

10. ABRAHAM LINCOLN IN THE MIND OF THE SOUTH: ASSASSINATION TO RECONCILIATION

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Word over all, beautiful as the sky!
Beautiful that war, and all its deeds of carnage, must in time be
utterly lost;
That the hands of the sisters Death and Night, incessantly softly
wash again, and ever again, this soil'd world:
... For my enemy is dead—a man as divine as myself is dead;
I look where he lies, white-faced and still, in the coffin—I draw near;
I bend down, and touch lightly with my lips the white face in the
coffin.

—Walt Whitman, "Reconciliation"

Every generation reads the historical record in its own way, and it is not for us, as observers, to comment on its appropriateness. However, we do have a responsibility to demonstrate how this reading can warp the historical record. The program of the U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, to take one example, devoted relatively little attention to Lincoln as Savior of the Union. In the words of an advisory committee member: "[O]f the themes that Executive Director Michael Bishop elaborated on in the opening at the beginning of the session, none of them addressed the idea of the Union or 'one nation indivisible' which was one of Lincoln's accomplishments."¹ However, the commission's idea of Lincoln's legacy, as will soon be shown, powerfully symbolizes and sustains an image of Lincoln embraced by the American people.

Lincoln's motives, on the other hand, differed from the motives twenty-first-century Americans attribute to him. Lincoln knew that while slavery was the *necessary* condition of the Civil War, secession was the *necessary and sufficient* condition. If the South had had no

slaves and eleven states decided to secede, whatever their reason might be, Lincoln would have brought them back into the Union by force. Without secession, there would have been and, constitutionally, *could* have been, no war.

At Gettysburg, Edward Everett, not Lincoln, clarified best the war's meaning. To permit secession, Everett said, would weaken the country fatally. It would

wrest from the Middle and Western States some of their great natural outlets to the sea and of their most important lines of internal communication; deprive the commerce and navigation of the country of *two-thirds* [emphasis added] of our sea coast and of the fortresses which protect it; not only so, but would enable each [autonomous] State—some of them with a white population equal to a good sized Northern county . . . to cede its territory, its harbors, its fortresses, the mouths of its rivers, to any foreign power. It cannot be that the people of the loyal States—the twenty-two millions of brave and prosperous freemen—will . . . consent to this hideous national suicide.²

Today's scholars and national leaders, however, seek a conversation about race, not unity. Their disinterest in reunification is not solely due to its having been achieved; it is also related to nationalism's erosion. Lincoln was a nationalist in the strictest sense of the word; he believed America, with its unique democracy, to be "the last, best hope of earth."³ Most Lincoln scholars deem this one of Lincoln's most quotable lines, but many influential intellectuals think differently. Martha Nussbaum, to take one respected voice, deems nationality irrelevant and seeks a cosmopolitan morality acknowledging allegiance to humanity.⁴ For Maurizio Viroli, nationalist projects are intrinsically harmful because they assume intolerant superiority over others. The concept of patriotism has for centuries referred to a willingness to sacrifice self-interest for the national good; among many of today's academics it stands for inoffensiveness, generosity, compassion, and respect for diversity⁵—a first cousin to cosmopolitanism. To preserve American unity by force of arms is therefore not the achievement for which intellectuals most admire Lincoln.

Indifference to nationalism is rarely articulated in connection with the 2009 Abraham Lincoln bicentennial, but without the assumption

of indifference, we are at a loss to understand how historians fail to emphasize that emancipation, their prime concern, depended on reunification. It is even more difficult to grasp how the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission can adopt the premise that the Emancipation Proclamation redefined the Civil War, "changing it from a war for Union to a war for human freedom," and has explicitly made Lincoln's significance for racial equality its major focus.⁶ From its earliest to its most recent reports, the commission's purpose has been unambiguous: "to explain Lincoln's legacy as it relates to race relations."⁷ Notwithstanding recent claims that Lincoln intended to abolish slavery from the moment he assumed the presidency,⁸ the historical record, *read in full*, shows his constant preoccupation to have been reunification and reconciliation.⁹

Since Lincoln's death, we have witnessed many struggles for secession, some successful, some not: Quebec Province in Canada; the Welsh and Scots in Great Britain; Southern Ireland's separation from the United Kingdom; the post-Cold War breakup of Soviet Republics, the separation of the Czechs and Slovaks, Catalans in Spain; Ibos in Nigeria, Kurds' efforts to leave Iraq; southern Sudanese seeking autonomy from the north; Somalis' struggle to get away from Ethiopia and Kenya. Whatever the outcome, bitterness usually remains after secession. But if secession is "the most dramatic form of disintegration of societies,"¹⁰ how, after the bloodiest war in American history, did the South become so soon and so fully reconciled with its former enemy? This question cannot be divorced from Abraham Lincoln's place in Southern memory.

For French historian Ernest Renan, shared memory is a necessary condition of nationhood. A nation is "a soul, a spiritual principle. Only two things, actually, constitute this soul, this spiritual principle. . . . One is the possession in common of a rich legacy of remembrances; the other is the actual consent, the desire to live together, the will to continue to value the heritage which all hold in common."¹¹ Abraham Lincoln foreshadows Renan's assertions in the final point of his First Inaugural Address, directed mainly to the Southern people and their leaders. "Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union."¹²

In our time, Union is taken for granted while the significance of Abraham Lincoln's life and presidency are gauged in the context of slavery and racial conflict. During the last half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth, however, regional reconciliation was incompatible with race relations reform, and many fine historians, notably David Blight, now express moral outrage that North and South were reconciled at the expense of racial justice—as if racial harmony then lay just below the surface of national life, as if continued *regional* antagonism would have ended *racial* antagonism.¹³ To revisit Lincoln as a symbol of regional rather than racial unity is to raise issues that historians like Blight have ignored. They see nationalism as America's *problem* rather than its *salvation*. Yet, to show Lincoln as a symbol of Union when *race* did not matter is as relevant to us, historically and sociologically, as to show Lincoln as he is today: a symbol of racial justice when *Union* does not matter.

Lincoln's place in Southern memory is, in fact, slightly less than a sociological miracle, for what can be more extraordinary than the South's acknowledging the greatness of the president who killed a quarter of its young men, waged war against innocent civilians across Georgia and the Shenandoah, supplied his commanders with soft-nosed exploding bullets (which they refused to use), all the while outdoing Uriah Heep in his ostentatious displays of humility? To induce Southerners to admire such a man, to transform him from the Great Barbarian into the beneficent Savior of the Union, requires a new perspective on the legacy of the Civil War. Historians are fond of telling us how eagerly Northerners in the late nineteenth century swallowed the Lost Cause perspective on the war, but equally if not more remarkable is the Southerner's acceptance of the Unionist perspective in the early twentieth century, and then, at the turn of the twenty-first century, Southerners' embracing the war's emancipationist narrative. Lincoln's white Southern contemporaries certainly saw him and his war in a different light.

I

Northern journalists traveling throughout the South reported genuine sorrow at Lincoln's death. Across the northern tier of the Confederacy, newspapers commented on extensive insanity within John Wilkes Booth's family and dissociated the South from his crime. J. G. Ham-

ilton, a University of North Carolina historian, observed in 1909 that even before the war ended many Southerners reciprocated Lincoln's affection toward them. One-third of the many residents turning out to welcome Lincoln during his April 4, 1865, tour of Richmond were poor whites, and their numbers would have been even greater if there had been no curfew.¹⁴ In the Deep South, the memorial service on Savannah's main square was so well-attended that one witness could not recall "so large an assemblage of human beings collected together in our city." A city historian observed, "Savannah was at peace with the United States of America."¹⁵ Elsewhere, Confederate government officials, including Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, expressed regret over Lincoln's murder, and the wide publication of their statements heightened sympathy for him. Lee is reported to have said that he surrendered his forces with "Lincoln's benignity" as much as "Grant's artillery" in mind.¹⁶ Atlanta's mayor may or may not have shared this feeling about Lincoln, but in June 1865 he declared publicly that he had always opposed secession and wished to return Georgia to the Union. The city's other officials agreed.¹⁷

Southern sympathy for Lincoln must be recognized but not exaggerated. Every city in the South marked Abraham Lincoln's death by formal orations and mourning rites, but these public displays misrepresented private feelings. Because the cities were under occupation, civic bodies needing the military's cooperation to rebuild could not fail to express their regrets. Everywhere, in fact, disrespect for Lincoln resulted in punishment. Churches refusing to hold appropriate mourning services were compelled by military authorities to appoint new boards of directors, just as hostile newspapers were shut down and reopened under friendly editorship.¹⁸ Nineteen-year-old Sarah Morgan of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, described the situation in her diary:

To see a whole city draped in mourning is certainly an imposing spectacle. . . . So it is, in one sense. For the more violently 'secesh' the [residents], the more thankful they are for Lincoln's death, the more profusely the houses are decked with emblems of woe. . . . Men who have hated Lincoln with all their souls, under terms of confiscation and imprisonment which they *understand* is the alternative, tie black crepe from every practicable knob and point, to save their homes.¹⁹

If Southerners mourned Lincoln publicly, then his death, amid the devastation caused by his war against the South, seemed to many “like a gleam of sunshine on a Winter’s Day.”²⁰ The tyrant, at last, was gone. Abraham Lincoln had waged war against innocent people, burned their homes, sacked their farms, starved their children; a Texas editor could not forget:

In one of his messages [Lincoln] said, with grim and terrible satisfaction, “*that under all circumstances our Land would remain.*” Where the fierce Attila, calling himself “the curse of God,” swept with his barbaric hordes, records as the marks of his terrible wrath that “he left only the sky and the earth remaining . . .,” *Sic Semper Tyrannis*. Not in a fair fight merely, not on the field of honorable battle, not by the law’s formal sentence, but every where and by all means, *Sic Semper Tyrannis*. Whoever would impose the fate of servitude and slavery on these Confederate States, whatever fatal Providence of God shall lay him low, we say, and say it gladly, God’s will be done.²¹

Not only were many Southern mourning rites counterfeit; the commemorations that sustained pro-Lincoln sentiment in the North through the late 1860s and 1870s never affected the South. So greatly had Reconstruction (1865–1876) alienated Southern sentiment that even July 4 was “not much in vogue.”²² Ending Reconstruction added nothing to Southerners’ affection for Lincoln. The making of Lincoln prints and paintings, the carving and dedication of Lincoln statues, the establishment of immense Lincolniana collections, the founding of Lincoln clubs and memorial associations, the observance of his birth, the writing of poetry and of articles, essays, and books about his life—these were exclusively Northern enterprises.

As Southern intellectuals contemplated Reconstruction and the imprisonment of their president and symbol, Jefferson Davis, they were disinclined to pay respects of any kind to their former enemy. Paul Hamilton Hayne, a South Carolina man of letters, remembered Lincoln in 1871 as a “commonplace Vulgarian” who “mistook blasphemy for wit,” a “gaudy, coarse, not overly clean” man whose “idealization by Yankee fancy . . . would be ludicrous were it not disgusting.”²³ “Putting all partisan feeling aside,” William Hand Brown wrote in *Southern Magazine*, “we look back at the men who once were chosen

by their countrymen to fill the places that this man has occupied—a Washington, a Jefferson, a Madison, an Adams . . . men of culture and refinement, of honor, of exalted patriotism, of broad views and wise statesmanship—and measure the distance from them to Abraham Lincoln, [and] we sicken with shame and disgust.”²⁴

Albert Bledsoe, Lincoln’s friend and legal colleague in Illinois, was repelled by his conduct of the war against the South and turned against him. In 1873, he reported that Lincoln was not only an atheist; he believed Jesus to have been born a bastard. The President of the United States was also an unkind and ungrateful man, a man of “brute force, blind passion, fanatical hate, lust of power, and the greed of gain.” Ward Lamon, whose biography Bledsoe was reviewing, believed these traits proved Lincoln’s humanity and made him all the more venerable; for Bledsoe, they proved him to be no more than “the lowbred infidel of Tyson Creek, in whose eyes the Savior of the world was ‘an illegitimate child,’ and the Holy Mother as base as his own.”²⁵ Although Northern occupation forces limited the influence of Lincoln’s critics by forbidding reproach in public media and public places, Southern hostility did not depend on the press and pulpit to sustain itself. Indeed, as the Confederate “Lost Cause” tradition grew stronger throughout the 1880s and early 1890s, anti-Lincoln sentiments increased.

Michael Davis, however, argues that Southerners were so certain of Lincoln’s leniency that they responded to his assassination with a great wave of affection. He concludes his *The Image of Lincoln in the South*, the only book-length work on the subject, with a survey of Southern cities participating in the 1909 Lincoln centennial—evidence, in his view, of the South’s embracing its old enemy. That Davis exaggerates admiration for Lincoln during the postwar decades is certain, but his work’s merit is to reveal the basis of heretofore ignored admiration that matured during the first half of the twentieth century. He prefigures Merrill Peterson’s claim that “most Southerners” in the second quarter of the twentieth century (1925–1950) were Lincoln admirers.²⁶ Peterson’s statement is accurate, but the adjective “most” makes it ambiguous.

II

As the power of authoritarian Europe and Asia grew at the turn of the twentieth century, the rebuilding of Union became urgent. Reconciliation of North and South began during America’s “Great Patriotic

Age”—an age of intense nationalism—running roughly from 1890 to 1925. During this time, regional bitterness remained, but as the Civil War generation died out and foreign threats to American interests arose, the movement toward regional unity became irrepressible, indexed by white Southerners beginning to come to terms with Lincoln.

To underrate Southerners' affection for Lincoln is to fail to grasp the period mood. The Great Patriotic Age was a time of regional understanding.²⁷ For most Southerners, feelings about Lincoln mingled with feelings about the nation. "Feeling for the nation," not to mention readiness to embrace its symbols, had never disappeared completely. When the Confederate government moved from Montgomery to Richmond, it inaugurated Jefferson Davis in a rainstorm on George Washington's birthday beside Thomas Crawford's equestrian statue of Washington—an image that became the Great Seal of the Confederacy. Carl Degler was right to describe the American nation as an unfinished product in 1861,²⁸ but it was a partially finished product, with an array of symbols, rites, memories, motives, and moods capable of mobilizing Northerners for war—enthusiastically at first, hesitantly later. Emory Thomas was also right to describe war and a militant reconstruction policy as the condition for the growth of Confederate nationalism, as expressed in the Lost Cause movement²⁹; but as Richard Beringer has shown, Southerners' will to fight stemmed less from their nationalism than their attachment to the land and the civil society that Northern soldiers had violated.³⁰ This is why Confederate nationalism, such as it was, ended with the passing of the war generation.

Economic growth, geographical mobility, expanding print media, and a shrinking globe made regional reconciliation a vital national requirement. No regional commitments undermined its attainment. Reconciliation was not racially inclusive, but getting right with Lincoln was part of it.

National solidarity movements excluding race are now scorned by many historians. "Why take stock of lasting political and racial consequences," David Blight asks sarcastically, ". . . when what we really need today is a good story of national harmony and American problem solving. American tragedies, after all, demand happy endings."³¹ But regional reconciliation at the turn of the twentieth century was far more than a good story; it was a political, social, and military necessity, and this necessity was not a matter of America's playing what

Blight called “its appointed role in world affairs.”³² Despite his facetious statement, Blight must know there was no “appointed” role to play; there was a chosen role. Seemingly swayed by the “evil causes evil fallacy,” however, he cannot imagine virtuous consequences emerging from immoral conditions. He cannot acknowledge that America’s racist choices proved to be ironically fateful, saving all men, black and white alike, from future tyrannies and wars based on belief in racial, religious, and national supremacy.

Influential Southerners, like their Northern counterparts, praised Lincoln for restoring national unity. Henry Watterson, longtime editor of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, came to realize that if the South had won the war, the result would have been a fragmented nation prey to foreign power. Lincoln was God’s instrument for Union. Had he lived, there would have been no ten-year Reconstruction nightmare, and national unity would have been achieved more rapidly. His great life melded Northern and Southern consciousness into a common American consciousness.³³ Watterson’s paens to Lincoln, written from the late nineteenth century through the early 1920s, induced in many Southerners a pro-Lincoln attitude and converted many hostile Southerners to indifference, if not affection. Henry Grady, editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, articulating the New South’s credo of industrialization, urbanization, education, and national commitment, believed Lincoln embodied Puritan and Cavalier virtues but transcended both because he was so distinctly American.³⁴ A decade later, in 1895, Union general Oliver Howard helped to establish Lincoln Memorial University in Tennessee’s Cumberland Gap. Besides providing poor mountain people with educational opportunity, this institution embodied the nation’s new solidarity. The university’s administration building was named Grant-Lee Hall; the school colors, blue and gray.

Other dramatic changes accompanied the dying out of the Civil War generation: immigration peaked, the United States became a major player on the world stage. The 1898 Spanish-American War was the first time since the 1846–48 Mexican War that Northern and Southern men had fought together. After William McKinley, the war president, was assassinated in 1901, it seemed strange to no one to see him being escorted into America’s pantheon by allegorical representatives of both North and South.



"Entering America's Pantheon." Illustration by William A. Rogers, *Harper's Weekly*, September 14, 1901.

