, after Truman's birth on May 8, 1884, played no role in his life, nor did the small house in which he was born. As Robert Ferrell put it, Truman's parents had built it for \$685, moved away a year later and sold it for \$1,600, and it then "passed from their minds. When Harry ran for U.S. senator in 1934 he returned; there is no evidence he had visited earlier. Nominated for the vice presidency in 1944, he chose Lamar for the notification ceremony, but until that year his wife and daughter had not seen the place."

His father was a small man with a fiery temper that frequently led him into fights, where he fought "like a buzzsaw." His volatility, fortunately, did not carry over into family life. Truman biographers generally agree that he never hit the children, and some even portray him as a caring father. There seems certainly not to have been the animosity toward his father that characterized Lincoln's upbringing, but Truman, like Lincoln, was closer to his mother.

In 1889, the family, having moved to a farm owned by his grandfather, Solomon Young, had gone out to view a Fourth of July fireworks display. It became apparent "that Harry Truman had a problem with his eyes." He could not see the display in the sky, and only heard the explosions. He was discovered to be extremely nearsighted, and a doctor fitted him with thick glasses. Glasses were to characterize him throughout the rest of his life. The doctor warned him not to engage in sports, and to avoid physical activities that might break them. That led him in his boyhood to be different. It could be described in many ways as out of the mainstream. He was never "one of the fighters as he called them." He

ran from fights, David McCullough said, and quotes him as saying that he endured teasing because of his glasses. Certainly it was uncommon for children to wear them at the time. "To tell the truth," Truman told Merle Miller in his oral history, "I was kind of a sissy."



Abe Lincoln Licks Jack Armstrong
(71.2009.081.1701)

His brother Vivian, though, remembered it differently. He said Harry was not teased. Rather than being a sissy, it was merely that he was different, serious. The other boys respected him, recognizing that he had read widely and possessed an immense store of useful information. They turned to him for information to settle disputes. If they were arguing the history of the James gang, for example, they would trust him to know the historical facts.

Whatever the truth is regarding his fleeing violence as a child, such reticence did not carry over into adulthood. Numerous biographies describe how Truman volunteered for service in the Great War at the advanced age of 33 (when the draft called up men only through 32, and in any case exempted farmers as essential workers), and how he memorized the eye chart so that his poor vision would not disqualify him. He served with valor and extraordinary courage.

Moreover, the quality of his leadership was clear, as demonstrated by the outstanding performance of the unit he commanded as captain. He inspired loyalty as well. Men who served under him demonstrated their respect by supporting him throughout his political career.

In a rather concise but admirably comprehensive chapter, McCullough describes Truman's military service, absolutely including combat, as a turning point in his life. For someone who had never been in a fight, and who never before faced danger, it was an extraordinary awakening. Harry Truman's natural qualities emerged, and he had become a leader.

Biography also contributed to the resuscitation of Harry Truman's reputation. As indicated, that reputation was very low when he left office in January 1953, but it proceeded to grow steadily on its own. Like Adams, Truman had the disadvantage of succeeding a giant figure, in his case Franklin D. Roosevelt; unlike Adams, Truman had a personality that wore well, and he fared far better than any other president who followed a truly extraordinary figure (Adams, Van Buren, Andrew Johnson, and Taft). Truman could be petty—and he was hardly charismatic—but he radiated honesty, had generally good judgment, was forthright, and was decisive. More and more the public came to appreciate his plain-spoken style. When he died (December 1972) the country was being shaken by Vietnam, had just delivered a crushing defeat to the Democrats, and may have been marginally aware that it soon would be shaken yet again by "Watergate" – the most serious presidential scandal in history until the Trump era submerged it under a cascade of unprecedented and completely unanticipated presidential actions. In 1973 Alonzo Hamby published an analytical work on Truman's presidency, and soon, in 1975, so great had Truman's stature become that "Give 'Em Hell Harry," a one-man show with James Whitmore playing Truman, had its debut in Washington, D.C.; it captivated the country. Whitmore received an Oscar nomination for his portrayal of Truman in the same year the film version appeared. The stage show for years played regularly around the country, and finally made it to New York in 2008.

Other books praising Truman followed, as did television shows. Perhaps most successful in portraying the “Man from Missouri” to a general audience was the hugely popular—and also excellent—biography by David McCullough. In 1992, when McCullough brought out that massive and publicly acclaimed biography, *Truman*, Truman’s reputation had shot into the ranking stratosphere.

As an aside, despite the excellence of McCullough’s histories, many academicians find it too painful to give due recognition to works that are accessible and popular. One historian I remember hearing on NPR sniffed that McCullough “received the ‘obligatory’ Pulitzer, of course.” The identity of that historian has faded from my memory, while memories of Truman, and yes, McCullough, remain strong.

Truman brought McCullough his first Pulitzer Prize, and solidified Truman’s reputation as an outstanding American president. Robert Ferrell then brought out an in-depth study in 1994, and Alzono Hamby added yet another in 1995.

Lincoln and Truman certainly were unlike physically. Lincoln was physically imposing; Truman was not. As a young man, Lincoln was celebrated as a wrestler who could defeat all comers. He had prodigious strength. Doris Kearns Goodwin relates the well-known incident that took place when Lincoln, who then was in his 50s, was on a Treasury ship steaming to meet with his reluctant (yet arrogant) general, George McClellan. “Lincoln playfully demonstrated that in ‘muscular power he was one in a thousand,’ possessing ‘the strength of a giant.’ He picked up an ax and ‘held it at arm’s length at the extremity of the [handle] with his thumb and forefinger, continuing to hold it there for a number of minutes. The most powerful sailors on board tried in vain to imitate him.”

