

THE LINCOLN FORUM BULLETIN

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GETTING RIGHT WITH LINCOLN AND DOUGLASS: AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BLIGHT

We recently asked David W. Blight, keynote speaker at this year's Lincoln Forum Symposium banquet, to answer some questions about the political and personal relationship between Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass.

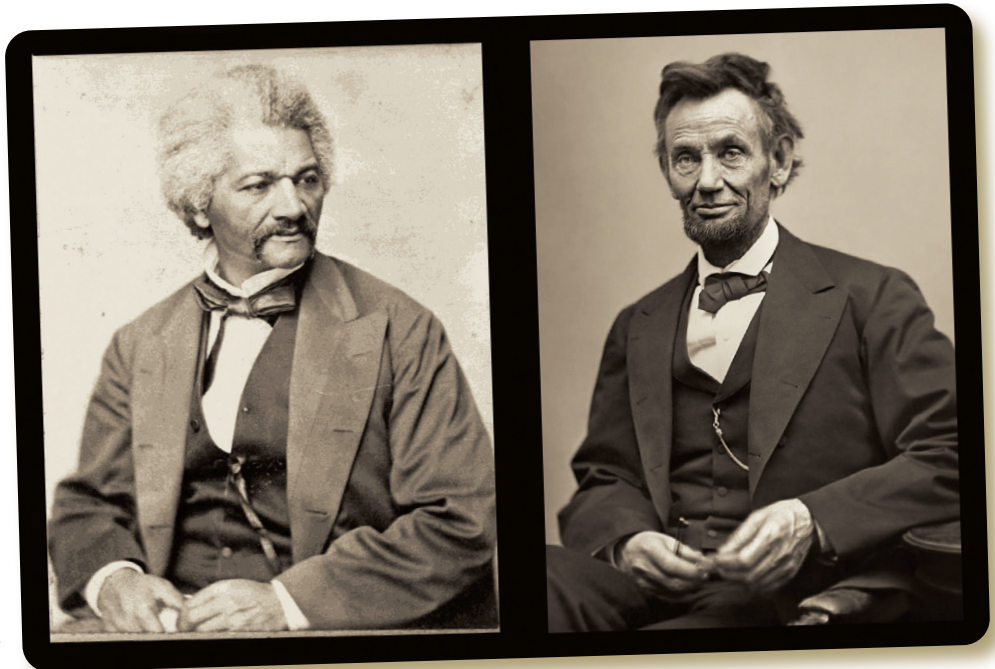
Dr. Blight is Class of 1954 Professor of American History and Director of the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University. He is the author of *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001), which won the Frederick Douglass Prize, the Bancroft Prize, and two awards from the Organization of American Historians. His newest book—which he will introduce at Forum XXIII—is *Frederick Douglass: Prophet of Freedom*.

Q: Douglass started out as a Lincoln critic—objecting to his first inaugural in 1861 and, especially, to the president's comments the next year to the delegation of Free African Americans, urging colonization. How important were Douglass's comments?

A: Well, Douglass was a fierce critic of Lincoln during the first year and a bit more of the war. The importance of his comments is difficult to judge. His readers in the newspaper were not a huge number, but he went on the stump to do the same and Douglass spoke to thousands. The importance of his attacks on Lincoln may simply be that for those looking for a radical abolitionist critique of Lincoln's policies, especially about fugitive slaves, there was no better voice than Frederick Douglass. As for the August 1862 White House meeting with the black leaders, Douglass went ballistic. Douglass was shocked and angry, to say the least. He called Lincoln an "itinerant colonization lecturer" and likened Lincoln's logic to "a horse thief pleading the existence of the horse is the apology for his theft or a highwayman contending that the money in the traveler's pocket is the sole first cause of his robbery."

Q: How do we explain Douglass's subsequent 180-degree turn on Lincoln? Was it emancipation? Black recruitment?

A: The turn on Lincoln really begins with the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. The final Proclamation was crucial as well. His depictions of Lincoln in the fall of 1862 are new and different. Douglass was really troubled, though, by the annual message of December (that colonization was still pushed), but still expressed confidence in the Proclamation coming on January 1. He wrote his editorial, called "A Day for Poetry and Song," in late December before leaving on a train to be in Boston for the January 1 watch night celebration. **continued on page 12**



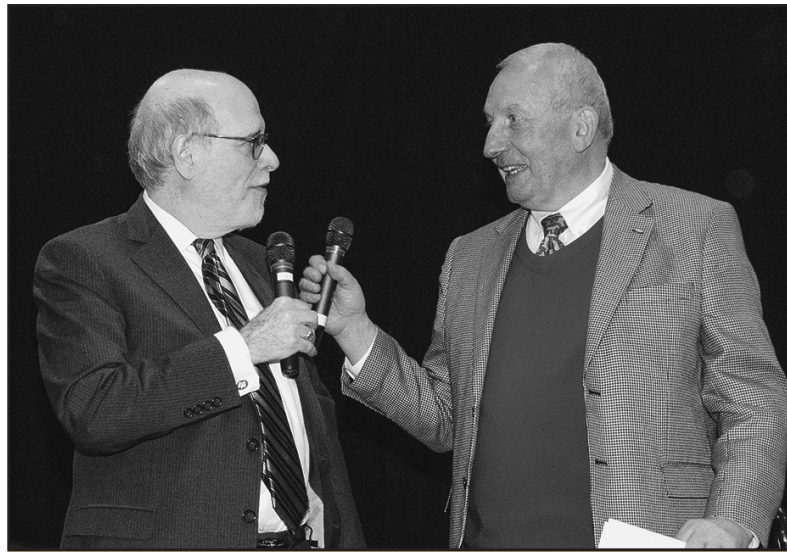
MAGIC INGREDIENTS: SCHOLARSHIP, FELLOWSHIP, AND CONTINUITY

As we gather for our 23rd annual symposium, we cannot help reminding ourselves—with a mixture of sadness over recent losses, and optimism about future plans—that the magic ingredients that make the Forum so popular and so rewarding have always animated our approach to the organization.

We call this menu of goals our “magic ingredients”—the attributes to which we remain as committed as when we co-founded the Forum back in 1995.

First is *scholarship*: the goal of presenting top-notch historians in new lectures and discussions based on their most recent works. This year we host speakers who have won Lincoln Prizes, the National Book Award, the Man Booker Prize, and other prestigious accolades.

The current issue of the *Bulletin* also reflects this commitment—and across multi-generational lines. On these pages, among other articles, we feature a major essay



MESSAGE from the CO-CHAIRS

on Lincoln and Churchill by Lewis Lehrman, co-founder of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, who recently celebrated his 80th birthday; and a research discovery by William Morgan-Palmer, a recent college graduate. We will always seek the best and brightest of all ages to bring their insights to our readers and attendees.

The second core ingredient is *fellowship*—with apologies for falling back on a phrase that probably does not match the current standards of political correctness. In Lincoln’s era, and we hope in ours (if we can find a gender-neutral way of expressing it) it means sustaining the “family” spirit to which the Forum has always been committed. It’s an attribute sorely lacking in today’s political climate. One might even say that rancor in the public weal has descended to its most fraught level since the secession crisis. One can only hope the nation need not go through a convulsion as horrific as the Civil War to restore a sense of national purpose and unity. At the Forum, we continue to welcome people of diverse backgrounds and views—brought together through a shared interest in history.