Two years after Southerners observed the centennial of Robert E. Lee's birth, they participated in the 1909 centennial of Lincoln's. Eight years later, America entered World War I, and Union became a familiar part of Southern discourse. In the words of an Arkansas observer:

I am glad that I was here when the war broke. You see, a Yankee still had a cloven hoof and a spiked tail, down here in Arkansas. But the war has done what years had failed to do and done it in

a matter of months. This country is just one flame of loyalty. . . . And now the women don't want to call our soldiers Sammies. "The boys hate it," said one the other day, secretary of the local U.D.C. "It is such a sissy name! They're YANKS, that's what they are. That sounds like a man. We're all YANKS, every one of us today. . . . Yes, we've got one country now."³⁵

As Northern and Southern congressmen visited each other's constituents to affirm this solidarity, each side framed the crisis as a challenge to Lincoln's legacy.

III

Up to this point we have seen that two crises, the Spanish-American War and World War I, contributed most to Southerners' reconciling with Lincoln and the rest of the nation. It has often been observed that crisis enhances social solidarity, but this relation is contingent on some preexisting unity. If society is weakly unified to begin with, crisis is more likely to fragment than consolidate. Reconstruction is an example.

The withdrawal of Union occupation troops was part of the negotiation resulting in Rutherford Hayes's presidency. Today, many regard this agreement as a shameful abandonment of African Americans to Southern state governments. Yet, Lincoln envisioned precisely this arrangement. He never anticipated an extended occupation but rather assumed liberated slaves would be subject to state laws. That the white people of the South would have been receptive to reconciliation in the early 1900s is doubtful, whatever the nature of the nation's crisis, if Reconstruction had not ended in 1876. Reconstruction may have been a noble experiment, but it was neither pragmatic nor wise from the standpoint of long-term national, not to mention minority, interest.

The end of Reconstruction could not in itself have led to regional reconciliation. Southern whites' attachment to the Union, however residual, played a necessary role. The literature of memory and reconciliation was, in this regard, indispensable. Southern writers, including Atlanta's Joel Chandler Harris ("The Kidnappers") and Alabamian Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews (*The Perfect Tribute*) made Lincoln's Southern sympathies glow through their prose and made plausible Southerners' belief that Lincoln was one of their own. Thomas Dixon, however, gave Lincoln his most influential voice. Dixon's

characters were stereotyped and racist; his prose, melodramatic; but his stories converted bitter resentments, North and South, into passionate nationalism. Dixon distinguished himself by a series of novels, including his Klan (Reconstruction) trilogy: *The Leopard's Spots* (1902), *The Clansman* (1905) and *The Traitor* (1907). Equally prominent, for our purposes, is *The Southerner: A Romance of the Real Lincoln* (1913), dedicated to Dixon's Johns Hopkins schoolmate, Woodrow Wilson, "America's first Southern President since Lincoln," and *The Man of the People: A Drama of Abraham Lincoln* (1920).

The best known of Dixon's works is *The Clansman*, which D. W. Griffith made into *Birth of a Nation*, the first great full-length photoplay, released in 1915, before the United States entered World War I. Condemned today as racist, reactionary, revisionist, and wrong, *Birth of a Nation* makes the Ku Klux Klan a noble force against corruption and violence. But Griffith's job, as he then conceived it, was to express white American desire for reconciliation. *Birth of a Nation* presents us with a mundane plot. Like sheet music and scores of fifteen- to twenty-minute films shown in the back of grocery stores during the first two decades of the century, Griffith's epic exploits love interests among the sons and daughters of Northern and Southern families as reconciliation metaphors.³⁶ Before Griffith brings Lincoln into these families' lives, he shows him wiping away tears after signing an order for seventy-five thousand troops to meet the Confederate threat. He wishes not to harm the Southern people or destroy their institutions but "to enforce the rule of the upcoming nation over the states." Lincoln seeks the birth of a nation through a unification of souls. In the defining scene, the mother of a Southern protagonist unjustly convicted of spying and condemned to death, petitions Lincoln. At first, the "Great Heart" resists her plea, but she persists and he relents. As the kindly president writes out his pardon, the grateful mother bends down to kiss him but stops and backs away respectfully. "Mr. Lincoln has given back your life to me," she later tells her boy.

That Lincoln would have protected the South from vengeful reconstruction is evident in the scenes following his assassination. Abolitionist villain Austin Stoneman, representing Thaddeus Stevens, is told by his mixed-race prodigy (symbolizing Stevens's love for an African American woman) that Lincoln is dead, that now he, Stoneman, is the most powerful man in the country—free to wreak revenge upon the

South. Senator Stoneman's ruthlessness perfects the plot's irony, for his own son Phil and daughter Elsie have fallen in love with Margaret and Ben, daughter and son of the Camerons, a Southern planter family. Some critics insist that Griffith weaved his sentimental love plots as a vehicle to promote sympathy for racial supremacy. He was, in fact, exploiting conventional reconciliation symbolism. In the final scene, Ben and Elsie, portrayed together on the verge of marriage, fade into the final subtitle (from Daniel Webster): "Liberty and Union, one and inseparable, now and forever!" However acute its hypocrisy and crude racism, the film's principal theme, reestablishment of Union, is overpowering.

Public reaction to *Birth of a Nation* was extraordinary. During the first year the film appeared, almost every performance sold out. When asked to give their opinion of the film, people typically replied that it provided a spectacular and unforgettable history lesson, making real the brutality of war and evoking the love of peace, tranquility, and unity.³⁷ At the biggest theater in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, two soldiers, one dressed in Union blue, the other in Confederate gray, stood in the lobby. "No one can witness *Birth of a Nation*," wrote the reporter, "without feeling a deeper interest in mankind, a greater love for country, and for the flag." Further, "You have a greater admiration for the South, a love for a united nation and a united people."³⁸ Newspaper advertisements made the same point: Dixon's great photoplay "will make a better American of you."³⁹

That *Birth of a Nation* angered America's black communities everywhere was no surprise to those who had seen and loved the film. Its emphasis on the "black brute," rather than the "faithful souls" who constituted most of the emancipated population, resulted from radical Republicans rewarding undeserving blacks for the sole purpose of punishing innocent white communities. This, in addition to the film's nationalistic message, is why efforts to ban the showing of the film on the grounds of inciting racial and regional animosity met everywhere with derision and failure.⁴⁰

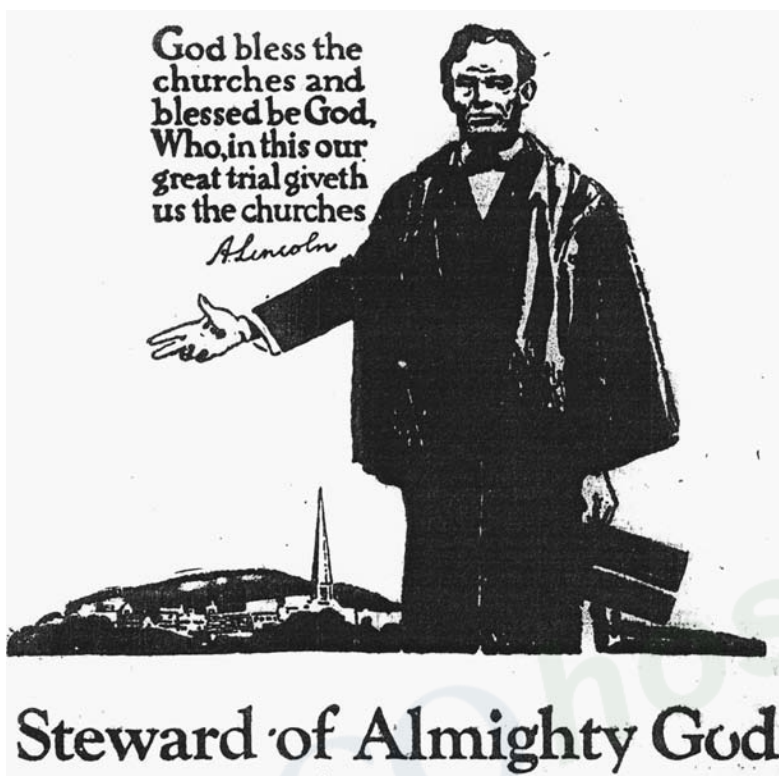
National unity is not the only theme that drew the American public to *Birth of a Nation*. After all, both Griffith, the producer, and Dixon, the author of the book on which the film is based, revered Abraham Lincoln. Dixon's portrait of Lincoln as a Southerner was persuasive because it was largely true. Family and cultural ties bound Lincoln to the South. His wife was from a Kentucky slaveholding family. He

referred to himself as a Southerner, and others looked upon him as such. New Salem, the hamlet in which he spent his young adulthood, was founded by Southerners James Rutledge and John Cameron. Sangamon County was filled with immigrants from Tennessee; Kentucky, where he was born; and Virginia, birthplace of his grandfather and father. His professional associates, including Orville Browning and Ward Hill Lamon, and his law partners, John Stuart, Stephen Logan, and William Herndon, were men of the South. He was committed to the Whig party, which regularly chose its presidential candidates from the South. As a member of the U.S. House, he belonged to the "Young Indians" club and enjoyed the fellowship of Alexander Stephens, Robert Toombs, William Preston, and other Southern politicians. He was nominated for president because he repudiated the Republican party's "Ultra" (anti-Southern) members. Throughout the war, Lincoln fought the people of the South vigorously, but he never ceased to sympathize and identify with them. The motif of his reconstruction plan, laid out in his December 1863 message to Congress, while the war raged, was leniency.⁴¹ By the time the dust settled at the turn of the twentieth century, many Southerners found themselves identifying with Lincoln.