Both Truman and Lincoln had integrity and determination. Each was driven to do the right thing regardless of opposition or threats to reputation. An immediate difference, according to Miller, was that “Lincoln was an outwardly melancholy man. Truman was not. His general demeanor was sunny, and if he experienced depths of depression or despair, he kept it private.” Lincoln had charisma, Truman had a down-to-earth appeal. Each had experienced racist conditions – in fact, each had grown up in a society in which racism was pervasive – yet each had risen above his surroundings and become outraged at the inevitable injustices that racism generated. As a young man Lincoln was exposed to slavery when he took a flatboat trip to the Deep South. He thought that he had to do something to reform the system if ever he were in a position to do so.

Both Truman and Lincoln had some racist sentiments when young, but each had an innate sense of fairness that prevented him from developing the virulent racism with which his society bombarded him. When President Truman was informed of the maiming of a veteran returning home from defending his country, he determined to use his presidential powers to do something about it.



Abraham Lincoln and George McClellan
(LFA-0562)

Each also took an action that only a very few people in history could have had the power to accomplish. That is, each fired a popular general (in Lincoln’s case, two: Frémont, and McClellan). Lincoln, though, was

the only president whose entire presidency was characterized by the overwhelming presence of war.

As to that civil war, unquestionably it was a huge tragedy, killing over 600,000 Americans; recent estimates have elevated that figure to 750,000 or so. In retrospect, many writers have concluded that such an enormous bloodbath could not have been justifiable. It is difficult, however, if not impossible, to come to that conclusion without a racist dismissal of the claims of millions of human beings to self-determination.

That is to say, Southern leaders were so determined to maintain their system of enslavement that it could never have been eradicated without force. As for a more moderate course, it is doubtful that it could ever have succeeded. Even if it could have been effective, such a course would have prolonged enslavement inexcusably. Just how much oppression could it ever be “justifiable” to ask of a people? It is worth noting here the observation of a subsequent president who was himself an accomplished historian, Theodore Roosevelt. “As regards the actual act of secession, the actual opening of the Civil War,” he said, “I think the right was exclusively with the Union people and the wrong exclusively with the secessionists.” He followed with, “I do not know of another struggle in history in which the sharp division between right and wrong can be made in such a clear-cut manner.” As I said when discussing this elsewhere, “Roosevelt’s mother was from the South and had sympathized with the Confederacy, and all his life he had taken pride in the heroic deeds of his maternal uncles who fought for the South. He was too keen an observer, however, to ignore the facts. Slavery and secession were indefensible.”

As the conflict began, everyone knew what had happened. One has only to read the articles of secession that the Confederate states adopted

to recognize the constant refrain of Southern complaint that the North was interfering, or was potentially interfering, with its “peculiar institution.” At the war’s end, there remained no doubt as to its cause: the South fought not only to retain but to expand its system of human chattel slavery.

By the end of the nineteenth century, though, it was obvious that fighting for the right to enslave people put the white South on the wrong side of history. Thus, a neo-Confederate school of historians arose to propagate the “Lost Cause” myth that dominated American history for decades. It obscured what should have been obvious: what the country almost assuredly would have become had Lincoln lost, had there been no Lincoln, or had there been no war. Historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. (along with *Harper’s Magazine’s* Bernard DeVoto) was the exception who saw through the cant and recognized its implications.

Schlesinger spoke of an “amateur historian of impeccable Confederate ancestry” who made it clear that the Civil War had been justified. This historian was Harry Truman himself, who wrote a commentary on an article by MacKinlay Kantor in *Look Magazine* titled “If the South Had Won the Civil War.” Truman was sufficiently realistic to base his interpretation on the facts, rather than received “wisdom” of the Lost Cause. If Lee had won, he said:

“England would have recognized the Confederacy, and France would have stayed in Mexico with a French Empire from Panama to the Rio Grande. . . . Russia would have kept Alaska and in all probability have taken all Northwestern Canada.

There would have been the Northwest Republic, the Northeast Republic, the Confederate Republic, the Mexican Empire in the Southwest, with California, Utah, Arizona, and New Mexico as part of that Empire.

And the Bolsheviks would have had the whole Northwest, and what then? Maybe the Northeast and the Southeast could have created an alliance and held the Russians at the Mississippi. Isn’t it great to contemplate?

My sympathies and my family were on the side of the South. But I think the organization of the greatest republic in the history of the world was worth all the sacrifices made to save it.”



President Harry Truman (LOC 96523444)

Truman wrote this from retirement in Independence, Missouri. One thing he failed to mention is that the Confederate republic—assuming that it survived—would have maintained its practice of enslaving people, but because of Lincoln and the Civil War no longer was there an extensive system of human slavery in the Western Hemisphere. What Lincoln accomplished required “superb political skills as well as steeled determination.” The distinguished historian John Hope Franklin (who, of course, was far above the Lost Cause school), outlined Lincoln’s shrewd politics. Lincoln, he wrote, had been successful in arranging for Nevada, where Republicans were strong, to be admitted in time for its electoral votes to be counted. He issued orders for soldiers who wanted to go home to vote to be furloughed to do so, assuming correctly that they would be supportive. “He had been

responsible for the disintegration of the opposition within the party and for undermining the arguments and proposals advanced by Democrats. The political victory of 1864 was therefore in a real sense a Lincoln victory.”

Bruce Catton summed it up. He wrote, perceptively, “there have been few bitter-end fighters in all history quite as tenacious as Abraham Lincoln.”

Being a “bitter-end fighter,” though, does not describe the complete Lincoln. He had a poetic sense as well. Although he provides no source, Epstein has said that “while no one nowadays wishes Lincoln had given up politics, the critics Jacques Barzun and Edmund Wilson have both proposed that Lincoln – alone among our presidents – could have made a lasting contribution to American letters if he had preferred a literary career.”

