

Framing Variations and Collective Memory

“Honest Abe” versus “the Great Emancipator”

Central to American identity have been public memories of events like the struggle for independence and the achievements of key figures from the past. The individual most often subject to hagiographic accounts is Abraham Lincoln, with emphasis both on his epic achievements in saving the Union and ending slavery and on his personal characteristics, such as honesty and the motivation to transcend his “backwoods” childhood and attain positions of local, state, and national leadership. However, a recent study based on extensive survey data found that Lincoln’s connection to emancipation provided the primary content of beliefs about him for most Americans today, with other beliefs mentioned much less often. Our present research supports that emphasis when presidential actions are the focus, but a randomized survey-based experiment shows that with a type of questioning that reflects the distinction between “essence” and “action”—inner character versus public achievements—beliefs about the former become at least as prominent as beliefs about the latter. Preliminary evidence to this effect is replicated decisively in a separate experiment, and the study is then extended to consider changes over time in indicators of essence versus action. Our research highlights the importance of how inquiries are framed, and they show that variations in framing, including those that are unintended, can enlarge our understanding of collective memory of Lincoln and of collective memory generally.

Different approaches have been used to explore public beliefs about Abraham Lincoln and other important figures from the American past. On the one hand, Jeffrey K. Olick (1999: 345) writes of “genuinely collective memory,” where the emphasis is on “public discourses about the past as wholes

or [on] narrative images of the past that speak in the name of collectivities.” Somewhat similarly, though more informally, Merrill D. Peterson (1994), in *Lincoln in American Memory*, brings together a wide range of anecdotes, poems, paintings, documents, and historical writings to present what he considers the picture of Lincoln developed for the public between his assassination in 1865 and the present.

Although the same type of evidence is considered in Barry Schwartz’s (2000, 2008) two volumes about the memories of Lincoln, he draws also on measures based on national sample surveys of the beliefs about Lincoln held by the general public. From this perspective, “collective memory” refers to the distribution throughout society of what individuals know about the past, what they believe and feel about the past, how they judge it morally, and how much they identify with it. Collective memory cannot be *reduced* to the individual orientations that constitute it, but it is *realized* in these orientations (Schwartz 2010). Schwartz’s assumption is that we need to study not only memory makers and the representations they create or endorse (the dominant focus of most collective memory studies) but also “memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform [representations of the past] according to their own interests” (Kansteiner 2002: 180). Thus we shift attention from commemorative agents’ representations to their reception and expression by ordinary people. The present article takes this approach but does so self-critically and with awareness of its problems.

As with any method of research, findings based on surveys are limited to what can be assessed well—in this case by means of the question-answer process and, more specifically, by the particular ways that questions are *framed* by investigators and understood by respondents. The concept of *framing*—carefully defined—is helpful for understanding how shifts in questions, whether intended or unintended, can influence what memories are elicited. Erving Goffman (1974: 10–11) defines frames as the basic “principles of organization” that provide the structure for interpreting experience. Similarly, William A. Gamson et al. (1992) suggest that frames are organizing principles that increase the salience or accessibility of certain interpretations among the many circulating in the culture. This emphasis on the role of framing in the construction of meaning is close to our own: we focus on framing as a source of cues that individuals use to identify which beliefs are relevant in a given situation. Thus we framed our questions broadly to learn what respondents had “in mind” when remembering Lincoln, and we did

not always fully anticipate what we would learn. In addition, different historical contexts, as will be shown, can amplify or mute the effects of theoretically relevant frames.¹

Popular Images of Lincoln: Conclusions from Previous Research

Starting from five general themes that Peterson (1994) considered to represent the main popular images of Lincoln, Schwartz (2008) and Schwartz and Schuman (2005) used two different questions in surveys in 1999 and 2001 to assess Lincoln's present reputation. Their results showed that by far the single most frequent explanation of Lincoln's greatness cast him as "the Great Emancipator": 32 percent of first responses in one survey and 44 percent in the other (see *ibid.*: 189).² Another 6 percent and 4 percent, respectively, of the explanations in the two surveys went beyond seeing Lincoln as ending slavery by claiming that he supported social equality between blacks and whites, though there is little evidence that Lincoln held such a belief.³ If these two types of response dealing with racial liberalization are added together, the sums of 38 percent and 48 percent in the two surveys define Lincoln's predominance in contemporary American memory as the Great Emancipator (Mallon 2008). (The term *Great Emancipator* will be used in our analysis to include *both* ending slavery and advocating equal rights, though restricting the analysis to emancipation responses alone does not alter our main results.)