IV

During the first quarter of the twentieth century, Southerners praised Lincoln in many ways. Southern newspapers, including the *New Orleans Times Picayune* and *Charleston Courier*, invoked him as the Steward of Almighty God and friend of the church. Architect Henry Bacon, born, reared, and buried in Wilmington, North Carolina, designed the Lincoln Memorial. "Linking together the District of Columbia with Virginia," Bacon wrote in his proposal, the monument "could be made a striking symbol of reunion between the North and the South . . ."⁴² On Memorial Day 1922, the Lincoln Memorial dedication, aided by the media, affirmed Bacon's vision of reconciliation. From the *Chicago Tribune*: "Comrades in Arms from the South and the North now Join Hands."

Seven years later, the Virginia legislature officially honored Lincoln on the 120th anniversary of his birth. The Lincoln honored is the Lincoln of *Birth of a Nation*, a kind, segregationist president who regrets the war and grieves over the death of men on both sides. Southern



"Friend of the Church." *New Orleans Times-Picayune*, February 12, 1920.

ideas about Lincoln were conforming ever more closely to those of the rest of the country. On February 16, 1930, a *New York Times* journalist living in Savannah, Georgia, noted a remarkable fact about modern communication and Southern memory:

The weekly newspapers here are giving more space to the announcement of Lincoln's birthday than ever before. This is due largely to the fact that many of them subscribe to Northern illustrated news services with the result that when Lincoln's birthday rolls around the papers receive a liberal supply of pictures and articles dealing with the subject and much of this matter is printed. Twenty-five years ago a Georgia editor who did this would have been practically ostracized. Now the practice arouses no comment.⁴³



Comrades in Arms
from the South and the North
Now Join Hands
*"To cover them Over
with Beautiful Flowers"*

With boundary lines forgotten—every wound healed—they have joined in united regard for their honored dead.

Let everyone join them in remembrance of loved ones who have passed on. Each resting place is worthy of the brightest flowers that bloom.

Flowers are Now Plentiful.

Reasonable in Price

Memorial Day flowers delivered by wife within a few hours to any city or town in the U. S. or Canada. Ask any florist.

Allied Florists' Association

"Comrades in Arms." *Chicago Tribune*, May 29, 1922.

Bearing on the larger question of the media's role in promoting regional reconciliation, the journalist's point cannot be overemphasized. News services' accounts of Lincoln's commemoration appear on Southern front pages because editors correctly believed they would attract, not repel, readers.

Throughout the 1930s, popular media everywhere portrayed Lincoln as a reconciliation-minded segregationist. "We may be certain," declared Columbia University's Alan Nevins, that Lincoln "would have opposed all confiscation of southern property, all harsh treatment of former Confederates; that he would have opposed undue prolongation of military government for the south, and that he would have been against the immediate grant of the ballot to all negroes."⁴⁴ Nevins's statement, which appeared in newspapers throughout the South, recapitulated the orthodoxy on Lincoln scholarship, then dominated by James G. Randall and his students.

Much 1930s' commentary on Lincoln, however, was indigenous. In the *Cullman* (Alabama) *Democrat*, Rixford J. Lincoln, member of a prominent New Orleans family (unrelated to the former president), published a poem ending with the familiar question: "Would that you could rule us today/ When wracked the world in woe/ Oh, guide us from afar, we pray/ Wisdom on us bestow."⁴⁵ Three years later, a columnist from this same Alabama newspaper, observing Lincoln's Birthday, declared "America at this time can welcome a re-baptism in the clear springs of patriotic memory . . ."

Through the Depression, Lincoln's aura diffused, and Southern traditionalists, more than any other group, were aware of the change. In 1939, one of the contributors to *Tyler's Quarterly Magazine*, still the major outlet for Confederate nostalgia and reaction, complained that

praises for Lincoln emanate in almost equal fervor from practically every section of America. Indeed in these frenzied hosannas the effort is made to represent him as devoid of sectional or partisan feeling, loving the South as well as the North. A foreigner, confused and vague in regard to our history, might well be excused for wondering which side this man represented after all.⁴⁶

This Southerner recognized a tendency of his time, and that tendency became a great asset as America entered its second great war.

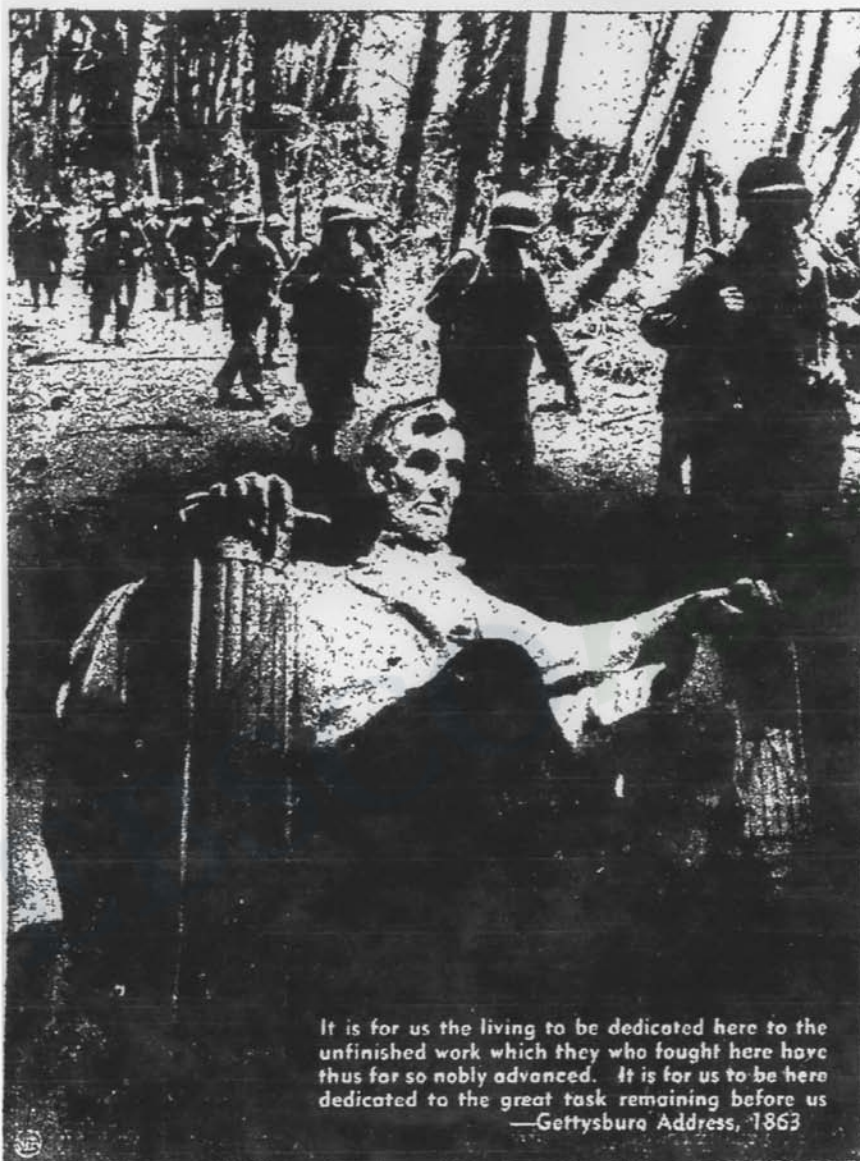
V

After Pearl Harbor, all American media, schools, and churches scanned the past for images to define the war's purpose, sustain the will to achieve it, and console those bearing its cost. The February 12, 1943, issue of the *Dothan (Alabama) Eagle*, to take one example, carried an image appearing in scores of other papers throughout the South: the terrible battle of Guadalcanal is keyed to Lincoln's words from Gettysburg about "the cause which they who fought here have so nobly advanced." In Athens, Alabama, Lincoln's image frames his speech to an Ohio regiment about the purpose of preserving free government for posterity. The *Statesville (North Carolina) Daily Record's* (February 12, 1945) war bond advertisement, depicting Lincoln and a series of complimentary phrases about him, may or may not have been designed by a local artist, but Holmes Drug Company, J. F. Duncan Plumbing, McNeer Dillon Company, and several other businesses wanted to associate themselves with it. So did Statesville's churches, which chose Abraham Lincoln's "malice toward none and charity for all" to dramatize a lesson on the quality of forgiveness. On the other hand, Port Arthur, Texas, residents found in Abraham Lincoln's Lyceum Address no direct references to the Civil War, but the phrase quoted below Lincoln's countenance, implies that America could only be defeated by tearing *itself* apart. Syndicated features in the *Port Arthur News* included Walter Winchell, Drew Pearson, and Westbrook Pegler. Op-ed pages were beginning to look the same everywhere.