The third goal—and the hardest to achieve—is *continuity*. By this we mean bringing our “frequent flyers” back to Gettysburg year after year, armed not only with a spirit of reunion and renewal but with genuine enthusiasm for our latest programming.

As we approach November 2018, our reliance on continuity is under severe test, buffeted by the recent losses of some of the key Forum veterans. Earlier this year, we lost Paul Pascal, leader of the DC wing of the Forum, whose enthusiasm inspired us for years. Recently, Bob Maher passed on (see separate obituary), one of the leaders who generously transferred his own knowledge of organization-building to your co-chairmen without ever insisting on a stake in the new Lincoln Forum. As we went to press, John Elliff and popular Gettysburg figure Tina Grim passed from the scene, too, yet another major blow.

Loss is both inevitable and unavoidable. Our goal must be to find new generations of history enthusiasts to enlist, participate in symposia, and join Forum leadership—people who will succeed Paul Pascal, Bob Maher, and such much-missed builders as the late Budge Weidman, Lorraine Davis, Jo Dzombak, and Jim Getty. We know which building blocks will attract our future participants: *scholarship* and *fellowship*. With those guarantees at the top of our priorities, *continuity* will surely follow.

Renew your memberships, attend the symposium, share your ideas, and volunteer your time. If you wish to do more—and we hope you do—see us at Gettysburg! 📌

Frank J. Williams, Co-Chairman

Harold Holzer, Co-Chairman

The Lincoln Forum Bulletin welcomes contributions from members and historians—articles and photos alike. Send to editor Harold Holzer at hh433@hunter.cuny.edu. The editor particularly thanks the contributors to the current issue.

ROBERT MAHER, TINA GRIM ARE DEAD; BOTH ACTIVE IN FORMATION OF LINCOLN FORUM

Once again, the Forum Bulletin is obliged to report two sad losses—each a unique and irreplaceable figure in the world of Civil War history and commemoration.

Robert Maher, founder and longtime impresario of the Civil War Education Association (CWEA) died in Virginia on July 28 after a long series of illnesses. He was 74. Maher created the CWEA in 1994 “to enhance the memory and further the understanding of the American Civil War through educational programs for adults and youth.”

Tina Grim, 57, succumbed after years of health issues on July 9. She served for years as administrator of the Civil War Institute at Gettysburg College, and later as development officer at the Gettysburg Foundation and President of the Lincoln Fellowship of Pennsylvania. Tina long served on the Lincoln Forum Board of advisors, attended many Forum symposia, and for several years

brought Gettysburg Foundation board members to annual Forum banquets. She organized and hosted many November 19 ceremonies at the Soldiers’ Cemetery and worked to restore the Lincoln Depot in downtown Gettysburg.

“This is a terrible loss for both students of history and visitors to Gettysburg,” commented the Forum in an official statement. “For decades, Tina Grim and Civil War studies at Gettysburg were almost synonymous. Tina’s kindness, efficiency, and warmth

made her a beloved figure to students of the Civil War who lived in and visited the town—where the mere announcement of her name at our events was enough to elicit cheers. She will be greatly missed by all who loved and admired her as a model of hospitality and a champion of lifelong learning.”

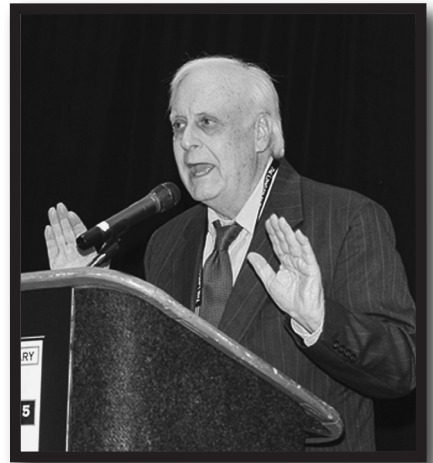
For more than three decades, Bob Maher hosted Civil War symposia across the country, highlighted by 26 annual January events

in Sarasota, Florida. Maher also created a Robert E. Lee symposium, hosted tours of Civil War battlefields, welcomed military history enthusiasts to West Point, convened “Great Cities of American History” tours, and led Revolutionary War, World War I, and World War II conferences (under his recently branded “American History Forum”).

Among the Forum regulars who became fixtures at CWEA programs in Sarasota were co-chairs Frank J. Williams and Harold Holzer, William C. “Jack” Davis, Craig Symonds, John Marszalek, and “Bud” Robertson.

It was at a 1995 Maher conference in West Palm Beach, Florida, that plans for The Lincoln Forum were first hatched by Williams, Holzer, and Maher, along with the late Maynard Schrock, Chuck Platt, and David Long. Maher’s CWEA went on to help plan and host the Forum’s first-ever symposium at Gettysburg in 1996.

In a joint statement, co-chairs Williams and Holzer said: “Bob set the gold standard for history conferences. His modesty, affability, ability to attract great speakers, and contagious enthusiasm made his attendees feel welcome when they arrived and better-informed when they left. Always he worked to combine education and enjoyment—establishing the “family” sensibility that the Forum has always endeavored to replicate. In recent years, battling health crises and economic challenges that would have felled most men, Bob somehow maintained his unbreakable optimism, convening history enthusiasts for great conferences and good fellowship. Bob never grew wealthy in his endeavors, but he leaves history enthusiasts deeply in *his* debt for so often and so rewardingly bringing them together. Bob will be greatly missed.”



Robert Maher (Photo: Henry F. Ballone)



Tina Grim (Photo: Henry F. Ballone)

HISTORY MIAMI TO HOST ONE-DAY CONFERENCE ON LINCOLN, THE LAW, AND IMMIGRATION

For the 10th consecutive year, HistoryMiami, South Florida’s premier history museum, will host a Lincoln-and Civil War-themed conference this winter.

The 2019 event, scheduled for the afternoon of January 27, will focus on “Presidential Power and Immigration Policy: America’s Uncivil War—from Lincoln to Today.” Lincoln Forum co-chairs Harold Holzer and Frank J. Williams will again join a panel of distinguished Miami-based scholars to explore this historic, still-unresolved, and ever-controversial topic.

Support for the program is provided by Florida-based Lincoln Forum benefactor Jean Soman and her husband William; and by David Lawrence, former publisher of the *Miami Herald*. Both were members of the Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation board.

For more information and tickets: www.historymiami.org.



UNPARDONED BY LINCOLN: STEPHEN A. DOUGLAS' HOUSE SERVANT

By William M. Palmer

James Hepburn was a respected black servant in Washington D.C. For 15 years, he worked in the largest hotels and in prominent households in the city, including more than a year as a house servant for Stephen A. Douglas at the end of the senator's life. Despite his status as "a free colored man," however, Hepburn faced significant hardships. At some point about 1860, his wife, who was a slave, was sold into bondage in the Deep South.¹

At the beginning of the Civil War, Hepburn worked as a member of the wait staff at Willard's Hotel. Located on Pennsylvania Avenue near the White House, Nathaniel Hawthorne once observed that the Willard Hotel "may be more justly called the centre of Washington and the Union than either the Capitol, the White House, or the State Department."² Indeed, the Willard has been a fixture of D.C. culture for most of the last 160 years and has frequently hosted high-profile guests and events.

