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Editor's Note



I am truly grateful to those of you who wrote to me about how much you enjoyed the Summer issue of *Lincoln Lore*. I was thrilled to have such pathbreaking essays by Christopher Oakley and Michelle Krowl in my inaugural issue. The book reviews were also highly informative, and I was glad to be able to bring attention to a book by an esteemed member of the Board of the Friends of the Lincoln Collection, Bill Bartelt.

In this issue we gain new perspectives on how Lincoln approached the issues of race and slavery throughout his life. Edna Greene Medford brings us into the racially charged election of 1864 as Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, and others sought to understand (and at times either avoid or exploit) the race issue in that pivotal campaign. Glenn W. LaFantasie takes us thirty years earlier, to Lincoln's time as a boatman who traveled to New Orleans and saw the horrifying sights of slavery. In many ways, these two pieces offer bookends to Lincoln's life as he grappled with two of the central issues of American life and politics at the beginning of his adulthood and at the end of his presidency.

As promised in my first Editor's Note, I hope to bring increased attention to the Lincoln Collection and the history of *Lincoln Lore*. In a fascinating interview with Gerald J. Prokopowicz, we learn stories of the creation of The Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne in the 1990s. And in a collections piece by Kayla Gustafson and Jessie Cortesi, we see some of the important work being done in the Rolland Center today.

Finally, I would like to congratulate Sara Gabbard for being awarded the Sagamore of the Wabash by the state of Indiana for her work with the Lincoln Collection, and Jessie Cortesi for being selected as The Lincoln Forum's 2023 Ross E. Heller Fellow.

- Jonathan W. White

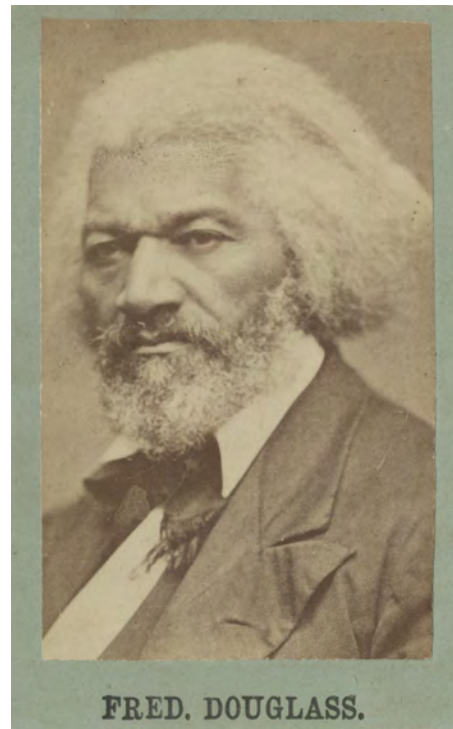
On The Cover: *Lincoln Quick Step* (71.2009.083.0024)



"The American Declaration of Independence Illustrated," ca. 1861 (Library of Congress)

LINCOLN, DOUGLASS, & THE POLITICS OF RACE

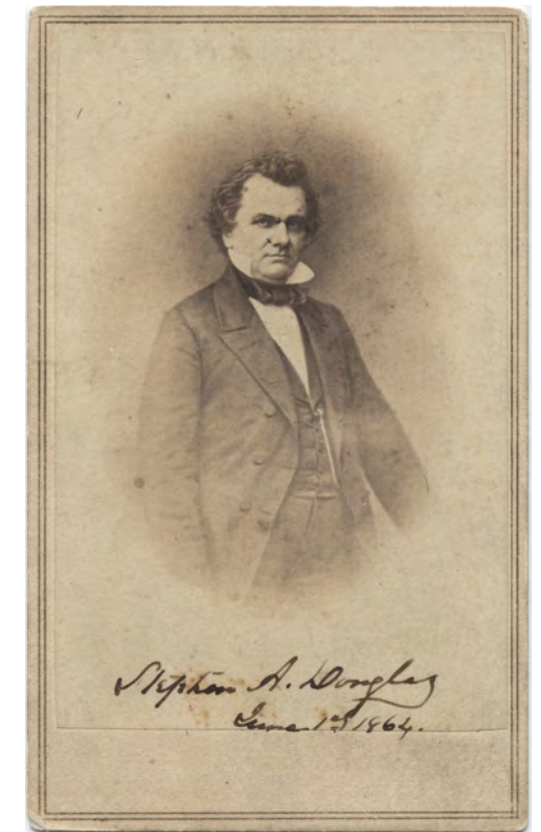
Edna Greene Medford



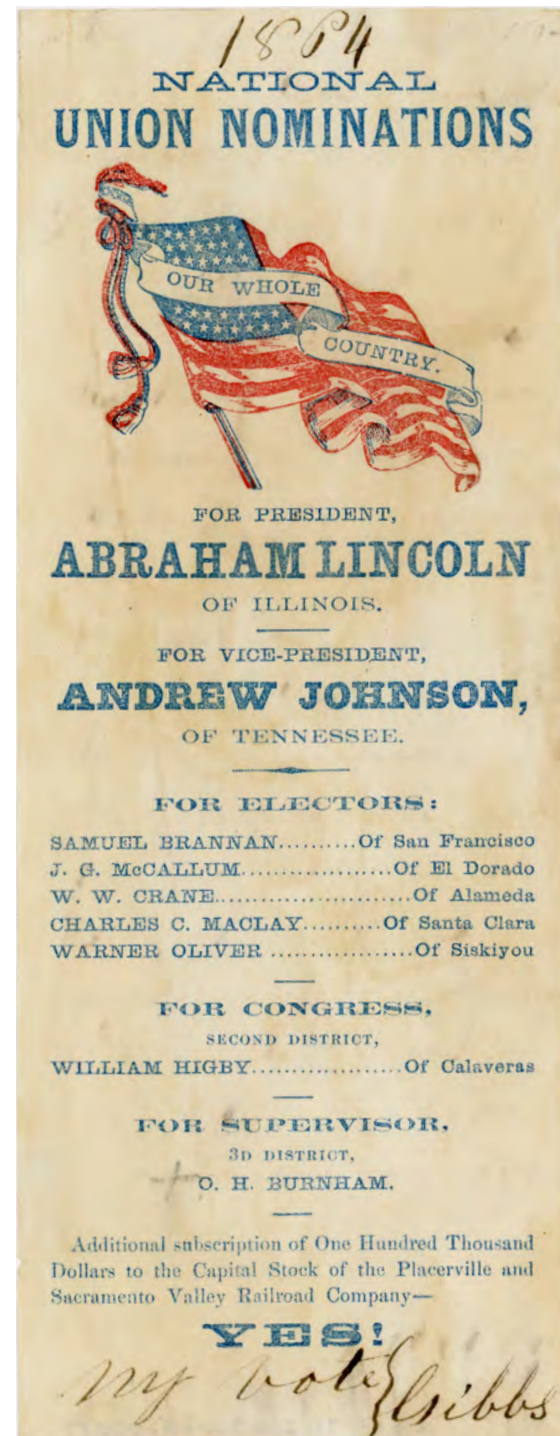
Frederick Douglass (LN-0512)

widely expected nor accepted by white Americans, even the abolitionists. For many (perhaps most) it did not matter if the Black man or woman was enslaved, free, unlettered, educated, crushed by poverty, or economically secure. Whiteness was the standard that determined the extent to which Americans would be permitted to partake of the nation's many opportunities, and most Americans accepted this. The 1857 decision

of the U.S. Supreme Court in *Dred Scott v. Sandford* reflected prevailing public sentiment. The Court declared that African Americans "had for more than a century before been regarded as beings of an inferior order," that they were not citizens of the United States and hence were not entitled to the protections enjoyed by other Americans. Free Black men and women contested such assertions. They declared that it was bigotry that imposed disabilities on African Americans and prevented their advancement: "We meet the monster prejudice everywhere," one complained. "We cannot elevate ourselves . . . prejudice follows us everywhere, even to the grave."



Stephen A. Douglas (LFA-0478)



Republican Ballot from California, 1864 (71200908500017)

A few weeks before the 1864 presidential election, Frederick Douglass penned a letter to Theodore Tilton, an abolitionist and the editor of *The Independent*, a New York newspaper. Referring to the impending election, Douglass wrote: "To all appearance [the Republicans] have been more ashamed of the Negro during this canvass than those of 56 and 60. . . . I am not doing much in this Presidential canvass for the reason that the Republican committees do not wish to expose themselves to the charge of being the Nigger party." Frustrated by the party's discomfort with some of the more radical ideas of its supporters, Douglass declared that "The Negro is the deformed child, which is put out of the room when company comes."

Douglass's blunt assessment of the relationship between the Republicans and African Americans reflected the political realities of the day. Many in the party would indeed have considered African American canvassers a political liability, especially someone like Douglass, who was pressing not just for abolition but for political and social equality as well. The party leaders had temporarily changed the name of their organization to the National Union Party to attract War Democrats, but the term "Black Republicans" continued to be used as a pejorative by those who sought to link it to the quest for racial equality. Douglass and others of like mind complicated the effort of Republicans to distance themselves from what was an unpopular position. Continued agitation from "Fred" Douglass, they feared, could upend the delicate alliance that the party hoped would keep Lincoln in office.

The tension between advocates of racial equality and those who were simply antislavery had been of long standing. In the years before the Civil War, racial equality was neither

Douglass was among the most persistent and influential voices proposing equality between the races. Since his self-emancipation at the age of twenty, he had pressed for the liberation of his brothers and sisters in bondage, initially aligning himself with the Garrisonians, who called for immediate abolition, joining the antislavery lecture circuit, chronicling his life under slavery in autobiography (three in all), and publishing editorials against the institution in his own newspapers. However, his crusade against slavery was but one component in the struggle to obtain rights for all African Americans. He was an active participant in the Black conventions that were held pre-Civil War to bring attention to the plight of both enslaved and free Black men and women. An 1849 editorial in his newspaper, *The North Star*, summed up his views:

It is evident that white and black 'must fall or flourish together.' In the light of this great truth, laws ought to be enacted and institutions established—all distinctions founded on complexion, ought to be repealed, repudiated, and for ever abolished, and every right, privilege, and immunity, now enjoyed by the white man ought to be as freely granted to the man of color.

Several years later, Douglass used his oratorical prowess and skill with the pen to respond swiftly and aggressively to the *Dred Scott* decision. He argued that the Constitution makes "no distinction in favor of, or against, any class of the people, but is fitted to protect and preserve the rights of all, without reference to color, size, or any physical peculiarities." He encouraged Americans to rely on the Constitution, embrace its principles and spirit, and enforce its provisions.

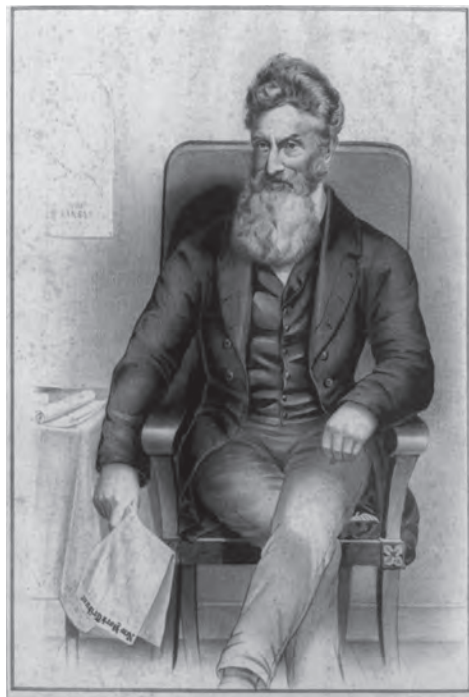
In his personal life as well, Douglass epitomized the idea of racial equality. Fellow abolitionist John Brown was a weeks-long guest in his home. Both Julia Griffiths (Crofts), an Englishwoman who assisted Douglass in editing *The North Star*, and Ottilie Assing, a German woman who translated into German Douglass's autobiography *My Bondage and My Freedom*, had long-term personal and professional relationships with him and had extended stays in his home. His habit of escorting white female friends and acquaintances such as Griffiths and Assing around town provoked sharp criticism from white observers who suspected a romantic involvement.

