



# LINCOLN LORE

●●● NUMBER 1911 SPRING 2016



## LINCOLN COLLECTION ITEMS ON EXHIBIT

AT THE HISTORY CENTER IN FORT WAYNE

Learn more on page 3.

# LINCOLN LORE

IS THE BULLETIN OF  
THE ALLEN COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY  
AND THE FRIENDS OF THE  
LINCOLN COLLECTION OF INDIANA

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# UPCOMING EVENTS



MAY 18, 2016

## FIFTH ANNUAL ROLLAND LECTURE

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

Hon. Randall T. Shepard will present the Fifth Annual Rolland Lecture at the Allen County Public Library, 900 Library Plaza, Fort Wayne, IN. Free and open to the public. Sponsored by the Lupke Foundation.



SEPTEMBER 20, 2016

## ANNUAL MCMURTRY LECTURE

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

Hon. Frank J. Williams will present the annual McMurtry Lecture at the Allen County Public Library. Free and open to the public.

OCTOBER 7-8, 2016

## ANNUAL LINCOLN COLLOQUIUM

LINCOLN CITY, INDIANA

The National Park service will host the Annual Lincoln Colloquium at the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial.



FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT NATIONAL LINCOLN EVENTS,  
VISIT [WWW.LINCOLNBICENTENNIAL.ORG/EVENTS](http://WWW.LINCOLNBICENTENNIAL.ORG/EVENTS).

## NEW BOOKS ABOUT ABRAHAM LINCOLN

*A Just and Generous Nation: Abraham Lincoln and the Fight for American Opportunity*, Harold Holzer and Norton Garfinkle, Perseus Books, 2015. The authors present a new look at Lincoln's motivations for going to war. While acknowledging the standard explanations of saving the Union and destroying slavery as powerful motives, they extend the discussion to include his belief in the salvation of the "American dream," the defense of equal economic opportunity for all Americans.

*Redeeming the Great Emancipator*, Allen Guelzo, Harvard University Press, 2016. (This book is based upon the author's text for the 2012 Nathan I. Huggins Lecture Series at Harvard.) Professor Guelzo refutes accusations that Abraham Lincoln was both a racist and a "political opportunist." The author tackles the continuing problems with racism today and includes the accomplishments Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, and W. E. B. DuBois.

*Loathing Lincoln: An American Tradition from the Civil War to the Present*, John McKee Barr, Louisiana State University Press, 2014. The author examines the criticism

which greeted Abraham Lincoln from his first steps into public life, through his presidency and the Civil War, and to the present day.

*Lincoln, the Law and Presidential Leadership*, Charles M. Hubbard, ed., Southern Illinois University Press, 2015. Contributors: Daniel W. Stowell, Mark E. Steiner, Charles M. Hubbard, Frank J. Williams, Edna Greene Medford, Ron Soodalter, Burrus M. Carnahan, Natalie Sweet, and Jason R. Jividen. In studying Abraham Lincoln's life, we must always remember his experience as an attorney and his regard for the law itself. These essays examine the decision-making process and the actions of the 16th President as they relate to his understanding of law and the Constitution.

*Herndon on Lincoln: Letters*, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., University of Illinois Press, 2016. A compilation of the letters which William H. Herndon wrote about his law partner, Abraham Lincoln. This new publication sheds light on Herndon's personal thoughts about Lincoln, and it will become an important and indispensable source for scholarly research.

This issue of Lincoln Lore was made possible in part by a grant from The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation.



## FROM THE LINCOLN FINANCIAL FOUNDATION COLLECTION

**T**wenty-seven artifacts from the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection will be on display at the History Center ([www.fwhistorycenter.com](http://www.fwhistorycenter.com)) in Fort Wayne, Indiana, March 14 – May 20, 2016. The exhibit will feature prints, sculpture, photographs, campaign and assassination memorabilia, and more, including the items shown on the cover.



### Chair from Alexander Gardner's photography studio, circa 1864

Alexander Gardner took many of the most familiar photographs of Abraham Lincoln, including several studio portraits of the President sitting in this oak and leather chair (since re-upholstered). Lincoln posed at Gardner's studio with his youngest son Tad on February 5, 1865. That image and four others, which the President sat for on that day, were the last posed photographs taken of Abraham Lincoln.

Gardner acquired the chair in 1863 at a sale of surplus Congressional furnishings, and it remained with his family until his daughter donated it to her church. The church put the artifact, and a letter from Lincoln to Gardner, for sale at auction on May 22, 2001, when it was purchased by the Lincoln Financial Foundation.

### *First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Lincoln, 1866. Alexander Ritchie after Francis Carpenter. Steel plate engraving*

Francis Carpenter completed his original painting of Lincoln and his cabinet during his six months at the White House in 1864. The artist later commissioned Alexander Ritchie to produce a steel plate engraving of his painting. The President was so impressed by the reproduction that he signed on as the first subscriber. The engraving was finally published in 1866, after Lincoln's death, and soon became the definitive image of Lincoln with his Cabinet.



### Abraham Lincoln. Leonard Volk, circa 1870. Composition bust

Sculptor Leonard Volk used the life mask of Lincoln that he had cast in Chicago in the spring of 1860 as the model for this bust and several succeeding sculptures. Following the President's assassination in 1865, Volk's heroic portrayal of Lincoln in classic Greco-Roman style became a favored image of the martyred leader.

### *Honest Old Abe. D. Wentworth and A Wide Awake. Buffalo: Blodgett and Bradford, 1860. Sheet music*

This copy of Wide Awake sheet music is inscribed "To Mrs. A. Lincoln Compliments of the Publisher."



### "Wide Awake" torch and lamp, circa 1860

Young Republicans called "Wide Awakes" (against the scourge of slavery) roused political passions by marching in huge torchlight parades during the campaign of 1860. This Wide Awake lamp was discovered in Elkhart, Indiana.





Left: *The Lincoln family cabin in Indiana (71.2009.081.1782)*, Right: *Little Pigeon Primitive Baptist Church (71.2009.081.1719)*

## An Interview with William Bartelt

### Author of *There I Grew Up: Remembering Abraham Lincoln's Indiana Youth*

**SG:** Please comment on the main reasons that Thomas Lincoln determined to migrate from Kentucky to Indiana.

**WB:** Abraham Lincoln answered this question in 1860 in response to John Locke Scripps of the *Chicago Press and Tribune*, "This removal was partly on account of slavery; but chiefly on account of the difficulty in land titles in Ky."

Then in 1864, Lincoln wrote to Kentuckian Albert Hodges, "I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I cannot remember when I did not so think and feel." Indeed, Lincoln probably gained this anti-slavery view from his parents. This response was not, however, merely a religious or moral issue; it was also an economic one. In Kentucky the practice of slavery affected free laborers like Thomas Lincoln, workers who competed with slaves "hired out" by their masters to do farm work, split rails, and perform other menial labor. As a result, wages paid free workers stayed low. A state without slavery, therefore, offered more economic opportunity to men who, like Lincoln, needed to supplement farm income.

Though some maintain Abraham Lincoln's slavery comment was aimed to gain political advantage in the 1860 campaign, Lincoln states clearly in his comments to Scripps that the main reason for the move lay in Kentucky's antiquated metes-and-bounds system of land description and conflicting

land claims. Few legal concerns mattered to pioneer farmers as much as the security of their land claims. In Indiana, because they purchased land directly from the U.S. Government, the owners received clear titles to the land. Moreover, the U. S. government made purchasing land easy by offering a credit system. Thomas Lincoln eventually received a land patent for 80 acres of Spencer County land.

**SG:** How long did the migration take? How many people were involved?

**WB:** Historians generally agree that the Lincolns' route from Knob Creek, Kentucky, to the home site in Spencer County covered about 110 miles. Although the party could travel this distance in a week, the family—Thomas, Nancy, Sarah, Abraham—chose a more leisurely pace visiting friends and relatives along the way. They probably took ten days to two weeks.

**SG:** How did Thomas Lincoln choose the eventual site for his destination? Did he already know people in the area?

**WB:** Thomas Lincoln had conducted a scouting expedition earlier in 1816 to find a suitable location. He chose a parcel of rolling hills burned over years earlier, thus easier to clear.

Legend suggests that another reason for selecting this area of Spencer County was a planned distillery that would provide work for Thomas as a cooper. One local history

records that Thomas Carter, a man Lincoln knew in Kentucky, brought a still with him and opened a distillery in 1817.

Of course, Carter was not the only local Thomas knew. Of 33 landowners in the community in 1830, 22 came from Kentucky, 13 of those from Hardin or Nelson Counties. Thomas naturally knew many men in these counties.

**SG:** How did a settler actually register his land claim?

**WB:** Registration began with a trip to the Vincennes Land Office. Thomas Lincoln traveled to Vincennes on October 15, 1817.

The U. S. government required applicants to purchase a minimum of 160 acres at a price of \$2 an acre, with 1/20 down, 1/4 in 40 days, another 1/4 due in 2 years, another 1/4 due in 3 years, and the final payment within 4 years of the sale date. Vincennes Land Office receipts record the name as "Linkorn" or "Linkern," an error that continued throughout the history of the transaction. But after the Panic of 1819 rules changed to extend credit for a longer period and reduced the minimum acreage purchase. Thomas eventually secured his patent to 80 acres in 1827.

**SG:** How soon did the Lincolns become involved with a church in Indiana? Please provide details.

**WB:** Both symbolically and geographically, the Little Pigeon Primitive Baptist

Church served as the community's center. The Church was established in neighboring Warrick County in 1816, the same year the Lincolns settled in Indiana. Then, in 1819, the congregation decided to build a meetinghouse; and on December 11, 1819, members selected a site on Noah Gorden's property near the Lincoln home. In 1821, members planned construction of a building as supervised by Thomas Lincoln.

Thomas and Sally (Abraham's stepmother) Lincoln joined this church on June 7, 1823. He joined "by letter" of transfer from Little Mount Separate Baptist Church in Kentucky, and she "by experience." Sarah Lincoln (Abraham's sister) joined "by experience" on April 8, 1826, about four months before marrying Aaron Grigsby. Abraham did not join the church.

**SG: What were Abraham Lincoln's first comments about the family's new home?**

WB: In Lincoln's "little sketch" for Jesse Fell in 1859, he said, "We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up."

One of my favorite descriptions of his new home comes from a poem Lincoln wrote after his 1844 return visit to Indiana:

*When first my father settled here,  
'Twas then the frontier line:  
The panther's scream, filled night with fear  
And bears preyed on the swine.*

**SG: Please comment on both Abraham's limited experiences with formal education and the books, which he was able to obtain in order to continue his program of self-education.**

WB: In his autobiographical statements, Lincoln referred to his education as "defective"; "there were some schools, so called," and "the aggregate of all his schooling did not amount to one year." He also said "There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course when I came of age I did not know much." He was too modest.

Indeed, Lincoln had a limited formal education, but the two Kentucky schools and three Indiana schools he attended taught him to read, write, and cipher, tools which allowed him to continue an education on his own. By the time he left Indiana at age 21, Lincoln knew a great deal.

While his formal education was important, equally significant was Lincoln's ability to learn from persons around him and from books. Historians have documented around 25 books Lincoln likely read in Indiana. Although we might describe a few of these works as textbooks, they included fiction and biography. He was especially interested in reading about history and the lives of George Washington and Benjamin Franklin. The one book always present in the Lincoln cabin was the Bible. With few books available, readers read and reread until extremely familiar with the words. We need only to read Lincoln's later speeches to see his close familiarity with the language of the Bible. Lincoln once told his friend Joshua Speed, "I am slow to learn and slow to forget that which I have learned—my mind is like a piece of steel, very hard to scratch anything on it and almost impossible after you get it there to rub it out."

**SG: Is history's portrayal of Thomas Lincoln fair?**

WB: Early biographers described Thomas Lincoln as a shiftless ne'er-do-well with no ambition. Perhaps some truth lies here if we examine only the elderly, Illinois Thomas, but certainly not true of the Kentucky and Indiana man. Recent scholarship has revised that view; now we see, in the Kentucky and Indiana years, Thomas Lincoln as an upstanding member of the community. Abraham's Indiana boyhood friend Nathaniel Grigsby described Thomas as a good citizen, an intelligent farmer, and a devout Christian.

Recently historians have focused on a new

consideration — the relationship between Abraham and Thomas, surely a complicated topic. The two did not enjoy a close, affectionate relationship, which became more obvious in Illinois. During Abraham's childhood Thomas was a strict disciplinarian who tried to prepare the boy for life on the rural frontier. Yet early on, family and friends recognized that Abraham longed for a life different from his father's. But I do not find their relationship as disagreeable or hostile as some authors depict. Regardless of the warmth in this relationship, Thomas obviously influenced Abraham. They shared political views, attitude toward slavery, and the ability to entertain with good stories.