In 1862, the Willard's management accused Hepburn of stealing two silver-plated waiters (small trays), valued at \$24, an assortment of silverware valued at \$30, and a tablecloth worth \$3. Items matching this description were later found in Hepburn's possession; however, they did not have any unique markers of identification that verified that they had once belonged to Willard's.

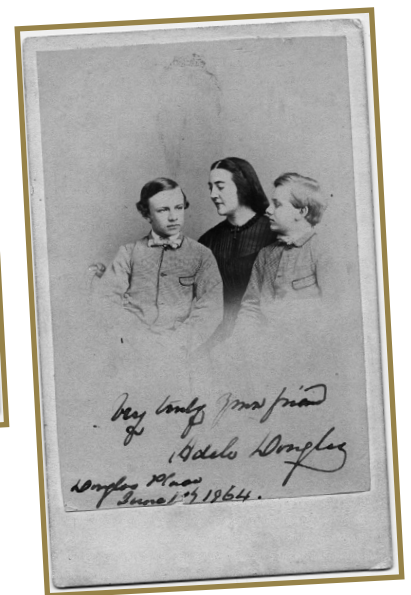
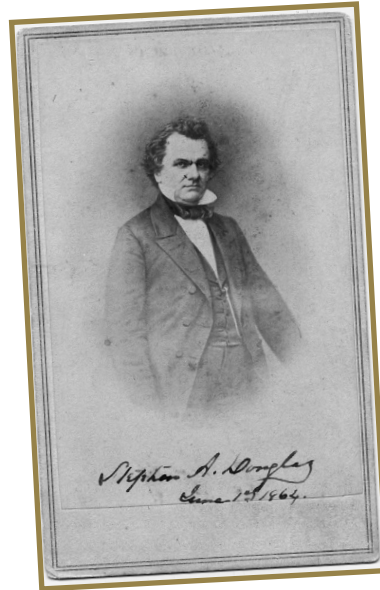
The hotel's owners pressed charges, and Hepburn faced grand larceny charges in the Criminal Court of the District of Columbia, a federal court that met in D.C.'s Old City Hall near Judiciary Square. Hepburn retained John E. Norris (1816-1887), a prominent Jacksonian Democrat and D.C. lawyer, as his defense attorney. The trial took place on June 23, 1862. Norris centered his defense on his client's lack of motive and reputable character, claiming that Hepburn had purchased the silver several years before when he had been in Saratoga, New York. Unfortunately, these points were not enough to overcome the incriminating evidence that had been discovered in the defendant's possession. The jury found Hepburn guilty the same day as the trial, and on June 24, he was sentenced "to suffer imprisonment and labor" for two years at the District of Columbia penitentiary. The sentence was set to begin on July 6.³

Following Hepburn's conviction, Norris and a number of prominent Washington citizens petitioned President Lincoln for a pardon. Included with the petitions was a character reference written by one of Hepburn's former employers, Adele Douglas, the late Senator Douglas's wife. "James Hepburn lived with me for nearly a year and accompanied me as dining room servant to the West—he had entire control over my silver indeed every thing in my house," she wrote. "I never for a moment doubted his honesty." (Douglas had written this statement prior to the trial, on June 16. It had been introduced at the trial and then was later used to try to influence Lincoln.) The other petitions similarly highlighted Hepburn's reputation as an upstanding employee, asserting a lack of motive for these uncharacteristic actions. These papers were then sent to the Attorney General's Office to be reviewed by the president's pardon clerk.

Unfortunately for Hepburn, the pardon clerk was unmoved. "I do not think that Mr. Norris has made out a satisfactory case," he wrote. "I have no doubt that all the arguments

brought forward in this letter were used at the trial, and considered by the convicting jury." Attorney General Edward Bates concurred. On December 10, 1862, he scrawled on the case file, "not granted." There the proceedings stopped. It is likely that Lincoln never saw this case involving the servant of his former political rival. Hepburn was left to serve out his time in the D.C. penitentiary.⁴

(William M. Palmer, a student of Professor Jonathan White, graduated from Christopher Newport University with degrees in American Studies and Political Science. He now attends Regent University School of Law.) 📖



Though "The Little Giant" was Lincoln's bitter political rival, he and wife Mary kept these signed carte-de-visite photographs of Stephen and Adele Douglas in their family album. They were each "autographed" by Mrs. Douglas after the senator's death in 1861. (From the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection, courtesy of the Allen Co. Public Library and Indiana State Museum)

¹ Record Group 204 (Records of the Office of the Pardon Attorney), Entry 1a (Pardon Case Files, 1853-1946), National Archives at College Park, Maryland. (Thanks to the Papers of Abraham Lincoln for providing scans of these documents.)

² Nathaniel Hawthorne, "Chiefly about War Matters," *Atlantic Monthly* 10 (July 1862): 59.

³ Record Group 21 (Records of the District Courts of the District of Columbia), Entry 20 (Criminal Case Files, 1838-1963), case #83 (*United States v. James Hepburn*), and Entry 42 (Criminal Docket Books, 1838-1863), June Term 1862. (Thanks to Robert Ellis for providing scans of these records.)

⁴ Pardon Case File A-428.

LINCOLN AND CHURCHILL: MAGNANIMOUS WAR LEADERS

By Lewis E. Lehrman

In the late 1930s, Winston Churchill made himself a thorn in the side of the leaders of Great Britain's Conservative Party government, and a scold of the appeasement policies of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain. In May 1940, Churchill succeeded to the prime ministership after Chamberlain lost the confidence of both the Labour Party and a significant portion of the ruling Conservative Party.



The immediate cause for change was a disastrous military expedition to Norway—for which Churchill himself was partially responsible but for which Chamberlain was found culpable. Churchill's subsequent kindness and consideration to his former antagonist proved remarkable. The deposed prime minister, who did not yet know he was suffering from terminal cancer, was appointed First Lord President. On August 31, the Prime Minister wrote his predecessor a long letter asking for his "counsel and assistance."¹ When Chamberlain died, Churchill delivered an effusive eulogy.