Hence, it was not surprising that Stephen A. Douglas, a shrewd politician skilled in race-baiting, would reference Frederick Douglass in the Illinois senator's campaign for reelection in 1858. In the seven debates with Lincoln, the Democrat, Douglas, took advantage of the racial sensibilities of the day to portray his challenger and the Republicans as proponents of citizenship and full equality for African Americans. In Freeport, and later in Jonesboro, the senator attempted to place Lincoln in the abolitionist camp and suggested that Frederick Douglass was one of Lincoln's advisers. Then, in words meant to incite disgust from whites and fear of race-mixing, the incumbent declared that in an earlier visit to Freeport, he had witnessed an incident that reflected the agenda of the Republicans. Senator Douglas claimed that he had seen a white man driving a carriage in which a "beautiful young lady," presumably the driver's daughter, sat on the box-seat "whilst Fred Douglass and her mother reclined inside." He suggested that those who found such behavior acceptable would vote for Lincoln. Again, in Jonesboro, on September 15, Senator Douglas repeated the story in abbreviated form, but doubtless with the same effect. He also argued, in

opposition to Lincoln's views, that the signers of the Declaration of Independence did not intend to include Black people, or "any inferior and degraded race," in its assertions of equality for all men.

Three days later, at the infamous Charleston debate, Lincoln responded to his opponent's accusations. In explicit language that was meant to allay the concerns of pro-southern residents of the region, Lincoln declared that he was not and never had been in favor of racial equality. Nor did he favor extending voting rights to Black men or permitting them to serve on juries or become office holders. Anyone who opposed race-mixing was assured as well that he did not support intermarriage. Lincoln asserted that the physical differences between the races were so great that they would preclude the two groups from living as social and political equals. Consequently, one race would have to occupy the superior position and the other an inferior one. During the debates with Douglas, Lincoln also defended his position on the intent of the Declaration of Independence. He suggested that while the signers of the Declaration intended to include all men as equal, they did not mean to declare all men equal "in all respects." All men were not equal in color, size, intellect, or moral development and moral capacity; but they were equal in their right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

Although Lincoln did not win the senatorial race, his debates with Douglas provided him with the opportunity to hone his thoughts on the issue of slavery. Over the next two years, his carefully prepared remarks on the aim of the Founders regarding slavery, and the Republican Party's objection to the extension of the institution into the territories, made him recognizable as a



John Brown (Library of Congress)

significant political actor within and beyond Illinois. His moderate position on slavery—he was not yet an abolitionist—advantaged him over politicians who were more radical in their thinking.

A year following the debates, Lincoln and the Republican Party faced the fallout from John Brown's abortive raid on Harpers Ferry. The Democratic-leaning press seized on the opportunity to blame Republicans, especially after they learned of the satchel of letters and documents he left behind implicating prominent abolitionists. To the *New York Herald*, for instance, this was a "vast conspiracy, aided by the funds of wealthy men, and encouraged by black republican politicians and other fanatics." At the very least, the *Herald* argued, Republican antislavery agitation fed the lunacy of John Brown and prompted him to carry out such an absurd plot.

Unfortunately, Frederick Douglass found himself implicated in the raid. John Cook, one of Brown's lieutenants, alleged that Douglass had promised to recruit men for the cause and bring them to Harpers Ferry. On that information, Virginia governor Henry Wise swore out a warrant for Douglass's arrest. Hearing this, Douglass left the United States for England and remained there until the death of his daughter, Annie, compelled him to return home a few months later. The investigation of Douglass collapsed, but he was linked in the minds of members of the Republican Party with a violent attempt to liberate enslaved people.

Despite his more radical position on slavery, Douglass found reason to favor the Republican Party and its candidate in the 1860 campaign. "While we should be glad to co-operate with a party fully committed to the doctrine of 'All rights to all men,'" he wrote, "in the absence of all hope of rearing up the standard of such a party for the coming campaign, we can but desire the success of the Republican candidates." As for Lincoln, Douglass found him to be a man of "unblemished private character . . . great firmness of will . . . and one of the most frank, honest men in political life."

The praise would change to condemnation after the November election. Lincoln's victory prompted several southern

states to secede, and by the time he took the oath of office, attempts to return the wayward slaveholding states to the fold had failed miserably. Douglass feared that the new president and his party would broker a peace that would not only leave slavery intact but would strengthen it. The inaugural address confirmed the validity of that concern. Lincoln disappointed the abolitionists, especially Douglass, by declaring that he had no lawful right nor was he inclined to interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed. His aim was to reunite the divided nation. Until that time, he would work to ensure that all "domestic institutions" were protected.

Douglass was especially agitated that Lincoln declared his support for the enforcement of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. The law was one of several compromises that aimed to quiet tensions arising over the territory ceded by Mexico after the war of 1846–1848. One of the most undemocratic measures ever to be enacted, it required the free states (including both public officials and private citizens) to assist in the apprehension of runaways. A federal court would determine the status of the alleged slave, but the accused could not testify on his or her behalf and was not entitled to a jury trial. Commissioners (who presided in the place of federal judges) were paid more to find in the supposed owner's favor than they were if they found for the accused. Douglass charged that the president

has avowed himself ready to catch [enslaved men and women] if they run away, to shoot them down if they rise against their oppressors, and to prohibit the Federal Government *irrevocably* from interfering for their deliverance. With such declarations before them, coming from our first modern anti-slavery President, the Abolitionists must know what to expect during the next four years.

Douglass did not temper his criticism of Lincoln when war erupted a few weeks later. Like most Black leaders, he believed northern victory could be secured rather quickly with the employment of an army of Black liberators. Armed African Americans could free the enslaved population and both could be employed to put down the rebellion. Black men offered their services

at the very beginning of armed conflict, but fear of angering the Border States and the belief that Black men lacked the courage to face white men on the battlefield led the Lincoln administration to decline to accept them as soldiers. Douglass noted that the Confederates were using their enslaved laborers to great advantage, while the North refused to act. "Every consideration of justice, humanity, and sound policy confirms the wisdom of calling upon black men just now to take up arms in behalf of their country."

Douglass used the phrase "their country" purposely. Although the *Dred Scott* decision ruled that African Americans were not entitled to the same rights as other Americans, he insisted that they were indeed citizens and that they had always supported the nation in all its wars. But patriotism had its limits. The Black response to the war was shaped by the desire for freedom—for the enslaved and for those who were legally free but who continued to be constrained by prejudice. So even as Douglass pressed for the acceptance of Black men into the Union army, he cautioned that until the North recognized the reason for the rebellion and struck down the institution of human bondage, it did not "deserve the support of a single sable arm."

Congressional action in the spring of 1862 elicited a positive response from the former bondman. Congress controlled the District of Columbia, a federal enclave, and as such, had the authority to end slavery there. In April, the legislators approved a bill that emancipated the nearly 3,200 enslaved laborers in the city. District slaveholders received an average of \$300 to compensate them for the loss of each laborer. Of course, the formerly enslaved received nothing for their uncompensated toil. Nevertheless, Douglass declared District emancipation to be "the first great step towards that righteousness which exalts a nation." He could not have been pleased, however, that the government saw fit to appropriate \$100,000 to be used for colonizing the emancipated to either Haiti or Liberia.

During the summer of 1862, Douglass returned to his scathing criticism of the Lincoln administration. In a speech on July 4, he characterized the administration as weak, imbecilic, and unfaithful. He accused Lincoln of being overly influenced by the interests of the Border States, allowing certain generals to return runaways, and pursuing a policy that was meant to return the Union to its former state with slavery intact. In a letter to fellow abolitionist Gerrit Smith in early September, he complained about Lincoln's decision to put Democrats in charge of key parts of the army. His response to the president's remarks to a group of Black men who had been invited to the White House to listen to Lincoln's views on colonization in August 1862 was caustic. Despite having been elected as an antislavery man, he charged, the president was "a genuine representative of American prejudice and Negro hatred." Douglass chastised Lincoln for being more concerned with preserving slavery and not offending the Border States than with securing justice and humanity.

Douglass was unaware that Lincoln had already come around to his way of thinking. After failing to convince the Border

States to save the Union by emancipating their enslaved laborers, Lincoln had found a way to do it himself while remaining within bounds of the Constitution. His preliminary proclamation, issued on September 22, 1862, was a final warning to the Confederate states that they had 100 days to cease their rebellion or be prepared to lose their human property.

Douglass responded to the preliminary proclamation with great optimism, certain that on January 1, 1863, the president would keep his promise if the seceded states did not return to the Union. He urged the lovers of freedom to support the president's decision with their voices and votes. But as the weeks passed, Douglass grew concerned that Lincoln might change his mind. Opposition to emancipation was strong, as reflected in the midterm elections, which saw the Democrats gain 34 additional seats in Congress and win gubernatorial races in New Jersey and New York. Douglass now expressed dissatisfaction with the preliminary proclamation. "Emancipation is put off," he lamented. "It was made future and conditional—not present and absolute." Lincoln's annual message to Congress in December 1862 did little to allay Douglass's fears. Instead of referencing the coming proclamation, the president took the opportunity to propose a constitutional amendment that would provide compensation for any state that implemented a plan of gradual emancipation by the end of the century.

Despite Douglass's concerns, on January 1, 1863, Lincoln issued the final proclamation. Based on military necessity, the decree promised freedom to those who were under the control of the Confederacy. Although it did not free enslaved people in the Border States, Douglass viewed it as the beginning of slavery's demise in America. Once Virginia had been declared free, he believed, Maryland could not continue for long to deprive African

Americans of their right to liberty. He was especially pleased that the proclamation authorized the use of Black men as soldiers, suggesting that through military service African Americans could secure the rights to citizenship and equality. He believed: "Once let the black man get upon his chest the brass letter, U.S., let him get an eagle on his button, and a musket on his shoulder and bullets in his pocket, and there is no power on the earth or under the earth that can deny that he has earned the right to citizenship in the United States."