**SG: Please comment on Abraham Lincoln's relationship with both his mother and his stepmother.**

WB: Abraham was fortunate in his two loving, supportive mothers. Neighbors described his birth mother, Nancy, as possessing extraordinary strength of mind. Although uneducated, she recognized Abraham's curiosity and encouraged his desire for education. Sarah, his stepmother, destroys all wicked-stepmother images. She, too, recognized something special in Abraham and fostered his development. In particular, I love Sarah's statement to William Herndon on September 8, 1865: "His mind & mine — what little I had seemed to run together — move in the same channel." In the Scripps statement Abraham said of Sarah: "She proved a good and kind mother . . ."

**SG: Your book on Lincoln in Indiana, *There I Grew Up*, is my "go-to-source" on the topic. Do you think**



Thomas Lincoln  
(LN-1475)



Sarah Bush Lincoln  
(LFA-0565)



Left: "Boy Lincoln Reading by Firelight" by Eastman Johnson (71.2009.081.1767),  
Above: "Young Lincoln Driving a Team of Oxen" by Fletcher Ransom  
(71.2009.081.0703)

that authors exploring Lincoln's entire life give sufficient emphasis to this important period in his life?

WB: You know I will say no! When questioned about the importance of Lincoln's childhood, I ask the person to assess the importance of his own fourteen years from 7 to 21 in life development. We must say no less about Lincoln's life in Indiana. Though I love to read biographies, I must admit that rarely does much attention fall on the subject's early life, yet, we know this time is crucial in the development in every individual.

SG: There are ample statements that Abraham Lincoln really did not appreciate his forced role as a farmer. However, the poem he wrote ("My Childhood Home I see Again") after a trip he made back to Southern Indiana seems to express a certain affection for the fields he tilled and perhaps even an appreciation for that period of time in his life. Please comment.

WB: I think we forget that such a "forced role" was the norm among rural families—and not just during the frontier period. Children were important economic parts of the family and were expected to contribute to its well-being. Lincoln told an Indiana neighbor that his father taught him how to work, but did not learn [sic] him to love it. Though not an unusual sentiment, it was part of the

experience. Here he grew up, and he felt nostalgic about it.

SG: The coincidence of 2016 being not only the bicentennial of statehood for Indiana but also the 200th anniversary of the year that the Lincoln family moved to Southern Indiana seems to be a natural reason to celebrate both events. Please comment on plans for celebrations of the history of Abraham Lincoln in Indiana.

WB: I know of these five significant commemorative events.

The Abraham Lincoln Association is commemorating the event by publishing a 2016 calendar featuring photographs of Thomas Lincoln furniture. Some of the pieces he created in Indiana, and they appear in Indiana museums.

The Evansville Museum of Arts, History, and Science will exhibit images of Lincoln's Indiana period. The exhibit runs from April to July 2016, and will include artifacts from the Museum's collection in addition to many items from private collections, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, the Lincoln Presidential Museum, the Indiana State Museum, and the Allen County Public Library.

On October 7 and 8, 2016, Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, site of the Lincoln farm in Indiana, will host the annual

Lincoln Colloquium focused on the theme "Lincoln in Public Memory." The two-day event will address ways we remember, honor, and memorialize Abraham Lincoln throughout the country.

The Indiana State Museum in Indianapolis is in the process of redesigning their 19th State Gallery to focus on Indiana in the period from 1816-1830. The centerpiece will be a cabin (not a replica of the Lincoln cabin, but more of a general representation). The exhibit will explore the Lincolns as typical Indiana settlers at the time of statehood. The exhibit will open in September.

Although not in 2016, the Indiana Historical Society will present a You Are There exhibit featuring the Lincoln ciphering book page in the Society's collection. Scheduled to open in 2018, this two-year exhibit will interpret the Lincoln family and their Indiana community. ♦

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### William Bartelt

William Bartelt is a Director of the Friends of the Lincoln Collection of Indiana and author of *There I Grew Up: Remembering Abraham Lincoln's Indiana Youth*.

## An Interview with Harold Holzer

About his new book, *A Just and Generous Nation: Abraham Lincoln and the Fight for American Opportunity*

**SG:** On Page 1, you go directly to the point: "Why was the Civil War really fought." Please mention the "usual" explanations and why they fall short.

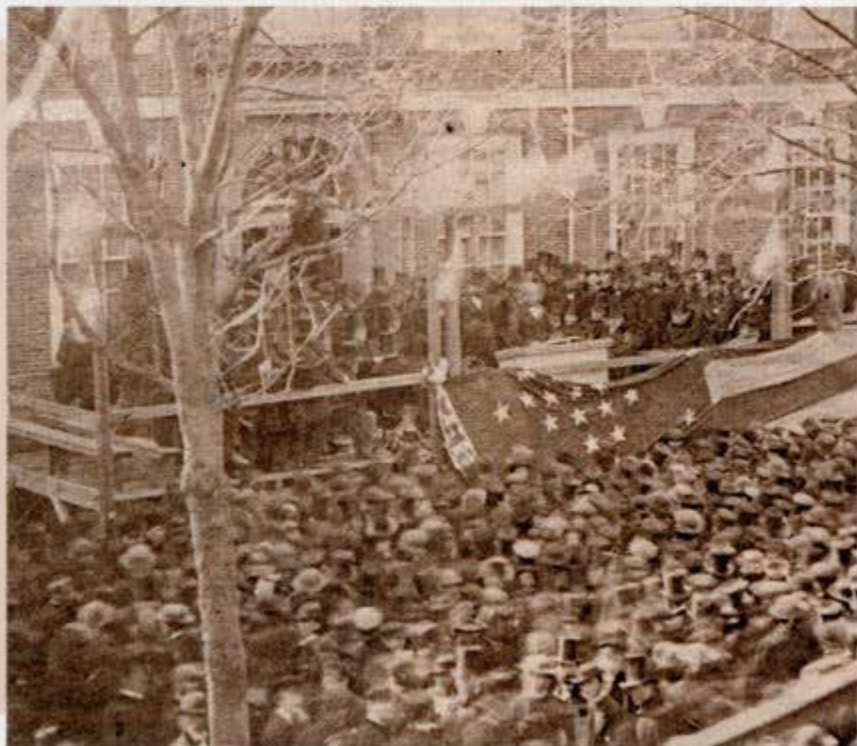
**HH:** I suppose that what we first learned about the causes of the Civil War depends on when and where we first heard them. As a New Yorker coming of age during the reconciliation-focused Civil War Centennial, I was taught from grade school on that the war was caused by hothead extremists in both sections who might more rationally have settled their so-called gentlemen's disputes amicably over time. Essentially, we were taught that differences over states' rights, tariffs, and economic systems caused the sectional discontent; and that the war itself was a noble, brother-against-brother conflict that brought out the valiant best in white participants, North as well as South. Slavery was rarely mentioned at all! At least we were not told that the conflict was a "war of Northern aggression," as many of my white Southern friends heard, and which some folks sadly still believe. But North as well as South, I'm afraid, the fact that slavery's very existence not only tortured an enslaved race, but defiled the founders' original vision of a land of genuine freedom and economic opportunity—that was mentioned not at all. It took years to learn about our country's indifference to its original sin—its compromise enshrinement of slavery in the Constitution. But my coauthor, Norton Garfinkle, and I think that even modern analyses that take slavery fully into account pretty much ignore why slavery and the threat of its expansion "aroused" Lincoln back into politics in 1854. The truth is, his was not originally an abolitionist's passionate crusade to set millions of people free at once. In our book, we maintain that the perpetuation and expansion of a system of forced labor meant to him that the American promise of middle-class opportunity could never be fulfilled. And it was this threat—this "cause" of secession and war—that aroused Lincoln to fight back against a section and an aristocratic class

that maintained that men's economic position, and that of those beneath them, would forever remain fixed.

**SG:** Please explain Abraham Lincoln's commitment to what he considered to be the "American Dream."

**HH:** The most extraordinary thing about Lincoln is that he not only lived the American dream himself, but vivified it in his writing. No one ever described American economic exceptionalism better than my good friend and onetime coauthor, Gabor Boritt, who abbreviated Lincoln's onetime endorsement of "the right to rise up" and memorably defined Lincoln's economic philosophy as "the right to rise." And no one ever gave better expression to the idea than Lincoln himself. "We proposed to give all a chance," Lincoln wrote in a memorandum around 1854, "and we expect the weak to grow stronger; the ignorant, wiser; and all better, and happier together." It was the "O"

word—"Opportunity"—that animated Lincoln's vision of the American Dream. "I hold the value of life is to improve one's condition," he told a group of German-Americans a few weeks before his 1861 inauguration. "Whatever is calculated to advance the condition of the honest, struggling, laboring man, so far as my judgment will enable me to judge of a correct thing, I am for that thing." As secession loomed ever closer, "that thing" became increasingly more important to Lincoln, and its expression ever more sublime. Appearing at Independence Hall on Washington's Birthday 1861, Lincoln passionately defined the dream and the responsibilities of Washington's successors to preserve it: "It was that which gave promise that in due time the weights should be lifted from the shoulders of all men, and that all should have an equal chance." With that pledge in mind, and knowing that a credible threat to his life awaited him in nearby Baltimore, Lincoln blurted out, he would "rather be



*Abraham Lincoln raising the flag outside Independence Hall, Philadelphia (LN-1433)*

assassinated on this spot than to surrender it.” By which he meant he would never surrender Independence Hall or the American dream given shape there.

**SG: Did Lincoln's life reflect Tocqueville's view of the United States? Why or why not?**

HH: I'm still not sure Lincoln ever read *Democracy in America*, but he did not need a foreign visitor's observations to direct him toward similar beliefs. Tocqueville noted that Americans seemed devoted to political liberty and religious freedom, and moreover that everyone who arrived on these shores (except African Americans, of course), inherently joined the middle class. In this idea, Lincoln and Tocqueville shared sentiments to a remarkable degree. But Tocqueville also worried that the tyranny of the majority posed a threat to the future of American democracy, and Lincoln believed unwaveringly in majority rule. Remember, he insisted that, despite winning just 40% of the popular vote in 1860, he had won a clear victory in the all-important Electoral College and therefore deserved to serve as President over a united country. Conversely, he not only believed for a time that he would lose his re-election bid in 1864, he felt it was his “duty” to turn over the presidency to a rival party, and, moreover, to cooperate in the transition. French “democracy,” while it lasted, never quite worked that way. As Norton Garfinkle and I point out in opening our book, Tocqueville was forcibly struck by the singular “equality of conditions” in the United States. Lincoln, who coincidentally entered the state legislature the year the Frenchman concluded his journey to America, believed passionately in the kind of social mobility Tocqueville was stunned to observe here. Remember, though, Tocqueville also believed opportunity was so boundless here that no class of people would ever violently revolt against another. It's extraordinary to observe how many otherwise astute observers remained blind to the existence of an entire race of people who enjoyed no right

at all to advance in society, and whose status as property would eventually excite just the kind of envy and violence Tocqueville (and maybe even Lincoln) doubted could ever manifest itself on our shores.

**SG: How important was Henry Clay's influence in the development of Lincoln's thoughts about the role of the federal government?**

HH: Quite important, though I've always believed that Clay was Lincoln's “practical” political model, as opposed to George Washington, who remained his “character” model. Still, Lincoln must

nationwide, black as well as white—and even proved willing to fight a war to defend it. Very un-Clay like!

**SG: Did Andrew Jackson's actions also play a role?**

HH: Well, Jackson was certainly a convenient bogeyman for Lincoln throughout his political rise—the very model of a modern major general (and tyrannical bully) whose politics seemed to favor unambitious rural farmers, along with laborers locked into permanent attachment to their economic class. Jackson opposed economic development, fought the national bank, and was deaf to what big government, as we call it today, could do to encourage enterprise. Thus Whigs, Lincoln among them, made Jackson their target for years. Yet I find it fascinating that when Lincoln arrived at the White House to take office, he placed a painting of Old Hickory in his office—and kept it there to inspire him for the rest of his days. When a Maryland delegation came calling in the spring of 1861 to plead that Northern troops marching to the defense of Washington be redirected around their barely loyal state to prevent violent protest, Lincoln thundered that there was “no Washington” in such



Henry Clay  
(OC-0496)



Andrew Jackson  
(LFA-0279)

be believed when he referred to Henry Clay as his “beau ideal of a statesman,” and there is no doubt but that The Great Compromiser was his modern guide star to making the founding dream into modern reality. Clay inspired Lincoln into the Whig Party, and Lincoln became a devotee of Clay's American System, supporting the public funding of what today we call “infrastructure”—modern transportation systems like roads and canals, eventually a kind of philosophical “right of way” for railroads, and the belief in a strong central banking system. Lincoln even embraced Clay's support for black colonization in its early days as a philanthropic movement meant to rescue a suffering people. In the end, however, we cannot dismiss the fact that as much as Lincoln admired Clay's famed ability to reconcile foes and achieve middle ground, when his own turn came to lead, Lincoln drew a line in the sand on slavery—meaning equal opportunity

a retreat—“no Jackson in that.” Later in the war, facing indignation over suspensions in civil due process that led to the arrest and censorship of anti-war newspaper editors, Lincoln again summoned the memory of Jackson, reminding critics that while in command at New Orleans, helping to save the country from the British, the general had cracked down on “traitorous” editors, too—and had overcome all complaints, political and legal. In Lincoln's fertile and breath-takingly practical mind, Jackson went from tyrant to totem.

