

Introduction

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As the United States celebrates the sesquicentennial anniversary of the Civil War, it is fitting that scholars organize forums dedicated to reminding Americans that we live in a nation, according to Abraham Lincoln, “worth fighting for.” Preservation of our political system and the guarantee of its national existence were borne in four long years of war that cost more than 750,000 American lives. As such, Lincoln’s presidency occupies a central place in our history, and rightfully so. His characterization that America’s democratic republic represented “the last best hope of earth” reminds us that *our* reward is as great as the sacrifice of *those* who went before—lest we forget.

This volume represents the multifaceted nature of Lincoln’s presidency and offers a glimpse of Civil War America in the North. Taken together, these essays are intended for a general audience and offer diverse perspectives on politics, war, and society. Lincoln and Northerners grappled to vindicate democracy by reuniting a nation and accepting the changes that came with reunification. Since the conflict ended, scholars have written the Civil War into our national narrative to explain how and why it was (and still is) central to American history’s foundation. In the case of these essays, scholars explore the context of Lincoln’s presidency, his role as both pedagogue and commander in chief. They examine the war beyond the White House and the battlefield. Finally, these scholars examine Lincoln as leader, diplomat, and visionary, who used his ability, his influence, and the power of his office to shape the contours of the new republic born out of the conflict. In short, these reflections explore the broad nature of how the president touched the Civil War era, and in particular, Northern society.

It has been said that few presidents came into office with less political experience and lower popular expectations than did Abraham Lincoln. Still, he was a man of vision, ambition, conviction, and determination. In explaining the contest to Northerners, Lincoln gave new meaning to the ideas of self-governance and relied on the cooperation of citizens to preserve the federal Union by responding to his call. His task appeared larger than the presidency itself, and he spent four years defining the Union's course in restoring the Founding Fathers' Federalism. Along the way, he presided over citizens who looked to him to keep his oath to preserve and defend the Union and the Constitution. He led the nation back to its formation, guiding and cajoling Northerners to follow his lead and educating those citizens who lacked an understanding of the paramount meaning of the war and their relationship to the cause.

An incalculable set of circumstances that required resolve from both Lincoln and the Northern people defined Lincoln's presidency. John Hay said of Lincoln as he was writing about the life of the president: "As I go on with the work, Lincoln grows greater and greater." Lincoln proved to be as exceptional as the times. His leadership of a political party that had no ideological ties to the South prompted Southerners to withdraw from the Union. Whether Lincoln linked the Union's preservation with the emancipation of slaves was not as significant as the fact that the war produced the conditions that ultimately required Northerners to accept the idea that the preservation of one institution necessitated the death of the other. What mattered was what Lincoln did as political leader and commander in chief, and how he used his rhetoric and the power of his office to inspire and inform the Northern populace while leading it with a visible hand. More than anything, Lincoln believed it was his moral and social responsibility to shape a public understanding of the Union and to sustain the democratic model of governance he inherited. Northerners agreed that the Union must be preserved, even when they sometimes disagreed with Lincoln's means of achieving military victory.

Three themes shape these essays. The first theme, *Lincoln's War and the Peoples' Contest*, examines the age of Lincoln, his use of the presidency to educate the public about citizenship during war, and his determination to guide the military campaigns with a visible hand. Vernon Burton's essay, "The Passage of Lincoln's Republic: Providence in Progress," lays the

foundation for understanding the complicated nature of the United States' passage from an agrarian-oriented republic that viewed slavery as beneficial for economic and political life to an industrial wage-based free-soil society that viewed slavery as incompatible with the Union. This opening essay highlights the republic's evolution during Lincoln's age and how he viewed the progressive nature of the economic and political order of the day. It links Lincoln's political faith—in the redeeming value of free labor and the rights to property and self-determination—to the basic values of the founders and provides insights into how religious reform grafted to the dynamism of free-labor capitalism to bring about a modern political culture that triumphed over Southern slavery.

As Northerners mobilized for war, citizens responded to the call in ways that reflected republican virtues of citizenship. To highlight Lincoln's expectations of a faithful citizenry, Matt Gallman explores, in "The President as Pedagogue: Teaching Citizenship in Time of War," the public consumption of the president's literary/tutorial directives about citizenship in the nineteenth century. He examines how Lincoln expected citizens to behave during war. His words of instruction displayed his use of the presidency to ensure that good people demanded respect and that loyal citizens paid attention to national events and took great pains to exercise their franchise. Gallman addresses the social responsibility of citizenship among Northerners and how Lincoln used his position to infuse and boost political loyalty. Still, those who sacrificed in the name of the war effort did so as a result of personal choices and without expectations of particular rewards.

Having been entrusted with thousands of citizen-soldiers, Lincoln sought to direct the generals who governed them to ensure military success. Lincoln was a skilled commander in chief who crafted grand military/political strategy, and navigated the "hazardous shoals" of domestic public opinion, while carrying to a successful conclusion his search for a general who could direct the war to victory. Lincoln involved himself daily with military operations, often guiding movements through telegraphic dispatch. Even from the War Department his hand was visible in conducting campaigns. Yet, Mark Grimsley argues, in his essay "Lincoln as Commander in Chief: A Foray into Generalship," that in the spring of 1862, Lincoln perhaps overplayed his hand. He explores Lincoln's assumption of power and his ability to grow into his role as commander in chief of

national forces that he understood were the products of a state-oriented mobilization. Yet, Lincoln took his responsibility for military decisions seriously and thus often made forays into generalship. Grimsley offers a reconsideration of perhaps Lincoln's most flagrant and extensive foray into de facto generalship. It occurred in late May 1862, when he intervened in operations in Virginia's Shenandoah Valley, an involvement that also had a critical impact on the Union's Peninsula Campaign, which was designed to seize the Confederate capital of Richmond. By reassessing Lincoln's intervention, Grimsley argues that it was a well-intentioned, but misguided, military adventure.