Considered too old to fight (he was forty-five in 1863), Douglass committed himself to recruiting Black men for the Union army. He soon realized, however, that the promises of equality he made to those men would not be honored. Pay inequities, excessive fatigue duty, inadequate equipment, and cruel disciplinary measures convinced Douglass and the men he had recruited that the North was not serious about fair treatment. Most disturbing to him and to many Americans was the pronouncement by Jefferson Davis in December 1863 that all "negro slaves" who were captured while shouldering arms for the Union would be turned over to the states from which they came to be "dealt with according to the laws of said States." Of course, the Confederacy labeled all



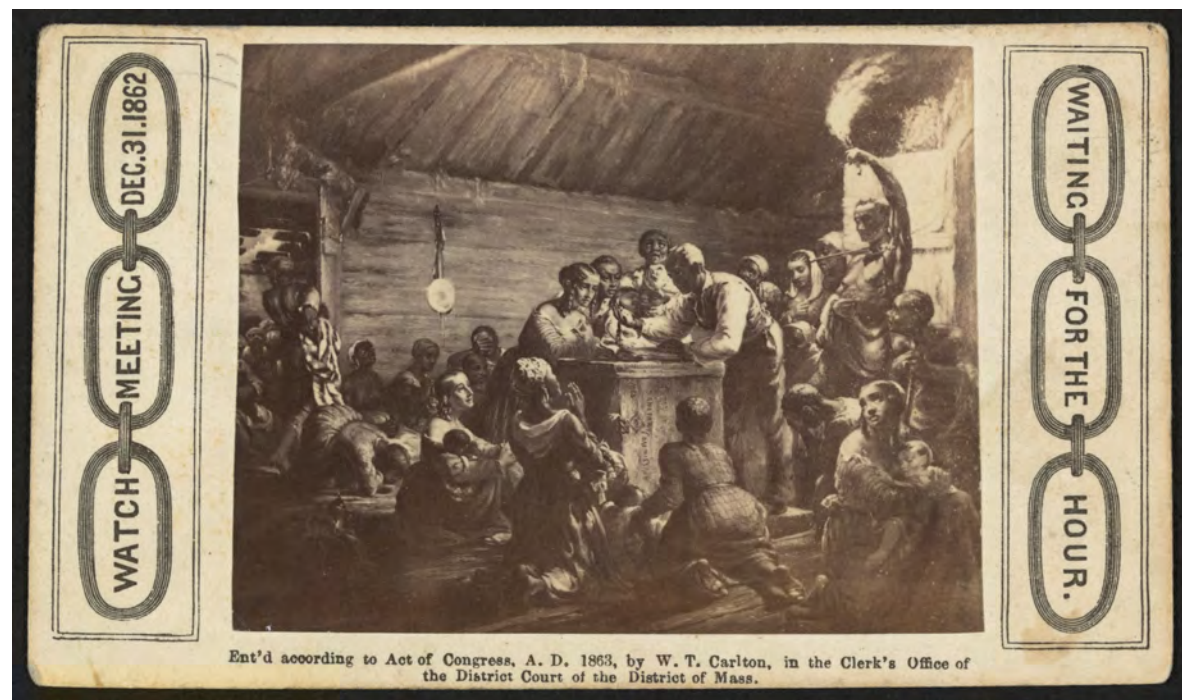
"Emancipation Proclamation, September 22, 1862," ca. 1919 (71.2009.081.0145)

Black men who were serving the Union as insurrectionists, whether they had been enslaved or free. And the laws of the states dictated that such men could be executed. At the very least, they would be sold into slavery. Douglass criticized Lincoln for failing to intervene to protect those soldiers, declaring that "no word comes from Mr. Lincoln or from the War Department, sternly assuring the Rebel Chief that inquisitions shall yet be made for innocent blood. . . . If the President is ever to demand justice and humanity for black soldiers, is not this the time for him to do it?"

Eager to secure the equal treatment he had promised the men he recruited, Douglass visited the White House in the summer of 1863. Arriving without an appointment, he expected to spend a good part of the day waiting for his turn to see the president. As he related to an audience

months later, he saw Lincoln ahead of many white men who had arrived before him. He recalled that as he moved toward the front of the group, they gave him disapproving looks and made insulting remarks. Once inside the president's office, Douglass outlined his concerns to a sympathetic Lincoln, but the president counseled patience, as the American people were not yet ready to see Black men treated the same as whites. He reminded Douglass of the effort that had to be expended just to get the Black man in the fight. The rest would come later.

The man who had been so critical of Lincoln throughout the war (except when he issued the Emancipation Proclamation) carried with him from the White House the impression that the president was an honest man, sincerely devoted to the country and thoroughly determined to save it. Lincoln won over the strident abolitionist (temporarily) by treating him, in Douglass's words, "just as you have seen one gentleman receiving another, with a hand and a voice well-balanced between a kind cordiality and a respectful reserve." Such praise of Lincoln's "kind cordiality" and "respectful reserve" toward a Black man was met with disdain by those who believed African Americans deserved no such courtesy. But for a man such as Douglass, who believed



Watch Meeting, Dec. 31, 1862 - Waiting for the Hour (Library of Congress)

fervently in equality, the president's treatment of him was obviously gratifying.

Nevertheless, Douglass continued to challenge Lincoln when the president's views diverged from his own. Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation had significantly advanced the cause of freedom, but Douglass was determined to push for even greater advances. He insisted on a new social and political order that rested on equality. Lincoln's plans for Reconstruction in the post-Civil War era were not compatible with Douglass's vision. To ensure that Black men would be treated as full-fledged citizens, Douglass favored a more radical candidate in the 1864 presidential election. For a time, he found that person in John C. Frémont, the candidate representing the newly created Radical Democracy Party. When Frémont withdrew his candidacy and George B. McClellan won the nomination as the Democratic Party candidate, Douglass resumed his support of Lincoln.



John C. Frémont (OC-0593)

speeches in the Lincoln-Douglas debates, a Democratic-sympathizing editor and reporter of the *New York World* published a pamphlet on race-mixing that purported to have been written and endorsed by Republicans. The nonsensical, hoax publication claimed that Lincoln's intent in issuing the Emancipation Proclamation was to solve the problem of prejudice in America by encouraging "miscegenation." Citing Douglass as an advocate of this alleged agenda, the authors claimed that he had said: "We love the white man, and will remain with him . . . but we must possess with him the rights of freemen." Curiously, a few abolitionists seemingly endorsed the pamphlet, including Douglass's friend Theodore Tilton. Sensing a plot to discredit Republicans, Lincoln did not respond to the pamphlet's content.

Given his forceful defense of racial equality and his biting criticism of Lincoln during most of the war, Douglass's support in the 1864 campaign was viewed as of doubtful advantage. He represented for many inside and outside the party an America that was simply too progressive. Yet, he could not be ignored—not by the party nor by its standard-bearer. Douglass's agitation kept the cause of freedom and equality alive and helped to place the nation on a path toward a more just future for all its people.

Edna Greene Medford is professor of history emerita at Howard University and the author of *Lincoln and Emancipation* (2015). She serves as president of the Abraham Lincoln Institute, a member of The Lincoln Forum executive committee, and a director of the Abraham Lincoln Association.

By the summer of 1864, Douglass had acquired a reputation for radicalism that the moderate Republicans could ill afford to have on display during a presidential campaign, especially when wartime decisions had made the party's candidate so vulnerable. Even without Douglass's canvassing, the campaign proved to be especially messy. Reprising the race-baiting and vile arguments that characterized Stephen Douglas's



AN INTERVIEW WITH *GERALD J. PROKOPOWICZ*

Jonathan W. White

Gerald J. Prokopowicz is professor of history at East Carolina University and a longtime member of The Lincoln Forum Advisory Board. A highly sought-after public speaker and battlefield tour guide, Prokopowicz is perhaps best known as the host of the popular podcast *Civil War Talk Radio*, which can be heard on Voice America, Apple podcasts, and other platforms—and which began its twentieth season in August! He is the author of two books: *All for the Regiment: The Army of the Ohio, 1861–62* (University of North Carolina Press, 2001), and *Did Lincoln Own Slaves? And Other Frequently Asked Questions about Abraham Lincoln* (Pantheon, 2008). From 1996 to 2002 he was editor of *Lincoln Lore*. He joins us today to discuss his career in the Lincoln and Civil War fields.

JW: You practiced law for several years in Chicago after attending the University of Michigan for both undergrad and law school. What led you to leave that career and to pursue graduate work in history?

GP: History was always my first interest. When I was growing up, I was surrounded by adults who had participated in World War II. My grandfather had fought in World War I. So when I was a boy, playing army in the backyard with my friends, we all assumed that we would one day end up taking part in World War III. We watched “Combat” with Vic Morrow on TV and played with GI Joe. The kid who wasn’t interested in WWII history was the exception.

The Civil War was another story. I knew little about it until my family drove from Michigan to Washington, DC, to visit friends when I was in 4th grade. My parents weren’t history or Civil War buffs, but on the way back, they decided to detour to Antietam. My two younger brothers had fun playing on the cannons and climbing the observation tower, but I was transformed by the experience. To look at photographs of the Dunker Church and the Bloody Lane in the visitor center and then go outside and see those places right there was incredible. It was November when we were there, as practically the only visitors on the field, but I felt like there were a lot of ghosts present. I wanted to know more about them. Why had they come here to fight and die? How did they do it? And why?



Dunker Church (Library of Congress)

In college I majored in history to pursue that interest, but I didn’t go to graduate school right away, because everyone in 1980 was saying that the job market for history professors was down but should improve once the GI Bill generation retired. I decided to go to law school instead, in order to be able to make a living. I spent a few years practicing commercial real estate in Chicago, representing developers who were building new strip malls along Cicero Avenue. It wasn’t very fulfilling work. I finally figured that the developers could get along without my expertise, and since I was still deeply interested in Civil War-era history, I decided to apply to a half dozen of the most selective history programs I could find, with the thought that if I could get into one of those, I might have a chance of becoming a professor someday, even with the job market as it was.

JW: What was it like to work with David Herbert Donald as your dissertation advisor?

GP: It was a wonderful experience. He was a great mentor and an extremely dedicated teacher. He would return thesis chapter drafts with more comments in the margin than there was text on the page. He was also very patient with me, more I’m sure than I deserved. Over the years, I’ve met people in the field who mentioned Professor Donald’s famous temper, but in eight years working under him, I never saw it displayed. One time I wrote a research assignment for his biography of Abraham Lincoln, and I didn’t do it the way he expected. He wasn’t happy, but instead of raising his voice, he just spoke quietly in his Mississippi accent, sort of like the way Martin Sheen as Robert E. Lee talks to Jeb Stuart in the *Gettysburg* movie: “Well, Gerry, this is not really what I expected.” It was just like, “Well, General Stuart, you are here at last,” as Lee supposedly said, and it was equally devastating.

But what I more often remember about him was how generous he was with his time. He set an example that I try to follow with my own graduate students, not always successfully. Seeing how much help they need makes me painfully aware of what a burden my classmates and I must have been for Professor Donald, and of how much I owe him for whatever I’ve been able to accomplish as a historian.

JW: Your first job out of graduate school was at The Lincoln Museum in Fort Wayne. How did you wind up there, and what impact did it have on your career?

GP: I have Professor Donald to thank for that first job as well. A representative from the museum contacted him after Mark E. Neely Jr. left that position when he won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties*. As a fresh ABD [“all but dissertation”], still finishing my thesis, I couldn’t pretend to fill Mark’s shoes, but fortunately the people running The Lincoln Museum were willing to take a chance on me. Up to that time, I had never even thought about practicing history in a museum, but as of 1993 the market for tenure-track historians was no better than a decade earlier, so I was happy to get any kind of history-related job.

As it turned out, the job exceeded my expectations. The Lincoln Museum, which was founded in 1928 by Louis Warren as part of what became the Lincoln National Corporation, had an extraordinary collection of Lincoln-related artwork, documents, books, and artifacts. Better still, Lincoln National had just committed \$6 million to creating a new home for the museum in their headquarters building in downtown Fort Wayne, Indiana. My first two years there were spent working on the design and construction of the new museum. I learned on-the-job about exhibit design, label writing, artifact acquisition and conservation, fundraising, education, community outreach, docent training, and all the other aspects of building and running a major museum. I hadn’t studied any of those things in grad school, but I got to work with some very talented professionals. Our bosses at Lincoln National originally thought that we could complete the project in a month, but fortunately they consulted with a panel of museum professionals from around the country who told them that it would take a minimum of two years. The bosses backed down and gave us a year and a half, which led to some long



R. Gerald McMurtry in the old Lincoln Library and Museum, ca. 1960

hours, but we got the museum open on time and on budget. Between 40,000 and 50,000 people visited the museum every year after that, until it was closed in 2008. It’s gratifying to have participated in a project that was viewed by more than half a million people, many more than will ever read my books or listen to my podcasts.