**SG: What speech best reflects Lincoln's “American Dream?”**

HH: This is a tough one. Readers may disagree with me on this one—and I admit that our new book hearkens back repeatedly to the “of the people, by the people, for the people” and “unfinished work” themes of the Gettysburg Address. But were I to choose one speech (well, a “speech” in name



only, for it was never delivered aloud by Lincoln) it would be his Special Message to Congress on July 4, 1861. That document brilliantly showcased Lincoln's political, constitutional, and emotional rationales for preventing disunion—including his case for strong presidential powers in wartime. Here is the argument that disunion and state's rights were "sophistical contrivances"—and here came his faith in the "plain people" in an "hour of trial"—all this and more. But first and foremost, the Independence Day Message featured his sublime argument for why the coming battle was worth fighting: because it was "a People's contest"—by which he meant a struggle not alone for the preservation of the government, but for what it stood for. And this meant opportunity. For Lincoln, then, and always, government's "leading object," as he put it in that message, was "to elevate the condition of men—to lift artificial weights from all shoulders—to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all—to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life." You know, the message offered a potpourri of arguments, burst after burst, and not always brilliantly organized, but in that little paragraph Lincoln did nothing less than magnificently describe "the leading object of the government for whose existence we contend," and better, in my view, than ever before or after.

**SG: I know that you have written extensively on Abraham Lincoln's virtual silence on grave issues between his election and inauguration. Was this a wise decision? What topics did he choose to address for public consumption? Why were these choices made?**

HH: Well, the debate continues. It is one of the questions I get asked most frequently, at lectures, symposia, and even from students preparing for their History Day projects. In the end, I think Lincoln was wise to choose silence and focus on lofty ideas about God's protection (as he expressed them in his Farewell Address), and repeated references to his past writing. For one thing, he was a true traditionalist; he had made no campaign speeches in 1860 after Cooper Union, and in his era, presidents-elect simply did not try to impact policy during the long four months between elections and inaugurations. Politically, Lincoln believed that if he held his tongue, the crisis might even pass, and latent Unionism in the South would rise up and tamp down the extremists. In this rose-colored faith, Lincoln was over-opti-

mistic. But when, during the early days of his inaugural journey, Lincoln did venture to tilt first toward conciliation, then toward confrontation, the press response was hostile and people wondered whether Lincoln was fit for the White House. With controversy swirling around him, Lincoln's best bet was to hold his tongue, write a great inaugural address (which he did), and insist that President Buchanan do his duty and enforce the law before March 1861, which he didn't.

**SG: Please comment on your thesis that Lincoln presented himself as "both a man of peace and a man of war." Explain his "remarkable evolution."**

HH: Well, it's complicated. For one thing, I think historians have overestimated Lincoln's hostility toward military action and justifiable war. Remember, he had grown up immersed in the glory of the American Revolution and its heroes—as he frankly told the New Jersey state legislature in 1861. And he simply loved his experience in the Black Hawk War, declaring in 1860 that his election as company captain pleased him more than any election success of his life. When his enlistment ended, Captain Lincoln even re-enlisted as a private! I think the notion of Lincoln as a pacifist originates with his opposition to the Mexican-American War, a position motivated not by pacifism but by politics; like all Whigs, Lincoln feared that any territorial acquisition would be pro-slavery and pro-Democratic. Of course Lincoln presented himself as an unwilling warrior to rally a reluctant North to fight to preserve their democracy. And politically, he did evolve dramatically from dove to hawk—but I think the fire was always in him to fight when necessary for a good cause. He didn't defer to Jack Armstrong on the wrestling fields of New Salem, and I don't think he was ever going to roll over for disunion thirty years later.

**SG: You note that in 1864 Lincoln "provided a new rationale for the war." Please comment on this concept.**

HH: Lincoln actually altered the rationale for the war several times. Originally he portrayed the conflict as a fight to preserve the Union. By 1863 it had also become a war to end slavery. But then Lincoln began openly discussing another reason for its unexpected duration and horrific cost: the will of God. I've always thought that this was more than a case of Lincoln "getting religion." Rather, I suspect he simply needed

to share the guilt over so much loss of life with a Higher Being. It was as if he comforted himself—and hoped to comfort the nation—by saying that the war would have to continue if such was "God's will." It was a politically dexterous but I think totally sincere transformation. But in the end, as my coauthor and I assert, Lincoln never really altered his basic belief in an economic and social system worth fighting for—one that enshrined and expanded equal opportunity. That he added God to his army and arsenal was simply another weapon to sustain a government truly committed to its original "of, by, and for the people" promise.

**SG: What presidential policies from the Civil War era still continue to be relevant today?**

HH: Above all, I think we need to appreciate, learn from, and continue to build on Lincoln's efforts belatedly to offer full American opportunity to African Americans. Did any President before Barack Obama more sincerely believe that "black lives matter"? Tragically, this "unfinished work," as Lincoln described it at Gettysburg, remains on America's "to do" list 150+ years later. The "perfect union" for which we lost 750,000 souls remains an elusive, but crucial, aspiration. Lincoln would have expected us to continue working to achieve a truly colorblind society, and an equally accessible economic ladder. That's the most crucially relevant policy challenge we continue to face today. But Lincoln also believed passionately in economic development, education, and opportunity—yet we continue to debate the meaning of that vision today. Personally, and I think speaking for my coauthor, I wish some of that debate was no longer as "relevant" as the question, and my answer, acknowledge. Sadly, there are still lessons we still need to learn from Lincoln. But on the bright side, American history has given us no greater teacher. ♦

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Harold Holzer :

Harold Holzer is the Chairman of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation and Director of the Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College. Mr. Holzer is the author or editor of 50 books on Abraham Lincoln. His book *Lincoln and the Power of the Press* won the 2015 Lincoln Prize.

## "A Father in My Affliction:" African American Women and Their Wartime Letters to President Lincoln

by **Arlisha Norwood**



On January 16, 1865, Abbie A. Myers, resident of Clarendon, New York, wrote to President Abraham Lincoln. "I am in trouble and know not what to do," she explained. "I thought I would write you." Myers requested information about her husband's whereabouts. When she last heard from him, he was stationed in New Orleans, but she could not be sure where he was now. She outlined her desperate situation to the president: she was sick, had no money or financial support, and to make matters worse, she had a family to raise. In words colored with religious sentiment, Myers continued, "Dear Brother in Christ, I look to you as a father in my affliction may heaven bless you is my prayer it seems as if my cup is full but I look to him who rules all events." Expressing her views on the military conflict that had separated her from her husband, she hoped that the war would "cease and peace may be restored to this land and country." Unbeknownst to Mrs. Myers, her husband Aaron, a private in Company M, 11th USCT Heavy Artillery Regiment, had died in Louisiana from diphtheria seventeen days before she penned her letter to the president.

Myers' letter joined a large body of correspondence to the president from a variety of war-weary Americans. Civilian letters to the president increased dramatically during the Civil War. Lincoln's assistant private secretary, William Stoddard, recalled that

*The packages and envelopes, of all sorts and sizes, sometimes numbered hundreds in a day, and sometimes dwindled to a few dozens. They related to all imaginable interests and affairs: applications for office, for contracts, for pardons, for pecuniary aid, for advice, for information, for autographs, voluminous letters of advice, political disquisitions, religious exhortations, the rant and drivel of insanity, bitter abuse, foul obscenity, slanderous charges against public men, police and war information, military reports - there never was on earth such another omnium gatherum.*

Lincoln's voluminous correspondence reflects Americans' perceptions of his acces-

sibility. During the nineteenth century and particularly during Lincoln's tenure, Americans enjoyed unrestricted access to the president. Walt Whitman recalled publicly encountering him almost daily. Moreover, the White House, the president's home and office, retained lax security well into the late nineteenth century. It was hardly a refuge for the president; a constant stream of people seeking one favor or another or simply wanting to get closer to the center of power traversed its space. And Lincoln insisted on remaining in touch with the public's pulse. "Anything that kept the people away from him he disapproved," secretary John Hay recalled. In turn, those who petitioned him expected his attention. He served their interests, and they thought nothing of seeking his assistance.

African American women were generally not so bold as to disturb the president at his workplace and residence, but they were compelled by circumstances to put their concerns in writing. Historians have long attributed the dearth of African Americans who wrote to the president to the high rate of illiteracy among them. Recent archival research has uncovered notes that disprove this theory and allows the construction of an inclusive narrative which illuminates African American thoughts and attitudes about the Civil War, freedom, the Union and Abraham Lincoln. Black women's letters to President Lincoln reveal the war's impact on those left to struggle with the challenges presented to them on the home front. Although poor and without influence, they did not hesitate to seek the help of the man who occupied the highest political office in the nation.

Much like general correspondence the president received, African American women addressed a plethora of issues in their letters. However, the consistent theme of equality and freedom echoes throughout their communications. In a few short words, and sometimes in rather lengthy paragraphs, they conveyed the urgency and significance of the war in their personal lives, while also indicating their expectations of the presiden-

tial role in the wartime environment. They boldly petitioned and advised the president on military policy and domestic affairs. As a result of their efforts to draw attention to their plight, they left behind a rich testimony of their political and social agency.

With the issuance of the proclamation and the subsequent organization of the United States Colored Troops, Union policies finally reflected the black community's agenda. While the proclamation authorized the securing of the services of African American males, black women sacrificed as their husbands, sons, and brothers went off to war. As the men in their lives fought to preserve the Union and to secure freedom, the women left behind empathized with them and struggled with their own hardships. Those with family members in the USCT not only encountered a change in familial structures, but many also experienced a decline in economic status. Their suffering is movingly illustrated in their letters to the president about the discriminatory Union army policies that affected their loved ones and, consequently, impacted their own lives. Central to African American women's concerns was the unequal and inconsistent pay received by black men in the service of the Union. While the proclamation recognized enlisted African American males as soldiers, it did not guarantee equal pay. Under the Militia Act of 1862, black soldiers were compensated \$10.00 per month with a reduction of \$3.00 for clothing. Their white counterparts received \$13.00 a month, in addition to clothing. Although, black men frequently communicated their outrage about the policy, African American women called attention to the dismal situations the practice created. In June 1864, Rosanna Henson petitioned the president on behalf of her husband, a soldier in the 22nd USCT. Henson informed Lincoln that her husband had not received pay since May 1863. As a result of her husband's unstable pay schedule she admitted her current economic status was a "great struggle." Appealing to the president's sense of fairness, she wrote: "I being