Scholarly as well as popular accounts of Lincoln spread throughout the South. In 1945, Louis Warren, director of the Fort Wayne, Indiana, Lincoln Museum contributed to the war effort by lecturing for the War Department in thirty-three different states, including many Southern states, and traveling within Texas to Tyler, Dallas, Fort Worth, Austin, Corpus Christi, San Antonio, Houston, and Beaumont, in addition to Port Arthur, to tell the story of Lincoln to large and attentive audiences.

The year 1945 was also important for our purposes because we then see the first National Opinion Research Center survey of beliefs about Lincoln. "In all the history of the United States, whom do you regard as two or three of the greatest men who have ever lived in this country?" The answers, aggregated by region, showed 46 percent, almost half, of Southern respondents naming Lincoln, compared to 61 percent outside

1863--Abraham Lincoln Guides Fight For Freedom--1943



It is for us the living to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us
—Gettysburg Address, 1863

On this 134th anniversary of his birth, Abraham Lincoln is a guiding force in the fighting for the freedoms he championed. As at Gettysburg in 1863, Lincoln's words apply in 1943 at Guadalcanal and on other world fronts where Americans are dedicated to the completion of an "unfinished work."

"Guiding the Fight." *Dothan Eagle* (Alabama), February 12, 1943. (Reproduction courtesy of the *Dothan Eagle*.)



Lincoln never died . . .

HE'S still among us — the same long, angular figure, the sorrowful face, gaunt-cheeked, hollow-eyed, brooding, lined by cares and suffering above and beyond his own.

HE will live as long as free people cherish a free nation. He will live as long as there remains one man who will fight to free another.

HE will live as long as people remember and live by what he said.

THE whole world remembers his phrases, and he uttered them over eighty years ago. They are as apt and as true now as were when the Great Emancipator was struggling to hold together a split nation. It is somehow typical of all that Lincoln thought and said and did that the shortest and most widely known speech in our history should be his.

THE Gettysburg Address is bounded neither by years nor by nations. It remains for us, the living, to prove our devotion to the cause of free men by putting our physical efforts in war work and our financial efforts in War Bonds. We should again resolve that our dead shall not have died in vain—nor even have lost their lives needlessly because we here at home did not help with all our resources.

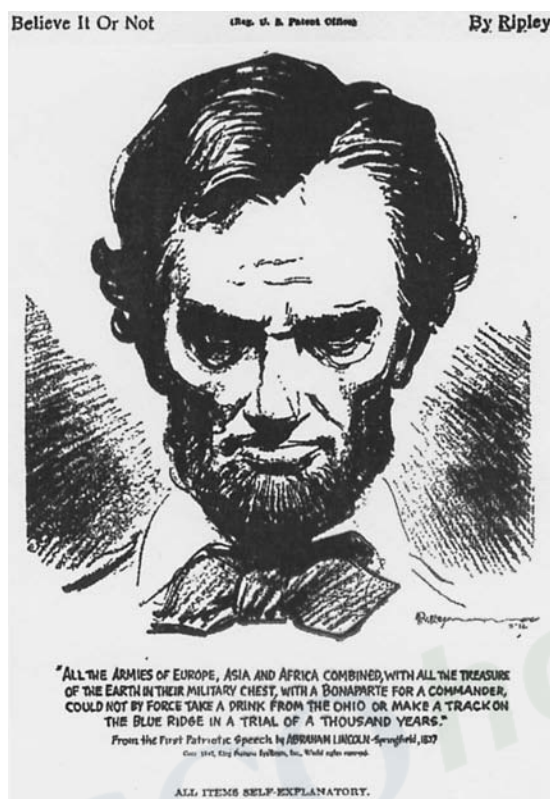
[F]or we do that, the faith in freedom that was Lincoln's can never die.

*Keep faith with our fighters
Buy War Bonds for Keeps*

This Patriotic Advertisement Sponsored By

Holmes Drug Company	Mills Electric Shop
J.F. Duncan Plumbing	Moose Concrete Products
McNeer Dillon Co.	Reavis Armature & Battery Co.
L. Gordon Iron & Metal Co.	

"Eternal Lincoln." *Statesville Daily Record* (North Carolina), February 12, 1945.
(Reproduction courtesy of the *Statesville Record & Landmark*.)



"Impregnable America." *Port Arthur (Texas) News*,
February 12, 1942; reprint, February 12, 1945. © 2010
Ripley Entertainment Inc.

the South. This difference is considerable, but it is a difference among regions where admiration for Lincoln is strong. Southerners actually rated Lincoln three points higher than they did their own George Washington (43 percent).

VI

The third quarter of the twentieth century witnessed not only the sesquicentennial of Lincoln's birth and Civil War centennial but also a cultural revolution including educational reform, historical revisionism, debate over the Vietnam War, and unprecedented racial strife. No development, however, had more affinity with Lincoln's late-twentieth-century decline—in the South and elsewhere alike—than the civil rights movement.

By midcentury, the formerly agricultural South mixed urban and rural culture, modernity and tradition,⁴⁷ but existing images of Lincoln as champion of segregation remained relevant. At the very beginning of the civil rights movement, South Carolina Democrat Joseph R. Bryson, in 1946, remarked to the U.S. House of Representatives that "In the dark days, when the South in her grief/ Needed a Lincoln to lend her relief/ From carpetbaggers' and free negroes' scorn/ Scalawags scourged her and crowned her with thorns."⁴⁸ South Carolina's Olin D. T. Johnston, known as "the Senator for the South,"⁴⁹ protested the "present civil rights holocaust" consisting of efforts to "force a new reconstruction." Lincoln would have had no part of such measures. While civil rights activities intensified, Lincoln's pro-South reputation remained. Richard Harwell observed in 1952 that "Southern antipathy for Abraham Lincoln . . . is gone," that Lincoln "has taken his place in the hearts of Southerners as in those of all Americans, as a national hero along with Washington and, in the South at least, along with Lee."⁵⁰

Northern and Southerners, however, differed in their understanding of Lincoln's beliefs. Southern history textbooks recognized regional differences while emphasizing the congruity, if not identity, of national and Southern values.⁵¹ By contrast, Southern Democrats quoted Lincoln often to legitimate defiance of the Supreme Court's 1954–55 Brown decision. In particular, Governor Orville Faubus of Arkansas and Senator Robert Byrd of West Virginia condemned Brown by invoking Lincoln's determination to "resist" the Dred Scott decision. The Court, as Southern leaders recalled it in the late 1950s, defined slaves as property of their masters, even when taken into free states and territories. Lincoln asserted publicly that the decision was wrong, that the Supreme Court is not a sacred institution, and that citizens should challenge its decisions when they consider them unjust. So compelling was the logic of the Southern argument that the *Washington Post's* editorial writer sadly deferred to it, but other liberal commentators reminded Southerners that Lincoln's criticism had included a clear statement on the people's obligation to obey Court rulings.⁵² Such a nicety missed the point. Many Southern leaders who had fought Franklin Roosevelt's battles against the Supreme Court were still active in the 1950s. The passage of time, they believed, had vindicated Roosevelt's contention that the Court was out of step with public opinion, and they were proud to have supported his efforts to pack it with

sympathetic justices. These men and their younger colleagues felt the same way about the Brown decision: to oppose Brown was in line with American tradition from Lincoln down to Roosevelt.⁵³

Believing segregation to be legal and moral, Southern representatives never tired of quoting from Lincoln's fourth debate against Stephen Douglas: "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 races."⁵⁴ As one representative put it, "Mr. Lincoln was a segregationist, no matter what any wild-eyed leftwinger says."⁵⁵ When the Baptist Convention of Texas referred to Lincoln to justify its vote to abide by the Supreme Court's order to integrate the state's schools, opponents explained that Lincoln believed in emancipation, not amalgamation (then deemed integration's inevitable consequence).⁵⁶ The Capital Citizens Committee of Little Rock, Arkansas, likewise distributed brochures indicating what Lincoln had said about the necessity of segregation.⁵⁷ Governor James Byrnes of South Carolina, speaking to the Illinois Bar Association, recognized segregationists' stake in the revelation of Lincoln's real racial views but was even more impressed by Lincoln's beliefs about the role of majority opinion. He reminded his audience that whether slavery, in Lincoln's words, "accords with justice and sound judgment is not the sole question, if indeed it was any part of it. Universal feeling, whether well or ill founded, cannot be safely disregarded." In other words, Lincoln would see segregation retained if the majority of whites wanted it.⁵⁸ Whether or not Lincoln himself would have been a civil rights-era segregationist, his public statements and actions allowed segregationists to identify with him.