JW: In 2001, you invited Lerone Bennett to speak at the museum. What was that experience like?

At The Lincoln Museum

The 22nd Annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture

Saturday, September 22, 2001 7:30 p.m.

Lerone Bennett Jr., executive editor of *Ebony*, is the author of one of the most controversial Lincoln books ever written, *Forced Into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* (Chicago: Johnson Publishing Co., 2000). In this book, Bennett expanded the thesis first advanced in his 1965 essay, “Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?” His theories turn the popular image of Abraham Lincoln upside-down: not the Great Emancipator, but a racist who sought to preserve slavery; not a great leader, but a waffling, indecisive, self-interested politician.

Admission to the lecture and reception that follows are \$10 (\$15 for non-members); please call (219) 455-1832 for reservations.



Lerone Bennett Jr.

GP: One of my responsibilities at the museum was to help organize the annual R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture, which has hosted many of the giants of Lincoln history. My first choice, in 1995, was to invite David Herbert Donald, who had just published *Lincoln* to national acclaim. In contrast, in 2000 Lerone Bennett published *Forced into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* and upset a lot of people. Bennett pointed out that historians traditionally excused anything Abraham Lincoln ever said that sounded racially inappropriate to twentieth-century ears by saying that he was just being a practical politician, appeasing the deep racism of his nineteenth-century voters. When Lincoln said something more virtuous, like, “If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong,” the same historians said that those were Lincoln’s true feelings. Bennett asked, what if the opposite were true? He reversed these interpretations to portray a Lincoln whose real commitment was to white supremacy and who only spoke for freedom and equality as a cynical political expedient. It reminded me of Bizarro, the evil clone of Superman. I thought then, and still think, that Bennett’s interpretation was

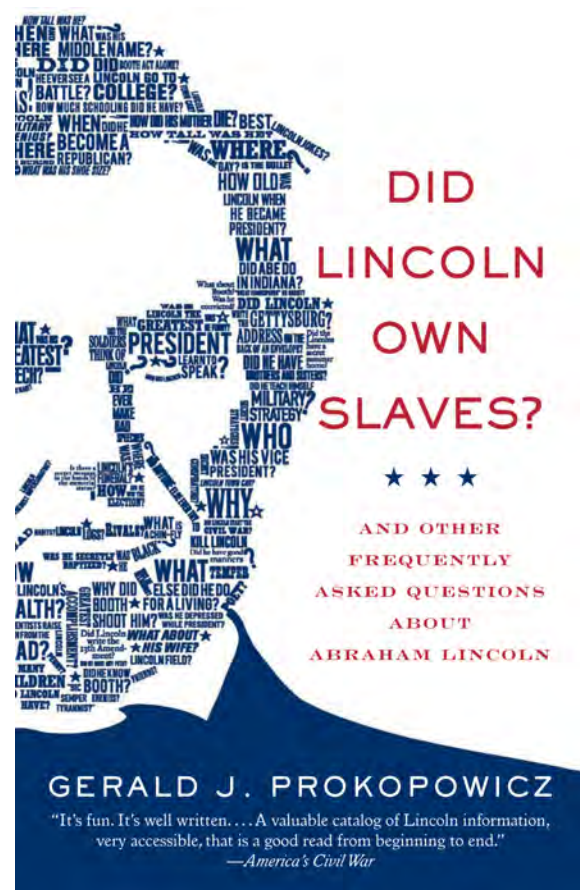
wrong, but it was fascinating to see how consistently he stayed with the original documents, just reading each one 180 degrees from the way everyone else had. It was an argument that exposed the traditional bias in Lincoln interpretation and opened the door for other scholars to take more complex and nuanced views of Lincoln and race, as Brian Dirck would do ten years later in *Abraham Lincoln and White America*. I didn't agree with Bennett's conclusions, but I thought that his work was important enough to merit a hearing in a venue like the McMurtry Lecture that had always featured more mainstream speakers.

The lecture was supposed to happen in September 2001, but a week or so after September 11th, Lerone called me to talk about what had just happened. He said that the country was now in a different place and national unity was important. He didn't think that it was the right time for his iconoclastic approach to an American hero like Lincoln, so we rescheduled the lecture for late October.

When it finally happened, the lecture was a great success. We had one of the largest turnouts for any McMurtry Lecture during my time at the museum, and by far the most diverse audience ever, generationally as well as racially. I did receive a little bit of negative feedback, presumably from people uncomfortable with Bennett's challenge to their views of Lincoln, but my only regret was that I was not able to schedule more events with such provocative speakers.

JW: Tell us about *Did Lincoln Own Slaves?* What led you to write that book, and what did you enjoy most about the process of conceptualizing and writing it?

GP: One of my favorite things about working at The Lincoln Museum was talking to visitors and giving presentations to non-academic audiences. I especially enjoyed the question-and-answer sessions that came at the end of talks. It was fascinating to me to see what kinds of things people really wanted to know about the past, and to see how sharply their interests often differed from those of academic historians. Since grad school, I've posted on my office wall a quote attributed to Leo Tolstoy: "Historians are like deaf people who go on answering questions no one has



asked them." Sometimes we do need to think of and answer questions that no one else has yet thought to ask, but there's a real danger of irrelevance if those are the only questions that historians answer. If we don't stop and listen to the questions people really are asking, then people are going to get their answers somewhere else.

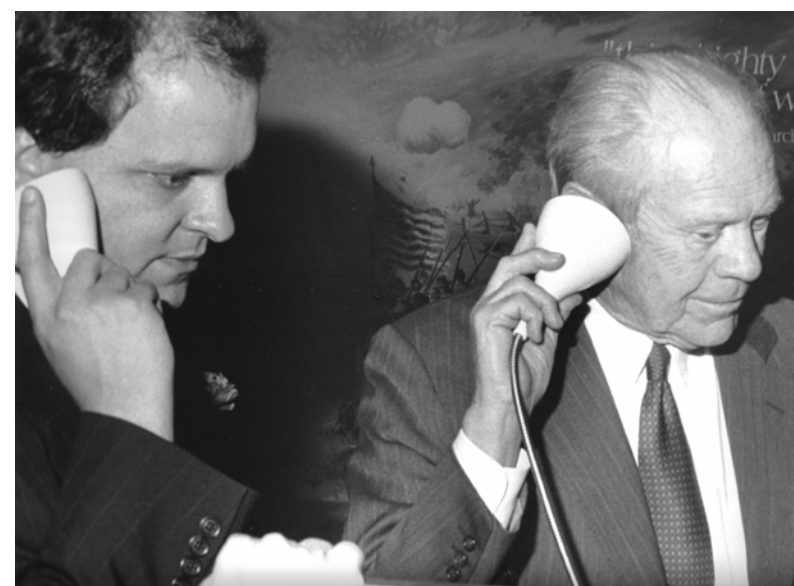
I left The Lincoln Museum in 2003 to see if I could finally live the dream of becoming a history professor. Unfortunately, the job market had gotten no better, at least not for Civil War history professors. As I was looking at job ads, though, I kept seeing positions for people who could teach something called "public history," which I had never heard of. When I got around to researching what it was, I discovered that it was what I'd been doing for the past nine years. That opened up some new opportunities that led to my current position teaching American history, military history, and public history at East Carolina University.

Teaching was every bit as fulfilling as I had hoped, but I didn't want to lose my connection to the world of practical public history or forget all the fascinating question-and-answer sessions about Abraham Lincoln that had been part of my work at The Lincoln Museum. That's why I wrote *Did Lincoln Own Slaves? And Other Frequently Asked Questions about Abraham Lincoln*, formatted as a prolonged question-and-answer session. The questions were a way to recognize the importance of the public's

particular interests, while the annotated answers were intended to summarize the best of serious Lincoln scholarship.

JW: Civil War Talk Radio is one of my favorite podcasts—both as a listener and a guest. When you began doing the show in 2004, it seems you were on the cutting edge of what is now known as digital humanities. What led you to start the program, and how has doing the show changed over the years?

GP: The show was started as part of something called World Talk Radio, based in Phoenix. The entrepreneurs who created it imagined that there was a market for what they called "internet radio." Their expectation was that listeners would tune in to their computers to hear scheduled live webcasts, the way people used to listen to radio programs in the 1930s. One program idea they had was for a show about the Civil War, something they called "Civil War Talk Radio." Through a friend of a friend, I was asked to do a sample program, which I did. They didn't have anyone lined up for the next week's show, so I did that one too, and the next six hundred after that. It wasn't anyone's plan.



Gerald Prokopowicz and President Gerald Ford at The Lincoln Museum in 1995

As it turned out, almost no one listened to the show when it went out on the internet live. Few people listen to the live webcast today, maybe twenty in a good week. But the shows were posted in an archive online after they were produced, and it soon turned out that lots of people were downloading the archived recordings so they could listen on their iPods when they were washing dishes or mowing the lawn, instead of listening live. Civil War Talk Radio was essentially podcasting in 2004, making it today one of the oldest continuously running podcasts.

In terms of the format of the program, very little has changed over the past twenty years. The idea has always been to find guests who have done interesting work in Civil War history, as authors, curators, preservationists, musicians, or through any

other form of public history, and then to let them have time to develop their ideas over the course of an in-depth interview. Despite the name of the program, it has never sounded anything like typical "talk radio." The guests get to do most of the talking, there are no callers into the show, and the host doesn't interrupt or rant and rave about anything. Well, actually, I do sometimes rave about topics of interest to me during the first ten minutes of each program, but that's before the guest comes on. Sometimes I'll talk about current issues in Civil War history, but more frequently it will be about administrative nonsense at East Carolina University, or the games of my daughters' soccer teams (back when they were kids), or the ups and downs of University of Michigan sports. Some listeners have written in to say that they enjoy the personal connection that they feel from hearing about whatever's on my mind each week. Others have no use for the monologue, but that's what the fast forward button is for.

JW: Listeners can learn more about Civil War Talk Radio at www.impedimentsofwar.org/. How did you come up with that URL? And what can readers of *Lincoln Lore* find there?

GP: Like the name of the show, "Civil War Talk Radio," the name of the website "Impediments of War" wasn't my idea. The website was created and is maintained by Mark Gaffney, whom I've never met. He created it as a fan website many years ago and I've been happy to work with him. I send him the schedule of upcoming shows as soon as I have commitments from guests, and he updates the website and Facebook page for Civil War Talk Radio. Occasionally I'll send him a box of books that I've received from publishers that I haven't been able to use on the show, as a gesture of thanks for all that he does, but other than that, Impediments of War is purely a labor of love on his part, and one for which I'm very grateful.

JW: Over the course of nineteen seasons, you've conducted more than 600 hours of interviews. Looking back over those hundreds of episodes, do you have any that stand out?