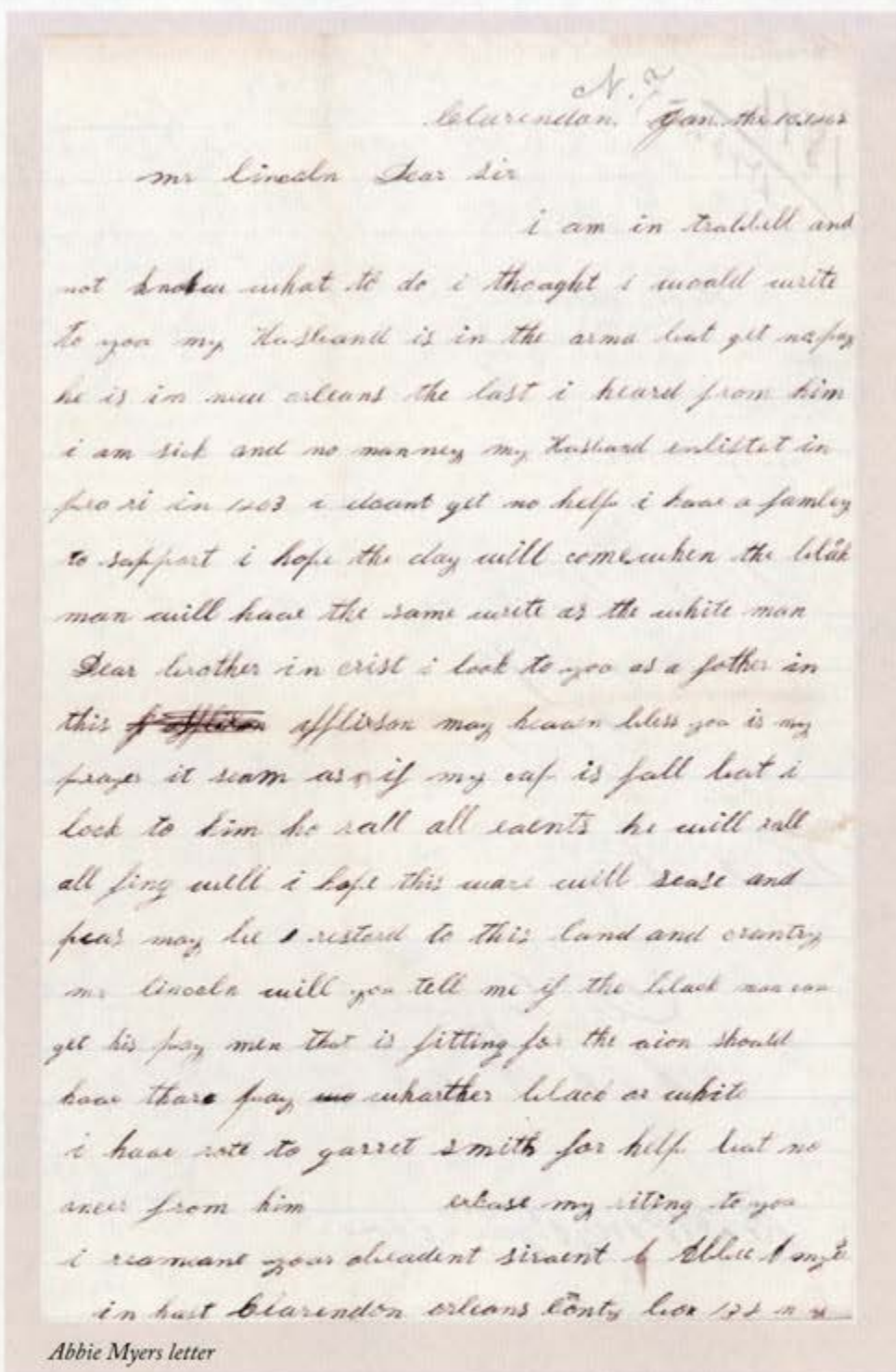
a colored women do not get any pay. Yet my husband is fighting for this country." Henson expressed confidence that Lincoln would take care of her situation. "I write to you because I have been told you will see to it."

Jane Welcome from Carlisle, Pennsylvania, complained of similar circumstances. On November 21, 1864, she wrote to President Lincoln requesting the release of her son, Mart Welcome, sergeant in the 8th Regiment, United States Colored Troops. Welcome admitted to suffering greatly since her son's absence. "He is all the support I have now that his father is dead and his brother that was all the help that I had has been wounded twice," she claimed. Welcome explained her bold decision to appeal directly to the president, indicating that, "they say that you will sympathize with the poor there was a white gentleman told me to write you."

Abbie Myers had also expressed concerns about her husband's pay. "Mr. Lincoln, will you tell me if the black man can get his pay," she wrote. "[M]en fighting for the union should have there pay whether black or white." Although her current situation was bleak, Myers looked to a better future. "I hope the day will come when the black man has the same rights as the white man," she wrote.

African American women were not shy about offering advice to the chief executive. Hannah Johnson, mother of a soldier in the famed 54th Massachusetts Regiment, wrote, "I am a colored woman and my son was strong and able as any to fight for his country." Expressing what she considered the duty of all Americans and the expectations of fair treatment for those who defended the Union, she stated, "Now I know it is right that a colored man should go and fight for his country and so ought to a white man . . . So why not our enemies should be compelled to treat him the same, Made to do it." Johnson's primary concern was the forced re-enslavement of African American soldiers. Although she admitted to a lack of education, she justified her advice to Lincoln based on her moral compass. "I know just as well as any what is right between man and man," she argued.

Like Henson's letter, Johnson's urgent call to President Lincoln reflects the various issues that African Americans felt Lincoln should remedy in this ultimate war for their freedom. From her perspective, the re-enslavement of African American soldiers not only was counterproductive to the



Abbie Myers letter

freedom narrative but also an attempt to undermine black social advancement. Johnson believed that African American progress angered Confederate soldiers because the war finally placed both black and white on an equal footing. USCT soldiers, "were now proving themselves to be men." She also eloquently reminded the president of the physical and mental effects of slavery on African Americans, "robbing the colored people of their labor is but a small part of the robbery, their souls are almost taken, they are made brutes often." She encouraged the president to put the "rebels to work in

State prisons to making shoes and things, if they sell our colored soldiers, till they let them all go." She ended her letter with a call to action, assertively asking, "Will you see that colored men fighting are fairly treated?"

While many African American women offered advice on military policy, others requested acknowledgement of their freedom. In 1864, Annie Davis wrote the president expressing her "desire to be free." Her letter illustrates African Americans' persistence to escape bondage while encountering the fluid boundaries of freedom during the war. Davis identified herself as a slave

in Belair, Maryland, a state that had been exempted from the proclamation. Doubtless, Davis' mistress understood the limits of Lincoln's decree, but Davis remained unwilling to accept her status as a slave. Instead, she chose to seek clarification and appeal to a higher authority. The brief account brings to light the clashing of agendas between enslaved African American women and their owners. Just as importantly, it is yet another example of black people's expectations that the president would protect them and look after their interests. Although Lincoln never responded to Davis, the state of Maryland officially abolished slavery four months after her attempt to engage the president in her very personal desire.

African American women's letters to the president abounded with religious imagery, which hints at how black people comfortably accepted Lincoln into their spirituality. Jane Welcome declared in her letter, "I hope the Lord will bless you and me." Han-

nah Johnson urged the president to stand behind the Emancipation Proclamation. "When you are dead and in Heaven, in a thousand years that action of yours will make the Angels sing your praises I know it," she wrote. Abbie Myers addressed the president as her, "Brother in Christ." These black women appealed to Lincoln as an honorable man who, with God's help, would make the right decisions.

Letters from black women to Abraham Lincoln recast the roles of African Americans in the Civil War and emancipation narrative. Their correspondence articulates the unique difficulties black women faced, and their letters remain testaments to their efforts to have their concerns addressed. They petitioned the president for all matters, revealing their lack of concern for political bureaucracy. Although their letters were ignored during the writers' lifetimes, their firm and transparent appeals to the holder of the highest office of the United States allows us to

add this rich chapter in our understanding of black women's experiences during the war. ♦

#### Source:

The Papers of Abraham Lincoln: Images from the National Archives and Library of Congress, Internet, RG 99, Entry 7: Correspondence, Letters Received, 1799-1894, Document 255871, National Archives, Washington D.C. Available from <http://lincolnpapers2.dataformat.com/images/1865/01/255871.pdf>

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

#### Arlisha Norwood

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## The Lincoln-Era Greenbacks and Their Amazing Relevance Today

Most students of the Civil War learn all about Confederate money — they learn it was totally worthless by the end of the conflict, a joke in monetary terms that significantly undermined the viability of the Confederate regime. Sometimes devotees of Lincoln and Civil War studies also learn about the Union's counterpart: the "Greenbacks," the United States Notes, first issued in 1862. These also depreciated in value in the course of the war.

But while Confederate money is famous as a monetary experiment that failed, the Greenbacks — despite their wartime depreciation — succeeded in a great many ways, and they rose in value after the war, becoming a viable part of the United States money supply that survived far into the twentieth century. And that little-known story holds immense potential for twenty-first century finance.

Since I have just authored a book on that overall subject — *How America Can Spend Its Way Back to Greatness*, published by Praeger in May 2015 — and since the book presents some monetary history in picturesque terms for a general readership — I am going to share a few facts about the history of money in America that will put the Civil War

Greenback experiment in clear perspective.

Legal tender paper money was created during the colonial period, and some of these experiments, such as Pennsylvania's, succeeded very well. But these colonial experiments were at odds with the standard monetary practice of Europe. Other nations in the western world, including Great Britain, created legal tender money at the mint, and it consisted of minted coins — solid gold or solid silver coins. The method was simple: the owners of gold and silver had the option of bringing this metal to the mint, where it would be melted, stamped into standard-measure coins, and given back. But the coins were private property (though created by the sovereign state); they did not become the property of the state until they were taxed into government coffers.

Britain's American colonies were "cash poor" in terms of coins, since Parliament had forbidden both the exportation of coins to America and also the creation of mints in colonial America.

In most European nations, the legal tender coinage in circulation was never plentiful enough to constitute an adequate money supply since gold and silver were after all

scarce (and thus valuable). But early commercial banks filled the gap in the money supply by creating an additional "circulating medium" that could function as money but was not legal tender.

These early commercial banks, including the Bank of England, printed up "bank notes," which were paper certificates containing a printed statement on the front: a statement that the face value of the note was "payable to the bearer on demand," payable in coin. Then they lent these notes into circulation.

These notes were not legal tender; people didn't have to accept them. But when people did accept them, they served as a surrogate for money, since they constituted a form of real purchasing power.

These bankers were crafty operators: they printed and lent far more of these banknotes than they could ever redeem in hard cash (i.e., coin). But the law permitted them to do this. They were influential people with connections in high places, so their trick — their juggling act, their sleight of hand, as recorded by the methods of double-entry book-keeping — laid the foundations for the system of "bank credit" that we have in

use today, though few members of the general public in today's world really understand it. Economists call this system "fractional reserve banking."

These bankers figured it was very unlikely that everyone possessing one of the notes would come storming into the bank at the very same time demanding cold hard coin of the realm.

But it happened sometimes — when a "run on the bank" or a "bank panic" started. At that point the bank had a serious "liquidity problem" and what happened next would depend upon the banking laws on the books.

Fast forward for a moment to the American Revolution. The Continental Congress, beginning in 1775, decided to finance the revolution in part through the printing and spending of "Continental Dollars," legal-tender currency notes which — somewhat like banknotes — could be redeemed in coin. But there was a very important difference between the "Continental Currency" and bank notes. These "Continentials" did not contain the words "payable to the bearer on demand" within the printed promise. The notes stated that the bearer was entitled to receive the face value of the note (in coin), but the timing and circumstances for redemption in coin were not specified. And that was one of the reasons why the notes depreciated — i.e., circulated at less than face value — for people were understandably skeptical that the fledgling United States would ever be able to pay the face value of the currency in coin. And this Continental Currency of the Revolution was comparable to both the Confederate money and the Greenbacks of Civil War America.

Money and banking evolved in the years from the founding of the American Republic to the Civil War. In the Coinage Act of 1792, the United States Mint was created by Congress, thus launching the American dollar as a precious-metal coin. Congress also chartered the first Bank of the United States the year before. Modeled on the Bank of England, this federal bank went out of existence in 1811, when its charter lapsed. Congress chartered a second Bank of the United States in 1816, but its charter also lapsed (in 1836). However, numerous commercial banks were chartered at the state level all over America.

The aggregate money supply of the United States in these years consisted of minted coins that were legal tender, supplemented by bank notes — which were not legal tender, but which functioned as money when people

were willing to accept them. The banking laws varied from state to state, and some of these laws were quite lax. Some commercial banks ("wildcat banks") were required under law to keep very little coin on reserve.

Sometimes when bank panics happened, the laws on the books permitted "bank holi-

days," or "suspensions of specie payments" (coins were called "specie" in financial jargon), which meant that banks were allowed to close their doors for a while and reorganize their affairs.

We are now ready for a look at the financial methods of the Lincoln administration



Top: Confederate twenty dollar bill with Vice President Alexander Stephens (front and back),  
Bottom: United States one dollar bill with Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase (front and back)

and Congress.

Lincoln and the Republican Congress paid for the war using three methods: (1) taxes, including the first direct income tax in American history, which was instituted in 1862; (2) deficit spending, specifically the sale of war bonds by the treasury, bonds that were often “floated” to the public in partnership with investment banks such as Jay Cooke’s bank in New York; and (3) the direct creation of legal-tender money, which could be spent right into circulation. This legal-tender money consisted of United States Notes, first authorized in 1862.

These United States Notes were very similar to the “Continental” of the American Revolution. They were promises to pay in coin, but the timing and circumstances for this payment were left vague. They had legal-tender status, so they could be spent directly into use: people had to accept them. But they would often circulate at depreciated rates, which meant that the prices charged for goods would increase if one proposed to pay with this federal paper money. The result was inflation.

The rate of inflation in the Union during the Civil War was about 80%. That’s double-digit inflation, which today would be regarded as terrible. But the inflation rate in the Confederacy was nothing less than 9,000%, which of course was catastrophic.