Their survey evidence led Schwartz and Schuman (2005) to conclude that a second Peterson theme had largely disappeared: the memory of Lincoln as "the Savior of the Union," which was dominant during the Civil War and in the years after, including the 1922 dedication of the Lincoln Memorial, and very probably through World War II (Schwartz 1996). By the turn of the twenty-first century, however, only small proportions of the public referred to Lincoln's role in saving the Union as the reason for his greatness: 3 percent and 8 percent of first responses in the 1999 and 2001 surveys, respectively. Even when more than one answer was coded in 1999 in order not to preclude a second response of lesser importance, only 7 percent of the respondents mentioned preserving the Union as against 58 percent who gave emancipation/equal rights as an answer (Schwartz and Schuman 2005: 189, table 1). Such results can be interpreted to mean that most Americans now

take the unity of their country so much for granted that they are hardly able to imagine the serious threats to its integrity that occurred in the years preceding and including the Civil War. Especially since the civil rights movement, American beliefs about Lincoln have resonated far more strongly with racial issues than with national unity issues.⁴

Schwartz and Schuman (2005) coded three other themes that Peterson (1994) regarded as providing important continuing collective memories of Lincoln: "self-made man," "man of the people," and "first American." Together these three themes can be considered "folk beliefs" about Lincoln's personal character, thus distinguishing them from the "epic beliefs" of the Great Emancipator and the Savior of the Union that were based on Lincoln's major accomplishments as president. Yet even after combining all three folk images into a single category, Schwartz and Schuman (2005: 189, table 1) found that only 2 percent of the population named such beliefs in first place in the two national surveys. The many anecdotal folk images that filled notable biographies of Lincoln after his death (e.g., Herndon and Weik 1888; Sandburg 1926, 1939; Tarbell 1896, 1900) and that were dramatized in films (D. W. Griffith's *Abraham Lincoln* [1930]; John Ford's *Young Mr. Lincoln* [1939]; John Cromwell's *Abe Lincoln in Illinois* [1940], based on Robert Emmet Sherwood's Pulitzer Prize-winning play [1938] of the same name) are far less evident today. Lincoln as a common man ("man of the people"); as a personification of the frontier myth, with individual traits, such as simplicity, friendliness, and candor ("first American"); and as a self-made man (log cabin to White House) seem no longer brought to mind when his name is mentioned. Schwartz and Schuman (2005) concluded that traditional folk beliefs play only a minor part today in Americans' memories of Lincoln.⁵

Consistent with these cross-section results, Schwartz and Schuman (ibid.) introduced data showing changes in memories of Lincoln over the past half century. A Gallup poll in 1945 included the question "Who do you think was the greater man, George Washington or Abraham Lincoln?," followed by "Why?" Schwartz and Schuman were able to repeat the question in 2001, thus making it possible to examine change over a half century (ibid.: 191–93). The results provided compelling evidence of a substantial decline and near disappearance over the 56-year period in folk-type answers emphasizing Lincoln's personal character.⁶ Lincoln's continued renown appeared to be largely due to his role in ending slavery and to his being treated as a forerunner of the civil rights movement that occurred during the second half

of the twentieth century. Neither the “folklore Lincoln” (Donald 1956) nor Lincoln as the Savior of the Union resonated with the most recent survey respondents.

Reframing the Questions

On reflection, it seemed to us possible that the low salience of certain types of memories in the findings by Schwartz and Schuman (2005) and Schwartz (2008) might have been due to the way that their questions were framed. Two of the questions, replicating a series first asked by the Gallup poll in 1956, emphasized Lincoln’s greatness in relation to other presidents, and their third also implied greatness by asking what an adult would tell a young boy or girl about what Lincoln had done to make himself memorable. In retrospect, all three questions seemed to invite respondents to focus on Lincoln’s actions as president rather than on the personal character of the man himself.

We therefore investigated whether a different though equally legitimate framing of questions about Lincoln might produce responses that included more beliefs about the “folk” character of the president. We developed two new questions that asked about the “lessons” that could be learned from Lincoln, with neither question referring to his accomplishments or necessarily implying “greatness”:

Life question. “Abraham Lincoln is one of the past presidents we sometimes hear about. Is there any lesson you think we can draw from Lincoln’s *life*?”

Did/Said question. “Abraham Lincoln is one of the past presidents we sometimes hear about. Is there any lesson you think we can draw from what Lincoln *did or said* during his lifetime?”

We thought that one or both of these new wordings about “lessons learned from Lincoln” might evoke a different array of beliefs than Schwartz and Schuman (2005) found in response to their earlier questions. If these new wordings, which separate Lincoln’s life, on the one hand, from his accomplishments, on the other, evoked the same array of beliefs, then our hypotheses must be discarded. The two new questions were administered in a national telephone survey ($N = 398$) in February and March 2010, with the Life question asked to a random half of the sample and the Did/Said question to the other half.⁷

Table 1 Lessons learned from Lincoln

Category	Initial survey, February–March 2010 ^a		Replication, October 2010 ^b	
	Life (%)	Did/Said (%)	Life (%)	Did/Said (%)
Savior of Union	0.8	11.1	1.1	7.1
Great Emancipator	4.5	15.7	5.4	17.9
Equal rights	14.4	13.9	10.3	14.9
Self-made man	21.2	5.6	9.2	3.0
Honest	25.0	13.0	46.5	26.2
Compassionate	2.3	3.7	0.0	2.4
Religious	0.8	0.9	0.5	1.8
Leadership, ability	15.2	16.7	14.1	11.9
Negative beliefs about Lincoln	0.8	0.9	0.5	1.8
Other positive responses	15.2	18.5	12.4	13.1
Total	100.2	100.0	100.0	100.1
N	132	108	185	168
	$\chi^2 = 38.1$, df = 9, $p < .001$		$\chi^2 = 47.6$, df = 9, $p < .001$	

Note: Some columns do not sum to 100.0 because of rounding errors.