In fairness, one should note that other presidents did write poetry. Despite his dour countenance, John Quincy Adams is among them, as is Jimmy Carter, whose 1994 *Always a Reckoning and Other Poems* received some favorable comment from critics.

Lincoln was certainly among America’s most cerebral presidents, but he had no formal education. His reading was characterized more by depth than by breadth, yet he was superbly—considering his challenges one might conclude uniquely—successful. Jackson, Franklin Roosevelt, and Lyndon Johnson obviously possessed keen intelligence also—it is not too extreme to say that along with Lincoln they exhibited political genius—but they were not scholars nor were they “intellectuals.” Unlike Lincoln, they were not among our most “cerebral” presidents, yet Jackson and FDR performed skillfully in office, and LBJ was extraordinarily effective in his domestic policy.

Lincoln’s exposure to Transcendentalism came primarily

from the works of three of its prominent adherents: Ralph Waldo Emerson, Walt Whitman, and Theodore Parker. His law partner, William Herndon, called his attention to Parker's writings. As president, Lincoln's mastery of the language enabled him to create in the Gettysburg Address what Garry Wills accurately described as "The Words that Remade America." Wills pays tribute to his genius: "Lincoln was an artist." His address "created a political prose for America, to rank with the vernacular excellence of Twain."



The Gettysburg Address (ZPC-424)

In his Gettysburg Address of a mere 272 words, Lincoln portrayed the Declaration of Independence as America's founding document, with the Constitution as a splendid but necessarily imperfect instrument designed to approximate the Declaration's ideal. "Equality" took its place among America's fundamental principles. Lincoln's "dialectic of ideals struggling for their realization in history owes a great deal to the primary intellectual fashion of his period, Transcendentalism." The Declaration became an influence not limited to America; it was one

that radiated "out to all people everywhere." As Hutchison put it, Lincoln had "transplanted" the "'transcendentalist' credo to the political sphere."

Wills quotes Hemingway that "all modern American novels are the offspring of Huckleberry Finn. It is no greater exaggeration." Wills adds, "to say that all modern political prose descends from the Gettysburg Address." Lincoln "was a Transcendentalist without the fuzziness. He spoke a modern language because he was dealing with a scientific age. . . . Words were weapons, for him, even though he meant them to be weapons of peace in the midst of war." Wills does not exaggerate when he writes that Lincoln "came to change the world, to effect an intellectual revolution. No other words could have done it. The miracle is that these words did. In his brief time before the crowd at Gettysburg he wove a spell that has not, yet, been broken. . . ."

Wills wrote these words some three decades ago. Recently, that spell has become strained. America entered dark days: its government first engaged in pre-emptive war, and subsequently installed a president who seemed to believe that he could rule without limit – or at least that he should be able to do so, even disregarding the vote itself – thus coming close to erasing Lincoln's "self-government." Those days have not passed, despite the discrediting of the administration that brought them, but optimists see promise that they are ending.

Lincoln's interpretation of the Declaration was the interpretation that most Americans had come to accept; it may yet be restored as official policy, considering that we now have rational leadership in office. Repairing the damage, though, will take time, and will depend upon the continuation of rational leadership.

Wills notes that "preparing the public mind" was of great importance in an age of

Transcendentalism. It is no less important now that Lincoln's principles have suffered erosion from such powerful assault. Using the proper words, adopting literature to the task may be of great assistance in the restoration. It will require wisdom and leadership of enormous skill. The world will join us in hoping that it will not require another Abraham Lincoln. Another Truman might be sufficient. His thoughtful practicality, his informed common sense, may be enough to form an effective substitute for Lincoln's Transcendentalism. Recent American politics may offer reason for hope. In September 2022, after President Biden's culmination of policy successes (both legislative and by executive order) and his talks giving blunt defenses of democracy against any and all attackers, "pundits" began to say he had found his inner Truman.

To be fair, considering the intensely partisan nature of today's politics – partisanship that eclipses even the bitterness of Truman's time – such comparisons of Biden with Truman usually have come from Democrats. The first such comparison, though, came just after Biden's inauguration. Director of the Truman Library and Museum, Kurt Graham, noted a number of similarities, including especially the humility of each. So, there may now be a glimmer of hope. Considering the turmoil and irrationality of the political scene today, even a glimmer is welcome.

Max Skidmore is University of Missouri Curators' Distinguished Professor of Political Science Emeritus. This paper was presented at the 39th Annual Abraham Lincoln Lecture at Louisiana State University Shreveport on October 22, 2022.

Citations for this article may be found at <https://www.friendsofthelincolncollection.org/lincoln-lore>



Lincoln's Toast at the Long Nine Banquet (71.2009.083.1305)

LINCOLN & THE FRANCHISE

M. Kelly Tillery, Esq.

“The most fundamental right in America is the right to vote – and to have it counted. And it’s under assault. In state after state, new laws have been passed, not only to suppress the vote, but to subvert entire elections. We cannot let this happen.”

Joseph R. Biden, Jr., 46th President of the United States of America, State of the Union, March 1, 2022

Teddy Roosevelt, who at six years old, on April 25, 1865, watched Lincoln’s funeral procession from a window of his grandfather’s home in Manhattan, often said that as president, when confronted with a dilemma, his first inquiry to himself was, “What would Lincoln have done?”



Lincoln’s Funeral Procession in New York City (OC-0307)

As we today face an unprecedented, relentless, well-organized, systematic, nationwide effort to suppress, dilute, not count, and even change the votes of millions, surely it is timely to ask, “What would Lincoln do?” To answer, we must examine what he said and did in regard to the sacred franchise. Lincoln dealt with virtually every electoral issue we encounter today – fraud claims without evidence, actual fraud, voter ID, alien voters, voter eligibility restrictions, military vote, gerrymandering, sore losers, conspiracy theories, bundling, drop boxes, mail-in voting, recounts, court challenges, court-packing, and more.