So the Union’s experiment with legal tender paper money was a qualified success, whereas the Confederates’ attempt to create and circulate paper money failed completely.

The first Legal Tender Act, introduced in Congress by Rep. Elbridge G. Spaulding of New York, was passed on February 25, 1862. In addition to this act, two subsequent legal tender acts — passed by Congress on July

11, 1862, and March 3, 1863 — resulted in a currency issue which, by the end of the Civil War, totaled approximately \$430 million.

These United States Notes were popularly known as “Greenbacks” because their legal-tender status was explained in a statement on the back of the note that was printed in green ink. On the front of the bill was a statement proclaiming that “the United States will pay” the bearer the face value of the note. On the back was the following statement: “This note is a legal tender for all debts public and private except duties on imports and interest on the public debt; and is receivable in payment of all loans made to the United States.”

It was commonly presumed that these bills would be redeemed in coin after the war. That was certainly the view of Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase, who was reluctant to support the legal tender acts at all, as well as his successors in the treasury department, William Pitt Fessenden and Hugh McCulloch. Congress made provision for a gradual “redemption” policy in 1865, and the treasury began to pay out coin in exchange for the Greenbacks, which were then destroyed.

But as early as 1865, an economist, Henry Carey, proposed that the redemption policy should be halted, that the United States Notes should remain in circulation as a permanent part of the United States money supply.

Thus began the “Greenbacker” heresy.

Congress and the treasury shifted their redemption policy back and forth in the years that followed the war for complicated reasons. Redemption was halted for a while in 1868. For one thing, banks, when they received these United States Notes in the course of their regular business, could use

them as a “reserve” — that is, as a backing for their own notes — since the Greenbacks possessed the status of legal tender. This was very handy for the bankers: they could pay out Greenbacks to depositors instead of coin, and the depositors would have to accept these notes, whether they liked it or not. For another thing, the Greenbacks were proving themselves very useful for federal finance.

It is important to understand that the federal budget process as we know it did not exist at that time: Congress would decide to spend certain sums of money for specified purposes through legislated appropriations. But then sufficient federal revenue would have to be brought into the treasury to pay for what Congress had decided to spend, and it was difficult to predict the size of these revenue streams. If the revenue from taxes proved insufficient, the treasury would have to engage in deficit spending, i.e., sell bonds.

The Greenbacks changed this calculation. They expanded the monetary base that could be used by investors for the purchase of bonds. And they were also legal tender for the payment of internal taxes to the federal government. When the treasury received these United States Notes for any reason — as long as the redemption policy was halted — it could store them instead of swapping them for gold and then destroying them.

For that reason, George Boutwell, who served as treasury secretary during the first presidential term of Ulysses S. Grant, kept a stock of Greenbacks “on reserve.” If federal revenues fell short of congressional appropriations in any given year, he would simply pay out the difference by spending a sufficient amount of Greenbacks into circulation. They were legal tender.

During this time, the constitutionality of the legal tender acts was challenged in court, and the Supreme Court proceeded to rule on the matter twice — in back-to-back decisions. In 1870, the court overturned the acts as unconstitutional in the case of *Hepburn v. Griswold*. But in 1871, the court reversed itself in the case of *Knox v. Lee*.

During the 1870s, congressional policy on redemption continued to shift. In 1875, Congress passed the Specie Payment Resumption Act, which directed the treasury to resume the exchange of Greenbacks



*Left to right:*  
Salmon Chase (LN-1166),  
William Fessenden (LN-1160),  
Hugh McCulloch (LN-1156)

for gold on the first business day of 1879. In the meantime, however, a significant popular movement to keep the Greenbacks in circulation developed.

For one thing, the Panic of 1873 ushered in a fearsome economic depression and when bank panics happened the money supply of the United States shrank. The process was very simple. When banks were unable to pay out coin to the people who brought in their bank notes, the notes became worthless. As this happened, the active purchasing power at work in the U.S. economy shrank in direct proportion. And a shrunken money supply was not conducive to economic recovery.

In 1876, a new party, the Greenback-Labor Party, nominated Peter Cooper, the founder of the Cooper Union school in New York, for the presidency. The party advocated repeal of the 1875 Resumption Act; they demanded that the Greenbacks should be kept circulating as legal tender currency.

In 1878, Congress took note of this movement and passed "An Act to Forbid the Further Retirement of United States Legal Tender Notes." This act forced the treasury to keep the circulating Greenbacks — whose face value at the time was precisely \$346,681,016 — in circulation indefinitely. This meant that when resumption of specie payments began in 1879, the United States Notes that were swapped for gold could not be destroyed. They would have to be stored. They would also have to be kept "circulating," which meant that when federal revenues fell short of congressional appropriations, the Greenbacks would have to be spent right back into use.

The treasury department established a \$100 million "gold reserve" to redeem United States Notes in coin when people turned them in. This meant, in effect, that the federal government was operating on principles that were not very different from the methods of commercial banks: the face value of its circulating currency (approximately \$347 million) greatly exceeded the value of its gold coin reserves (\$100 million), the coin reserves that backed the currency. The big difference: the banks were lending money into circulation (at interest), whereas the government was spending it into circulation.

The treasury pulled this off successfully. Gold flowed into the treasury from many revenue sources in those days: land sales, the payment of import duties, and the sale of bonds. And as long as Uncle Sam could redeem all the notes that people turned in at local treasury branches, the purchasing



Peter Cooper  
(OC-0505)

value of a U.S. Note was literally "as good as gold."

Consider what this meant.

It meant that by the 1880s the wartime depreciation in the value of the Greenbacks had ceased. They were worth as much as gold dollars. And as long as the 1878 law remained on the books, roughly \$347 million had been added to the U.S. money supply indefinitely. The government had increased the money supply of the United States by printing money — and, by the 1880s, there was no inflation associated with this process.

Consider something else: that 1878 law stayed on the books until 1994.

A number of Gilded Age "Greenbackers" made proposals for federal programs to be financed by new issues of United States Notes. Though none of these proposals were adopted, a few of them retain great interest. In 1894, when another economic depression was ravaging America, a maverick Ohio businessman named Jacob Coxey proposed that Congress spend \$500 million to put the nation's unemployed to work building new roads. And the finance method that Coxey proposed: Greenbacks, United States Notes. It would not cost the taxpayers anything, and it would not require deficit spending. But it could lead to economic recovery.

Congress never adopted this proposal.

In the Great Depression of the 1930s an economist named John R. Commons revived the same basic proposal. "In order to create the consumer demand," he wrote in 1934, "on which business depends for sales, the government itself must create . . . new money and go completely over the head of the entire

banking system by paying it out directly to the unemployed, either for relief or for construction of public works." Like Coxey's proposal, this suggestion was ignored by the president (Franklin D. Roosevelt) and by Congress.

But it surely could have hastened economic recovery in the 1930s without higher taxes and without any deficit spending.

There is reason to believe that the long-term success of the United States Notes — the Civil War Greenbacks — could provide a useful guide for improving the financial, economic, monetary, and political prospects of this nation. I lack sufficient time in an article of this length to spell out the details. Suffice it to say that we are falling ever farther behind in our upkeep of infrastructure. And the urgent need to adapt to the changes that are coming because of global warming (the creation of sea walls, for instance, to protect coastal cities) will probably bear a price tag that staggers the mind. The politics of budget-balancing, retrenchment, and austerity have been shrinking the power of America to pay for the things that we all have in common. That's appalling. And the politics of deficit spending are dead on arrival these days, not only in Washington but all over America.

In our new age of electronic money — an age when precious-metal coinage no longer exists — is there a way to bring the Greenback method up to date, to pay for necessities without higher taxes, without more deficit spending, without inflation (an important point), without costing anybody anything?

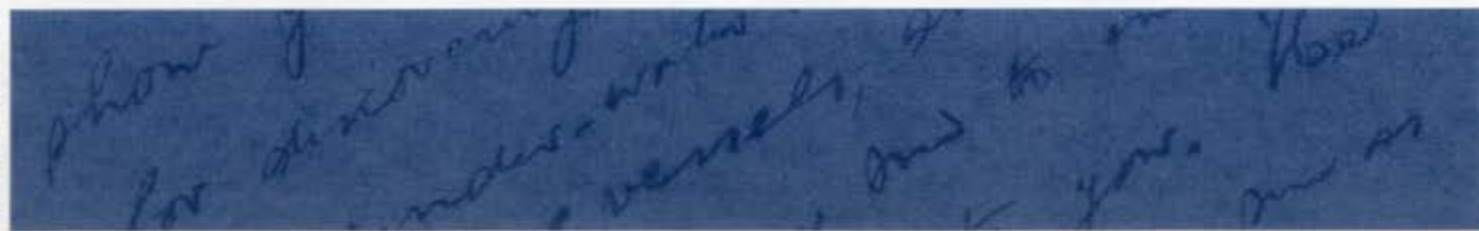
There is.

At the risk of being self-promotional, I invite you to read my new book — *How America Can Spend Its Way Back to Greatness*. I welcome debate on this subject, and you may or may not be convinced by my arguments. But there is far more significance in the study of Civil War finance than might first meet the eye. ♦

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### Richard Striner

Richard Striner teaches at Washington College. He is the author of *Lincoln and Race*; *Lincoln's Way: How Six Great Presidents Created American Power*; and *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle To End Slavery*.



## An Interview with Hon. Frank J. Williams

### On the Sesquicentennial of the Year 1866

**SG:** The Thirteenth Amendment was ratified in December 1865. What came next for the implementation process?

**FW:** The death of President Lincoln on April 15, 1865, did not stall the ratification process of the Thirteenth Amendment, which the House of Representatives approved on January 31, 1865. If the eleven former Confederate states were assumed not to have left the Union, the nation had thirty-six states and thus twenty-seven were needed to ratify and that was the determination by Secretary of State William H. Seward. Andrew Johnson supported abolition and with his encouragement, eight of the former Confederate states voted to approve the amendment. On December 15, 1865, the Thirteenth Amendment went into effect.

As a result of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and President Johnson's restoration plan which required abolition even before the

amendment went into effect, virtually all slaves were free by late 1865. While the amendment clearly prohibited slavery, its real impact remained uncertain. Did it end only the legal ownership, and the domestic slave trade, or did it redefine freedom to include equality in both formal and customary relationships? In other words, if slavery was no longer a status, were all Americans equally free? Did not being a slave automatically make someone a citizen? With the abolition of slavery, only freedom remained, but what did freedom mean?

Radical Republicans clearly intended the amendment to do more than permanently end the enslavement of African Americans. At least some of its framers and supporters saw the constitutional amendment as requiring equality before the law for everyone. But such an interpretation was opposed and feared by many in the Democratic Party. While they saw a former slave as someone who was no longer a slave, freedom did not give them rights equal to whites.

An example of the amendment's broad definition was its use as the constitutional foundation for the Civil Rights Act of 1866. The statute was prompted by the southern states' passage in 1865 and 1866 of Black Codes, laws that did not formally reinstitute slavery, but which limited the freedom of the former slaves. As enacted by the 39th Congress in early 1866, the statute covered various civil and economic rights, such as making contracts, owning and selling property, and bringing lawsuits. Supporters of the measure argued that without these rights, freedom had no meaning and denial of these rights – whether by government or private individual – was a badge of slavery, violating the Thirteenth Amendment.

Unfortunately the Civil Rights Act of 1866, passed to implement the Thirteenth Amendment, was honored more in the

breach. Within a short time, despite the nation's first Civil Rights Act, opponents of the Thirteenth Amendment had little to fear about its broad reach. The amendment was undermined by the country's state-based federal system and by its entrenched racism. Neither would let the national government become too active or reach too extensively into private lives. Moreover, the ratification of the Fourteenth (1868) and Fifteenth Amendments (1870) pushed the Thirteenth Amendment into the constitutional background as its provision of slavery was narrowly viewed by courts and lawmakers.

**SG:** What was the status of Mary Lincoln in 1866? Robert? Tad?

**FW:** After William Wallace Lincoln ("Willie") died in the White House on February 20, 1862, Mrs. Lincoln was never quite the same. The assassination of her husband on April 14, 1865, plummeted Mary into a grief so deep that she could take no part in any of the funeral ceremonies. In fact, she did not leave the Executive Mansion for Chicago until May 22, more than a month after the assassination. Her bereavement and anxieties over her debts made her miserable and dominated the subject matter of her letters until her death.