^aRespondents who said “No lesson learned” are omitted: 62 on the Life question, 96 on the Did/Said question ($\chi^2 = 9.53$, df = 1, $p < .01$).

^bRespondents who said “No lesson learned” are omitted: 74 on the Life question, 82 on the Did/Said question ($\chi^2 = 1.07$, n.s.).

Both new questions elicited significantly more responses consistent with Lincoln as a folk hero than did the questions originally asked by Schwartz and Schuman (*ibid.*).⁸ But in addition, and more important for our next step, examination of the results revealed an even more striking difference *between* the two ways that our new questions were framed. As shown in the first pair of columns in table 1 under the heading “Initial Survey,” the Life question led to far more answers characterizing Lincoln in terms of such personal attributes as honest and self-made man than the Did/Said question—a difference that registered overall as highly reliable ($p < .001$ for the “Initial Survey” pair of columns in table 1). At the same time, the Did/Said question yielded many more responses about Lincoln’s presidential achievements as the Great Emancipator (including equal rights responses) and the Savior of the Union. The overall comparison (which includes minor categories showing small numbers and little difference by question) is both statistically and substantively significant.⁹

The differences between the Life and Did/Said questions discovered in the February–March survey suggest that the Did/Said question probably preserved part of the emphasis of the earlier Schwartz and Schuman (2005) questions that had focused on Lincoln’s accomplishments as president—what he “did.” The Life question, on the other hand, apparently directed attention to Lincoln’s boyhood, youth, and early adulthood, including much of the anecdotal material about his honesty—for example, his trekking a long distance to return a small amount of money—and also about his ambition and self-reliance, reflected in his rise from a log-cabin childhood to the attainment of his nation’s highest political office.

Essence versus Action

We believe that the new Life and Did/Said questions successfully discriminated between two types of belief about Lincoln, because they tapped two fundamentally different aspects of identity: *essential* but often unobservable personal characteristics (the Life question) and *observable* actions (the Did/Said question) in one or more public situations. Harold Garfinkel (1956) was among the first to make this distinction explicit. If one wishes to degrade a person, he explained, one must demonstrate that that person is not what he or she seems to be. He or she is not simply someone who committed a wrong; he or she is fundamentally, permanently, *essentially* bad. If one wishes to elevate rather than degrade another person, one must accomplish the same thing, and that is to show convincingly the essence of the person: not the man or woman who does worthwhile things in certain situations but the person who is fundamentally, permanently, *essentially* good. Essences of identity are therefore described by nouns, situational identities by verbs. As Jack Katz (1975: 1370) notes further, moral identity (the transsituational, “essential,” aspect of personal character) cannot always be inferred from public actions: “essences” are “personal qualities which exist independently of, and cannot be completely verified in, observed conduct or action.”

We believe the distinction between the contents of a person’s character and what that person does in the form of public action is fundamental. These two question frames, essence versus action, evoke different aspects of Lincoln’s life—character and achievements—through two separate but mutually reinforcing linkages: inner character and public achievement reflect an underlying tendency for people to think in terms of essence and action,

but this tendency is not homologous. Lincoln's honesty may well be inferred from what he did and said; Lincoln's emancipation policy may well be attributed to an essential hatred of slavery. (Some respondents in our survey seem to have drawn these inferences.) Accordingly, the strength of this alignment expresses itself analogically: essence is to action as Life responses are to Said/Did responses. The essence/action polarity is thus important to our respondents, because they are attuned to differences between the way their fellows act and the way they really are. Goffman (1959) elevated this distinction to a vision of human interaction in *Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, an introduction to a series of works explaining why all action is a "performance," while the actor's real motives are unseen. For example, when Harry Truman included civil rights in his 1948 platform, it was virtually impossible to know how much his actions reflected essential inner conviction and how much the rising importance of the black vote in northern cities. Goffman's work is powerful because it articulates a distinction that we know exists but could not heretofore express as well.

Goffman, Katz, Garfinkel—these writers, working at about the same time, theorized the dichotomy to which our survey's respondents were so sensitive, namely, the categories of appearance and reality. We have no direct data on what respondents believed about these conceptual issues, but we can identify the context aligning the concept of essence to Life responses and the concept of action to Did/Said responses as follows. Of the scores of major Lincoln biographies, among them Herndon and Weik 1888, Charnwood 1917, Thomas 1952, Oates 1977, Donald 1995, and Burlingame 2008, there is considerable diversity in accounts of Lincoln's convictions and achievements, but they all seek to document the essence of Lincoln's moral character and the authenticity of his achievements. Respondents answered our questions on the basis of their exposure to such positive representations. Not everyone who has read these flattering Lincoln biographies, or shorter versions in school or elsewhere, may have been convinced by them, but it is fair to assume that they were written to appeal to existing positive beliefs about Lincoln or to mold beliefs in the positive direction.