In 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected to the presidency in a nation of 31,443,321 people, the largest democracy then or ever to that point. The United States was the only large democracy other than Britain, though that nation restricted the franchise to less than 3 percent of its citizenry and had an unelected, hereditary monarch and one unelected, hereditary legislative house. The Swiss Republic, the Republic of San Marino, Liberia and the Boer Republic were the only other democracies in a world otherwise governed by a variety of dictators, warlords, and “royals.” As historian Michael Lind says, the United States was “the first-sustained, large-scale republic since antiquity.” This nation and its special form of government, “of the people, by the people and for the people,” was then only four score and four years young. It was still an experiment and, sadly, in serious danger of failing because 11 of 33 states that had participated in a free and fair national election refused to accept its outcome – the greatest single voter suppression event in history.

Over a period of 34 years Lincoln had actual experience at every level of the electoral process, from the most basic casting his first ballot to the pinnacle of being re-elected president. He served as voter, election clerk, vote tally courier, candidate, state legislator, congressman, presidential elector, campaign manager, and president. Along the way, he was also employed in areas intimately intertwined with electoral politics, including postmaster, journalist, essayist, lecturer, newspaper owner, and, of course, lawyer. And, curiously, he was a victim of voter suppression himself on more than one occasion.

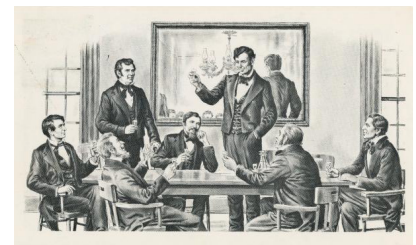
FIRST CONTACT

The earliest election-related document in Lincoln’s hand is a May 26, 1830, Petition to the Macon County Commissioners’ Court

signed by Lincoln and 44 other “qualified voters” requesting that the polling location for Decatur Precinct be moved from Permenius Smallwoods to the courthouse in Decatur. Curiously, although not yet then actually such a “qualified voter” due to the Illinois six-month residence requirement and not yet even aspiring to be a lawyer, it is an example of the early recognition by his neighbors that he could write and of his civic engagement in the electoral process. He was all of 21 and had been in Illinois only a couple of months. The petition states no reason for the request or the location, apparently a man’s name and no doubt referring to his home, but the Decatur Courthouse on the southwest side of the new town square was a central location and would make voting easier for most of the small electorate.

Thus, even before he cast his first vote, Lincoln publicly expressed concern and demand for making voting easier for more people. It became a recurring theme in his political life. Ironically, however, the man soon to be called “Honest Abe” began his political journey disenfranchised by voter eligibility limits and with a technically false written representation to a government body.

GERRYMANDERING



Lincoln’s Toast at the Long Nine Banquet (71.2009.083.1305)

Lincoln jumped into the partisan politics of reapportionment in a special section of the Illinois legislature early in his political career in December 1835, just as he was becoming one of the Whig floor leaders. The “Long Nine” of Sangamon County, including the longest, Lincoln, were a product of

that 1835 reapportionment. Thus, Lincoln and the interests of his constituents were beneficiaries of partisan apportionment, though, of course, not then (yet) based on race or any other immutable characteristic, just political party.

By the early 1850s the tables were turning and though the Democrats held control, they required gerrymandering to maintain power. Lincoln litigated only one significant case related to the franchise and it involved reapportionment. In *People ex rel Lanphier and Walker v. Hatch*, 19 Ill. 283 (1857), he successfully prevented Democrat legislators from compelling the implementation of a gerrymandered reapportionment bill. In 1857, Illinois was a microcosm of the divided nation – a Republican governor with a Democrat-controlled House and Senate, based on Republican majority in the north and Democrat majority in the south. But things were changing. As Chicago and the north expanded, Republicans were swamping Democrats and would surely lead in the 1858 elections in a fair vote – unless the Democrat-controlled legislature somehow changed the rules so that their newly-minoritized party could retain control.

As the Illinois Constitution of 1848 required reapportionment every five years, a new legislative district map was required in 1857 based on the 1855 census. Since the days of Elbridge Thomas Gerry (1744–1814) and his infamous “Gerry-mander” (1812), manipulation of legislative district shapes had been a time-worn, sure-fire way for a minority to cling to power by changing the rules. The Illinois Democrats moved swiftly to pass a reapportionment bill proposed by Representative Samuel W. Moulton (D-Shelbyville) on strict party lines in the House (38 to 33) and the Senate (13 to 9).

All, including Lincoln, expected the Republican governor, William H. Bissell, to veto this obvious partisan ploy, but being handed several bills at once to act upon by his private

secretary, Benjamin F. Johnson, Bissell “inadvertently” signed the reapportionment bill and Johnson reported the same to the House. Bissell quickly realized his error, crossed out his signature, inserted “Not” before “Approved” and sent a veto message half an hour later on February 18, 1857.

While most would have understood this simple human error and accepted the correction, desperate Democrats refused to let go of this slender thread of gimmickry that just might allow them to retain power, albeit soon a minority.

One can imagine Lincoln simply whittling, shaking his head, thinking, “This is why people hate politicians.”

The parties lawyered up and girded their loins for battle in the Illinois Supreme Court over one word – “not.” Republican Lincoln represented Secretary of State Ozias M. Hatch while Lincoln friend and frequent political and legal opponent Democrat John A. McClernand represented Lanphier and Walker, printers. Though the printer-plaintiffs nominally sought a mandamus (court order) directing Hatch to give them the “approved” apportionment bill to publish “as the law,” the case was actually simply a test of the validity of Governor Bissell’s correction of his mistake.