The second theme, *The War Beyond the White House*, explores the evolving understanding of the political, constitutional, and social culture wrought by the war. Jennifer L. Weber's essay, "The Political Culture of the North: Copperheads and Home Front Dissension," explores the context within which politicians—Republicans and Democrats, in Washington and in the Northern states—operated and how they managed to keep the Union from splintering into regional factions. The war presented dissenters with the opportunity to defend civil liberties and states' rights. The Emancipation Proclamation and conscription stirred them to oppose Lincoln's expanding war aims. As military failures mounted, Northerners were increasingly receptive to Peace Democrats, who caused considerable problems on the home front, especially west of the Appalachians. Their movement was nonetheless influential locally and helped to drive many Democrats back to Lincoln's Union. Thus, in addition to Lincoln's war against combatants, Northern political leaders fought over who would rule in the North, and Weber reminds us that without understanding the Copperheads, we cannot understand how easily the Civil War could have had a different result.

Still, however unorganized Copperheads were in mounting a national coalition to undermine Lincoln, one of the greatest achievements of Lincoln's Democratic opponents was their repudiation of the president's power to suspend the writ of habeas corpus. So influential in their refutation of this power were Democratic lawyers that they established a series of pamphlets that went a long way in creating the myth of the writ of habeas corpus. In fact, according to Mark Neely, establishing this myth constituted one of the greatest achievements of the Democratic Party in the Civil War.

In his essay, “Legalities in Wartime: The Myth of the Writ of Habeas Corpus,” Neely reassesses the meaning of the writ of habeas corpus as the writ of liberty, which ensured judges could examine the reasons for the arrests of persons held in prison by the government. He questions whether this really was the use of the vaunted legal bulwark and attempts to separate myth from fact in the actual uses of the writ of habeas corpus. His essay illustrates the surprising result of looking at the writ in fifty Northern cases during the war to arrive at a better understanding of Lincoln’s suspension of the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus. Neely encourages us to rethink our easy assumptions about the meaning of the suspension of the writ. If his survey of cases in 1862 and 1863 are representative, then chances are that the actual writ had nothing to do with liberty of expression, and therefore nothing to do with imprisonment. Instead, Neely cautions us, when one hears that Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus, one should think of underage soldiers and not of silenced journalists and muzzled opposition politicians.

The struggle to preserve the Union was simultaneously a struggle for civil rights, yet the rights remained a backdrop to the military drama that unfolded. The contestation had been an almost silent feature of the changing nature of the Union as a result of the war. In the shadow of the Capitol, as Kate Masur reminds us, masses of African Americans protested the return of fugitive slaves to their owners, groups of uniformed soldiers boarded the streetcars and demanded the right to ride, and church-based organizations raised money to help destitute runaway slaves. Masur’s essay, “Emancipation in Washington, D.C.: Battleground for Freedom and Reconstruction,” moves away from the political and constitutional dimensions of the war and explores the practical yet dramatic changes wrought during four years of conflict in Washington, D.C. She analyses the local dynamics that produced a remarkable synergy between black activation and Republican politics that brought about significant changes—changes that mirrored the expectations being played out on a national stage. The war brought to the nation’s capital a heightened understanding of racial equality and generated a transformation of the local civic culture. Although emancipation and Reconstruction were abstract, often over-politicized, concepts typically handled by military commanders in occupied areas, Lincoln went to work every day in a laboratory of federal policy and a changing environment

produced by the war. The significance of the relationship between freedom and reconstruction on the local level revealed itself as black Washingtonians used several legal stratagems to advance their status.

The third theme, *The Visible Hand of Leadership at Home and Abroad*, surveys Lincoln as a manager of an expanding conflict and examines his ability to maintain an influential hand, even in foreign affairs, while providing a blueprint for a reconstructed Union that evolved as a series of war-time measures. Lincoln wielded a strong hand as executive. He claimed expansive federal authority in carrying out war measures, which marked him as a master politician, and his use of those powers marked him as a great leader and president. Richard Carwardine's essay, "Lincoln as Leader: The Visible Hand of the Presidency," presents Lincoln as a top manager—a visible hand. He won the presidency, used public opinion effectively, confronted the limits of power, and deftly and effectively coerced Northerners into a public acceptance of cause. This is not to say that Lincoln controlled events. He was keenly aware of what he could control and was perceptive about how to go about what he wanted. Along the way he sustained a vision of national purpose, identified the strategic policy priorities to advance that purpose, maintained the day-to-day management of these goals, and communicated his conception of national purpose to a vast and often divided public, hoping to stiffen their resolve.

Lincoln's visible hand also extended to foreign affairs. In his essay, "Lincoln as Chief Diplomat in War: Perception and Reality," Howard Jones explores Lincoln's aggressive foreign policy for preventing European intervention led by England and France. Jones contends that Lincoln was a diplomat by nature and by instinct, gifted in the art of listening and taking advice even when it sharply disagreed with his own thinking. That he succeeded in keeping both nations at bay through four years of war at home was a testament to the resiliency of his foreign policy. William Seward underestimated Lincoln's quiet strength in handling foreign affairs, particularly when it came to placing these matters within a constitutional context. Despite the vast internal problems of waging war, Lincoln never relinquished control to Seward to determine the Union's diplomatic course, particularly when Seward appeared willing to provoke a foreign war in hopes of restoring the Union. Howard's essay reminds us that Lincoln's ability to maintain the Atlantic peace while preserving the Union rested on threatening war