Shortly after he became PM, Churchill had told the House of Commons: "I say, let pre-war feuds die; let personal quarrels be forgotten, and let us keep our hatreds for the common enemy. Let Party interests be ignored, let all our energies be harnessed, let the whole ability and forces of the nation be hurled into the struggle, and let the strong horses be pulling on the collar."²

Churchill chose David Margesson, who had been Chamberlain's chief House whip, to continue in that role until he was moved to the War Department in December 1940. "It has been my deliberate policy to try to rally all the forces for the life and death struggle in which we are plunged, and to let bygones be bygones," said the Prime Minister. "I am quite sure that Margesson will treat me with the loyalty he has given to my predecessors."³

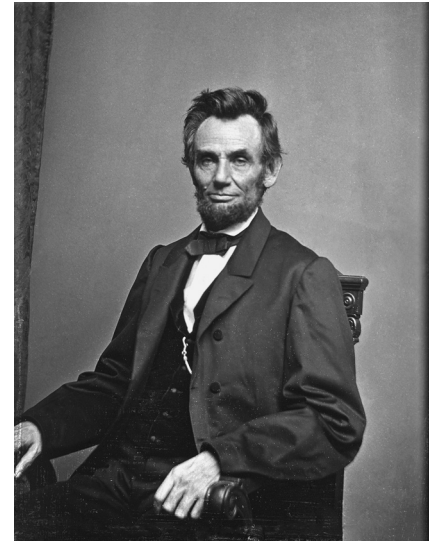
"If we open a quarrel between the past and the present, we shall find that we have lost the future," the Prime Minister told the House of Commons on June 18, 1940—four days after France asked for an armistice with Nazi Germany. Churchill had no time for recriminations. Focused as he was on defeating Germany, he had little appetite for lesser conflicts. One top general wrote in his diary in 1942 that Churchill "has only one interest in life at this moment, and that is to win the war. Every waking moment is devoted to that."⁴

British politician R. A. "Rab" Butler had been a supporter of the appeasement policy of Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain and a critic of appeasement opponent Winston Churchill. Butler had opposed Churchill's appointment as Prime Minister in 1940 arguing that "Winston and his rabble [were] a serious disaster" for

the country.⁵ Surprised when Churchill retained him as an Under Secretary of the Foreign Office, Butler reminded the new Prime Minister that he had disagreed with him on many previous occasions. Churchill acknowledged their disagreements but noted "you invited me to your private residence."⁶ For Churchill, civility was important and "showed goodwill." Private secretary John Colville observed that although the Prime Minister had been "disliked by so many in his youth and presumably both snubbed and thwarted, he never spoke ill of his critics in his later days. He remembered kindness he had received and opportunities he had been given."⁷

Winston Churchill and Abraham Lincoln understood that unity, commitment, and adherence to their principles were prerequisites to victory – to which baser motives must be subjugated.

Speaking of Russia in August 1941, just two months after Germany had invaded its former ally, the anti-communist Churchill said: "When you are fighting for the biggest things in the world, when your comrade is fighting like a bear, you must let bygones be bygones. We must think of the needs of the present, and the chances of the future."⁸



There was a soft inner core to Churchill. He usually did not hold long grudges. "One of the most signal virtues is his magnanimity," recalled British Cabinet member Oliver Lyttelton. Churchill "seldom carries forward from the ledger of today into tomorrow's account. It has befallen me more than once to have a sharp and almost bitter argument with him of an evening, when hard blows were exchanged, and to find him the next morning benign and smiling and affectionate. He regards these bouts with friends as dialectics and not personal contests. He often scorns the Queensberry rules himself, and if you too discard them when you have been hit a little low, he cares not a hang the next morning. It is difficult to describe how endearing this can be."⁹

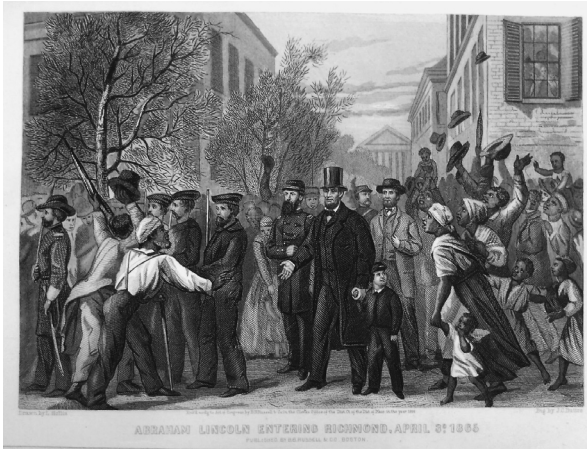
"Like a pugilist, he enjoyed the fight," recalled Colville, "but however hard the punches, when all was over he thought no ill of his opponent and wanted to shake hands. In a career replete with political, and sometimes personal, antagonisms he had suffered many bruises and the scars were sometimes deep; but he seemed incapable of bearing a grudge. He often spoke feelingly of those who had helped him: he never spoke ill of the many who, in the years of his unpopularity and isolation, had done all they could to thwart and defeat him."¹⁰

Churchill's magnanimity was "his most endearing" quality, wrote historian John Lukacs. "Generosity is a virtue: yet it often means not more than the willingness to give of one's possessions. Magnanimity is both rare and *continued on page 6*

LINCOLN AND CHURCHILL:

continued from page 5 greater: the capacity of giving of oneself. Magnanimity, too, is often the true source of loyalty.”¹¹ Although the Prime Minister could be loyal, he did not take criticism of friends or family without rejoinder. Biographer Martin Gilbert wrote: “When a friend was criticized in Parliament, Churchill was angered and quipped: “Love, me, love my dog, and if you don’t love my dog, you damn well can’t love me.”¹²

In May 1942, Churchill announced the sinking of the German battleship *Bismarck* to the House of Commons. “Winston sat [facing] the two most persistent critics of his conduct of the war—Emanuel Shinwell and Aneurin Bevan,” wrote John Peck. “Shinwell looked across and caught Winston’s eye, grinned broadly and gave him a friendly and encouraging nod. Bevan sat with



Two Bulldogs: Lincoln enters ravaged Richmond on April 4, 1865; Churchill surveys blitz-damaged London some four score years later.



shoulders hunched and hands in pockets; a black scowl on his face unable to conceal his chagrin that Churchill should have a victory to record.”¹³ Unsurprisingly, the Prime Minister respected Bevan’s rhetorical abilities but did not like the Welsh Labourite, who had begun attacking Churchill as “chameleon-like” in the 1920s.

Churchill’s usual willingness to forget the past was a characteristic of his personality. “I hate nobody except Hitler and that is professional,” he said privately.¹⁴ When Germany invaded Russia in June 1941, Adolf Hitler’s enemies naturally became Churchill’s friends—even though he had warred with the Russian Bolsheviks, “If Hitler invaded Hell, I would make at least a

favourable reference to the Devil in The House of Commons,” said the Prime Minister.¹⁵ Veteran *New York Times* correspondent C. L. Sulzberger wrote after visiting Churchill in 1956: “The greatest impression made on me was of his infinite courtesy and gentleness. He was generous in his references to every figure we discussed – save Hitler.”¹⁶

In the midst of the Nazi Blitz in September 1940, Churchill told the British people via the BBC: “This wicked man, the repository and embodiment of many forms of soul-destroying hatreds, this monstrous product of former wrongs and shame, has now resolved to try to break our famous Island race by a process of indiscriminate slaughter and destruction....He has lighted a fire which will burn with a steady and consuming flame until the last vestiges of Nazi tyranny have been *burnt* out in Europe, and until the Old World – and the New – can join hands to rebuild the temples of man’s freedom and man’s honour, upon foundations which will not soon or easily be overthrown.”¹⁷

At heart, Churchill was a romantic. “Do you know why I hate Nazis?” the Prime Minister once asked dinner guests at his weekend home. “I hate them because they frown when they fight. They are grim and dull-faced. They don’t go into battle with a song in their hearts. Now take our magnificent RAF lads. They grin when they fight.”¹⁸

Some antagonists *did* aggravate Churchill. In 1931, he called Indian nationalist Mohandas Gandhi “a seditious Middle Temple lawyer, now posing as a fakir of a type well-known in the East.” In World War II, the British Prime Minister called Ireland’s President, Eamon de Valera, a “murderer and perjurer” and a “wicked man” for his refusal to aid the war against Germany.¹⁹

Churchill’s usual magnanimity contrasted with his long reputation as a slashing debater. As young men, Abraham Lincoln and Winston Churchill wielded words like swords. They could be cutting and mean with opponents. Lincoln’s tongue could be so biting that his sarcastic rebuke of a political opponent in 1830s was known as the “skinning of Thomas.” Lincoln’s pen could be so venomous that a political opponent in 1842 challenged him to a duel. That incident helped smooth the abrasion from Lincoln’s personality.