Her trials were compounded in 1866 after Lincoln's last law partner, William H. Herndon, aired his theory that Ann Rutledge was the real love of Lincoln's life. Mary's problems and financial concerns turned into an obsession the following year when she tried to sell her old clothes in New York, a humiliating spectacle which exasperated her eldest son, Robert. In 1868, Mary's confidante and dress maker, Elizabeth Keckly, commented on the "Old Clothes Scandal" and forever lost Mrs. Lincoln's friendship. Mary shunned old friends and the public in general, often traveling incognito, using false names. Later that year, she escaped



Willie Lincoln  
(LFA-0484)



to Germany with Tad (Thomas Lincoln), returning in 1871. Tad died from tuberculosis on July 15, soon after their return.

The little tendency the Lincolns had toward disciplining Tad vanished at the death of his brother Willie. As the only boy at home, Tad was smothered with affection. Not forced to study, he had numerous pets, including a pony and two goats. After Lincoln's assassination, Tad's life had taken a turn for the worse. The boy became the constant companion of his mother, now a sad and emotionally extreme individual. She said in 1867, "Only my darling Taddie prevents my taking my life." Tad had testified at the trial of John H. Surratt – one of the Lincoln conspirators – in 1867. He finally attended school in Chicago (1866 – 1868) and learned his letters.

Robert was present at Robert E. Lee's surrender to Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865, and breakfasted with his father the day Lincoln was assassinated. In the end, he knew very little of his father's presidency because he "was very little in Washington while he was there."

With the help of Supreme Court Associate Justice David Davis, a long-time family friend and circuit judge when Lincoln rode the Eighth Judicial Circuit in Illinois, Robert assumed considerable responsibility for the family and his father's estate. He inherited \$138,901.54, including a third of Lincoln's original estate, half of his brother's estate at his death in 1871, and his mother's estate after her death in 1882.

Robert lived with his mother in Chicago

until the spring of 1867, when he began making his own way in the world. Admitted to the Illinois Bar on February 25, 1867, he became a successful lawyer. His mother became a serious burden. Embarrassed by her letters begging financial support from Lincoln's political friends and mortified by her attempt to sell her old clothes in 1867, Robert found it "very hard to deal with one who is sane on all subjects but one," money. He had his mother placed in a sanitarium in order to deal with her erratic behavior. He served presidents Garfield and Arthur as Secretary of War, became ambassador to England, and, eventually president of the Pullman Car Company.

**SG:** Mark Twain published his first major story, "The Celebrated Jumping Frog of Calaveras County," in 1866. In your reading of his works, have you found any statements by Twain which mention Abraham Lincoln?

**FW:** I know of no references to Abraham Lincoln in any of Mark Twain's classic works but Volumes 1 & 2 of the voluminous autobiography of Mark Twain, edited with distinction by the University of California – Berkeley, has several entries to Abraham Lincoln. Referring to a piece on General Ulysses S. Grant, Twain refers to the chivalry of England of thirteen hundred years ago. A "Sir Nector," falls in a "swoon" and then gives a tribute to his dead brother Sir Launcelot in a "noble and simple eloquence" not equaled in the English literature until Lincoln's Gettysburg Address "took its lofty place beside it."

But most references are explanatory notes

with Twain discussing several political appointments made by Lincoln and comments about Lincoln's political supporters including Joseph Medill, "proprietor of the *Chicago Tribune*," Philadelphia's "most revered, beloved, and illustrious old lawyer, Daniel Dougherty [Daniel O'Dogherty] who worked for Lincoln's election in 1864, and satirist Finley Peter Dunne a/k/a Peter Dunne Dooley. During the centenary of Clemens' 1835 birth, Dunne wrote that "if any centennial anniversary should be celebrated it is that of our unequalled humorist. ...our greatest writers: Emerson and Clemens, Hawthorne, Poe, Whitman, Abraham Lincoln. No 'centenary' can be too vivacious, no monument too high for him in his fame." (p. 619, Vol. 2 *Autobiography of Mark Twain*)

**SG:** An 1866 editorial in *The New York Tribune* contained the phrase "Go west, young man, go west." What was the national mood regarding expansion immediately after the Civil War? Please also comment on treatment of Native Americans at the time and Fetterman's Massacre.

**FW:** Horace Greeley, owner of *The New York Tribune*, had always supported settlement in the western territories. He labored early on for tariff protection, free land for settlers, and the Maine Law on prohibition of alcohol.

Greeley occupied himself in 1853 with reforms, demanding a Homestead Act for labor on the soil and cooperative production for laboring in New York City. Greeley said to Josiah B. Grinnell, "Go West young man, go West." The legend began to grow



Elizabeth Keckly  
(#3189)



Tad Lincoln  
(LFA-0084)



Robert Lincoln  
(LFA-0552)



Mark Twain  
(OC-1023)

that Greeley was the originator of the phrase although it was an Indiana editor who had used it first in 1851.

So, jumping ahead almost a decade, Greeley was well satisfied with two great aspects of federal legislation passed in 1862. The tariff was high at last and in May of 1862 a homestead bill had been passed. While not genuinely a democratic land law, Greeley saluted it as a panacea for economic ills, "Free homes are secure," he declared.

The Fetterman's Massacre is a sad chapter in U.S. history. Determined to challenge the growing American military presence in their territory, Indians in northern Wyoming lured Lieutenant Colonel William Fetterman and his soldiers into a deadly ambush on December 21, 1866. Tensions started to rise in 1863, when John Bozeman created the Bozeman Trail, a new route for emigrants traveling to the Montana gold fields. The trail was illegal because it passed directly through hunting grounds that the government had promised to the Sioux, Cheyenne, and Arapaho in the 1851 Fort Laramie Treaty. When Colorado militiamen murdered more than 200 peaceful Cheyenne during the Sand Creek Massacre of 1864, the Indians sought revenge by attacking whites across the Plains, including the emigrants traveling the Bozeman Trail. The government responded by building a series of protective forts along the trail. The largest and most important was Fort Kearney, erected in 1866 in north-central Wyoming. On the cold morning of December 21, approximately 2,000 Indians concealed themselves along the road just north of Fort Kearney. A small band made a diversionary attack on a party of woodcutters from the fort, and Commandant Colonel Henry Carrington quickly ordered Colonel Fetterman to go to their aid with a company of 80 troopers. Chief Crazy Horse and ten decoy warriors then rode into view of the fort. When Carrington fired an artillery round at them, the decoys ran away as if frightened. The party of woodcutters made it safely back to the fort, but Colonel Fetterman and his men chased after the fleeing Crazy Horse and his decoys, just as planned. The soldiers rode straight into the ambush and were wiped out.

The Fetterman Massacre was the army's worst defeat in the West until the Battle of Little Bighorn in 1876. Further Indian attacks eventually forced the army to reconsider its commitment to protecting the

Bozeman Trail, and in 1868 the military permanently vacated the forts. The Fetterman Massacre was one of a handful of Indian victories in the Plains Indian Wars.

**SG: There are reports of debates over Reconstruction policies. Please comment on the theory of presidential or congressional control over these policies.**

**FW:** In personality and outlook, Andrew Johnson was ill suited for the responsibilities he shouldered following Lincoln's death. The Radical Republicans and Johnson were



*Horace Greeley  
(OC-0669)*

at crossroads over how to handle the former rebel states of the South as they returned to the Union. After the assassination, Radicals believed Johnson would follow a hard Reconstruction program, but he followed in the footsteps of Lincoln, passing a proclamation that called for only an amnesty oath that dealt with future loyalty to the Union. The Radicals and others in the North felt that this was too lenient and favored the white former Confederates at the expense of the freedpeople.

Thus, the fall elections of 1866 mark the watershed in the history of Reconstruction. At stake was control of the Congress and the entire Reconstruction program. Republicans scored overwhelming successes across the Northern states, assuring that the next Congress that convened would not tolerate opposition from the executive.

While Reconstruction occurred across the country, it was the federal government that would play perhaps the pivotal role in this

drama. Its resources, vision and power could make or unmake the future. So then, which branch of the federal government would control Reconstruction and which party would control that branch?

With the accession of Johnson to the presidency at a time when Congress was not in session in 1865, it suggested that Reconstruction would be in the hands of the president. But Johnson's program was fraught with problems, for his liberal approach to former slave holders and indifferent approach to former slaves led to a state of affairs in the South inconsistent with freedom for the latter and defeat for the former. Johnson, a Unionist War Democrat, who had supported emancipation as a war measure, believed in a strict interpretation of the Constitution that seemed under assault by Radical manipulators bent on bringing racial conflict and federal despotism. When, in 1866, moderate Republicans sought compromise via such proposals as the Civil Rights bill, the Freedmen's Bureau bill, and the Fourteenth Amendment, Johnson's hostile rejections drove more conservative Republicans into the Radical camp. His acerbic speeches, antagonistic veto messages for the Civil Rights bill and extending the life of the Freedmen's Bureau, as well as growing violence in the South – including the Memphis riot capped by the New Orleans riot on July 30 – convinced many northerners that the president was beyond cooperation. Presidential Reconstruction had failed to assist the freed people, had failed to bring peace, had failed to energize the Republican Party, and had failed to instill and reinforce loyalty in the white South.

So, by the summer of 1866, the two questions had become linked for many northern voters – the president should not control Reconstruction and his party should not control the federal government. This set the stage for the 1866 fall elections which would determine which party controlled Congress and therefore the Reconstruction of the Union. President Johnson hoped that the National Union Movement would attract those disaffected with the Radical Republican agenda. Certainly his base was with the Democratic Party and other conservatives, but his appeal had to capture the North.

Unfortunately for the President and the National Union Movement, election reports brought only disappointment. Turnout was high, the highest of a congressional off-year election between 1858 and 1874 – and this too helped the Republicans. In the end, the

contest for control of Congress proved no contest at all, as Republican candidates swept the field and increased their number in both houses of Congress. Johnson's candidates suffered terrible losses, and the balance of power in Congress – and the federal government – shifted dramatically. The 40th Congress would be "veto-proof" if members voted by party block, since the Republican Party now constituted more than two-thirds of the House and the Senate. It could in theory pass legislation at will, for it had the requisite numbers to override a presidential veto – as it did for the Civil Rights bill which became law in 1866.

To prevent presidential interference and gather the momentum necessary for a full-fledged Reconstruction program, the sitting Congress called the new Congress-elect into session in March 1867, immediately after the 39th had closed. This would prevent Johnson from acting on his own when Congress was not in session as he had done in 1865. Therefore, Reconstruction, in many respects, began anew in the spring of 1867 with a Republican dominated Congress dictating policy.

**SG: Congress approved wording of the 14th Amendment. Please explain objections by Elizabeth Cady Stanton.**

**FW:** As passed by Congress, the Fourteenth Amendment was a compromise mea-

sure that followed the Radical Republicans' vision of a nation centered on equal rights protected by national power. However, the Radical desire for black and woman suffrage and for disenfranchisement of former Confederates was tempered by the widely held belief that suffrage was a privilege, not a right of citizenship, and by moderate Republican support for limited and speedy Reconstruction of the South that did little harm to state-based federalism. In addition, states remained responsible for regulating personal liberty and civil rights, but the national government gained supervisory oversight.

In 1863, Elizabeth Cady Stanton formed the Women's National Loyal League and gathered 400,000 signatures to support Senator Charles Sumner's constitutional amendment, a rejoinder to Abraham Lincoln's partial Emancipation Proclamation, to free slaves everywhere.

With victory, the abolitionists were in a uniquely powerful position at the leading edge of the Republican Party to shape Reconstruction. Wendell Phillips, taking over the American Antislavery Society from William Lloyd Garrison, proposed an amendment to the Constitution to enfranchise former slave males to protect their precarious liberty. He insisted that the matter took precedence over woman suffrage. Stanton argued that the last 30 years of agitation was not simply for the black man "as such, but on the broader ground of his humanity." Humanity was equal in all people or it was not. Putting black men ahead of women created an "aristocracy of sex." Stanton and Susan B. Anthony's opposition to black male suffrage without comparable rights for women meant their increasing isolation from former allies. After they gathered 10,000 signatures to include woman suffrage in the Fourteenth Amendment, Sumner did not even present their petition to the House. The two women worked hard, but futilely, to push woman suffrage in state referenda in New York and Kansas.

Stanton's argument for woman suffrage was no longer common humanity, but the superiority of women over blacks and immigrants. With the Fifteenth Amendment, she announced that Republicans have succeeded in establishing an "aristocracy of sex." Although she had rejected egalitarian arguments, Stanton continued to use the powerful metaphors of slavery to describe the disastrous results of legal and social sexism.

**SG: Who was in the Cabinet as 1866 began? What was their relationship with President Johnson? With each other?**

**FW:** When Andrew Johnson suddenly assumed the presidency upon Lincoln's death, Johnson decided to retain Lincoln's cabinet. However, due to political disagreements, several cabinet members eventually resigned. Johnson's impeachment resulted from his attempts to remove Edwin M. Stanton as Secretary of War after he had refused to resign.