For these reasons we assume that almost all respondents who mentioned Lincoln's honesty were thinking not of his being honest in a particular situation but of his being honest in all situations, hence the characterization "Honest Abe," and that those who mentioned the Emancipation Proclamation believed that his action was a necessary condition for the abolition of slavery. Hence his accomplishment as "the Great Emancipator."¹⁰

A Crucial Replication

The February–March 2010 framing difference, which we now identify theoretically as the difference between Essence (the Life question) and Action (the Did/Said question) was both meaningful and statistically significant, but it is always uncertain whether an unanticipated “significant finding” will prove replicable. We therefore repeated exactly the same randomized split-sample experiment in a new and fuller national sample nine months later, in October 2010.¹¹ The results shown in the second pair of columns labeled “Replication” in table 1 decisively confirm the findings from the earlier February–March survey. Not only is the overall distinction between the two question frames highly significant ($p < .001$), but the predicted percentage differences are substantial. The Life or Essence question elicited almost twice the number of answers characterizing Lincoln as honest compared to the Did/Said or Action question, and the ratio is nearly three to one for Lincoln seen as a self-made man. Both characterizations go to the heart of Peterson’s folk hero (see also Basler 1935; Donald 1956; Potter 1947). On the other hand, Lincoln’s most notable achievements as president, emancipating the slaves and preserving the Union, appear primarily in response to the Did/Said or action question, with the total for these presidential achievements of more than two to one as against responses to the Life question.

The intuitive credibility of these large differences is supported by their occurrence in the randomized administration of the two questions *within* the same major national telephone survey, thus excluding all but chance error from the direct comparison (“internal validity” in the classic conceptualization by Donald T. Campbell and Julian C. Stanley [1963]). Further confidence in the reliability of the October results comes from the fact that they represent a successful replication of differences obtained six months earlier and in a different questionnaire context (and thus provide one component of “external validity”).

Simplifying the Frame Contrast

For further analytic purposes, we divided the October 2010 responses into those signifying presidential accomplishments (Great Emancipator and Savior of the Union); those reflecting personal character (self-made man, honest, compassionate, religious); and a residual other category (leadership, negative, and miscellaneous positive) answers.¹² For the effect of ques-

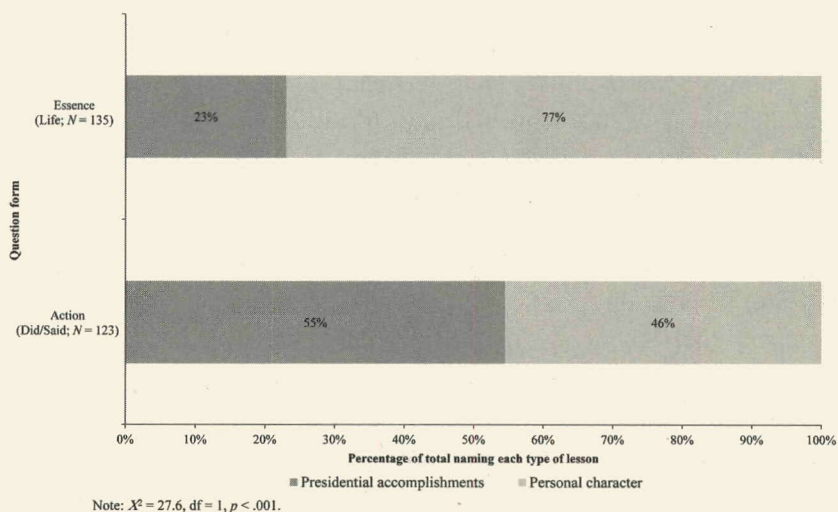


Figure 1 Percentages naming different lessons learned from Lincoln: summary categories by question form, October 2010

tion form on this three-category grouping of responses, the likelihood ratio chi-square, or $\chi^2 = 27.6$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$, but since almost all the variation between the two distributions is captured by the dichotomy of presidential accomplishments and personal character ($\chi^2 = 27.6$, $df = 1$), we can drop the residual other category and show the Essence versus Action distinction graphically in figure 1. This dichotomy serves as a simpler representation of the main difference between responses to the two question frames than does the unordered set of categories in the larger table 1.¹³ These responses are now renamed Essence and Action—our conceptualization of the responses to the Life and Did/Said questions. The difference due to framing shown in figure 1 is striking.

Historical Context as Framing: Changes over Time in Memory of Lincoln

Question wording is only one source of framing that can influence collective memories of a historical figure; the changing social and political context is another source of shifts in frames, with the effects reflected in change over time in the way that Lincoln is remembered. We consider now both long-term and short-term changes in memories of Lincoln.