Both leaders’ wit could be sharp and devastating. Churchill said of three-time Conservative Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin, under whom he served as Chancellor of the Exchequer in the 1920s: “Occasionally he stumbled over the truth, but hastily picked himself up and hurried on as if nothing had happened.” Said Baldwin of Churchill’s performance as Prime Minister: “The furnace of war had smelted out all of the base metals from him.”²⁰

Lincoln, like Churchill did not hold long grudges. The President said he was “in favor of short statutes of limitations in politics.”²¹ During the Civil War, he utilized the services of a Democratic general who had once challenged him to a duel (James Shields) and a fellow lawyer who had once humiliated him in an important case (Edwin M. Stanton).

Stanton would play a vital role as Lincoln’s Secretary of War. “I have made up my mind to sit down on all my pride,” said Lincoln, “and appoint him to the place.” Less than a year earlier, Lincoln had said of a possible cabinet appointment for Stanton: “I could not possibly pursue that course in view of his personal treatment of me.”²² Navy Secretary Gideon Welles described the

MAGNANIMOUS WAR LEADERS

Stanton appointment as “a surprise not only to the country but to every member of the Administration except the Secretary of State.

Over time, Stanton grew closer to Lincoln, while Secretary of the Treasury Salmon Chase grew apart as he plotted to wrest the 1864 Republican presidential nomination from Lincoln. October 29, 1863, Presidential aide John Hay wrote: “I told the Tycoon that Chase would try to make capital out of the Rosecrans business. He laughed & said, ‘I suppose he will, like the bluebottle fly, lay his eggs in every rotten spot he can find.’ He seems much amused at Chase’s mad hunt after the Presidency. He says it may win. He hopes the country will never do worse.”²³ When Chase attempted to resign in February, Lincoln refused to accept it. “If any man thinks my present position desirable to occupy, he is welcome to try it, as far as I am concerned,” commented the President.²⁴

As a young politician, Lincoln took serious umbrage at criticism he thought unfounded. In 1846, Congressman-elect Lincoln objected to a newspaper report about his religious faith. “I believe it is an established maxim in morals that he who makes an assertion without knowing whether it is true or false, is guilty of falsehood; and the accidental truth of the assertion, does not justify or excuse him,” wrote Lincoln. “This maxim ought to be particularly held in view, when we contemplate an attack upon the reputation of our neighbor.”²⁵

“Let bygones be bygones; let past differences as nothing be,” declared Lincoln in Chicago, December 10, 1856. Two years later, in one of the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates, Lincoln said: “It really hurts me very much to suppose that I have wronged anybody on earth.”²⁶ He himself was often wronged but tried not to dwell on it. As President, Lincoln said: “If I were to try to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how—the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what’s said against me won’t amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.”²⁷

“I have endured a great deal of ridicule without much malice; and have received a great deal of kindness, not quite free from ridicule. I am used to it,” wrote Lincoln to a Shakespearian actor in 1863 after the publication of their correspondence had resulted in public derision of the President’s interpretation of Shakespeare.²⁸ “You have more of that feeling of personal resentment than I,” Lincoln told a colleague as they awaited results of the 1864 election. “Perhaps I have too little of it; but I never thought it paid. A man has no time to spend half his life in quarrels. If any man ceases to attack me I never remember the past against him.”²⁹

Unlike James Buchanan, whose grudge match with Senator Stephen A. Douglas doomed his presidency to failure, Lincoln pursued no grudge matches as commander-in-chief. One of his first acts after Fort Sumter was to meet with longtime antagonist Douglas. Although personally not vindictive, Lincoln often found himself surrounded by people who were: law partner William Herndon, wife Mary, Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, Secretary of War Stanton. He let Mrs. Lincoln hold the grudges for the family. She could not stand Secretary of State Seward and wanted him fired, but she adored Seward’s foreign policy rival, Charles Sumner.

Rather than isolating the prickly Sumner, Lincoln drew him into the presidential court where Mary Todd Lincoln cultivated his friendship. Meanwhile the president cultivated Seward, who had demonstrated his self-importance when on April 1, 1861, he wrote Lincoln a memo that suggested the President transfer much of his powers to the Secretary of State. Rather than be offended, Lincoln befriended Seward. Lincoln became a regular visitor in his home. The President did not need to be surrounded by people who liked each other—not in his family, not in his cabinet, not in politics.

The mature Lincoln and the mature Churchill were careful to forgive and forget political animosities. Lincoln’s generosity extended to Union officeholders who opposed his re-nomination and reelection in 1864. President Lincoln rejected calls for firing his opponents, writing “I can not run this thing upon the theory that every officeholder must think I am the greatest man in the nation, and I will not.”³⁰ His generosity also extended to the South. “Lincoln’s magnanimity applied not just to personal interaction but also to high policy—to the giant battle for national self-definition of which he was a leader,” wrote Lincoln biographer William Lee Miller.³¹

French writer Adolphe de Chambrun, who observed President Lincoln in the final weeks of his life, concluded that, “when success had at last crowned so many bloody efforts, it was impossible to discover in Mr. Lincoln a single sentiment, I shall not say of revenge, but even of bitterness, in regard to the vanquished. Recall, as soon as possible, the Southern States into the Union, such was his chief preoccupation. When he encountered contrary opinion on that subject, when several of those who surrounded him insisted upon the necessity of exacting strong guarantees, at once on hearing them he would exhibit impatience. Although it was rare that such thoughts influenced his own, he nevertheless would evince, on hearing them expressed, a sort of fatigue and weariness, which he controlled, but was unable to dissimulate entirely.”