GP: There have been so many interesting guests that I could never pick a favorite show, but there have been some that stand

out in memory for other reasons. One of them was an interview with two sisters who were recent college graduates and authors of a book called *Badass Civil War Beards*. As a lark they had been writing a blog about the beards worn by Civil War generals, the sort of whimsical thing that you find on the internet when looking for something else, and apparently the blog was popular enough that they decided to compile their work into a book. I get messages from authors' publicists all the time, but theirs was relentless in her effort to get them on the show. I wasn't sure that I could put together 50 minutes' worth of questions about beards, but the publicist wouldn't take no for an answer, so I asked the listeners what they thought of the topic, and by a substantial margin they said they wanted me to do the interview. It turned out that the two co-authors were delightful people who unfortunately did not know a great deal about the Civil War, other than what they had picked up while compiling amusing photographs of bearded generals. But they were also close in age to my own two daughters, and I desperately wanted to avoid embarrassing them. What could I ask them that wouldn't expose their lack of knowledge? Fortunately, some of the listeners who had voted for the topic had included questions that they wanted me to ask, so I turned to those. Some of the questions went well beyond the frivolous nature of the book, dealing with issues like masculinity and self-image, but at least they didn't require any detailed knowledge of Civil War history and gave the program a semblance of meaning. One way or another, we got through the hour without any prolonged awkward silences. Most weeks, at the end of the show the guest and I are both a little surprised by how quickly the time has flown by, but the beard book interview was definitely the longest fifty minutes I've ever spent behind a microphone.

JW: Have there ever been any fireworks on the show? Any books where you challenged the author's views?

GP: Fireworks? No. I'm pretty sure that in 20 years of recording the show I've never raised my voice when speaking with a guest. If someone is looking for drama in the presentation, Civil War Talk Radio will disappoint. But that's not to say that I agree with everything I hear. I read every book in advance and make notes whenever I find

something that I think merits some pushback. Gary Gallagher, who has been on the show several times, is one of my favorite guests, and he and I definitely don't agree on some issues, but the kind of dialogue that results is, I hope, the kind that provokes thought instead of triggering an emotional response.

On a few occasions I've had guests whose work I thought deserved some serious criticism. Normally, I don't invite someone onto the show unless I think that the listeners will find their work valuable. I don't want to waste their time or mine talking about books that are neither interesting nor informative, but once in a while I'll schedule an interview about a book that looks promising but turns out to have little to recommend it. Maybe the author doesn't have anything original to say, or maybe they're just not a very good writer. When that happens, I don't spend the hour confronting the author with their work's flaws, but I will usually probe a little to see if they recognize where their work might not measure up. Not long ago I spoke with a bestselling author who was unwilling or unable to recognize the distinction between his work as a journalist who spent a year or two reading secondary sources in order to write an engaging but superficial narrative, and the work of a professional historian who spends a career steeped in primary sources to create works of original archival scholarship. I wasn't impressed by the guest's lack of self-awareness, but I figured that I had pursued the point far enough for the listeners to draw their own conclusions, so we moved on, and no fireworks ensued.

Actual talk radio is nothing but fireworks. I keep my car radio tuned to the station that plays East Carolina University sports, and if I turn it on when there's no game, what I usually hear is "sports talk radio," which as far as I can tell consists of two or more men talking loudly, interrupting one another, and delivering their opinions with an attitude of absolute certainty that implies that only an idiot could disagree. The content of their opinions is irrelevant. I'm pretty sure that they don't actually care if LeBron or Jordan is the greatest player of all time, they just take up opposing views so they can generate the necessary verbal fireworks. It's the audio equivalent of professional wrestling, and it's the opposite of what I try to do on Civil War Talk Radio.

JW: You really have your finger on the pulse of Civil War scholarship. (I've always been impressed by the wide variety of guests you have on your program.) What is your sense of the state of the field?

GP: I'm continuously impressed by the way that scholars keep finding new and unexpected approaches to the study of the Civil War era. Over the last twenty years, the so-called "Dark Turn" shifted research toward aspects of the war that were previously considered inappropriate, or too arcane, or that simply had never been thought of, but which now dovetail with the interests of many contemporary readers. The expansion of environmental history is one example. The growth of interest in guerrilla warfare, or the fighting in the Far West, are two others.

Your book, *Midnight in America: Darkness, Sleep, and Dreams during the Civil War*, looks at literally half of the Civil War era that historians have largely ignored because the sun was down. It's an extraordinary conceptual leap.

I also see scholars using new technological tools as well as intellectual ones to expand what we know about the Civil War. The recent identification of the place Lincoln was standing when he delivered the Gettysburg Address, for example, answers a long-asked question that isn't itself critical, but the use of 3D visualization software to triangulate well-known photographs and draw new information out of them is potentially the biggest step forward in Civil War photographic research since William Frassanito's work in the 1970s. [Editor's Note: Christopher Oakley originally presented his research on the location of the speaker's platform at The Lincoln Forum in November 2022. Unbeknownst to Gerry, the Summer 2023 issue of *Lincoln Lore*, which contains Oakley's article on this subject, was being printed at the very moment Gerry was answering this question.]

The intersection of Civil War studies and contemporary politics is another place where I see the field likely to evolve, perhaps in unpredictable directions. The controversy over the past few years regarding how we remember the Civil War and how we have memorialized it over the past century and a half has advanced the quality of discourse about public history dramatically. Ordinary people didn't think much about monuments twenty years ago, and when they did, they treated them as though they had sprung out of the earth. But now we see vigorous debate over both the subjects of Civil War memorials and the motives and meanings of the generations that put them up. I

hope that scholars will capitalize on this interest to keep educating the public on the topic.

Perhaps even more important, the value of evidence and the possibility of reaching conclusions about past events have been challenged by the evolution (or devolution) of political rhetoric and the ability of anyone to communicate to wide audiences via the internet. I see the discipline of history, not just Civil War-era history but the entire field, standing as a bulwark against the notion that anything can be true if you say it's true often enough and to enough people. As I tell my students over and over, we are practitioners of an evidence-based discipline. We can disagree as to interpretation, but we share a common respect for historical evidence as the common ground upon which we can judge one another's interpretations. Thus far, Civil War studies have largely maintained their integrity in this regard. We disagree amongst ourselves all the time, but we support our arguments with reference to historical sources, not by trying to drown out contrary interpretations with mere repetition. If Civil War Talk Radio makes

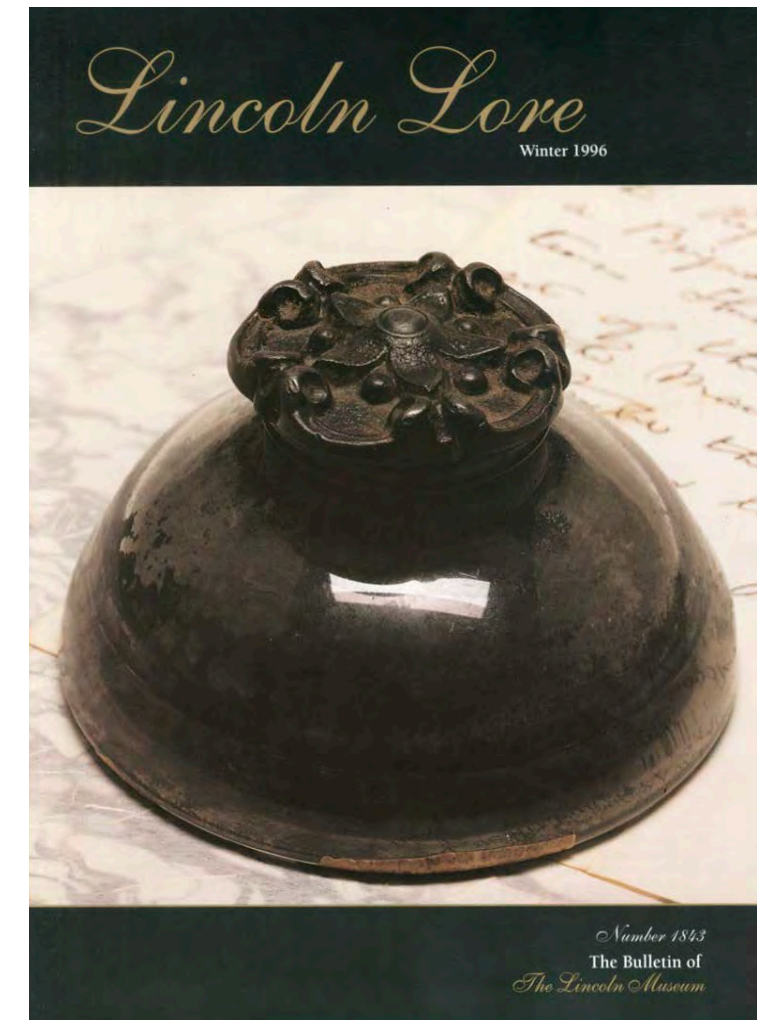
any contribution to the field, it is in promoting this kind of evidence-based discourse.

JW: What are you working on now?

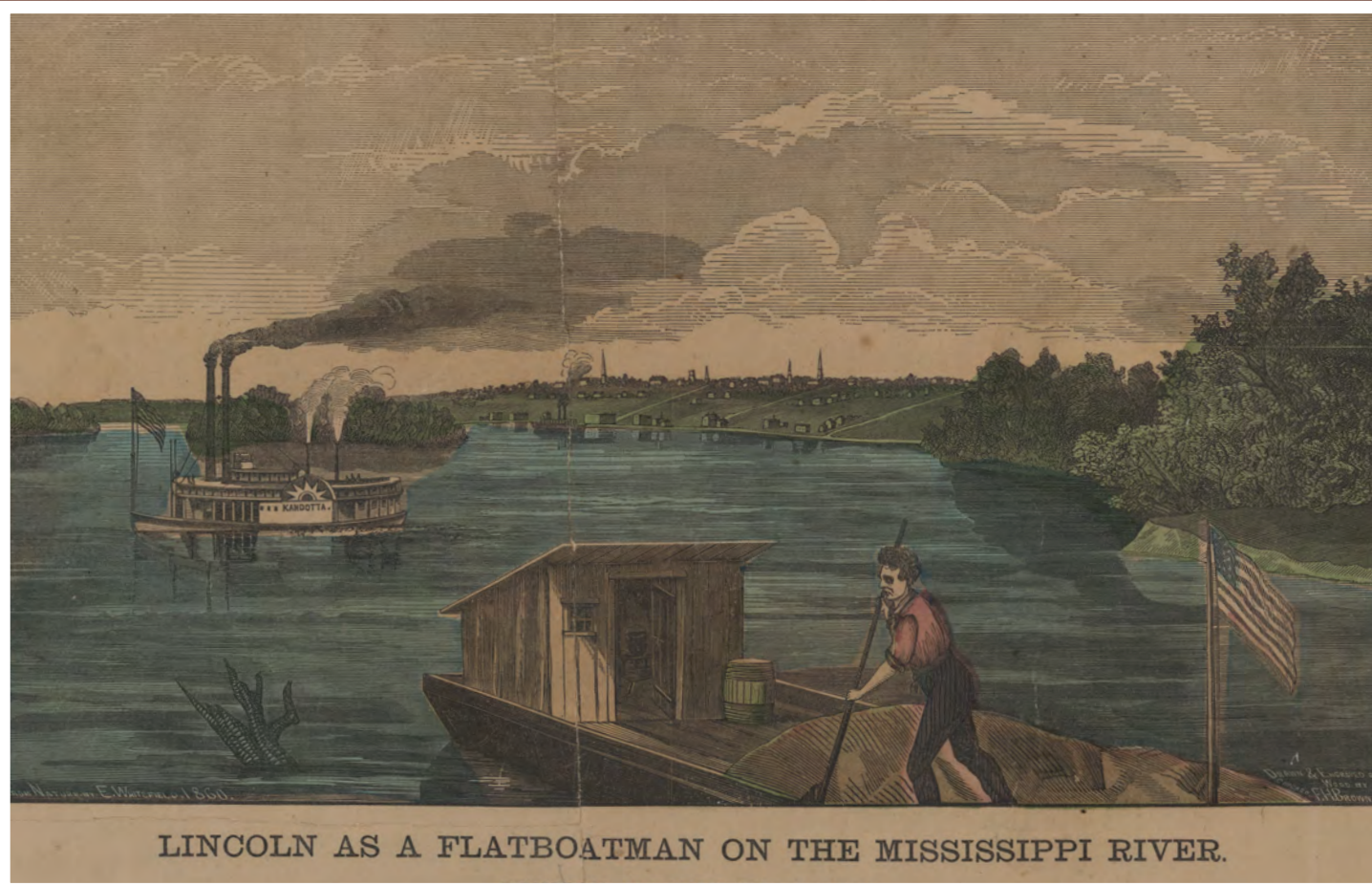
GP: Just the next season of Civil War Talk Radio at the moment. I'm planning to get back to research and writing as I approach retirement, but that I hope is still a few years away.