Long-Term Change

We noted earlier that as part of their original investigation Schwartz and Schuman (2005) drew on a Gallup poll question first asked in 1945, which they then repeated in 2001, yielding evidence that folk responses had decreased substantially over the 56-year period. Although the Gallup question had stressed Lincoln's greatness as a president, the comparison over time held that question wording constant, and the decrease over half a century in folk responses, especially "self-made man," was appreciable and highly significant ($p < .01$). We do not have results over the same lengthy time period for our new questions about "lessons learned" from Lincoln, but birth cohort can be employed as an indicator of effects due to learning about Lincoln at different points in history. Using logistic regression with controls for education, gender, and race (white/black), a 13-category birth cohort variable is significantly related to the responses for the dichotomous variable from figure 1: older respondents gave more personal character answers than younger respondents, and the opposite was true for presidential accomplishments (odds ratio = .89, $p < .001$).¹⁴ Thus older Americans in 2010 tended to have different memories of Lincoln than did younger Americans, as was discovered earlier by Schwartz and Schuman (*ibid.*).

To consider further evidence of historical change in the collective memory of Lincoln, we counted the frequency with which two major images of Lincoln—Honest Abe and the Great Emancipator—appeared in *New York Times* articles published between 1941 and 2005, which reveal considerable stability in the images' occurrence over the six decades, as shown in figure 2.¹⁵ Both images of Lincoln have persisted over time, at least in the *New York Times*, though the Great Emancipator predominates.¹⁶ The largest divergence in attention to the two images occurred at the height of the civil rights movement, when representations of the Great Emancipator symbolized the ideal of racial integration and equality and far outstripped Honest Abe.¹⁷

Short-Term Change

Although results in table 1 show convincingly that the differences between the Essence or Life and the Action or Did/Said questions replicated between the first survey (February–March) and the second (October), we also noted an apparent difference *within* that eight-month period in the levels of response

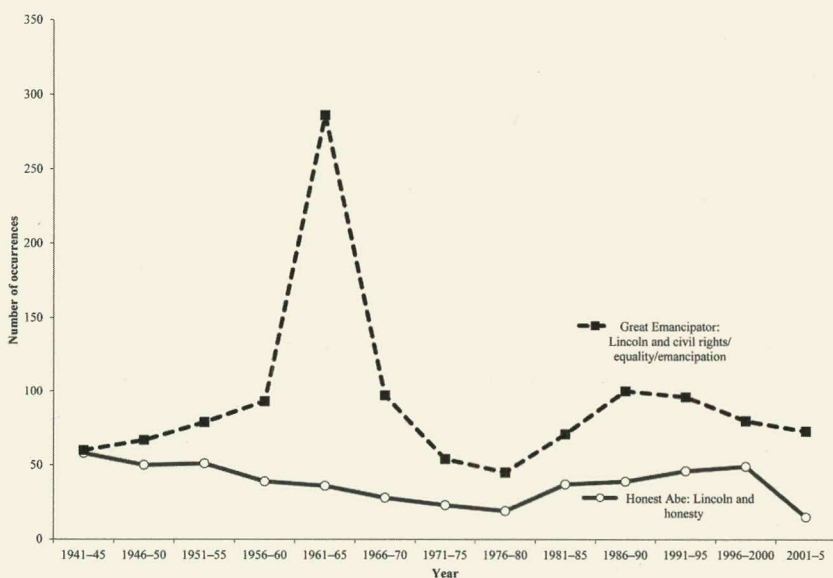


Figure 2 Frequency of occurrence of two images of Lincoln, *New York Times* articles, 1941–2005

for both the honest and the self-made man characterizations of Lincoln. The “honest” response nearly doubled in size over that relatively brief half-year period (from 20 percent to 37 percent), and the “self-made man” response decreased by a little more than half (from 14 percent to 6 percent)—all without altering the differences by question form that have already been discussed.¹⁸ If table 1 is recoded to create the two categories of honest and self-made man, with all else treated as a residual third category, the difference over time is quite large as well as highly reliable ($\chi^2 = 26.3$, $df = 2$, $p < .001$). We are being selective in focusing on two rows, albeit ones already identified as important, and this after-the-fact analysis is different from our earlier findings, where both prediction and replication added to confidence in conclusions. The results should therefore be treated gingerly, though they provoke legitimate speculation about the source of the difference due to events that may have occurred during 2010 between the February–March and October surveys.

Two major events during this eight-month period were the Gulf of Mexico oil spill in April and the midterm national election campaign that reached its peak during our October survey. We did not see a likely relation

of the oil spill to our questions, but a relation of attributions of honesty to Lincoln seemed quite possibly connected to the heavily negative nature of the national campaign in October 2010, just before the congressional election. We therefore recoded all mentions of Lincoln's honesty in terms of whether they *also* alluded to the honesty or dishonesty of politics in 2010. Of the 24 responses that referred in any way to contemporary politics, *every single one* carried a clear negative emphasis (e.g., "At least [Lincoln] was honest in his opinions unlike the ones we have now—they just tell you what they think you want to hear"). Crucially, the difference in negative mentions of present-day politics between the two time points is highly significant: $\chi^2 = 6.6$, $df = 1$, $p = .01$, evidence for a clear relation to the 2010 election campaign.