Lincoln and his co-counsel, fellow Republican Jackson Grimshaw, opposed the Democratic petition for mandamus. After briefing and three hours of argument, the three Democratic members of the Illinois Supreme Court, eschewing party loyalty and applying common sense and reason, denied the petition, allowing the veto to stand. Lincoln had defeated the Democrats’ effort to change the rules to avoid the effect of a change in the composition of the electorate.

While a victory for principle, law, and Lincoln, the practical implications for him were not so. Without any new reapportionment at all, the 1858 legislature was elected based on

the 1854 apportionment, which also favored the Democrats as based on the then outdated 1850 census. That new legislature, also Democrat-controlled, unsurprisingly tried again to gerrymander the districts. Incensed that they would disregard the spirit of the Illinois Constitution and to try to continue control by “a minority of the people,” Lincoln himself authored Governor Bissell’s second and timely veto message. To add insult to injury, that same Democrat-controlled legislature sent Stephen A. Douglas back to the U.S. Senate instead of Lincoln, even though there were more Republican votes than Democrat for the state legislators who made that choice. Lincoln was defeated, victim of a gerrymander.

Lincoln and friends, however, had the last laugh. Even under the 1854 “Democrat-favored” apportionment, Republican majorities were elected in both houses and reapportioned districts more fairly in 1861 based upon the U.S. Census of 1860. And, of course, by then Lincoln was elected president and had on his hands a much larger abuse of the electoral system by eleven Southern states.

CLAIMS OF VOTER FRAUD

Lincoln’s first known encounter with claims of voter fraud was in the 1838 Illinois congressional election in which his then-law partner, Whig John Todd Stuart, bested Lincoln’s lifelong political nemesis, Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, by only 36 votes out of 36,000 – 1/10 of 1 percent. Douglas charged fraud and demanded Stuart agree to a new election, but Stuart demurred. Lincoln sprung to his colleague’s defense. Ever the advocate, Lincoln knew that “the best defense is a good offense” and that evidence of improper votes for Douglas would be good ammunition in any upcoming legal fight.

Lincoln signed, sent and probably drafted a letter to the editor of the *Chicago American* newspaper, William Stuart, (and also to other

friendly Whig editors) requesting assistance in “the collection of proofs” regarding whether there were any mistakes “for or against Mr. Stuart” “on the face of the Poll Books of your County?, whether any minors or persons not resident for six preceding months had voted, and whether any ‘unnaturalized foreigners’ had voted for Douglas?”



Stephen A. Douglas (OC-0552)

Lincoln went further, asking for the “names” of any such “illegal voters,” the names of any witnesses regarding same and the names of local justices of the peace before who depositions could be taken to “procure the proofs.” And finally, Lincoln urged the editors to “consult political friends,” “solicit their assistance in procuring the above facts,” and appoint “precinct committees as you may think advisable.”

This aggressive, political, and legal effort to gather evidence useful in any court challenge is classic Lincoln – assess the injustice, gather all the evidence, ensure it is legally proper and admissible and be fully prepared for challenge. It is safe to assume that Douglas became aware of this early, bold, and preemptive move by Lincoln and it may have

been the, or one of the, reasons he decided not to challenge Stuart’s election. Like many defeated candidates and their supporters, Douglas may have felt cheated and sincerely believed that there was impropriety in the process, but actual evidence, and evidence of wrongdoing without which he would have won, was required to overturn an election. Douglas was a politician but he was also an able lawyer, a litigator, and knew the challenger had the burden under law to prove fraud sufficient to change the results. As much bluster as there was, there was just as little evidence – an all too common theme in election fraud cases.

Only two years later, Lincoln faced more such baseless claims. Whig William Henry Harrison defeated incumbent Democrat President Martin Van Buren in 1840 by a wide electoral margin. While the popular vote was close, there were no claims of widespread voter fraud at the national level. However, in Illinois, some disgruntled Democrats did make serious allegations of massive fraud, though more in concern for local elections with closer margins.

As he had just done the year before, Lincoln bristled at the suggestion that the sacred franchise had somehow been infected by fraud and spoke up with power and conviction. Lincoln friend, colleague at the bar, and frequent political opponent, John A. McClernand, Democrat of Gallatin County, complained of several instances of fraud including a claim about a mysterious steamboat which had allegedly plied the waters of the Wabash River up and down “voting a large number of people in various towns.”

Lincoln remarked on these baseless claims in the House and proactively introduced a resolution to have the matter “referred to the committee on elections” “to prepare and report” “a Bill [to] ... afford the greatest possible protection of the elective franchise, against all frauds of all sorts whatever.” Lincoln was

thus on record against “all frauds” and for the “greatest possible protection of the elective franchise,” but he was also requiring actual evidence of the same.

In response to “the Governor’s Message as it relates to fraudulent voting” and McClernand’s rantings, Lincoln called these claims “stupendous frauds,” “without granting for a moment the truth of any of the gentleman’s charges and surmises.” While he was “afraid of no investigation” and “if it was a fact that Legislative action was necessary to protect the elective franchise from abuse,” he could see no good coming from the investigation McClernand proposed because “he had every reason to believe all this hue and cry about frauds, was entirely groundless and raised for other than honest purposes.”

In order to test “the truth and character of these charges” Lincoln brazenly offered his own Sangamon County as a test case of a “special investigation” wherein “every vote should be scrutinized.” He observed that, “as much fraud had been charged to have taken place in Sangamon County as anywhere else,” “surely no gentleman who was honest in his beliefs of these frauds could object to the proposition.”