The cabinet members of each of the four Reconstruction presidents – Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Johnson, Ulysses S. Grant and Rutherford B. Hayes – assisted the president with developing and carrying out Reconstruction policy. Lincoln chose his cabinet members primarily from among the Republican Party leadership, especially his leading political rivals. He tried to balance party factions by including both former Whigs and former Democrats from a variety of geographical locations.

**SG: What was the status of the Ku Klux Klan in 1866?**

**FW:** The Ku Klux Klan was an organization dedicated to restoring political and social power to white conservative Democrats in the South after the Civil War. It became the counterrevolutionary vehicle for the Democratic Party through which extra legal means could be employed to thwart the Reconstruction agenda of Radical Republicans, Unionist scalawags, carpetbaggers, and their African American allies. It grew into a multifaceted organization that appealed to a wide range of southern white citizenry based upon the premise of white supremacy and employing methods that included persuasion as well as coercion to accomplish its goal.

Began in Pulaski, Tennessee, in early 1866, by six former Confederate officers, the organization at first served as a source of amusement and an opportunity to recall wartime connections for the ex-soldiers. The initial practices of the Klan amounted to little more than harmless pranks, but success in mild forms of intimidation became infectious and the Klan activities grew more audacious and aggressive.

By the end of 1866, the KKK in Tennessee had spread statewide. In April 1867 the leadership met in Nashville at the Maxwell House hotel to give the organization greater



*Elizabeth Cady Stanton, seated, with Susan B. Anthony (LC-USZ61-791)*

*Photo courtesy of Library of Congress*

cohesion. About the same time, it received its most famous recruit – and future leader. Former Confederate cavalry general Nathan Bedford Forrest joined its ranks and, according to some, assumed the office of grand wizard. Forrest had vowed to remain quietly at home when the war ended until he felt the actions of wartime Unionist and postwar governor William G. “Parson” Brownlow against former Confederates and Democrats in the state prompted him to become active in response.

### Andrew Johnson's Cabinet

#### Secretary of State

William H. Seward (1865-1869)

#### Secretary of the Treasury

Hugh McCulloch (1865-1869)

#### Secretary of War

Edwin M. Stanton (1865-1868)

Ulysses S. Grant (1867-1868)

Lorenzo Thomas (1868)

John M. Schofield (1868-1869)

#### Secretary of the Navy

Gideon Welles (1865-1869)

#### Attorney General

James Speed (1865-1866)

Henry Stanbery (1866-1868)

Orville H. Browning (1868)

William M. Evarts (1868-1869)

#### Secretary of the Interior

John B. Usher (1865)

James Harlan (1865-1866)

Orville H. Browning (1866-1869)

#### Postmaster General

William Dennison (1865-1866)

Alexander W. Randall (1866-1869)

Under Forrest's leadership, the Klan grew exponentially. Using his contacts and his railroad construction and insurance ventures, Forrest worked to expand the organization into neighboring states and throughout the South. Often he met on business matters with ex-Confederate colleagues, such as John B. Gordon, who then subsequently became central figures in establishing and leading Klan activities in their states. Forrest also benefited from friendly newspapers that

included notices or editorialized favorably on the secret society's behalf.

**SG: What was the general mood of the nation at the beginning of 1866 in both North and South? Did it change during the year?**

**FW:** Reconstruction occurred across the country, in households and courtrooms, in the planters' fields and in the state legislatures. The fall elections in 1866 pitted the name, policy, and party of the president, Andrew Johnson, against the moderate and Radical Republicans.

Johnson understood the stakes, and realized a need to build political momentum. In order to defend his program and stave off Republican assaults, he had to develop a solid base in Congress. His vehicle for this was a new political party. Taking the name of the broad-based party Lincoln fostered in his successful bid for reelection in 1864, Johnson and his advisors announced their National Union Party in the summer of 1866. President Johnson hoped that the National Union Movement would gather all those disaffected with the radical nature of the Republican agenda. Certainly, his base was with the Democratic Party and other conservatives, but his appeal had to capture the North. At a convention in Philadelphia in August, pro-Johnson conservatives from around the nation gathered to applaud Union veterans, criticize the Radical Republicans, and cheer on Johnson's program. The so called “arm-and-arm” convention (because of wartime rivals arriving with arms linked as a show of unity) did its best to promote presidential Reconstruction and Johnson's message of reconciliation, peace, and stability.

The Republicans countered with two conventions, one in Philadelphia in September and the other one later in Pittsburgh. These reflected divisions in the party, in particular over black suffrage, but did little to either bolster the Republican effort or hamper it. Most Republicans walked a middle road, endorsing certain black civil rights but eschewing dangerous proposals for suffrage or land confiscation. In the end, the president, his program, and white southerners were their own worst enemies. Johnson's ill-fated “Swing Around the Circle” speaking tour made more enemies than friends, and even cost him some allies. James Bennett and his *New York Herald*, formerly staunch supporters, began to distance themselves from the president after the embarrassing

saga. Johnson's obstinate behavior and the continuous reports of violence in the South were proof enough that the president and his program had failed.

The fall elections began in September and ended in November. With many of the southern states still out of the Union, the elections were primarily a northern and border-state contest. Along with the elections for national office, many states also had state seats up for election. As shown by historian Michael Les Benedict, usually in “off-year” nineteenth-century elections (non-presidential years), Democrats running for national office did very well since the focus tended to be on local and social issues. Although an “off-year,” Johnson had turned 1866 into a referendum on Reconstruction, an issue firmly at center stage of a national drama.

**SG: A Civil War-related book was published in 1866: *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary* (By John B. Jones) Was it widely read? Was it influential? Was it “too soon” for such subjects to be discussed?**

**FW:** *A Rebel War Clerk's Diary at the Confederate States Capital* has long been hailed as a classic. It provides a rare glimpse of the inner workings of the Confederate government. Editor of the Philadelphia proslavery paper *The Southern Monitor*, Jones slipped south four days before the firing on Fort Sumter. Serving as clerk in the Confederate War Office, he compiled a daily diary that is a key source on private enrichment. Moreover, it is peppered with assessments of numerous personalities in the Confederate government. This work is a must for craftsmen details and the incidents of wartime Richmond. Although the volumes of the diary were reprinted in 1982, with an abridged edition in 1958, it is yet to be published in full although efforts are being made to do that now. ♦

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

#### Frank J. Williams

Frank J. Williams recently retired as Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court. He co-founded The Lincoln Forum and is author of *Lincoln as Hero* and *Judging Lincoln*. He co-edited (with Michael Burkhimer) *The Mary Lincoln Enigma*.



Left: Teamsters with wagons (OC-1097), Right: Contrabands at Headquarters of General Lafayette, York County, Virginia (LN-2629)

## When Freedom Came: Emancipation and the Question of Timing

by: Edna Greene Medford

Louis Hughes never forgot the day he and his family became free. After having fled from Panola County, in northern Mississippi, he and a fellow bondman returned to their plantation to retrieve family members who had been left behind. With the aid of two northern soldiers, the determined men led nine people to Memphis, where they came under the protection of the Union army. The group joined thousands of other refugees from slavery who were building new lives as freed men and women. The date was July 4, 1865, nearly three months after Lee's surrender at Appomattox and two and a half years after President Lincoln issued his emancipating decree. "We knew it was our right to be free," Hughes would later recall, "for the proclamation had long been issued—yet they still held us."

We all know that on January 1, 1863, President Lincoln signed a proclamation that declared that enslaved people "thenceforward shall be free," but the remainder of the emancipation narrative has been, and continues to be, contested ground. For many years, both popular and scholarly opinion held that Lincoln freed the slaves on that New Year's day "with a stroke of his pen." This rather naive representation of emancipation was then countered by the equally simplistic argument that the president freed not a single slave because Confederates did not recognize his authority. As historians have mined the available sources on emancipation, they have revealed the different times and myriad ways enslaved people became free.

How, then, do we determine the appropriate date to celebrate the "day of Jubilee," as black men and women referred to their liberation? The answer is a difficult one that reflects the complexity of the emancipation story. It requires us to discard old assumptions and embrace new approaches to understanding the events that led to and sustained black freedom.

When President Lincoln signed his proclamation of freedom on January 1, 1863, he did so with practical considerations in mind. First, he sought to throw the Confederacy into chaos, to escalate the disorder that had already impacted the region as a consequence of war. President Lincoln realized that while the enslaved population gave advantage to the seceded states, it also made them vulnerable. Even before the armed conflict began, enslaved men and women heard rumors that the president planned to free them, prompting the great orator, abolitionist, and former slave Frederick Douglass to declare: "[the slaves] have given Mr. Lincoln credit for having intentions towards them far more benevolent and just than any he is known to cherish." Acting on their faith in Lincoln's commitment to the abolition of slavery, they had seized freedom themselves while they waited for him to implement a program of emancipation. They ignored the president's first inaugural address, in which he vowed non-interference with the South's domestic institutions and promised to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. With the commencement of

war, enslaved people fled from bondage and sought refuge with Mr. Lincoln's soldiers. Once the president issued the proclamation, its very existence operated, in the words of *The Weekly Anglo-African* editor, "like a pillar of flame, beckoning [enslaved people] to the dreamed of promise of freedom." Before the war ended, roughly 500,000 black men, women, and children had begun their new lives behind Union lines.

Lincoln knew that this exodus would strip the Confederacy of its most valuable resource. The coerced labor of enslaved black men and women bolstered the rebel economy, fed its army, threw up its fortifications, and provided the kind of assistance that made it possible for white men to fight on the battlefield. If this extraordinary force could be turned to the benefit of the Union, victory would belong to the North, especially if black men were freed and recruited into the Union Army. Many were already serving as military laborers of all kinds—as teamsters, blacksmiths, orderlies, grave-diggers, and builders of defenses. They performed much of the manual labor required to support and sustain an army. As the war wore on and manpower became more critical, Lincoln and the northern leadership in Congress reversed their earlier resistance to the recruitment of black fighting men. In essence, the government was "stretching forth its hands to Ethiopia" out of necessity.

Lincoln was also motivated to issue the proclamation by the desire to keep European nations from assisting the Confeder-

acy. By elevating the conflict to one in which securing black freedom was an official aim, he hoped to suppress any desire of foreign powers to recognize the legitimacy of the Confederacy. There was concern, especially, that the British government would make economic interests its priority, thus giving its support to its southern business partners. But Lincoln recognized the power of the British people, for a long time committed to free labor, to influence their government. The gamble worked, despite the strong economic ties England (and France) had with the cotton-producing states.

In issuing the proclamation, Lincoln did not intend that his decree would have universal application. Nor did he expect that physical freedom would be immediate. Instead, constitutional concerns shaped and limited his actions. Using his powers as commander-in-chief in time of war to end a revolt, he issued "a fit and necessary war measure" that declared freedom for just over three million enslaved people in the seceded states. Roughly 830,000 more remained in slavery, including those in the "loyal" border states of Missouri, Kentucky, Maryland, and Delaware. In the 48 western counties of Virginia that comprised West Virginia and in several southern counties of the state, as well as the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth; in nearly a dozen parishes near New Orleans, and the city itself; and in Tennessee, where a Unionist government under the leadership of the future vice president Andrew Johnson had been established; slavery was left "for the present . . . precisely as if [the] proclamation was not issued."

Once he issued the decree, Lincoln expected the Union army and navy to be a liberating force. In some instances, the military presence in certain areas guaranteed that liberation would be immediate. This included enslaved people in Northern Virginia and a few counties in Southeastern Virginia; Eastern North Carolina; the coastal area of Northern Florida (and the southern tip of the state); a Northern section of Arkansas, and a small section of Northern Alabama and Mississippi, comprising roughly 50,000 people in all. In the Union-occupied Sea Islands off the coast of South Carolina and Georgia, secessionist owners had abandoned the plantations in the first year of the war. The area soon became an experiment to test the abilities of black people under a free labor system. The proclamation was especially meaningful for these people as they transitioned from property to inclusion in

the human family. The recorded observations of Colonel Thomas Wentworth Higginson, the commander of the First South Carolina Volunteers, who were stationed at Camp Saxton, reveal the intensity of feeling of those assembled to hear the proclamation read:

*The proclamation [the September 22 version] was read to the crowd, and the very moment the speaker had ceased, and just as I took and waved the flag, which now for the first time meant anything to these poor people, there suddenly arose, close beside the platform, a strong male voice (but rather cracked and elderly), into which two women's voices blended, singing, as if by an impulse that could no more be re-pressed than the morning note of the song sparrow, "My country, 'tis of thee, Sweet land of liberty, Of thee I sing!"*

Higginson noted that this was "The first day they had ever had a country, the first flag they had ever seen which promised them anything."