JW: Thank you so much for joining us today!

GP: Thank you for the invitation. I'm pleased that *Lincoln Lore* is in such good editorial hands!



Gerald Prokopowicz's first issue of *Lincoln Lore*, Winter 1996 (Number 1843)



"Lincoln as a Flatboatman on the Mississippi River," from *The Republican Standard*, Chicago, 1860 (Library of Congress)

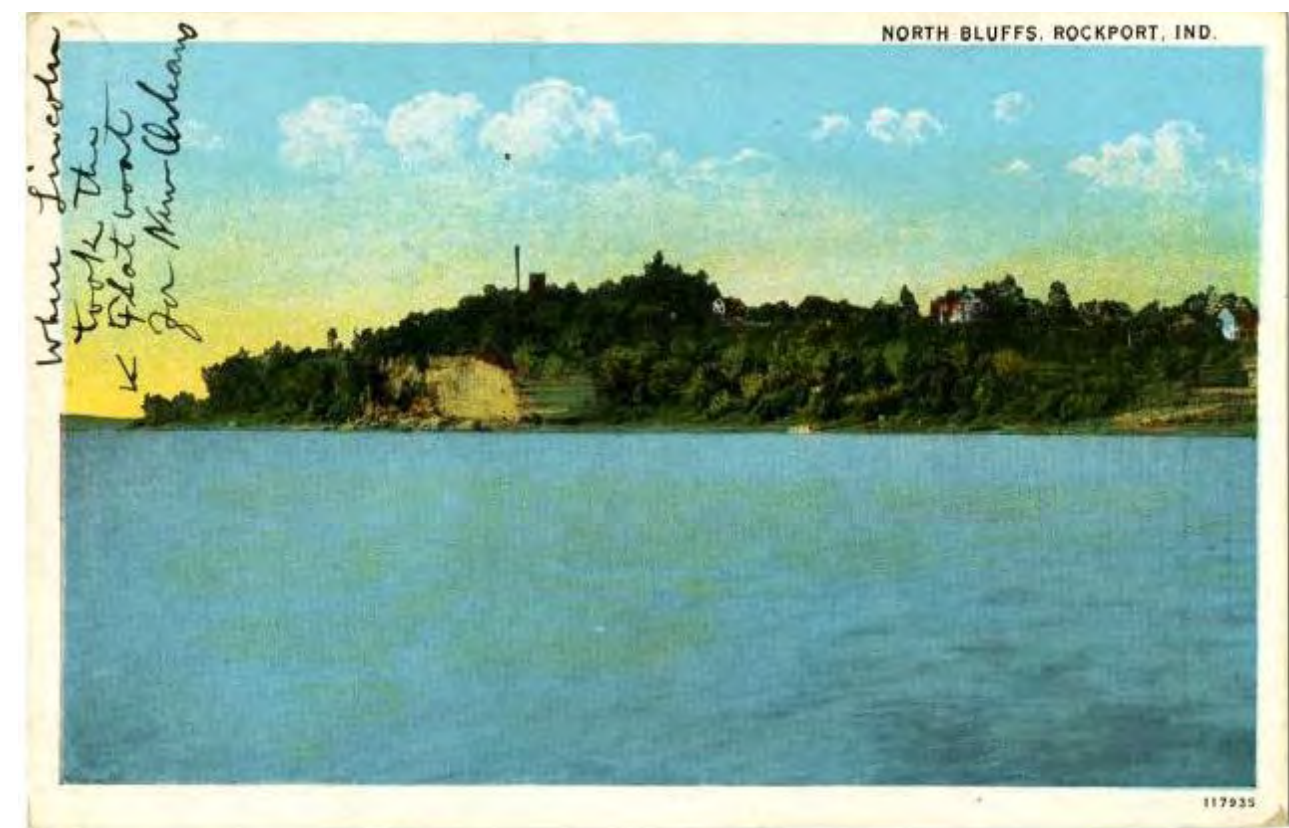
THE MYSTERY OF LINCOLN'S SECOND FLATBOAT TRIP TO NEW ORLEANS

Glenn W. LaFantasie

In his youth, Abraham Lincoln took two trips down the Mississippi River on flatboats laden with goods to be sold in New Orleans. The first trip occurred in the spring of 1828, when Lincoln lived in Indiana and agreed to accompany Allen Gentry, a merchant's son, down the Ohio River and the Mississippi to the Crescent City, the fat southern market city where westerners knew they could get top dollar for anything from pork to corn whiskey, tobacco to sorghum. The voyage must have been an eye-opener for Lincoln because he had never ventured far from his family's home in Spencer County. Both diligence and vigilance were required, for, as Mark Twain later explained, the Mississippi "had a new story to tell every day."

During the long trip, boisterous storms whipped at the bobbing flatboat, sometimes threatening to scuttle the vessel, crew, and goods. The rain soaked them through to the skin; the wind chilled them to the bone. At night they tied up close to the river's bank, bedding down on the hard wood of their "running board," as flatboats were sometimes called, and shivering themselves to sleep. A flatboat, Lincoln once remarked, floated "faster than an egg-shell," but in places the currents varied, and sometimes the vessel languished, only helped downstream by Lincoln using a pole or oar. When the going was slow, and people stood on the banks watching the flatboat slip by, it was possible to strike up a lazy conversation. Meanwhile, Gentry steered the flatboat as best he could, avoiding the sometimes-busy traffic on the rivers that included other flatboats, keelboats, and a high number of churning steamboats.

Along the way, Lincoln and Gentry were attacked one night at a landing by a group of Black marauders wielding hickory clubs. The ambushers, Lincoln recollected some three decades later, intended "to kill and rob them." Despite the surprise and the depths of darkness, he and Gentry fought back with vigor. Lincoln grabbed a club and knocked several of the attackers into the river. With quick wits, Gentry shouted out, "Lincoln get the guns and Shoot," a ruse to make the attackers think the two boatmen were armed. Almost at once, the Black men fled into the night, pursued by their wounded victims. Eventually, Lincoln and Gentry gave up the chase and returned to the flatboat, where they discovered their wounds from the fight were bleeding. Fearful that the raiders would return, the boatmen cut their vessel loose and, finding "the middle current," drifted downriver until daylight gave them comfort and made them feel more secure. Lincoln carried a scar from one of his wounds for the rest of his life. The rest of the trip was uneventful, although there is no record of Lincoln's impression of New Orleans, which was among the country's biggest cities and certainly the largest one he had ever seen so far in his young life.



North Bluffs, Rockport, Ind., "Where Lincoln took the Flatboat for New Orleans" (71.2009.083.1977)

The second flatboat journey happened a few years later, in April 1831, when Lincoln, who had recently arrived in Illinois and gone off on his own, compared himself to “a sort of floating Drift wood.” But this second voyage contains a mystery that historians have failed to solve conclusively. Unlike Lincoln’s earlier trip to New Orleans, this venture did not involve any high adventure with marauders, but it is mysterious because the extant records only vaguely reveal precisely who comprised the crew of the flatboat after a stop at St. Louis on the journey south, and who accompanied Lincoln on the crew’s return to Illinois.



Flat Boat to New Orleans - 1828 (71.2009.081.2152)

At the center of the mystery are Lincoln and his cousin John Hanks, the person who had persuaded Thomas Lincoln to relocate his family from Indiana to Illinois. Hanks, who had lived for a while with the Lincolns in Indiana, appeared every bit the weathered pioneer with his round face, high forehead, scraggly beard, and impish look in his eyes. To earn money during the winter of 1830–1831—when a tremendous blizzard called the “Deep Snow” covered the prairie in two to three feet of snow, after which high winds and arctic cold created drifts up to twenty feet high—Lincoln and Hanks found work doing various chores for the local farmers stranded in their cabins. They also worked splitting rails—hundreds, perhaps even thousands of them. As temperatures rose again with the advent of spring, the thaw produced a great flood in which rivers and streams overflowed their banks and travel could be accomplished only by floating vessels of low draft, like canoes and makeshift rafts.

Nevertheless, John Hanks, a boatman of high reputation, arranged with Denton Offutt, an amiable but not entirely trustworthy enterpriser, to hire Lincoln and his stepbrother John D. Johnston to man a flatboat to New Orleans. There, Offutt wanted to sell various goods for cash to finance a store in New Salem, a pioneer village on the Sangamon River that many believed was destined to become a significant entrepôt. None of them knew that Offutt, who stood about six feet tall and had a dark complexion, black hair, and a missing front tooth, was a skilled huckster and confidence man. He was described a few years later as “very talkative” and trying to “pass for a gentleman.” The three men were supposed to meet their new employer in Springfield, Illinois, but for hours they slogged through the town’s muddy streets without finding him. Finally, they discovered him sound asleep in a dingy corner of the Buckhorn Tavern, where he was three sheets to the wind. Soon they learned that he had failed to acquire a flatboat, a sure sign of the man’s almost total lack of responsibility. After sobering up, Offutt tried to redeem himself by hiring the three young men to build the flatboat for their journey south.



John Hanks (LN-0698)

Lincoln, Hanks, and Johnston agreed to do so, and they constructed it in Sangamotown, about eight miles northwest of Springfield on the Sangamon River. Many decades later, John Roll, a local worker hired to make the pins for the boat, vividly remembered his first sight of Lincoln. “He

was a tall, gaunt young man,” said Roll, “dressed in a suit of blue homespun jeans, consisting of a roundabout jacket waistcoat, and breeches which came to within four inches of his feet. The latter were encased in rawhide boots, in the tops of which, most of the time, his pantaloons were stuffed.” Lincoln’s soft felt hat had had once been black, but now, after much wear, was, in the young man’s own words, “sunburned until it was a combine of colors.” Actually, Lincoln looked much like any other man of the time, except that his legs were longer, his frame was skinnier, and his face—while not unpleasant to the eye—left some people fretful about his homeliness. Other people, however, were of two minds about his appearance. Said one woman who had met Lincoln during her childhood: “I considered Lincoln the ugliest person I ever saw, but in time his face grew to be good-looking.”