Lincoln thus made clear that there was no evidence of fraud, that the “hue and cry” was “raised for other than honest purposes” and a simple test in a sample county would likely confirm the same. Ever the careful lawyer, he demanded actual evidence, not political bluster. Unsurprisingly, again, no such evidence was ever forthcoming and the dispute died on the vine.

“ERIN GO VOTE...”

On October 20, 1858, Lincoln expressed concern about large scale voter fraud by Democrats in “doubtful districts” using Irish railroad workers to vote where they did not reside. Based only upon his “meeting” of “fifteen Celtic gentlemen, with black carpet sacks

in their hands" in Naples, Illinois, and a rumor he heard in Brown County about 400 such men being "brought into Schuyler, before the election," Lincoln wrote to his colleague Norman B. Judd, that what he feared was Democrats taking advantage of an electoral loophole and of such men by having them vote in a district where they did not reside. Lincoln knew that as they were "legal voters in all respects except residence" all they had to do was "swear to residence" and that would "put it beyond our power to exclude them." He knew it would be "next to impossible to convict them of perjury upon it."

Lincoln may have been paranoid on this point as he had little, if any, evidence of such a widespread, elaborate conspiracy. But his concern must have been genuine, as he told Judd twice that he was confident of winning, "if we are not over-run with fraudulent votes to a greater extent than usual" and "if we can head off the fraudulent votes," and then, oddly, he "suggested" a "dirty trick" of his own.

To counter this anticipated voter fraud by his opponents, in a very un-Lincolnlike manner, he made to Judd a "bare suggestion" that was arguably unethical and possibly illegal. It must be noted that this scheme pre-supposed that there was, in fact, such "a known body of these [illegal] voters," as Lincoln began his "suggestion" with, "Where there is a known body of these voters..." Apparently feeling "turnabout is fair play," Lincoln thought it would be "a great thing," "when the trick is attempted on us," to have "a true man of a 'detective' class" "introduced among them in disguise" "who could at the nick of time, control their votes?" presumably meaning to have them vote (illegally) Republican, not Democrat. "Think it over. It would be a great thing, when this trick is attempted, to have the saddle come upon the other horse."

So, not only was Lincoln suggesting that they suborn

perjury (have voters attest falsely on residence), but also that they encourage widespread voter fraud and interfere with a man's sacred franchise. If he was also intimating that they be bribed to vote Republican, then he was "suggesting" at least four or five crimes per voter. Not exactly "Honest" Abe.

Fortunately, the hordes of perjurious Celts were not to be found on election day and Lincoln's "bare suggestion" remained just that, not evidence cited in his indictment.

ACTUAL VOTER FRAUD

Lincoln's concern with voter fraud on occasion was real and documented, but evidence of actual voter fraud, much less any conviction for the same, was extremely rare. In fact, there is only one known instance of convictions for voter fraud of which there is evidence that Lincoln was aware.

On February 27, 1865, five days before his Second Inaugural and three months after his re-election, Lincoln wrote to Judge Advocate General of the U.S. Army Joseph Holt asking him to "procure the record, and report to me, on the case of Edward Donahue, Jr. about election fraud." Lincoln was assassinated only six weeks later, so we know not why he wanted this information, whether he received it or what he intended, if anything, to do about it.

Donahue had defended the charges against him of forging ballots for soldiers but had been convicted in large part based on the confession and testimony of his cohort, Moses J. Ferry. Donahue and Ferry had been charged with and convicted by a military commission chaired by General Abner Doubleday of forging ballots of New York soldiers, changing them to votes for George McClellan and other Democrats. The plot was foiled by a New York (Clinton County) vote monitor, Orville Wood, who, though

appointed by Democrat Governor Horatio Seymour, was a Lincoln supporter.

Perhaps Lincoln was curious about this voter fraud "unicorn" and/or was considering a pardon for Donahue. Of course, this actual fraud was miniscule and could not possibly have impacted the outcome of the election. Lincoln beat McClellan in New York by 6,549 votes (368,735 to 361,986).

WOMEN

On June 13, 1836, 27-year-old Abraham Lincoln wrote to the editor of the *Sangamo Journal*, published on June 18, 1836, stating his positions as a candidate for his first re-election to a seat in the legislature on two key issues: who shall bear the burdens of government and who shall share its privileges and distribution of proceeds of sales of public lands to the states to dig canals and construct railroads. Lincoln therein also plainly stated, "...I go for admitting all whites to the right of suffrage, who pay taxes or bear arms, (by no means excluding females)."

Some historians discount this comment, but Lincoln's friend, fellow Whig and last and longest law partner, Billy Herndon was an early supporter of many social and political reforms, including the franchise for women. Herndon later said he believed that Lincoln's "broad plan for universal suffrage certainly commends itself to the ladies, and we need no further evidence to satisfy our minds of his position on the subject of 'Women's Rights' had he lived."

Lincoln's relationship with and thoughts on women are complex and require substantial further analysis, yet one would find it hard to discern in anything Lincoln said or did that would evidence any philosophical or moral opposition to the women's suffrage. In fact, virtually everything he ever said about the franchise was

gender neutral. As with many advancements, even though he personally may have preferred this, he knew it was far beyond his power to implement and the nation was not yet ready for it. As he would say during the Trent Affair with England, "One war at a time."

BLACK MEN

As of September 18, 1858, Lincoln's position was clear: "I am not nor have I ever been in favor of making voters... of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office...." As the war changed so many things, it would also change his mind on these issues. Less than four years later in his last address, on April 11, 1865, he would say, "It is also unsatisfactory to some that the elective franchise is not given to the colored man. I would myself prefer that it were now conferred on the very intelligent, and on those who serve our cause as soldiers." Lincoln and the nation had evolved.