Despite its exceptions, African Americans generally embraced the Emancipation Proclamation as if it was a universal document. They believed that now that freedom had been proclaimed for most of the southern states, it would be just a matter of time before the others would be free as well. And, indeed, that was the case. Freedom by presidential decree was but one of the avenues by which black people threw off their shackles. By the time Lincoln issued his proclamation, slavery had already been outlawed in the District of Columbia and the western territories, in April 1862 and June 1862, respectively. As a federal enclave, Congress had authority over the District, as it did in the territories. Over the previous 30 years, slavery had steadily declined in the city, until by 1860, the population of enslaved people stood at just over 3,100. The free black population was three times that number at approximately 9,000. The extension of slavery into the western territories had been the divisive issue for many years. It had incited a mini-civil war in Kansas, destroyed the Whig Party, weakened the Democratic Party, given rise to the Republican Party, and now had plunged the entire nation into war. Never again would this issue be allowed to divide the nation.

The ranks of the free also expanded a month later with the passage of the Militia Act. The law provided for the acceptance of black men into service as military laborers, building entrenchments, performing tasks in camp, and fulfilling whatever duties for which they

were deemed fit. Not only were these men promised their freedom but it they had been owned by persons disloyal to the national government their mothers, wives, and children would be freed as well. After 1863, the near-frenzied recruitment of black soldiers, a provision of the Emancipation Proclamation hardly embraced by African Americans, further increased the population of freed people. Few black men could sidestep the army's persuasive (and often forced) recruitment tactics. Initially, recruiters in the exempted states (Maryland, Missouri, and Tennessee, specifically) were required to seek the permission of the owner, but by the summer of 1864, enlistments occurred without regard for consent.

Remarkably, freedom grew as a result of state action as well. In the first year of the war and well into the second, the president had attempted unsuccessfully to persuade the Border States to lead the abolition effort. Their refusal had forced him to take executive action, but by 1864, two of the Border States had heeded Lincoln's warning that slavery would be destroyed by the "mere friction of war" and that the states would fare better if they were in control of the institution's demise. In October 1864, Maryland abolished slavery when it ratified its new state constitution, and three months later, Missouri followed Maryland's lead. The remaining slaves in Louisiana effectively gained their freedom when the state began the process for readmission into the Union in September 1864 by ratifying a new state

**MEN OF COLOR**  
**TO ARMS! TO ARMS!**  
**NOW OR NEVER**

**Three Years' Service!**

**FAIL NOW, & OUR RACE IS DOOMED**

**ARE FREEMEN LESS BRAVE THAN SLAVES**

And will be admitted by  
 U. S. Recruiting Bureau and all Recruiting Headquarters, Large Meetings, Fairs and Charitable Events, Philadelphia

Recruitment broadside  
 (71.2009.081.1686)

constitution, which included the abolition of slavery. And Tennessee, the only Confederate state to be wholly exempted from the proclamation's provisions, joined the abolitionist ranks in February 1865, as did the newly formed West Virginia.

The emancipating states had embraced freedom as Congress began to move toward a permanent, comprehensive solution to the problem of slavery in America. From the outset the president and pro-freedom forces had wondered if an emancipating decree grounded in military necessity could survive legal challenge once the Union was secured. This concern, along with the need to confer freedom on those who remained in bondage and to prevent slavery from being reinstated in the Confederacy or anywhere else on American soil, led to the proposal for a thirteenth amendment to the Constitution.

Support for such an amendment was hardly universal, but the horrific loss of life on the battlefield and in the camps had convinced many northerners that dissension over slavery had been too costly. As pro-emancipation groups delivered petitions to Congress in the winter and spring of 1864, the two houses debated the merits and consequences. By April, the Senate had successfully approved the bill; predictably, the House of Representatives, with a stronger Democratic presence, failed to do the same. After the '64 presidential election, and with the president's considerable influence, the measure finally passed the House in January 1865. Even though not required, Lincoln signed the Resolution and sent it on to the states for ratification, and by the end of the year, it helped to usher in a new America, committed to freedom for all its people.

As the political struggle played out, the Union military continued to liberate those promised freedom by the proclamation. Many enslaved men and woman received the extraordinary news as Union forces marched into the yards of the plantations or camped nearby. Nervous owners called their laborers to the big house and let them know that they were as free as any white man, but encouraged them to stay on until the crops could be harvested. Others, defiant to the end, were compelled to acknowledge the existence of the proclamation as Union commanders threatened them if they continued to treat the freed people as slaves. After the war, Freedmen's Bureau agents, directed to facilitate the transition of the freed people from slavery to freedom (and to help displaced whites as well), traveled from plantation to



*President Lincoln Entering Richmond,  
Thomas Nast  
(71.2009.081.1544)*

plantation to enforce the proclamation. Even so, former owners continued to regard the freed people as they had before emancipation. When the soldiers moved on, the old customs and attitudes returned. Through treachery and deceit, slaveholders fought to continue the institution that had built their wealth and secured their social standing.

The response to hearing that freedom had arrived varied. Some reveled in the knowing; others were nearly paralyzed by fear of the uncertainty. Many left with the soldiers or packed up their meager belongings and struck out on their own, as some people put it, to meet freedom. All soon discovered that with their new status came responsibilities. Ezra Adams of South Carolina remembered the hard time as black men and women adjusted to an altered reality. "De slaves, where I lived, knowed after de war dat they had abundance of dat somethin' called freedom, what they could not eat, wear, and sleep in Yes sir, they soon found out dat freedom ain't nothing, less you is got somethin' to live on and a place to call home." Adams compared "livin' on liberty" to young couples living on love after marriage. "It just don't work," he observed. "No, sir, it las' so long and not a bit longer."

As enslaved people experienced the arrival of freedom on plantation and farm, others became a part of the mass liberations in the cities that were occupied by the Union army. Such was the case with black residents of the Confederate capital. When Richmond fell to Union forces on April 3, 1865, the enslaved people celebrated more than just

their freedom. Among the soldiers entering the city were members of the United States Colored Troops (USCT), whose presence confirmed the effort of black people in their own liberation and who represented the promise that the future held. Thomas Morris Chester, the only black correspondent of a major newspaper during the war, captured the moments when the Confederate capital came under the control of the Union army and liberated its black residents. Chester reported that members of the USCT were among the first to enter the city, which both shocked and delighted those who lined the streets. "The citizens stood gaping in wonder at the splendidly-equipped Army marching along under the graceful folds of the old flag," Chester wrote. The pious old negroes, male and female, indulged in such expressions: "You've come at last;" "We've been looking for you these many days;" "Jesus has opened the way;" "God bless you." The next day President Lincoln arrived in the city. "There is no describing the scene along the route," Chester recorded. "The colored population was wild with enthusiasm . . . There were many whites in the crowd, but they were lost in the great concourse of American citizens of African descent." In a matter of days, the war would be over. For many years thereafter, Richmond's African American residents would celebrate April 3 as their Emancipation Day.

Of course, the end of the war brought neither peace nor the death of slavery, especially in those areas where freedom could not be enforced. Emancipation in Texas serves as an example. The end of slavery in the Lone Star State began (at least in practical terms) with Major General Gordon Granger's arrival at Galveston on June 19, 1865. Armed with General Order No. 3, General Granger declared all slaves free "in accordance with a Proclamation from the Executive of the United States." He informed Texans that there now existed "an absolute equality of rights and rights of property between former masters and slaves." And lest they think freedom meant easy living, Granger admonished the freed people to "remain at their present homes and work for wages . . . and that they will not be supported in idleness."

Historians have explained postwar emancipation in Texas as the result of an absence of a strong Union military presence and the state's distance from the major theatres of war. There were no key battles fought there, and although Union soldiers touched the border areas, they never came into contact

with the large concentration of enslaved laborers in the interior, which was estimated to be nearly 200,000.

But the Texas emancipation narrative is about more than when freedom was declared within its borders. The ending of slavery in Texas is particularly significant because of the origin and nature of its black population. In 1860, it was home to over 182,000 enslaved people; by the end of the war that number had climbed to an estimated 250,000 or more. The increase was the result of panic on the part of planters from the East who were certain they would lose their human property if they remained at home. As the Union forces advanced into Confederate territory, slaveholders hastened to secure their enslaved laborers by “refugeeing” them or, in other words, removing them out of the military’s emancipating reach. The population of Texas grew, especially after the Emancipation Proclamation, with black men and women taken from Mississippi, Arkansas, Georgia, and even Indian Territory. These refugees likely knew the decree existed and brought that knowledge to the local Texans with whom they interacted. But since the Union army was thinly deployed in the area, enslaved people had no protecting entity to which they could flee. Freedom was delayed for as long as their owners could manage it.

Thus was born “Juneteenth,” a celebration of final freedom. Since that time, the observance of Juneteenth has spread across the nation; it is now embraced as enthusiastically in some parts of the North as in the South. It has come to symbolize not only the end of slavery in Texas, but a celebration of the collective struggle and triumph over injustice and bondage throughout the country. Let me give you one example. Two years ago, when the District of Columbia and Congress dedicated a statue of Frederick Douglass in Emancipation Hall, the event was held on June 19 rather than January 1 or December 6, or even Douglass’ birthday. The speakers at that time alluded to the day nearly 150 years ago when the last slaves were freed in America.

In reality, slavery continued in Texas for many months, perhaps years, after General Granger arrived in Galveston and proclaimed freedom. Several months after enslaved people had been freed in neighboring communities, black residents of Rusk County remained enslaved, even after a “government man” arrived to enforce the proclamation. Emancipation was an open secret, and when residents of Rusk attempted to

escape to freedom in Harrison County, they were shot down.

Despite the belated arrival of practical emancipation in Texas, the state was not the site of the last such action in America. That dubious distinction, one can argue, belongs to Oklahoma, at the time of the Civil War, Indian Territory and technically not a part of the United States. Slavery had developed among the so-called “five civilized tribes” who inhabited Indian Territory—the Cherokee, Choctaw, Chickasaw, Creek, and Seminole—when those groups attempted to survive the encroachments of white settlers eager to possess Indian lands. Believing that the adoption of European-based culture would save them, the tribes established towns, codified their practices, spoke English, and established plantations, which they worked with slave labor. Their removal from the southeastern states in the 1830s, despite their effort to convince white Americans that they were just like them, introduced slavery to the region. The institution among the Indians operated much like it did elsewhere. Enslaved laborers cultivated cotton and other staple crops, performed domestic duties, and suffered the physical abuse and uncertainty that was characteristic of slavery wherever it remained. In 1860, approximately 8,000 enslaved black people lived in Indian Territory, 14 percent of the overall population.

When war came, many of the Oklahoma tribes sided with the Confederacy, in part because they wanted to protect their property in slaves, but also because years of duplicity and deception had taught them to distrust the federal government. Support for the Confederacy was not unanimous, however. The Cherokee, especially, were divided in their loyalties. The national group turned away from the secessionists as early as 1862, and abolished slavery in February 1863, one month after Lincoln’s proclamation. Yet, many among the Cherokee chose to ignore the new law; some of them “refugeed” their slaves to Texas, just as white owners did. The southernmost branches of the group united with the Creek, Choctaw, and Chickasaw and organized fighting units in support of the Confederacy. Ironically, on June 23, 1865, the Cherokee Stand Watie, commanding the First Indian Brigade, would become the last Confederate general to surrender his forces to the Union military.

The abolition of slavery in Indian Territory rivals that in the South in its complexity. Marquette University professor of law,

J. Gordon Hylton, argues (rather convincingly) that because Indian Territory was outside of the jurisdiction of the United States, neither the Emancipation Proclamation nor the Thirteenth Amendment applied to them. Nor would the 1862 abolition of slavery in the territories have affected the institution in Oklahoma. Hylton contends that the real end of slavery came with the signing of treaties in 1866 between the federal government and the Native Americans that stipulated the abolition of slavery and required the tribes to give the freedmen full citizenship rights.

So, given the ambiguities of emancipation—its delays, its motivations, its challenges—which date should we be celebrating? Taken collectively, each event is important because it helped to complete the freedom narrative. No serious student of history would deny that the Emancipation Proclamation facilitated and encouraged a movement toward the liberation of enslaved people. Few would dare ignore the centrality of the Thirteenth Amendment and its defense of liberty. And who would dismiss the contribution of Juneteenth to our need to publically and culturally acknowledge the milestones of our struggle for freedom and equality in America? Juneteenth was a process like all the others. That day of emancipation and its celebration confirm the triumph of those who would be free, and indirectly, it acknowledges the efforts of all who contributed along the way. A delayed emancipation mattered to Louis Hughes and the countless others who experienced it, whether it was June 19, 1865, or July 4 of that year or a year or two later. It should matter to us as well. But as we celebrate the ultimate victory of these men and women, let us remind ourselves of all the triumphs, big and small, along the way, without which they would not have experienced freedom at all. ♦

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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