But the one point on which his mind seemed most irrevocably made up was his action in regard to the men who had taken part in the rebellion. Clemency never suggested itself more naturally to a victorious chieftain. The policy of pardon and forgiveness appeared to his mind and soul an absolute necessity.³²

The President reacted to a telegram from General Ulysses S. Grant suggesting that Union troops might capture Confederate President Jefferson Davis. Lincoln succinctly “pointed out to us the extreme difficulty in which this unfortunate capture would place the government.” Chambrun wrote that when a bystander suggested that Davis must hang, the President quoted “from his inaugural address: ‘Let us judge not, that we be not judged.’ Pressed anew by the remark that the sight of Libby Prison forbade mercy, he repeated twice the same biblical sentence he had just quoted.”³³

Lincoln and Churchill believed in conducting a hard war, but they rejected notions of a hard peace. Neither the President nor the Prime Minister were vindictive men. “With malice toward none, with charity *continued on page 8*

LINCOLN AND CHURCHILL: MAGNANIMOUS WAR LEADERS

continued from page 7 for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in," Lincoln had proclaimed in his Second Inaugural.³⁴ Lincoln had no sympathy for the position expressed by one northern clergyman who declared the government "shall be compelled to exterminate her 300,000 slaveholders."³⁵ When Joseph Stalin and Franklin D. Roosevelt joked at the 1943 Teheran summit about executing 50,000 German officers, Churchill had stormed out in protest, saying he could not agree to "the cold blooded murder of soldiers who had fought for their country."³⁶

On April 4 1865, as the Civil War was about to end, Abraham Lincoln walked through the devastated Confederate capital; a fire had consumed Richmond. A little over 80 years later in July 1945, Winston Churchill walked through the bombed out German capital of Berlin. Both Lincoln and Churchill looked forward to a world in which such conflicts and such devastation would merely be history. 🏰

(Lewis E. Lehrman, co-founder of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, is author of *Lincoln & Churchill: Statesmen at War* [Stackpole, 2018], from which this article has been adapted.)

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS MEET AT THE CIVIL WAR WHITE HOUSE

By John T. Elliff

This year marks the bicentennial of the birth of Frederick Douglass. Abraham Lincoln met Douglass at the White House on three occasions: in 1863, 1864, and 1865. Douglass recalled these meetings in his speeches and writings, including his last autobiography. The memory of their encounters also influenced two addresses Douglass delivered on President Lincoln—one a eulogy shortly after his assassination and the other at the 1876 dedication of the statue of Lincoln known as the Freedmen’s Monument.

Douglass was born a slave in Maryland and escaped to New York at the age of 20. After publishing his first autobiography at age 27, he became one of the best known abolitionist spokesmen in the North. He addressed abolitionists in Illinois in 1854; within four years, Senator Stephen A. Douglas denounced his campaign opponent Abraham Lincoln as aligned with notorious abolitionists such as Frederick Douglass. Lincoln resisted the “abolitionist” label but attacked the injustice of enslavement and hoped for its eventual end.

Lincoln’s election as president and the onset of civil war saw Douglass become one of his most vocal abolitionist critics. In the beginning Northern white public opinion backed Lincoln’s policy of waging war to reunite the country, while Douglass argued that the goal should be the end of slavery, not just reunion. The Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863, freeing slaves in enemy territory and authorizing the use of black troops, turned Douglass into the most prominent recruiter of African American volunteers. It was the Union government’s policies for black soldiers that took him to the White House for the first time.

Until 1863, Northern racial prejudice had barred the use of black troops in combat. Now, even as African American units formed and took the field, discrimination remained blatant: their compensation was less than for white soldiers, they did not receive enlistment bonuses to buy uniforms, and no black officers were commissioned. Most chilling of all, the Confederacy refused to treat captured African American troops as prisoners of war, sending them to slavery or execution. As black troops proved their bravery and skill in battle, these disparities caused Douglass to curtail his recruitment efforts. A Union officer in charge of recruiting black soldiers urged Douglass to take his concerns to President Lincoln in August 1863.

On his first visit, Douglass did not know what to expect at the White House. He later recalled wondering whether he would be allowed to enter or asked to leave without seeing the president. Accompanied by Senator Samuel Pomeroy, however, he was ushered past a large waiting crowd into the president’s office. As Douglass recounted the experience: “I was never more quickly or more completely put at ease in the presence of a great man than in that of Abraham Lincoln.” The president “appeared much over-worked and tired. Long lines of care were already deeply written on Mr. Lincoln’s brow, and his strong face, full of earnestness, lighted up as soon as my name was mentioned.” Lincoln was “surrounded by a multitude of

books and papers, his feet were extended in front of his chair. On my approach he slowly drew his feet in from the different parts of the room into which they had strayed, and began to rise.” As the president “extended his hand, and bade me welcome,” Douglass felt “in the presence of an honest man—one whom I could love, honor, and trust without reserve or doubt.” When Douglass began to introduce himself, Lincoln interrupted: “I know who you are, Mr. Douglass. Mr. Seward has told me all about you. Sit down. I am glad to see you.”

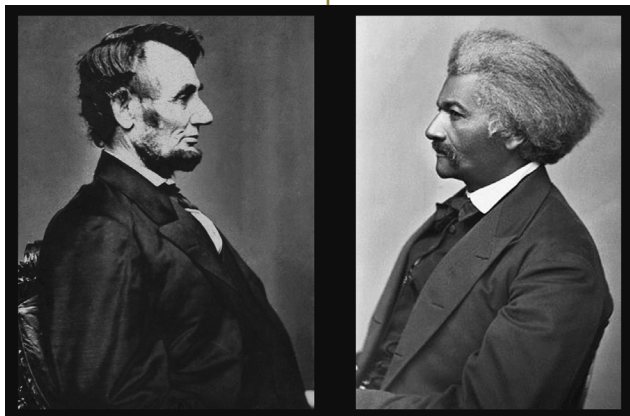
Stating his case, Douglass spoke as both an organizer of recruitment efforts and as the father of three Union soldiers. He explained that he had been “very successful in getting men to enlist, but that now it was not easy to induce the colored men to enter the service, because there was a feeling among them that the government did not deal fairly with them in several respects.” He cited the difference in pay, the need for retaliation against Confederate atrocities, and the lack of promotions for “great and uncommon service” in battle. Douglass

remembered, “Mr. Lincoln listened with earnest attention and with very apparent sympathy. He was serious and even troubled by what I had said, and by what he had evidently thought himself before upon the same points.” The president’s responses were not exactly what Douglass wanted to hear. Lincoln explained that Congress had authorized lower pay for black soldiers as “a necessary concession to smooth the way to their employment at all as soldiers; but that ultimately they would receive the same.” With respect to black officers, Lincoln promised that “he would sign any commission to colored soldiers which his Secretary of War should commend to him.”

On the issue of Confederate atrocities, Lincoln had already taken action. At his request, General Henry W. Halleck had issued an order that “for every soldier of the United States killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved by the enemy or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor.” Lincoln did not mention this order to Douglass. Instead, he expressed misgivings about such a policy. He was worried that “once begun, there was no telling where it would end; that if he could get hold of the Confederate soldiers who had been guilty [of atrocities] he could easily retaliate, but the thought of hanging men for a crime perpetrated by others was revolting to his feelings.” In this Douglass “saw the tender heart of the man rather than the stern warrior and commander-in-chief of the American army and navy, and while I could not agree with him, I could but respect his humane spirit.”

Douglass wrote shortly after the meeting: “Though I was not entirely satisfied with his views, I was so well satisfied with the man and with the educating tendency of the conflict that I determined to go on with the recruiting.” He recalled feeling so comfortable with President Lincoln that he could “put my hand on his shoulder.”