His suggestion in this last speech had actually been made a year earlier in private correspondence with Michael Hahn, governor-elect of Louisiana. Lincoln then used his "intelligent" condition (with "very" as a modifier) in his March 13, 1864, letter to Hahn. He never explained what he meant, but at a minimum he probably meant literate. Lincoln told one of his secretaries, William O. Stoddard, that the vote will be about the "only protection" Black people have after the war is over.

As Herndon had said of Lincoln's view of women voting, Frederick Douglass, Lincoln's friend, told audiences in Washington City and at the Brooklyn Academy of Music the year after the assassination, "Mr. Lincoln would have been in favor of an enfranchisement of the colored race, I tell you, he was a progressive man, he never took any step backwards."

Historian Michael Burlingame argues that Lincoln was assassinated not for winning the war or freeing the slaves but

rather for calling for even limited Black suffrage. Booth and his co-conspirators Lewis Payne and David Herold were in Lincoln's audience on April 11, 1865, as was Frederick Douglass and Edward Bates, Lincoln's first attorney general. When Lincoln expressed favor for some Black men to have the vote, it was the moment Booth expressed his plan to kill him, saying: "That means nigger citizenship. That's the last speech he's ever going to give. I'm going to run him through." Up until that moment, Booth's plans had always been to kidnap, not kill, Lincoln. If Lincoln was a martyr, it was as much due to Black men's right to vote as anything.

ALIENS

Lincoln was known to often write anonymously for politically friendly newspapers. While some pieces attributed to him are of doubtful provenance, others are clearly his positions, written in his voice. The "Editorial on the Right of Foreigners to Vote" published in the Galena, Illinois, *Daily Advertiser* on July 12, 1856, is decidedly the latter. The position stated that unnaturalized foreigners residing in Illinois prior to the adoption of the then new state constitution could legally vote under Illinois law, which was Lincoln's legal and political position. This "eight-point" style was also clearly his because 1) cites and states simply and clearly the opposing position, 2) restates the position as fairly and expansively as reasonable, 3) cites and quotes relevant legal authority, 4) cites and explains what the legislature did using that authority, 5) concludes, 6) advises those affected accordingly, 7) rhetorically causes readers to consider the implications of the opposite position, and 8) invites opponent to explain – all in ten sentences, five paragraphs. This style does not get much more Lincolnesque.

Lincoln reiterated his opposition to laws restricting the right of naturalized citizens to vote three years later. Writing to German American publisher Theodore

Canisius, he said it was not his place "to scold" Massachusetts for its recent such constitutional provision, but he was "against its adoption in Illinois or any other place, where I have a right to oppose it." "Understanding the spirit of our institutions to aim at the elevation of men, I am opposed to whatever degrades them," and thus cannot "favor any project for curtailing the existing rights of white men, even though born in different lands, and speaking different languages from myself."

VOTER ID

In Lincoln's time few white men did and fewer were required to carry any type of identification or proof of legal status. Free people of color, however, were required to do so in many states as were enslaved persons when travelling off their enslavers' land. In America then, and sometimes today, the chilling demand of "papers, please" is a prelude to some restriction of rights. No state required any type of identification for voting, though when registering some proof of age, residence, duration of residence and/or race was often required, no doubt most often simply neighbor vouching. However, naturalized American citizens, who in Lincoln's era had to be "free white persons," were often suspected of not being qualified voters and thus subject to abuse by those who did not like the way they often voted.

On November 1, 1858, Lincoln authored and published in the *Illinois Journal* a bipartisan "Opinion on Election Laws" addressing this issue. He was joined by two other Whig lawyers, B.S. Edwards and his former law partner Stephen T. Logan, and concurred in by Democrat state judge Samuel H. Treat.

The brief, one paragraph, dry, legalistic opinion, relies on the Illinois State Constitution, the Illinois Election Law of 1849, and the effective portions of the Illinois Revised Code of 1848, and

concludes simply that “any person taking the oath prescribed in the act of 1849, is entitled to vote” unless counter proof “satisfying a majority of the Judges that such oath is untrue.” This meant that any “foreigner” white male, 21 and over, resident of the county for six months prior and taking the oath was “entitled to vote,” or at least was presumed so in the absence of “counterproof” by a preponderance of the evidence.

As often times in politics, some do not recognize, understand, apply, or honor the law as written, especially in voting. Lincoln and his colleagues added some practical, preparedness advice to naturalized citizens upon going to vote—“take their papers with them.” In this present era of voter ID suppression laws, Lincoln’s suggestion bears repeating in its entirety:

“The Register of yesterday morning assumes that the Whigs will attempt to prevent our adopted citizens from voting today; and it advises them not to take their naturalization papers to the polls. By the opinion of three Whig lawyers and one democratic Judge, which we publish this morning, it seems the having the Naturalization papers at the polls is not indispensably necessary, but notwithstanding this, we would advise our friends among the adopted citizens to take their papers with them, as the shortest and easiest way of doing the thing up, in case of a controversy.”

Unsurprisingly, Lincoln did the right thing – he honestly and cogently explained the law and gave practical advice to assist those in voting who might be hampered, even though their votes were more likely to be for his political opponents. Eminently Lincolnesque.

VOTER SUPPRESSION LITIGATION

Lincoln sometimes refused to take an otherwise acceptable legal case when he disagreed with its merits or goal. So it was with a matter that his partner Billy Herndon,

then also Clerk and City Attorney for Springfield, proposed to him shortly after Lincoln returned from his unremarkable one term in Congress in 1850. Lincoln refused to participate, telling his friend and partner simply and clearly, “I am opposed to lessening the right of suffrage and I am in favor of its extension and enlargement... I don’t intend by any act of mine to crush or contract suffrage.”