As they built the flatboat, Lincoln talked incessantly. In between the thuds of axes and hammers, he frequently commented on the books he had read—“Shakespear & other histories and Tale Books of all Discription.” During his stay in Sangamotown, Lincoln read a book about Francis Marion and his partisans during the Revolutionary War and “an old blue-backed life of Washington,” and these may have been among the books he discussed with the construction team as they worked on the flatboat. Occasionally he recited his favorite poetry or prose passages gleaned from his voracious reading. Most of the time, however, he spoke about politics. One Sangamotown resident described young Lincoln as “a John Q Adams man & went his Length on that Side of politics.” In the rising spring of 1831, Lincoln made plain his devotion to Adams’s National Republican Party, a forerunner to the Whig Party, which would fully emerge three years later under the leadership of Henry Clay of Kentucky. Although the National Republicans fervently opposed practically everything that President Andrew Jackson said and did, Lincoln’s conversations on politics, as he smoothed rough planks with an adze and pounded pins into augured holes, defended the Democratic president, especially when his fellow workers disparaged the chief executive with lies or statements expressing outright malice. Hanks remembered that Lincoln “could not hear Jackson wrongfully abused.”



Old Salem Mill, Burned 1883 (71.2009.083.1517)

Lincoln’s political stance revealed an unusual sophistication for a young man of twenty-two, not only in his attitude toward the politics of his time, but about how he could readily keep his personal feelings and his political beliefs separate, coexisting in different spheres. For the rest of his life, his ability to segregate personal convictions from political principles became a stunning hallmark of his civic life. Remarkably he never treated his political enemies as mortal ones, although in private he sometimes spoke of his opponents more damningly. When he wasn’t talking politics, he regaled his audience of Sangamotown residents, who had gathered to watch the construction of the flatboat, with humorous yarns and witty stories.

By mid-April, Lincoln and the others—Offutt, Hanks, and Johnston—launched the flatboat and sailed down the Sangamon River toward Beardstown. At New Salem, however, a mill dam forced them to halt, for while the flatboat’s bow passed smoothly over the dam, the remainder of the vessel did not clear the barrier, and in an instant the boat became stuck, hung up on



"New Salem, Home of Abraham Lincoln 1831 to 1837," ca. 1909, featuring Lincoln's flatboat in the Sangamon River at the top right (Library of Congress)

the dam and suspended over its edge in the middle of the turbulent river. In what would become one of the most famous episodes of his life, Lincoln jumped off the boat into the cold water and tried to free the vessel by prying it over the obstacle. In the words of one New Salem witness, Lincoln strained "every nerve to push the boat off the dam," but his efforts failed.

Nothing would dislodge the boat, and the crew noticed that with the bow high in the air and protruding over the dam, the stern had dipped into the river and was taking on water. The situation was now more dire than it had been. It was at that moment, as the circumstances worsened, that Lincoln thought of a practical solution to the problem. Through the deep water of the mill pond created by the dam, he either waded or swam to the riverbank, inquired among the crowd of spectators, and walked to a carpenter's shop in the village, where he borrowed an augur. Then he returned to the river, found a small ferry boat that wasn't being used at the moment, and directed the effort to offload to the ferry (and thus to shore) as much of the flatboat's cargo as

the crew could manage. Onboard, Lincoln used the augur to drill a hole in the bow's hull. By now he was fully in command of the flatboat's rescue. He directed the crew into the water, and the three men lifted the stern of the boat out of the river, by which means they drained out through the bow hole all of the water that had seeped into the boat. Somehow (none of the surviving accounts are very detailed) Lincoln plugged the bow hole, probably with a wooden dowel sealed with pitch or tar, which he must have obtained from the watching villagers. Finally, with everyone's clothes soaking wet and their bodies shivering, the men pushed the flatboat over the dam. Later the crew reloaded the flatboat. Lincoln's ingenuity impressed everyone—Offutt, the onlookers, and everybody else who later heard about it. In fact, the story became something of a legend among the citizens of New Salem.

With the boat dislodged and reloaded, Offutt and his crew set off again down the rushing Sangamon. Just north of Beardstown, the Sangamon met the Illinois River, and the flatboat, finally leaving the Sangamon behind, picked up speed as it headed westward toward the Mississippi. North of Alton, Illinois, the flatboat slipped smoothly into the mighty river, came about, and pointed its bow south toward the Crescent City. For the second time in his life, Lincoln sailed the great river, looking for adventure and hoping for money in his pockets. Just like all the rivers in the West this spring, the Mississippi rose to its banks, fed by the thaw of snow in the mountains and the surging estuaries that carried water, mud, and silt along its pulsating

ambit. Flatboats and keelboats skimmed along the water's surface, and steamboats, chugging and puffing, worked their way down river and up—a grand flotilla of commerce and mobility.

Coming to St. Louis, the crew tied up the flatboat at one of the countless wharves along the city's edge, and it was there that the mystery of Lincoln's second trip to New Orleans enters muddy ground. Some thirty years after the fact, during the presidential campaign of 1860, Lincoln claimed that Offutt's flatboat paused in St. Louis so that John Hanks could be put ashore. Hanks, said Lincoln, wanted to turn back because he wished not "to be detained from home longer than at first expected." Hence, according to Lincoln, Hanks did not go to New Orleans with the others.

But there is something distinctly peculiar about Lincoln's assertion. Unlike John D. Johnston, who left Offutt's employ before construction of the flatboat had been completed and rejoined the crew after the vessel had been launched, Hanks had remained on hand for the whole endeavor, and Hanks's own accounts of his participation in the journey do not mention his departure at St. Louis; as a matter of fact, Hanks stated that he remained on board the flatboat until it reached New Orleans and then returned to Illinois with Lincoln. Is it possible that Lincoln's memory failed him? Or is it at all likely that Hanks prevaricated about visiting New Orleans with the rest of the crew? Is the more credible witness Lincoln or Hanks?

Lincoln's version has been generally taken at face value, if only because he seemed to have no reason to fabricate Hanks's departure or falsify the facts. Yet Hanks, without knowing about Lincoln's comment, claimed during two separate interviews he gave to Lincoln's former law partner William H. Herndon (one in June 1865 and the other in 1865 or 1866), that he did, in fact, visit New Orleans with Lincoln and the others. Apart from this detail of the flatboat journey, Hanks's overall testimony has been accepted as reliable, often filling in details about Lincoln's early life in Illinois that would otherwise have remained unknown. Why should his recollections about the New Orleans trip be called into question?

The most important doubt centers on Hanks's declaration, made in one of his interviews with Herndon, that Lincoln reacted negatively to the slave auctions and to the treatment of slaves that Offutt's crew witnessed in the Crescent City. In an obvious overstatement, Hanks asserted that Lincoln "formed his opinions of Slavery" after seeing firsthand the brutality of the peculiar institution. But if Hanks left the flatboat at St. Louis before Offutt and the others reached New Orleans, how could he possibly know about Lincoln's response to what was seen in the city's slave markets? Based on this conflicting evidence, some historians surmise that Lincoln may have told Hanks about his emotional reactions once the two men had been reunited in Illinois. But Hanks told Herndon definitively that he went with Offutt and the others to New Orleans. In an 1887 letter to Jesse W. Weik, Herndon's co-author of a Lincoln biography, Hanks tried to clarify his earlier testimony by saying that Lincoln

actually communicated his antislavery sentiments to John D. Johnston, his fellow crewman and stepbrother. Unfortunately for posterity, Hanks's letter is garbled and nearly inarticulate (he was illiterate, and someone must have written the letter for him). His precise words to Weik were: "It was his step Brother he mad[e] that remark to. his name was John Jonson[.] I was not at the sail at the time."

Hanks was referring specifically to an alleged statement that Lincoln made after viewing the harshness of slavery in New Orleans: "By God, boys, let's get away from this. If ever I get a chance to hit that thing [i.e., slavery], I'll hit it hard." Herndon said that he got the statement from Hanks, who quoted Lincoln during an interview, but Herndon's extant interview notes contain no such statement. One could surmise that John D. Johnston gave Lincoln's statement to Hanks, which seems to be what Hanks was trying to explain in his letter to Weik. But Hanks implied that the statement was made by Lincoln to Johnston on board a vessel ("sail"), perhaps meaning the steamboat that the crew took from New Orleans to St. Louis on the return trip. If so, then the statement makes no sense, since it is phrased in such a way to suggest that Lincoln said it while watching events transpire in the slave market and requesting his friends to leave the marketplace. More to the point, Hanks claimed in an interview with Herndon that Lincoln's reaction to the slave market "was silent from feeling—was Sad." From this we are led to believe that Lincoln said nothing at all about the institution of slavery or the treatment of slaves in the New Orleans slave market, but rather took on an expression of sadness caused by what he saw as a slave coffle passed by, perhaps on its way to the auction pens.

None of this means that Lincoln did not utter the statement that Herndon attributed to him. It's possible that Lincoln said something along those lines to Johnston while the crewmen walked the streets of New Orleans and that Johnston later repeated the words to Hanks who, in turn, told them to Herndon in an interview that went unrecorded or went missing over the years. But all this third- and fourth-hand information about such questionable evidence makes it seem unlikely Lincoln said

any such thing about hitting slavery hard in 1831. Complicating matters is the fact that Hanks, in a newspaper interview given in 1881, when he was seventy-nine years old, insisted that he and Lincoln had made “two different trips to New-Orleans” on flatboats in the early 1830s. Other sources also assert that Lincoln made a total of three flatboat voyages to New Orleans. It is certainly possible that Lincoln went to New Orleans on a third trip, but he never mentioned more than two voyages made by flatboat down the Mississippi, once in 1828 and again in 1831. So it seems fair to say, given the lack of corroborative sources, that Lincoln did not take a third flatboat trip to the Crescent City.

Nevertheless, Lincoln’s own statement about Hanks leaving the flatboat in St. Louis and returning to Illinois—given the weight of Hanks’s insistence that he remained in Offutt’s employ all the way to New Orleans—grows weak under close examination. If Hanks did return to Illinois as Lincoln claimed, why did he not turn back at Alton or ask to be dropped off, at the very least, on the Illinois side of the Mississippi, which would have made his trip home all the easier? Lincoln had no reason in 1860 to make up the story about Hanks leaving the flatboat in St. Louis. But it is interesting that his statement appears in only one of his autobiographical sketches for the campaign of 1860, the one prepared for John L. Scripps. What’s more, Scripps inexplicably asserted that he had “not been put in possession of any of the incidents connected with this trip,” when indeed he had been, and decided for whatever reason to leave out Lincoln’s reference to Hanks from the published campaign biography.



Sale of Estates, Pictures and Slaves in the Rotunda, New Orleans (71.2009.081.1699)

As for Hanks making the round trip to New Orleans and back, Herndon never doubted that Hanks had done just that. He also accepted that Lincoln swore to hit slavery hard after seeing a slave auction because, as Herndon put it, “I have also heard Mr. Lincoln refer to it himself”—the “it” being his reaction to the slave market or, possibly, to his remark about hitting slavery hard, or both. Mentioning Hanks as his source, Herndon professed that Lincoln at the slave market was specifically horrified by watching “a beautiful mulatto girl, sold at auction. She was felt over, pinched, trotted around to show the bidders that said article was sound, etc. Lincoln walked away from the sad, inhuman scene with a deep feeling of unsmotherable hate. He said to Hanks this: ‘By God! if I ever get a chance to hit that institution, I’ll hit it hard, John.’” Herndon added that “John Hanks, who was two or three times examined by me, told me the above facts about the negro girl and Lincoln’s declaration. There is no doubt about this.” But Hanks said nothing of the kind in the notes Herndon kept of his interviews, in the letter Hanks sent to Weik in 1887, or in any of the surviving newspaper interviews Hanks gave to the press.