These findings constitute an instance where events in the immediate present serve as a further frame for memories of the distant past. As public trust erodes, people seem to place a premium on honesty (Hetherington 1998; see also Sztompka 2000). The present political context thus evokes images of Honest Abe even more strongly.

A Note on Frame Differences versus Connotative Differences in Questions

Considering the different questions that led to our conclusions about essence and action and their connection to concrete Life and Did/Said answers, it is important to distinguish between this fundamental type of variation in question framing and the simpler form of variation that is due to connotative or emotional coloring of question wording. A classic example of the latter is reflected in the verbs *forbid* and *allow*, as first discovered by Donald Rugg (1941: 91–92) and replicated numerous times since. In these cases, the *literal* meaning of the terms *forbid* and *not allow* is exactly the same, as in Rugg's original demonstration:

"Do you think the United States should forbid public speeches against democracy?" 1. Yes, forbid 2. No, not forbid.

"Do you think the United States should allow public speeches against democracy?" 1. Yes, allow 2. No, not allow.

The fact that Americans were much more willing to not allow speeches than to forbid them—a highly significant difference of 21 percentage points—was almost certainly due to the stronger emotional or connotative force of the

term *forbid*. That the effect is greatest for the least-educated respondents and almost disappears among the college-educated supports the assumption that the difference is a matter of connotation rather than a real distinction in meaning (Schuman and Presser 1981: 276–79).

In contrast, the difference we discovered using the Life and Did/Said questions is one based not on connotation but on how an inquiry is framed—an implicit focus on the life of a historical figure, in the one case, or on what he did or said publicly, in the other. It is a difference in the actual meanings of the two questions—a conceptual or denotative difference, not merely a matter of emotional shading. In support of this interpretation, there is no sign of a difference by education in answers to the Life and Did/Said questions. Thus the framing effect that appears in table 1 should not be confused with garden-variety differences due to connotative wording.

Conclusions

We have melded two concerns in this article. One is about how Lincoln, widely regarded by scholars, media commentators, authors, and artists as one of the greatest US presidents, is remembered today by a cross section of Americans. Our other concern is with the importance of how questions are framed and how this in turn affects the kinds of memories that are elicited, not in an artifactual sense but in the sense that memories are manifold and different frames cue different memories (Rajaram and Barber 2008). Furthermore, the effects of framing change from one historical context to another: different cohorts alive today carry different memories based on what they learned in their own earlier lives, whether in school, at the movies, or from any other source. All this means that Lincoln is remembered differently among different groupings in society, and there is no simple answer to the question of how he is remembered at present. Moreover, this complexity is entirely apart from what would be said if we had started from historical and biographical narratives, reprinted anecdotes and jokes, tall tales and half-mythical accounts, monuments, shrines, and films—what can be thought of as the media of memory or as “publicly available memory” by those who prefer to emphasize that type of evidence.

More concretely, if we ask about “lessons learned” from Lincoln’s “life,” respondents tend to think in terms that can be aligned with Katz’s theoretical concept of essence, which focuses on what Peterson (1994) calls “folk”

and similar themes, especially Lincoln's personal history as a self-made man and his reputation as Honest Abe. If we ask about Lincoln's *actions*, respondents are more likely to refer to his "epic achievements" of ending slavery and preserving the Union, though it is important to note that emancipation (together with equal rights) is much more prominent at present than preserving the Union.

There is also evidence that responses referring to folk beliefs and moral traits have declined considerably since the 1940s, but such answers are nevertheless readily evoked today in substantial numbers when our question wording activates a frame that focuses on Lincoln's life rather than on his accomplishments as president.

Neither the essence nor the action frame elicited ideas of Lincoln as the Savior of the Union in more than a small number of cases. Most present-day Americans probably cannot conceive of the United States under threat of disunion as it was prior to the end of the Civil War, and therefore Lincoln's role in saving the Union is no longer salient or perhaps even meaningful to them. On the other hand, because of the use of Lincoln as an important backdrop for the civil rights movement (Jividen 2011; Sandage 1993)—exemplified by Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech, televised in front of the Lincoln Memorial—it is not surprising that Lincoln's presidential accomplishments are recalled today primarily in terms of racial equality. In that sense, he has remained a relevant public figure to a degree not true of other presidents who lived before most Americans today were born.

Our results point in two directions. First, standing back from the particular findings about Lincoln, the differences due to question framing in our research remind us that results can easily mislead investigators if taken too readily at face value, especially when more than a difference in the connotations or coloring of wording is involved. The framing cues that elicited responses about Lincoln were not deliberately intended to bias answers, yet they produced quite different collective memories of him. In addition, "history" also serves as a source of meaningful variation once we have access to what different cohorts learned in their own historical periods (Schwartz and Schuman 2005: 196–97).

Second, in terms of how we think about the study of collective memory, qualitative writing like that by Peterson (1994) can provide a richly detailed description of a past person or period and suggest patterns to look for when using more systematic approaches. The national survey encourages us to

investigate just such variation in collective memory using different frames and sometimes produces unexpected results and distinctions, as in our own analysis. Furthermore, the systematic inclusion of historical change facilitated by drawing on sample surveys (directly in one case with the use of over-time data, indirectly in the other case using birth cohort) greatly improves our understanding of the trajectory of Lincoln in American memory.