Years after Lincoln’s death, attorney Charles Shuster Zane recalled that when serving as Springfield City Attorney in 1858, he also had tried to engage Lincoln to serve as co-counsel in a similar case to deprive immigrants of the vote. Lincoln flatly refused, presumably for the same reason he had in 1850.

Neither the *Collected Works* nor the *Legal Papers* include any document evidencing that Lincoln was ever a litigant or counsel for any party in any election or voting irregularity dispute. As he handled virtually every other type of legal case imaginable and was as active in politics as any man, this absence is surprising.

LAST DISENFRANCHISEMENT

In ultimate irony, President Lincoln himself was disenfranchised by voting restrictions in his last election. Still as a resident of Springfield, Illinois, where he owned a home and business and intended to return, he was a registered voter there, not in Washington, D.C. The Illinois Constitution at the time required voting in person on Election Day, with no provision for absentee voting. Thus, he would have had to travel back to Springfield on November 8, 1864, to vote, a long journey away from his duties for a limited (one vote) purpose.

As Commander-in-Chief, he could have voted as many soldiers did, in the field. But unlike most states, Illinois did not make provision for same. The only active duty Illinois soldiers who voted were ones allowed to return home on furlough. Even if he were considered a resident of Washington, he still could not have voted for himself, as Washington residents did not get the right to vote for president until a century later after the ratification of the Twenty-third Amendment. Thus was Lincoln disenfranchised for yet a third time in his last and arguably most important election.



Reading the Returns of the Presidential Election (71.2009.081.1926)

INSURRECTION

Violence interfering with any aspect of the franchise was anathema to Lincoln. On January 5, 1861, Lincoln wrote to his secretary of state-to be, New York Senator William H. Seward that the day that the electoral votes would be counted was the most perilous day for the Republic: "It seems to me that inauguration [sic] is not the most dangerous point for us. Our adversaries have us more clearly at disadvantage, or the second Wednesday of February, when the votes should be officially counted... I think it best for me not to attempt appearing in Washington till the result of that ceremony is known."

Although duly elected in a fair and valid election, Lincoln feared most not his inauguration, but what almost happened on January 6, 2021 – that the houses of Congress might refuse to meet or be prevented from doing so for the counting of the electoral votes. As Lincoln said, "Where shall we be?"

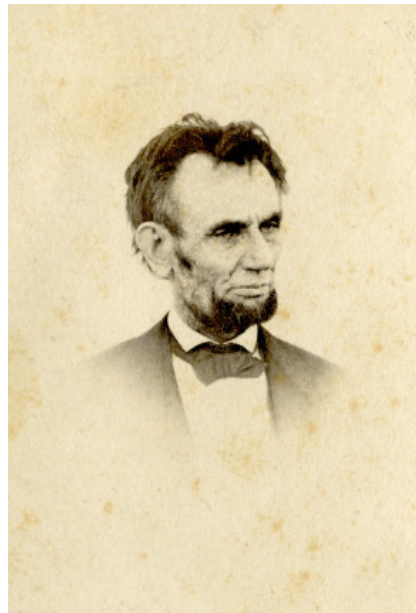
Washington City was on February 13, 1861, filled with thousands of armed District of Columbia volunteers, including cannons commanding the broad avenues, guards at every cross street, and sharpshooters atop prominent buildings. Fortunately for Lincoln, the Union and democracy, the Congress assembled and Vice President John C. Breckenridge (an unsuccessful candidate himself, winning the second most electoral votes) dutifully and uneventfully opened, counted, and announced the votes as required by Article II, Section 2, Clause 3 of the Constitution, certifying 180 electoral votes for Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States.

Lincoln friend and colleague Congressman Elihu B. Washburne (R-Ill.) was present on the day of count observing:

"...As in all times of great excitement, the air was filled with numberless and absurd rumors;

a few were in fear that in some unforeseen way the ceremony of the count might be interrupted and the result not declared. And hence all Washington was on the *qui vive*."

Somewhat ominously, however, Washburne continued, "Mr. Hindman, [Congressman Thomas C. Hindman of Arkansas] one of the most violent and vindictive secessionists, insisted that the ... committee inform General Scott that there is no more use for his janissaries about the Capitol, the votes being counted and the results being proclaimed." There was a certain feeling of relief among the loyal people of the country that Mr. Lincoln had been declared to be duly elected president, without the least pretense of illegality or irregularity.



*Last Photograph of Abraham Lincoln
(OC-0220)*

John Palmer Usher, who served as Lincoln's secretary of the interior, later also expressed surprise that the Secessionists allowed the electoral count to proceed without incident or even protest: "The secessionists dominated both Houses and they had it in their power to prevent the counting of the electoral vote." Usher said that William Seward was "apprehensive that Mr. [Jefferson] Davis might

inaugurate the rebellion before Mr. Lincoln was to be inaugurated – that he would resist the canvassing of the electoral vote."

Lincoln's fears were reasonable, yet the nation was spared such electoral violence until just two months later at 4:30 a.m. on April 12, 1861.

CONCLUSION

Lincoln's words and deeds evidence that he stood for (1) expansion of the franchise to all adult citizens, (2) making voting legally and practically easier for all, (3) fair apportionment of districts, and (4) actual evidence of any claimed fraud and against (5) anything that would inhibit (1), (2), or (3), (5) fraud of any sort in the electoral process, and (6) violence or threats of violence in any aspect of the process.

M. Kelly Tillery practices law in Philadelphia. This article was first presented at the International Lincoln Center Conference in Shreveport, LA on October 22, 2022. It is a preview of Mr. Tillery's book of same title to be published next year.

Citations for this article may be found at <https://www.friendsofthelincolncollection.org/lincoln-lore/>

Lincoln LORE

ACPL.INFO

LINCOLNCOLLECTION.ORG

FRIENDSOFTHELINCOLNCOLLECTION.ORG