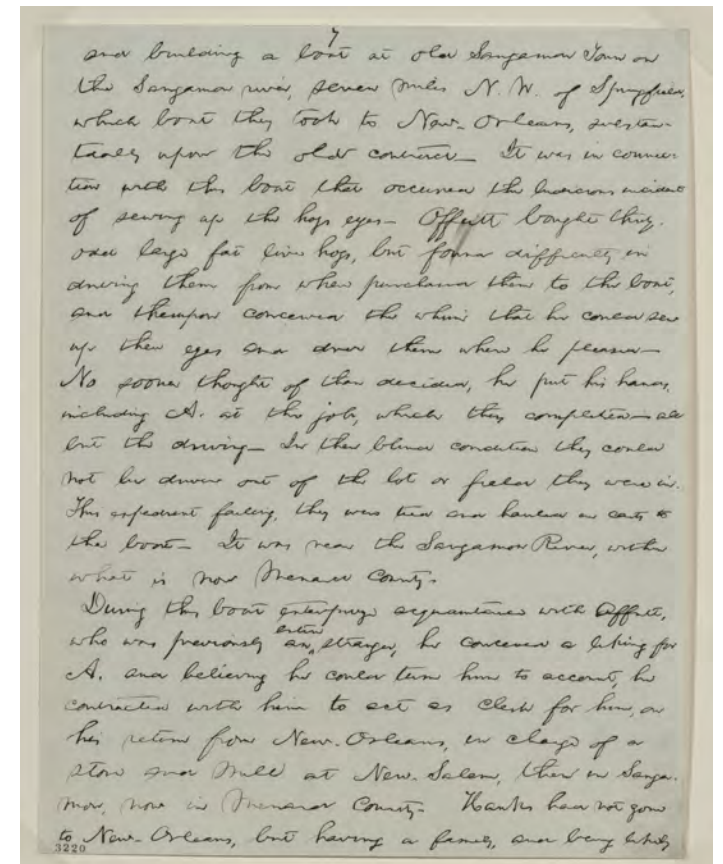
As if all this were not enough to muddy the record of Lincoln’s second trip to New Orleans, Herndon disclosed yet another episode that took place while Lincoln and the Offutt crew were there. In Herndon’s words, “when Lincoln went down to New Orleans in ’31 he consulted a Negress fortune teller, asking her to give him his history, his end and his fate; she told him what it was, according to her insight, which was no insight at all but simply a fraud to make money. It may be true that the Negress did believe that she was inspired or empowered to see the visions and end of all mortals. This story is said to be true. I cannot vouch for it, and yet it is told me and it is quite likely the case.” In another version of the story, the fortune teller predicts to Lincoln: “You will be President, and all the negroes will be free.”

Finally, the peculiar nature of the autobiography adds to the mystery. In early June 1860, after his nomination by the Republican Party, Lincoln received numerous requests for biographical

information and statements of his political policies. He turned down those requests by preparing forms that explained he could not possibly answer every individual query. Lincoln intended his brief autobiography to aid a handful of authors who were writing campaign biographies of him. But why he included details about so many things, like his flatboat trips, and excluded other crucial matters, like the names of his children, is not evident. The document is something of a hodge-podge, lacking a strict chronological order to the events he recounts and, one suspects, describing other experiences out of proportion to their real importance in his life, such as naming all of his school masters in Kentucky and Indiana, but admitting that he only attended those schools “by littles.”

Among the autobiography’s many oddities is the inclusion of his fellow crewmen by name on the flatboat in 1831. In that context, his remark about John Hanks’s departure at St. Louis appears all the more strange. While building the flatboat at Sangamotown, John Johnston—whom Lincoln always regarded as lazy—left Lincoln and Hanks to finish the job, but later returned to complete the trip to New Orleans. Lincoln made no mention of that, missing a fine opportunity to embarrass his stepbrother. For that matter, Lincoln himself quit the venture at Beardstown, when Offutt and Hanks went on a drinking spree, and walked all the way back to Sangamotown, where Offutt later found him. Smooth talker that he was, Offutt successfully begged Lincoln to rejoin the crew, promising that there would be no more carousing as they floated down the Mississippi. No doubt Lincoln was too ashamed to recount that episode in his autobiography. It also seems unusual that Lincoln made no explicit reference to his impression of New Orleans, which must have been favorable enough for him to hope he could stay on there and find work cutting cordwood for steamboats. When, however, Hanks and Johnston both took sick at the end of the month they all spent in the city, Lincoln decided his best course would be to accompany his mates home to Illinois.

Out of this morass of evidence, like a gummy, circuitous Louisiana bayou, it is nearly impossible to determine what precisely occurred during Lincoln’s second visit to New Orleans. But after weighing this



Page 7 of Lincoln’s autobiography written for John Locke Scripps (Library of Congress)

evidence, I have reached several conclusions that I’ve used to guide my understanding of the flatboat trip and the crew’s layover in New Orleans: 1. Hanks did not leave the flatboat in St. Louis (thus Lincoln’s memory must have failed him about Hanks’s departure; for his part, Scripps detected that something was amiss and omitted Lincoln’s reference to Hanks); 2. one of Hanks’s accounts of the trip—i.e., the one given in an interview conducted by Herndon, ca. 1865–1866—can be accepted as authentic and credible; 3. other claims about the New Orleans trip (even those attributed to Hanks)—such as Lincoln’s promise to hit slavery hard whenever he might get the chance, the story of the slave girl on the auction block, and the far too prescient remarks of the fortune teller—could well be true but suffer, in my estimation, from an excessive dose of Victorian melodrama.

Unless new sources come to light about Lincoln’s second voyage to New Orleans, it’s unlikely that the mystery surrounding whether John Hanks made the entire round trip or that he quoted Lincoln accurately can be conclusively solved. At this great distance from the spring of 1831, the appearance of corroborating evidence seems about as doubtful as the Mississippi River flowing backwards.

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From the Collection by Kayla Gustafson and Jessie Cortesi GERMAN-AMERICANS

In honor of German-American Heritage Month in October, librarians at the Rolland Center for Lincoln Research launched a new digital exhibit on lincolncollection.org highlighting items in the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection related to German-Americans from the Civil War period.

From 1845 to 1855, more than one million Germans fled to the United States to escape economic hardship and political unrest in Europe. German immigrants possessed a wealth of political and military knowledge that President Abraham Lincoln would utilize in the coming Civil War. Following the start of the war, numerous German-Americans joined the side of the Union to defend freedom. As members of antislavery societies, they rallied for a Union victory and railed against slavery. Many German-American soldiers rose quickly through the ranks, playing an important part in the Union victory.



Godfrey Weitzel (OC-1044)

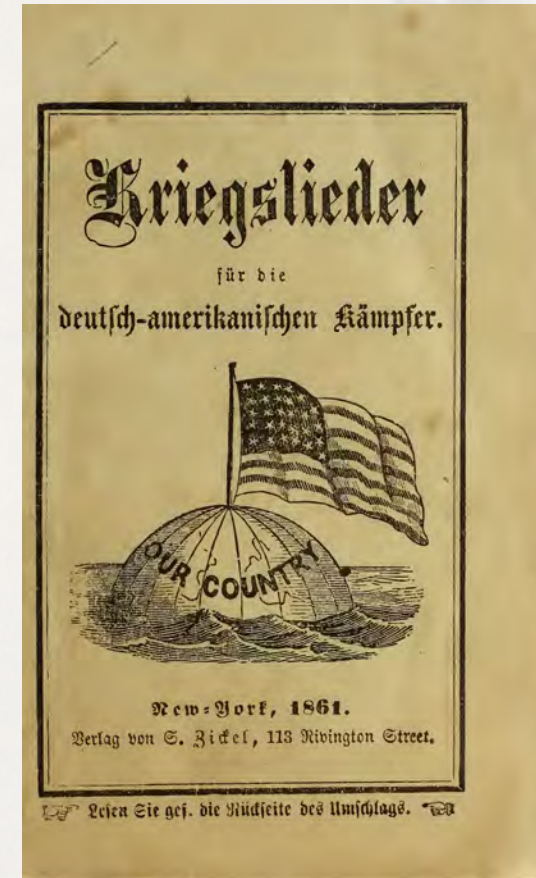
Godfrey Weitzel (1835–1884) was a German immigrant and a skilled Union general. He and his company served as Lincoln’s bodyguards during the first inauguration. In 1864, he took command of the Twenty-fifth Corps, the first army corps made up entirely of Black troops. In April 1865, Weitzel and his troops participated in the capture of Richmond. Weitzel sent a telegram to General Grant: “We took Richmond at 8:15 this morning. I captured many guns. The enemy left in great haste. The city is on fire in two places. Am making every effort to put it out. The people received us with enthusiastic expressions of joy.” When Lincoln visited the city the following day, Weitzel welcomed him at his headquarters—Jefferson Davis’ presidential residence.



Carl Schurz (OC-0917)

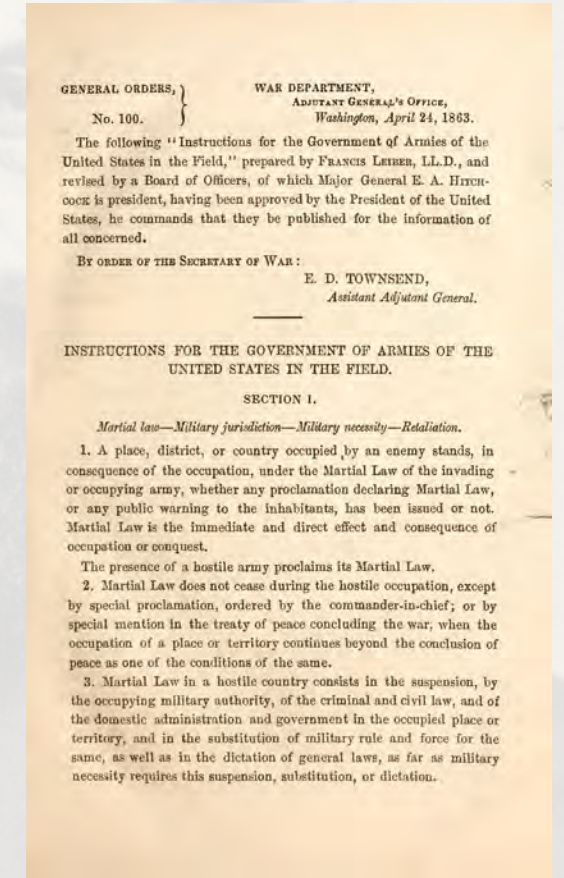
Carl Schurz (1829–1906) immigrated to the U.S. in the early 1850s and became involved in the newly-formed Republican Party. In 1860, he delivered speeches and rallied German-American voters in support of Abraham Lincoln. During the war he served as a brigadier general under General John C. Frémont, and later General Franz Sigel (another German immigrant). After the war, Schurz became editor of the *Detroit Post*, and in 1868 he became the first German-American elected to the U.S. Senate. President Rutherford B. Hayes appointed him as secretary of the interior in 1877.

IN THE CIVIL WAR ERA



Kriegslieder (71200908409526)

The *Kriegslieder für die Deutsch-Amerikanischen Kämpfer*, or *War Songs for the German-American Fighters*, was published in 1861 for the German-American soldiers that enlisted in the Union army. The German population was no more than five percent of the overall U.S. population, but they represented more than ten percent of Union soldiers.



Lieber Code (71200908410175)

Francis Lieber (1800–1872), a political philosopher and college professor, opposed slavery and became Lincoln’s legal advisor. He authored the Lieber Code (issued as General Orders No. 100 in April 1863), establishing standards of soldiers’ conduct in wartime. The Lieber Code remains a foundation for the laws of war in the United States.

Kayla Gustafson and Jessie Cortesi are Senior Lincoln Librarians with the Rolland Center for Lincoln Research at the Allen County Public Library.

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