Not all white Southerners were segregationists. A significant minority favored racial integration, and one of their most effective spokesman, Ralph McGill, reared in eastern Tennessee and later editor of the *Atlanta Constitution*, distinguished himself for his courage in acknowledging the South's sins against its black citizens. Declaring that "civilization" and "morality" had transcended segregation, McGill, a lifetime Lincoln disciple, equated racial oppression with Southern backwardness.⁵⁹ But most Southern newspaper editors affirmed segregation, some by connecting it to Lincoln. After federal courts began to enforce school integration in Virginia, the *Richmond News Leader* recalled:

In one of his many comments in support of Negro colonization, Mr. Lincoln said this: "There is no room for two distinct races of white men in America, much less for two distinct races of whites and blacks. . . . I can conceive of no greater calamity than the assimilation of the Negro into our social and political life as our equal. . . . We can never attain the ideal union our fathers dreamed, with millions of an alien, inferior race among us, whose assimilation is neither possible nor desirable."⁶⁰

The *News Leader's* editor had, in fact, taken these fictional remarks from Thomas Dixon's *Clansman*, but they are consistent not only with segregationists' claims but also postwar historiography. James G. Randall believed that Lincoln had more in common with Northern Democrats and moderate Southerners than the abolitionists who helped force him into war. Benjamin Thomas, Donald Riddle, and Reinhard Luthin saw Lincoln not as a moral hero but an operator who used the slavery issue to enhance his political fortune.⁶¹ None of these historians endorsed segregation, but their evidence divorced Lincoln from the prointegration views that race relations reformists had ascribed to him.⁶²

Randall and his successors could not be casually dismissed. The real Lincoln, even as former socialist Carl Sandburg portrayed him, suited segregation's proponents. Sandburg stated that Lincoln's Gettysburg Address was dedicated to Confederate as well as Union soldiers, that Southern soldiers showed great valor, that many Northerners—perhaps 25 percent—agreed with the Confederate cause, that Lincoln realized blacks needed education and believed unintelligent blacks should be prohibited from voting.⁶³ Sandburg made these comments in his 1959 Lincoln sesquicentennial address to a joint session of Congress.

VII

Fifty years after Sandburg spoke, America had changed dramatically. The tide of equality that had led to a successful civil rights movement had also reduced the prestige of great presidents and national heroes. Recent and contemporary presidents now received the nominations as greatest presidents once reserved for Lincoln, Roosevelt, Washington

(see table 1).⁶⁴ Lincoln, in particular, is diminished by the egalitarian ideal he symbolizes. Extraordinary people cannot be revered in a multicultural environment in which no one can be considered a model American.⁶⁵ As segregation waned throughout the South, the percentage of Southerners naming Lincoln one of America's three greatest presidents declined from 44 percent in 1956 to 40 percent in 2001. Outside the South, the decline was steeper: from 69 percent to 44 percent. Regional difference in the percentage naming Lincoln a great president thus narrows over forty-three years from 26 to 4 percentage points.⁶⁶ To the extent that racial equality takes hold throughout the United States, the renown of every great president diminishes. Yet, the viewer of table 1 will notice that by 1999 and 2001, Lincoln ranked first in presidential greatness in the South and non-South alike—above John Kennedy, Franklin Roosevelt, Dwight Eisenhower, Harry Truman, and George Washington. A separate analysis shows that during the previous two decades, Lincoln's most direct beneficiaries, the African American population, admire Lincoln significantly less than do white Southerners.⁶⁷

Table 1
Percentage of Respondents Designating Lincoln and Other Selected Presidents among America's Three Greatest Presidents, by Region

	Year											
	1956		1975		1985		1991		1999		2001	
President	Non-South (n = 1,004)	South (n = 381)	Non-South (n = 1,192)	South (n = 335)	Non-South (n = 1,265)	South (n = 275)	Non-South (n = 711)	South (n = 302)	Non-South (n = 622)	South (n = 379)	Non-South (n = 547)	South (n = 303)
Lincoln	69	44	50	42	50	37	49	35	44	36	44	40
Kennedy			53	46	54	53	48	47	36	34	35	36
Roosevelt	64	67	44	47	44	44	31	26	29	23	25	19
Truman	12	16	38	31	26	31	17	19	12	13	7	9
Washington	47	47	25	25	26	26	27	21	24	26	28	26
Eisenhower	31	40	23	31	15	17	12	16	9	8	7	5

Source. Gallup Polls, January 6–11, 1956; November 21–24, 1975; June 7–10, 1985; February 7–10, 1991; University of Maryland Survey, May 1999; September 2001.

Gauging Lincoln's renown and understanding his reputation, however, are separate problems. "Prestige" is that which sets one person apart from another on a scale of esteem. "Reputation" refers to the traits and achievements distinguishing one person from another. Derived from the Latin *reputare*, "to reckon up, think over," reputation refers to the assessment of personal qualities, character, and achievement. In the 1999 and 2001 national surveys, for example, respondents naming Lincoln one of the great presidents were asked to explain their reasons for doing so, while those who did not believe him to be a great president were still asked to tell what they thought about him. The two surveys, and the two sets of responses within each, yield almost identical results (table 2).

Table 2
Major Attributions to Lincoln in Maryland Survey, by Region

	Any Mention			
	South		Non-South	
	N	Percentage	N	Percentage
Savior of the Union	20	9.5	25	6.1
Great Emancipator	87	41.2	171	42.0
Equal Rights	16	7.6	30	7.4
Folk Themes	8	3.8	25	6.1
Moral Traits	41	19.4	83	20.4
Leadership	20	9.5	43	10.6
Negative Beliefs	17	8.1	17	4.2
Other Positive Beliefs	127	60.2	189	46.4
N	211		407	

Note. N corresponds to number of mentions. (Totals exceed 100 percent.)

In the most recent survey, 41.2 percent of Southern respondents attributed Lincoln's greatness to emancipation, while 7.6 percent viewed his policy on slavery a precursor to equal rights, as known today. Almost half the responses reflected the concerns of racial justice. Fewer than 10 percent attributed Lincoln's greatness to saving the Union; 3.8 percent, to his being a Man of the People, Frontier Youth, or Self-Made Man (identified in the table as Folk Themes).⁶⁸ The percentage of Southerners tracing Lincoln's greatness to other characteristics, including morality (bravery, integrity, perseverance, religious faith) and leadership ability are 19.4 and 9.5 percent respectively. Approximately 8 percent believe his reputation rests on a foundation of negative traits

and conduct. (Total percentages exceed 100 because many respondents give two or more reasons for Lincoln's greatness.) We are observing minor variations on the grand theme of emancipation. Within and outside the South, and, for that matter, within all categories of race, age, education, political party, and ideology, emancipation stands far above every other reason for Lincoln's prominence.⁶⁹

The present data do not allow us to say whether these figures testify to the triumph of the emancipationist vision of the Civil War, which David Blight traces back to the late nineteenth century, or whether the late twentieth century's emancipationist vision emerged independently from a new, racially inclusive mentality. That emancipationism dominates the popular view of Lincoln's motives, however, is certain.

VIII

This chapter opened with a brief discussion of the U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission's determination to make the bicentennial an occasion to contemplate the state of American race relations. Its program probably reflects more than it determines public beliefs about Lincoln. All historical figures resonate with contemporary experience when their personalities and achievements engage the presuppositions of the people encountering them. However, individuals are not passive end-links on some chain of causation; their beliefs reinforce or modify the texts and symbols they consume. The succession of historical perceptions is mediated by the interaction of authors, artists, and other producers, on the one hand, and, on the other, readers, viewers, and other consumers. Aggregation of individual beliefs, however measured, reacts upon the environment from which they emerged. "Culture creation" and "culture-reception" are thus inseparable,⁷⁰ but we can explore this connection only if we know what individuals, as consumers of Lincoln's image, actually believe.

As America's horizon of expectation changes, it inspires and welcomes the modification of old structures, like the Lincoln Memorial stair engraving that commemorates Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech; it also promotes the canonization of old structures, including the placement of the long-forgotten Soldiers' Home, where Lincoln drafted the Emancipation Proclamation, into the National Historical Registry; and it influences the policy of new organizations, including the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, which

claims that Lincoln gave a new meaning to the Civil War when he substituted freedom for Union as its goal.⁷¹

The commission's purpose has been unambiguous: "It is especially important to the Commission that the Bicentennial involve and engage diverse perspectives on Lincoln, specifically African-American and multi-cultural perspectives." The report goes on to explain that "race relations and human and civil rights" constitute America's greatest challenges, that Lincoln experts must be recruited "to explain Lincoln's legacy as it relates to race relations" and that key African American organizations (NAACP, Urban League, etc.) be singled out and invited to participate.⁷² Such an invitation would have been unimaginable during the 1909 Lincoln centennial, when African Americans in most places were forbidden to participate in official events. Not a new Bicentennial Commission but a new and more inclusive society, with a horizon of expectations that preceded the Commission's establishment, makes the difference.