The second meeting between the two men came at Lincoln’s request on August 19, 1864. As war casualties increased that summer, prospects for his re-election dimmed. War Democrats and a growing number of conservative Republicans *continued on page 10*



ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND FREDERICK DOUGLASS

continued from page 9 criticized the president for setting two conditions for a negotiated peace—reunification of the country and the end of slavery. The only condition, they argued, should be reunion. But Lincoln had strongly endorsed the platform of his party—named the Union Party to include War Democrats—which called for passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery. From the other direction, some Radical Republicans supported the third-party candidacy of General John C. Frémont, who would draw votes from Lincoln if he abandoned emancipation. By mid-August Lincoln believed he was likely to lose and called Douglass to the White House.

Before the meeting, Lincoln had conferred with a Union officer familiar with enslaved men who were escaping to Union lines. Now he wanted to know what could be done to bring more people to freedom before a new president could take office. In that case, slavery would probably survive—either in a reunited country without a Thirteenth Amendment or in an independent Confederacy. Lincoln thought Douglass could help. At their White House meeting, as recounted in Douglass’s autobiography, the President laid out the political situation and his concern that a negotiated peace “would leave still in slavery all who had not come within our lines.” He said enslaved people were “not coming so rapidly and so numerous as I had hoped.” One reason, Douglass explained, was that slaveholders had ways to prevent enslaved people from hearing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln’s idea was something we would today call a covert operation, using a “band of scouts, composed of colored men, somewhat after the original plan of John Brown, to go into rebel states, beyond the lines of our Armies, and carry the news of emancipation, and urge the slaves to come within our boundaries.”

Ten days later Douglass wrote to Lincoln: “Since the interview w[ith] Your Excellency was pleased to honor me a few days ago, I have freely conversed with several trustworthy and Patriotic Colored men concerning your suggestion that something should speedily be done to inform the slaves in the Rebel states of the true state of affairs in relation to them and to warn them as to what will be their probable condition should peace be concluded while they remain within the Rebel lines: and more especially to urge upon them the necessity of making their escape. All with whom I have thus far spoken on the subject, concur in the wisdom and benevolence of the idea, and some of them think it practicable.” With their advice, Douglass set out a six-point plan for the recruitment of agents and sub-agents with reporting channels to the military, provision for freed people brought within Union lines, financing arrangements, and accountability for the use of funds.

While Douglass was preparing to carry out the operation, he later recalled, it “was very soon rendered unnecessary by the success of the war.” The boldness of this idea—both Lincoln’s proposal and the willingness of Douglass to organize its implementation—has not received the attention it should.

Recalling an incident during their meeting which “illustrate[d] the character of this great man,” Douglass said the president’s secretary twice announced “Governor Buckingham of Connecticut.” Lincoln replied, “Tell Governor Buckingham to wait, for I want to have a long talk with my friend Frederick Douglass.” That long talk included an important subject that Douglass omitted from his autobiography: the political pressure to make reunion the only condition for negotiating peace.

An editor and War Democrat from Green Bay had sent a letter that was personally delivered by a former Wisconsin governor. The editor urged Lincoln to find a way to keep the support of Democrats who did not want a condition for negotiation to be “abandonment of slavery.” At their meeting three days later Lincoln showed Douglass the draft of a response to the editor that he had written.



Lincoln and Douglass meet at the White House—modern artist Stephen Alcorn imagines the scene. (Courtesy Stephen Alcorn)

Lincoln’s draft said, in part: “I am sure you would not desire me to say, or to leave an inference, that I am ready, whenever convenient, to join in re-enslaving those who shall have served us in consideration of our promise. As a matter of morals, could such treachery by any possibility, escape the curses of Heaven, or of any good man? As matter of policy, to *announce* such a purpose, would ruin the Union cause itself. All recruiting of colored men would instantly cease, and all colored men now in service, would instantly desert us. And rightfully too. Why should they give their lives for us, with full notice of our purpose to betray them...? Take from us, and give to the enemy, the hundred and thirty, forty, or fifty thousand colored persons now serving us as soldiers, seamen, and laborers, and we can no longer maintain the contest... It is not a question of sentiment or taste, but one of physical force, which may be measured, and estimated as horsepower, and steam power, are measured and estimated. And by measurement, it is more than we can lose, and live. Nor can we, by discarding it, get a white force in place of it. There is a witness in every white man’s bosom that he would rather go to war having the negro to help him, than to help the enemy against him. It is not the giving of one class for another. It is simply giving a large force to the enemy, for *nothing* in return.”

While strongly defending the commitment to emancipation, Lincoln’s draft pointed out that no Confederate authority had “intimated a willingness to” negotiate based on “restoration of the Union.” The draft closed, “If Jefferson Davis wishes, for himself, or for the benefit of his friends at the North, to know what I would do if he were to offer peace and re-union, saying nothing about slavery, let him try me.” The political calculation motivating the draft was an expectation that, if the letter were sent and made public and if as expected Davis rejected the offer, it would gain votes for Lincoln by showing Northern voters that the Confederacy had no interest in peace short of victory and independence.

As recalled in a letter three months later, Douglass objected strongly to Lincoln’s draft: “It would be given a broader meaning than you intend to convey; it would be taken as a complete surrender of your anti-slavery policy, and do you serious damage.” These objections

MEET AT THE CIVIL WAR WHITE HOUSE

helped Lincoln decide not to send the letter, and in a few days he told Union Party leaders that the campaign must remain firm on emancipation. Potential advantages with Northern voters were not worth backing away from the commitment to black freedom that the Emancipation Proclamation had made and the Thirteenth Amendment would confirm. Lincoln was prepared to accept political defeat if the price of victory was betrayal of that commitment.

In the evening after his meeting with Douglass, Lincoln called the two Wisconsin emissaries to the Soldiers Home after they had waited unsuccessfully to see him at the White House. The former Wisconsin governor's associate narrated the day's events in his diary. Lincoln spelled out the practical and moral case for a commitment to emancipation. "There are now between 1 & 200 thousand black men now in the service of the Union. . . . You cannot conciliate the South, when mastery & control of millions of blacks makes them sure of ultimate success. . . . There have been men who have proposed to me to return to slavery the black warriors of Port Hudson & Olustee to their masters to conciliate the South. I should be damned in time & in eternity for so doing." Lincoln's remarks inspired the visitor "with confidence, that he was Heavens instrument."

Lincoln delayed his guests' departure so he could entertain them "with reminiscences of the past." Before leaving, the diarist told Lincoln what had happened earlier that day in the dark White House reception room: "There in a corner I saw a man reading who possessed a remarkable physiognomy. I was riveted to the spot. I stood & stared at him. He raised his flashing eyes & caught me in the act. I was compelled to speak. Said I, Are you the President? No replied the stranger, I am Frederick Douglass."

Douglass told readers of his autobiography that his 1863 and 1864 meetings with Lincoln had "greatly increased my confidence in the antislavery integrity of the government," and he recalled his disappointment at being unable to accept a later invitation from the president "to take tea with him at the Soldiers Home."