Notes

We are grateful to James Lepkowski and two of his graduate students, Julia Lee and Fan Guo, for advice on an unusual calculation needed in note 8. This research was supported by a grant from the National Science Foundation (SES 0853381) to Howard Schuman.

- 1 Writings in political science and communications often emphasize the *deliberate* use of frames by the media, politicians, or other elites to influence individuals' beliefs or attitudes (Chong and Druckman 2007), as when the word *welfare* rather than the phrase *helping poor people* creates a difference in responses (e.g., Smith 1987). But that is *not* our focus here. Our concern is with nonmanipulated and indeed often unintended framing of inquiries. We are also interested in broad beliefs rather than in simple attitudes in the pro and con sense.
- 2 In the 1999 national telephone survey by the University of Maryland Survey Research Center, an initial question asked respondents, "Which three United States presidents do you regard as the greatest?" Those who mentioned Lincoln (45 percent) were then asked, "Why do you think Abraham Lincoln was one of America's three greatest presidents?" and those who did not mention Lincoln were asked, "Although you did not mention Abraham Lincoln as one of the three greatest presidents, we would like to know what comes to mind when you think about Abraham Lincoln." Responses to the two forms of the question were similar and were combined in presenting results. In the second national survey in 2001, carried out by Knowledge Networks, the question posed was: "Suppose a nephew or niece about 12 years old had just heard some mention of Abraham Lincoln and asked you to explain what Abraham Lincoln had done. What would you say?" The 1999 and 2001 surveys differed in other ways as well, for example, telephone interviews versus self-administered Internet questioning, and their results are shown separately in Schwartz and Schuman 2005: 189, table 1; see also Schwartz 2008: 000, table 4.1. The percentages discussed here are for answers based on the first codable response to each of the two questions; if more than one response was coded, the percentages increase, but the pattern of results is essentially the same. See Schwartz and Schuman 2005 for response rates and other details about the two surveys.
- 3 "There is no reason," said Lincoln in his first debate with Stephen Douglas in 1858, "why the negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. I hold he is

as much entitled to these as the white man" (Angle 1991: 117). In the fourth debate, however, Lincoln explained, "I will say then that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black race; that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people" (ibid.). Lincoln never failed to distinguish between liberty and social equality for the emancipated slave. In his address to Congress a few weeks before signing his Emancipation Proclamation, he reaffirmed his belief that the freed slaves' voluntary return to their homeland "with people of their own blood and race" (Lincoln 1953 [1862]: 535) would prevent a race problem in the United States. Later, having at last recognized colonization's unfeasibility, he was satisfied that former slaves would be subject to the laws of the states in which they lived, states in which civil rights were beyond imagination.

- 4 Not all recent writing on Lincoln has stressed his identification with the civil rights movement. Quotations such as the ones in note 3 have shown that for most of his life Lincoln did not believe in racial equality as that term is used today. Indeed, some widely publicized writing by African Americans has characterized him as little more than a "racist" (Bennett 1968, 2000), and there is also a stream of writing that portrays Lincoln as a politician who was able to say different things to different audiences (Hofstadter 1973). Furthermore, although Schwartz and Schuman (2005) found Lincoln mentioned most often as one of the three greatest presidents, the majority (55 percent) in their sample did not so name him, and both that study and ours found a scattering of quite negative views of Lincoln. Thus his reputation is by no means entirely without perceived flaws. There have also been attacks on Lincoln from various quarters. Edgar Lee Masters (1931), a self-professed Jeffersonian, wrote so critically about Lincoln that efforts were made to prevent the Postal Service from delivering his book. Richard Hofstadter (1973) was among a long line of Lincoln critics from the left, including black activists in Don Fehrenbacher's (1987: 197–213) "Anti-Lincoln Tradition." Neo-Confederate and even Southern Heritage groups have renounced Lincoln. Libertarians are represented by Thomas J. DiLorenzo's (2002, 2006) well-known criticism of Lincoln setting the precedent of big government and the imperial presidency. Yet as Schuman et al. (2005) show in the case of Christopher Columbus, even a dramatic turnaround in his reputation by many scholars and even more activists around the time of the 1992 quincentenary had very little effect on positive public beliefs about Columbus. Indeed, even many Native Americans continued to see Columbus as simply the man who discovered America. Lincoln remains a much more positive reference than Columbus for historians and also for African American leaders like Barack Obama. The Lincoln Memorial in Washington still symbolizes what it did for Marian Anderson and for Martin Luther King Jr. (Sandage 1993), and even measured accounts by writers like Henry Louis Gates Jr. (2009) end by being fundamentally positive about Lincoln.
- 5 Schwartz and Schuman (2005) did not include under folk beliefs answers that referred to Lincoln's "honesty," but even if their results are expanded to include