IX

On April 5, 2003, the 138th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's visit to conquered Richmond, that city dedicated David Frech's statue of Lincoln and son Tad near the James River, just across from the Tredegar Iron Works, which supplied the Confederacy with a variety of armaments. As the dedication date approached, opposition to the statue swelled, aided by media hyperbole. The *New York Times* published an editorial titled "Lincoln Returns to the Old South"—the adjective "Old" allowing, if not inviting, the implication that not much had changed since 1865. The *New Jersey Sunday Herald* left less to the imagination: "Great Emancipator regarded as 'bad guy' in the South."⁷³ The project's supporters explained that Lincoln had visited Richmond in a spirit of reconciliation. For the Virginia Sons of Confederate Veterans (VSCV), however, the whole affair demeaned the gallant men killed defending the South. As a VSCV contingent marched from the grave of Confederate president Jefferson Davis to the statue dedication site, Bragdon Bowling, its commander, declared: "There hasn't been any clamoring for a Lincoln statue here." The Heritage Preservation Association, which opposes anti-Southern bigotry and attacks on Confederate symbols, and the Virginia League of the South, a neo-Confederate organization with separatist aspirations, also fought the

planned statue. Thousands of letters poured into the *Richmond Times-Dispatch*, almost all negative. Why commemorate “this country’s most notorious war criminal”? Nevertheless, the statue was erected.⁷⁴ Above the dedication ceremony site circled an airplane displaying the banner “Sic Semper Tyrannus” (“Thus Always to Tyrants”)—the official state slogan shouted by John Wilkes Booth after he murdered Lincoln. Did the dissenters speak for the South? What kind of man do Southerners consider Lincoln to have been? The answers to these questions must by now be clear.

That no generation gives to its successor the same Lincoln it receives from its predecessor is axiomatic because each generation sees him differently—differently enough to modify his legacy but not so differently as to make him unrecognizable. Not only has the regional difference in admiration for Lincoln narrowed during the last half of the twentieth century; differences in beliefs about the reason for Lincoln’s greatness have almost vanished. Southern distinctiveness in racial attitudes, on the other hand, endures, but at unprecedented



“Reconciliation.” 2003 statue by David Frech in Richmond, Virginia. Photograph by Barry Schwartz.

levels of inclusiveness and harmony—and with regional differences diminishing across time.⁷⁵ If this essay were premised on perpetual Southern distinctiveness, its findings of regional similarities in perception of Lincoln would be incomprehensible.

The realities of the Civil War have caused many Southern *organizations* to continue to disdain Lincoln. The Confederacy's fight for independence was so bitter, the defeat so devastating, that 145 years later the region's residual grief has coalesced in scores of special purpose organizations that concentrate the source of their resentment on the actions of one man. But for typical Americans, Southerners and non-Southerners alike, the wounds of the past are long healed.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, the absolute level of Southern affection and respect for Lincoln has been vastly underestimated. Lincoln became a positive element in Southern memory during the Great Patriotic Era—a period of ultranationalism extending from the 1890s to the mid-1920s. Many left-leaning Americans condemn this period as racist and chauvinistic, but these traits were correlates, not causes, of the regional reconciliation needed to meet the new century's challenges. Harmonious race relations presuppose regional unity, and the achievement of that unity, given our knowledge of Lincoln's war priorities and reconstruction plans, is his chief legacy.

Historical legacies are impermanent. Prior to the mid-twentieth century, Southern affection for Lincoln was based on the belief that he was a segregationist, a man who understood and loved Southerners, and a president who based his postwar policy on reconciliation, not revenge. During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the segregationist Lincoln no longer resonated with the beliefs of Southern society. Southerners and non-Southerners alike now admire him for similar reasons.

The great change in Lincoln's reputation—the major achievements Southerners attributed to him—occurred in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, the very era his prestige began to decline. The simultaneous weakening of positive stereotypes of heroic presidents and negative stereotypes of minorities reflect the complex relation between memory and social movements. Lincoln's prestige, as noted, soared in the South as early-twentieth-century nationalism gained momentum; it fell abruptly during the last half of the twentieth century as minority rights movements changed America's social landscape. As the increasing relevance of equality, rights, and inclusion have

mutated the resonance of freedom, duty, and patriotism (the values on which the Patriotic Era was based), America has become a postheroic society, recognizing but no longer revering and identifying with the great men of the past.

In the opening passages of this essay, I posed the question of how collective memory contributes to the general problem of postwar reconciliation. From this case study it is clear that memory is not what reconciles; it is a medium for articulating reconciliation's ideals. When a significant region of a nation concedes the merit of a formerly hated enemy leader, then we know that something has happened to that region's cultural values. That Southerners now admire the man their forebears despised, that they deem him great for affirming ideals they now share, means that the distinctiveness of the mind of the South is now diminishing and blending into the mind of America.

Notes

1. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission (ALBC) Advisory Committee Meeting, *ALBC Public Awareness Committee Programs* (U.S. Government Printing Office, February 13, 2006), 2.
2. Edward Everett, "Address," in *Address of Hon. Edward Everett at the Consecration of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, 19th November 1863, with the Dedicatory Speech of President Lincoln and the Other Exercises of the Occasion* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1864), 69–70.
3. "We shall nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope of earth." From Lincoln's address to Congress, December 1, 1862. Lincoln's remark was part of an effort to convince Congress to offer the Confederacy compensated emancipation and appropriate funds for voluntary colonization. See Roy P. Basler, ed., *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 9 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953–55), 5:537 (hereinafter cited as *Collected Works*).
4. Martha Nussbaum, *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, ed. Joshua Cohen (Boston: Beacon, 1996).
5. Maurizio Viroli, *For Love of Country: An Essay on Patriotism and Nationalism* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1995).
6. U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, *Interim Report, June 2004* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office), 7, 48.
7. U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. *U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Strategic Plan and Preliminary Fundraising and Communication/Marketing Recommendations* (Metropolitan Group, February 12, 2005), 5, 9.
8. Carl F. Wieck, *Lincoln's Quest for Equality: The Road to Gettysburg* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002); Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004); Richard Striner, *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Ronald C. White, *A. Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Random House, 2008).

9. For a useful commentary on Allen Guelzo's *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation*, see Michael P. Johnson's review essay in the *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 26 (2005): 75–81. Johnson's refusal to discount Lincoln's repeated declarations that he took the country to war to save the Union reminds us of the three views of Lincoln's motives: (1) He intended to free the slaves from the start of his presidency; (2) His initial war policy did not include slavery, but he changed his war goal and became an emancipationist, and (3) His war goal was always the preservation of union, to which emancipation was always secondary. As we move from the revisionist biographies of the 1930s to the middle of the twentieth century, to the post–civil rights era biographies of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the attribution of emancipation motives to Lincoln grows.

10. Edward A. Shils, *Center and Periphery: Essays in Macrosociology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 54.

11. Ernest Renan, *Oeuvres Complètes*, 10 vols. (Paris, France: Calman-Levy [1888] 1947), 1:903.

12. The sincerity of the new president's words is amply attested by James G. Randall's *Lincoln and the South* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1946), which traces Lincoln's Southern roots and attachments.

13. David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001); Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002).

14. *New York World*, April 19, 1865, 8; *Boston Journal* reprinted in *Littrell's Living Age*, April 22, 1865, 137–38; J. G. Hamilton, "Lincoln and the South," *Sewanee Review* 17 (1909): 128–38.

15. Alexander A. Lawrence, *A Present for Mr. Lincoln* (Macon, Ga.: Ardivan Press, 1961), 217; 218–19.

16. *New York World*, April 19, 1865, 8.

17. Paul W. Miller, ed., *Atlanta: Capital of the South* (New York: Oliver Durrell, 1949), 23.

18. Gerald M. Capers, *Occupied City* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 176–83; Walter J. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston!* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1989), 273.

19. Sarah Morgan, *The Civil War Diary of a Southern Woman* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991), 608.

20. Cited in Michael Davis, *The Image of Lincoln in the South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 99.

21. *Houston Tri-Weekly Telegraph*, April 25, 1865.

22. *Atlanta Constitution*, July 2, 1876, 2.

23. Rayburne S. Moore, *A Man of Letters in the Nineteenth-Century South: Selected Letters of Paul Hamilton Hayne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 93.