Their third and final encounter took place on Inauguration Day, March 4, 1865. Douglass was in the crowd at the Capitol to hear the Second Inaugural Address. He thought he saw Lincoln point himself out to Andrew Johnson as the two came onto the inaugural platform, with Johnson appearing to react with distaste. Douglass's autobiography focused on what he considered the most meaningful passages from the Address:

"In the fewest words possible it referred to the condition of the country four years before, on his accession to the presidency—to the causes of the war, and the reasons on both sides for which it had been waged. 'Neither party,' he said, 'expected for the war the magnitude of the duration which it had already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding.' Then in a few short sentences, admitting the conviction that slavery had been 'the offense which, in the providence of God, must needs come, and the war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came,' he asks if there can be 'discerned in this, any departure from those Divine attributes which the believers in a loving God always ascribe to him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said, 'The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.'"

Later that day, Douglass went to the White House for the inaugural reception and had problems gaining admittance. He later described the scene as he finally entered the East Room: "Like a mountain pine high above all others, Mr. Lincoln stood, in his grand simplicity and home-like beauty. Recognizing me, even before I reached him, he exclaimed, so that all around could hear him, 'Here comes my friend Douglass.' Taking me by the hand, he said, 'I am glad to see you. I saw you in the crowd to-day, listening to my inaugural address, how did you like it?' I said, 'Mr. Lincoln, I must not detain you with my poor opinion, when there are thousands waiting to shake hands with you.' 'No, no,' he said, 'you must stop a little, Douglass; there is no man in the country whose opinion I value more than yours. I want to know what you think of it?' I replied, 'Mr. Lincoln, that was a sacred effort.' 'I am glad you liked it!' He said, and I passed on, feeling that any man, however distinguished, might well regard himself honored by such expressions, from such a man."

Drawing on the experience of their meetings in the context of all the events of the Civil War, Douglass distilled his thoughts about Abraham Lincoln in two speeches. The first was a eulogy delivered on June 1, 1865. He described Lincoln as "in a sense hitherto without example, emphatically the black man's president: the first American president who . . . rose above the prejudice of his times, and country." Describing their first meeting, Douglass said, "He set me at perfect liberty to state where I differed from him as when I agreed with him. From the first five minutes I seemed to myself to have been acquainted with [him] during all my life."

At the dedication of the Freedmen's Monument on April 14, 1876, the anniversary of Lincoln's assassination, Douglass spoke at greater length to present a more complex estimate of the man and his times: "He was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men." From another perspective, however, Douglass went on to say, "Viewed from the genuine abolitionist ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of the country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical and determined." Douglass considered this tribute to Lincoln so important that it was one of only two addresses included in full in his autobiography.

Seldom have two great men, having spent so little time together, formed so close a bond. "In his company I was never in any way reminded of my humble origin, or of my unpopular color," Douglass said in his autobiography. Recalling "the kind consideration which I have reason to believe Mr. Lincoln entertained towards me," Douglass explained that he "did not take Mr. Lincoln's attentions as due to my merits or personal qualities. While I have no doubt that Messrs. Seward and Chase had spoken well of me to him, and the fact of my having been a slave, and gained my freedom, and of having picked up some sort of an education, and being in some sense a 'self-made man,' and having made myself useful as an advocate of the claims of my people, gave me favor in his eyes; yet I am quite sure that the main thing which gave me consideration with him was my well known relation to the colored people of the Republic, and especially the help which that relation enabled me to give to the work of suppressing the rebellion and of placing the Union on a firmer basis than it ever had or could have sustained in the days of slavery."

(The late John Elliff was a member of the Forum Advisory Board and President of the Lincoln Group of the District of Columbia. This is the last of his many contributions to the Bulletin.) 📖

GETTING RIGHT WITH LINCOLN AND DOUGLASS: AN INTERVIEW WITH DAVID BLIGHT

continued from page 1

Q: *Do you think Lincoln got the better of Douglass in hinting that he might serve as an officer in the Union army? Did that promise encourage Douglass to give up his newspaper, Douglass' Monthly, and thus remove a thorn in Lincoln's side?*

A: "Got the better of?" That offer to be an officer recruiting in the Deep South first came from Secretary of War Edwin Stanton. There is some reason to think they used it as a way of getting him out of their offices. They may have played him. The offer to go recruit stayed real, but the commission from Stanton did not.

Q: *How many meetings did Lincoln and Douglass actually have?*

A: They had three meetings: August 1863, August 1864, and at the reception in the White House after the Second Inaugural. Lincoln sent him an invitation to tea in late March or early April '65 but Douglass had a speaking engagement. Too bad. Douglass later lamented that he did not attend that tea. Our loss, too.

Q: *What accounted for the respect Douglass ultimately developed for Lincoln? Was it, as Douglass later said, because both had the same origins—had both started out poor and disadvantaged—even though the conditions of white poverty and enslavement were certainly different? Douglass remained astounded that Lincoln never treated him with any special attitude based on race. How unusual was this in the 1860s, even among progressive and enlightened white leaders?*

A: The respect that Douglass ultimately develops for Lincoln is born of experience and events more than identifying with roots in poverty. Although the poverty and commonness of Lincoln's roots do matter, since Douglass used those ideas even in the Freedmen's Memorial speech. He called Lincoln an "honest boatman." He respected Lincoln in part also because he came to see him as an honest broker, a man who moved to the right ideas at the right time. At the meetings he clearly felt Lincoln's decency and lack of pretension about race or much of anything else. And after the assassination, Lincoln was so useful to African American memory and claims on citizenship.

Q: *How do you think Lincoln regarded Douglass, in the end? Was he really "my friend, Douglass," as Douglass remembered him saying aloud on inauguration day, March 4, 1865?*

A: How Lincoln regarded Douglass is of course very hard to know.

But he surely respected him, admired the language and the oratory in all likelihood. We just cannot know how much of Douglass Lincoln had read. But in words and prose the two had so much in common: a King James language converted to political narratives about the revolution they made and lived in the midst of. Their friendship was first hugely symbolic, but to a small extent real, based especially on that second meeting in '64.

Q: *Douglass called Lincoln both "the black man's president" and "the white man's president" in orations 11 years apart; the first in 1865, the second in 1876 at the dedication of a statue funded entirely by Freedmen. How should we ultimately assess Douglass' regard for Lincoln, both personally and historically?*



David Blight (Photo: Henry F. Ballone)

A: This question can take pages. Frederick Douglass used "black man's president" in '65 right after the assassination.

Context and timing is all. In '76 Lincoln is the "white man's president" to set up the "stepchild" metaphor because in great part that speech is all about the betrayal and fall of Reconstruction. He also uses that term in '76 to set up the idea of the great transformations—emancipation—that came "in his time." That was Douglass's way of saying that the United States had freed the slaves and the country had the responsibility of making it good.

Q: *Should we regard Lincoln and Douglass as the most important figures of the second half of the 19th century—both individually and for what they accomplished "together"?*

A: Well I would count them as the two most important as individual thinkers and actors. But Lincoln of course had far more power than Douglass did. Douglass led with words. So did Lincoln. But if I am pressed, I do think we have to say that Douglass may have needed Lincoln more than Lincoln needed Douglass. Both transcended history as well as made it in quite different ways. 📌

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