- honesty and other "moral traits," the totals of first responses would be only 13 percent and 7 percent, respectively, in their two surveys, still well below the sum of non-folk beliefs about the Great Emancipator and Savior of the Union.
- 6 Great Emancipator and Savior of the Union responses could not be clearly distinguished because of Gallup's form of coding, but it seemed likely to Schwartz and Schuman that most of the 1945 responses concerned Savior of the Union, in sharp contrast to the more recent survey data, where Great Emancipator clearly predominates. Given what we know about the most popular Lincoln biographies and public attitudes toward race relations in 1945 (a week after the Battle of the Bulge and two weeks before the Battle of Iwo Jima, when fighting against Germany and Japan was still intense and Americans were taking heavy casualties), it is difficult to believe that Savior of the Union responses would not have dominated Great Emancipator responses to a question about Lincoln's greatness. It is fair to assume that Gallup's coders were more likely than their late twentieth-century successors to recognize the *causal* relation between preserving the Union and emancipation. Without Union there could have been no emancipation. For further discussion, including detailed estimates of the 1945 Union-emancipation ratio, see Schwartz and Schuman 2005: 192.
 - 7 This was the recontact sample of the University of Michigan Survey of Consumer Attitudes, which reinterviews respondents from previous random digit dial (RDD) samples of six months earlier. The general experience of the survey directors has been that the two subsample components, RDD and recontact, do not produce different results, and with the October survey discussed below, that was clearly the case (the RDD versus recontact distributions on Lincoln images did not approach significance or look at all different). The response rate (American Association for Public Opinion Research [AAPOR] 2 calculation) for the two months averaged 59 percent, taking into account both the rate for the original RDD sample and the rate for the reinterviews.
 - 8 Using the same code categories as those employed by the earlier authors, $\chi^2 = 349.5$ for the comparison with the Life question and $\chi^2 = 180.8$ for the comparison with the Did/Said question, both chi-squares are highly significant ($df = 7$, $p < .001$). We attribute these large differences mainly to the way that both new questions were framed as "lessons" to be learned from Lincoln, without implication of his greatness. As the relative sizes of the two chi-square values also suggest, the Life question shows a significantly greater difference than the Did/Said question: $\chi^2 = 154.6$, $df = 7$, $p < .001$. This finding is consistent with the basic difference in theoretical meaning between the two new questions.
 - 9 Responses to the question were coded independently by two of the authors, with agreement in 90 percent of the cases and disagreements resolved by discussion. In preparing table 1 numbers, we have omitted respondents who answered no when asked if they could draw any lesson from Lincoln's life or from what he said or did. Such respondents tended to have lower education than others and to be older. ("Don't know" responses were significantly greater for the Did/Said than for the

Life question in the February–March survey, but the difference did not replicate in the October survey [Fisher’s exact test: $p = .17$], and since our main results were unaffected by such a difference, we have not pursued it in this article.)

- 10 In point of fact, the Emancipation Proclamation only applied to slaves in those states that were still in rebellion in 1863 and thus not under the control of the Union army. It did not apply to the border states that were not considered in rebellion. Because it qualified the Constitution’s protection of slavery, however, its immediate effect was dramatic both domestically and internationally. Only with the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment at the end of 1865, however, was slavery finally and officially ended in the United States. Nevertheless, in the minds of most Americans, the term *emancipation* is tied to the 1863 proclamation, and it was indeed treated at the time as a momentous act.
- 11 This national survey included 301 cases selected by an RDD method and 208 recontact cases that had been drawn by the RDD method six months earlier and were now reinterviewed. No difference approaching significance was found between these two components, and they are therefore merged. The weighted response rate for the combined sample was 50 percent using the AAPOR 2 calculation method.
- 12 We focus here on data from the October 2010 responses, because our prediction was developed on the basis of the earlier February–March responses.
- 13 Most of the omitted table 1 categories are small and show little difference between the two “lessons learned” questions.
- 14 No sign of an effect occurs for education, gender, or race in these regressions. When question framing (Life vs. Did/Said) is included as a main effect, it is also highly significant ($p < .001$), as would be expected, and the other results are unchanged.
- 15 To identify the two images, we searched *New York Times* articles for instances where references to “Lincoln” occurred in the same paragraph as “honest” or “honesty,” on the one hand, and “civil rights,” “equal rights,” or “emancipation,” on the other.
- 16 The meaning of emancipation itself is variable. Through the 1940s slavery was a metaphor for the captive nations; emancipation, the Allies’ aim to free them from fascist and communist control.
- 17 The timing of this divergence corresponds well to the cohort differences found in the October 2010 data: individuals born between 1915 and 1952, whose youth and socialization occurred mainly prior to the height of the civil rights movement, tended to think in terms of Lincoln’s personal character, while for those who came of age during or after the movement, his presidential accomplishments were most salient. (For details on critical period effects, see Schuman and Corning 2012.) Thus these findings using content analysis of the *New York Times* are consistent with the previous results using the Gallup question repeated over time, even though there remains more evidence of answers concerning personal character when the question is framed in terms of Lincoln’s life than Schwartz and Schuman (2005) discovered with their 1999 and 2001 questions.
- 18 These differences in univariate levels appeared to occur on both “lessons learned” questions, so we deal here with totals regardless of question form.

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