24. William Hand Brown, "Lamon's Lincoln," *Southern Magazine* 11 (1872): 374.

25. Albert Bledsoe, "Lamon's Life of Lincoln," *Southern Review* 12 (1873): 364.

26. Merrill Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 254–55.

27. On the history of American nationalism, see Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983); Wilbur Zelinsky, *Nation into State: The Shifting Symbolic Foundations of American Nationalism* (Chapel Hill:

University of North Carolina Press, 1988); Stuart McConnell, "Reading the Flag: A Reconsideration of the Patriotic Cults of the 1890s," in *Bonds of Affection: Americans Define Their Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 102–19; Robert J. Goldstein, *Saving Old Glory: The History of the American Flag Desecration Controversy* (Boulder, Colo., Westview Press, 1995); Anthony D. Smith, *Nationalism and Modernism: A Critical Survey of Recent Theories of Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Routledge, 1998); Cecilia O'Leary, *To Die For: The Paradox of American Patriotism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

28. Carl N. Degler, "The American Civil War and the German Wars of Unification: The Problem of Comparison," in *On the Road to Total War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861–1871*, ed. Stig Forster and Jorg Nagler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 53–71.

29. Emory Thomas, *The Confederacy as a Revolutionary Experience* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1992); *The Confederate Nation, 1861–1865* (New York: Harper and Row, 1979).

30. Richard E. Beringer, "Confederate Identity and the Will to Fight," in *On the Road to Total War and the German Wars of Unification, 1861–1871*, 75–100.

31. David W. Blight, "Historians and 'Memory,'" *Common-Place* 2 (April 2002): 3, <www.common-place.org>.

32. Ibid.

33. Henry Watterson, "Lincoln from the Southern Standpoint," *Cosmopolitan* 46 (1909): 463–75.

34. Henry Grady, cited in Michael Davis, *The Image of Lincoln in the South*, 159.

35. *The Stars and Stripes* (Paris, France), September 13, 1918, 4.

36. Reconciliation is dramatized in several ways: (1) by interregional love interests, including a Radical Republican's son with the daughter of a Southern planter and the planter's son with the Radical Republican's daughter; (2) by the battle in which the planter's younger son desists from bayoneting his wounded Northern friend as soon as he recognizes him, then is immediately hit by a rifle ball and dies on the spot at the instant his friend dies of his own wounds; (3) by another battle scene wherein the elder Southern boy is wounded while leading a charge against federal lines, and his Union friend recognizes him and saves his life; (4) by this same Northern soldier's writing to his friend's sister Elsie, working as a nurse at a Washington, D.C., hospital, asking her to give his Southern friend special care; the patient, in turn, shows the Southern girl the picture of her he had always carried around with him through the fighting; (5) by the film's climax, where Southern and Northern protagonists together take refuge in a cabin occupied by former Union soldiers who protect and fight with them against the radical federal brigade.

37. *Oakland Tribune*, May 9, 1915, 57; *LaCross Tribune*, November 12, 1915, 16; *Galveston Daily News*, June 27, 1915, 20.

38. *Sheboygan Press*, October 18, 1915, 2.

39. *The Racine Journal-News*, December 21, 1915, 16.

40. Even in Ohio, the only state to ban the film as of the end of 1915, the many residents who saw it in other states reacted positively. In one mail survey, 98 percent approved the film. Ibid., December 12, 1915, 9; see also *Lima Sunday News*, December 19, 1915, 1, 6, 11; *Lowell Sun*, September 4, 1915, 1.

41. The best account of Lincoln's Southern bonds is still James G. Randall's *Lincoln and the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1946).

42. Henry Bacon, *Report of the Architect on the Final Design for the Lincoln Memorial*. December 5, 62nd Cong., 2nd sess., Senate Doc., 1913, 965.
43. *New York Times*, February 16, 1930.
44. Quoted and discussed in the *Bee* (Danville, Virginia), February 12, 1930, 1.
45. Rixford J. Lincoln, "Abraham Lincoln," *Cullman Democrat*, February 13, 1936, 21.
46. Marcus Anderson, "Father Abraham: Analysis of a Myth," *Tyler's Quarterly Magazine* 20 (1937): 77–78.
47. Pete Daniels, *Lost Revolutions: The South in the 1950s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000).
48. Joseph R. Bryson, "Lincoln and the South," *Congressional Record*, House of Representatives, February 12, 1946, A683.
49. John E. Huss, *Senator for the South* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1961).
50. Richard Harwell, in *Lincoln for the Ages*, ed. Ralph G. Newman (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1960), 203.
51. Carl N. Degler, "The South in Southern History Textbooks," *Journal of Southern History* 30 (February, 1964): 48–57.
52. *New Republic*, September 15, 1958, 3–4.
53. Overall, Republican and Democratic conservatives appealed to Lincoln more often in opposition to than in avoidance of civil rights issues. In a debate titled "Integration of Schools," Democratic Senator Absalom Robertson of Virginia summarized the conservative position by inserting into the *Congressional Record* a *U.S. News and World Report* (July 6, 1956) article on "Conformity and Coercion" by David Lawrence. Lawrence declared that "equality is a theoretical goal," but so is discrimination. "One need not agree at all with the reasons given for such discriminations—indeed, one may be offended by their practice. But if we are to rely on theory, there is as much right to discrimination as there is to non-discrimination" (*Congressional Record*, Senate, February 12, 1959, 2231).
54. Fourth Debate with Stephen A. Douglas, September 18, 1858, Abraham Lincoln, *Collected Works*, 3:145–46.
55. *Congressional Record*, House of Representatives, 1956, 3209. See also Mississippi Democrat John Bell Williams, "Where Is the Reign of Terror?" *Congressional Record*, March 27, 1956, 5690.
56. *Kannapolis (North Carolina) Daily Independent*, June 6, 1954, 1.
57. *Panama City Herald*, September 3, 1957, 2.
58. James Byrnes, "Address . . . before Illinois State Bar Association," *Congressional Record*, Senate, February 14, 1957, 2020.
59. Ralph McGill, *The South and the Southerner* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1963); Barbara B. Clowse, *Ralph McGill: A Biography* (Macon, Ga.: Mercer University Press, 1998).
60. *Richmond News Leader*, Feb. 7, 1959, 8. In this same editorial, Thomas Jefferson's name is invoked: "Nothing is more certainly written in the book of fate than that these people are to be free; nor is it less certain that the two races, equally free, cannot live in the same government."
61. Benjamin Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Knopf, 1952); Donald W. Riddle, *Congressman Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1957); Reinhard H. Luthin, *The Real Abraham Lincoln* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960); James G. Randall, *Lincoln and the South; Lincoln the Liberal*

Statesman (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1947).

62. Criticism of Lincoln from the Left, including Richard Hofstadter's "Abraham Lincoln and the Self-Made Myth" in *The American Political Tradition* (New York: Knopf, [1948] 1974), 118–74, had the same effect.

63. Carl Sandburg, "Address to Congress," *Report of the Joint Committee on Arrangements on the Commemoration Ceremony in Observance of the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1959* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1959), 5.

64. Table 1 shows a dramatic diffusion of prestige: the absolute percentage of Americans naming Lincoln, Roosevelt, and Washington among the great presidents in 2001 was almost half that naming them in 1956.

65. For detail, see Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in the Late Twentieth Century* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 180–218.

66. Presidential rankings are also converging. In the most recent (2001) survey shown in table 1, Lincoln, Kennedy, and Washington are named by both Southerners and non-Southerners as the three greatest presidents.

67. Barry Schwartz, "The Limits of Gratitude: Lincoln in African American Memory," *Magazine of History* 23 (2009): 29; *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in the Late Twentieth Century*, 297.

68. Great Emancipator, Savior of the Union, Man of the People, Frontier Youth ("First American"), and Self-Made Man are the categories of Merrill Peterson's discussion in *Abraham Lincoln in American Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994).

69. Of the total sample of 849 in 2001, 211 respondents answered "Don't Know" to the question about reasons for Lincoln's greatness or named no president as great and were therefore not asked the open question.

70. Wendy Griswold, "A Methodological Framework for the Sociology of Culture," in *Sociological Methodology* 1.17, ed. Clifford Clogg (Washington, D.C.: American Sociological Association, 1987), 1–35; James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

71. U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, *Interim Report, June 2004*, 7, 48.

72. U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. *U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission Strategic Plan and Preliminary Fundraising and Communication/Marketing Recommendations*, 5, 9.

73. *New York Times*, February 17, 2003, A20; *New Jersey Sunday Herald*, March 30, 2002, D-7.

74. For detail, see *New Jersey Sunday Herald*, *ibid*.

75. Howard Schuman, Charlotte Steeh, Lawrence Bobo, and Maria Krysan, *Racial Attitudes in America: Trends and Interpretations* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 110, 113, 115, 126, 132; Larry J. Griffin and Peggy G. Hargis, "Still Distinctive after All These Years: Trends in Racial Attitudes in and out of the South," *Southern Cultures* 14 (Fall 2008): 117–41. Asked whether he or she would vote for a qualified African American presidential candidate, Griffin and Hargis report 82 percent of white Southerners responding positively; 90 percent of non-Southerners—a significant but small difference (122).