

Lincoln Studies at the Bicentennial: A Round Table

Lincoln Theme 2.0

Matthew Pinsker

Early during the 1989 spring semester at Harvard University, members of Professor David Herbert Donald's graduate seminar on Abraham Lincoln received diskettes that offered a glimpse of their future as historians. The 3.5 inch floppy disks with neatly typed labels held about a dozen word-processing files representing the whole of Don E. Fehrenbacher's *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait through His Speeches and Writings* (1964). Donald had asked his secretary, Laura Nakatsuka, to enter this well-known collection of Lincoln writings into a computer and make copies for his students. He also showed off a database containing thousands of digital note cards that he and his research assistants had developed in preparation for his forthcoming biography of Lincoln.¹ There were certainly bigger revolutions that year. The Berlin Wall fell. A motley coalition of Afghan tribes, international jihadists, and Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) operatives drove the Soviets out of Afghanistan. Virginia voters chose the nation's first elected black governor, and within a few more months, the *Harvard Law Review* selected a popular student named Barack Obama as its first African American president. Yet Donald's venture into digital history marked a notable shift. The nearly seventy-year-old Mississippi native was about to become the first major Lincoln biographer to add full-text searching and database management to his research arsenal.

More than fifty years earlier, the revisionist historian James G. Randall had posed a question that helps explain why one of his favorite graduate students would later show such a surprising interest in digital technology as an aging Harvard professor. "Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?" was the title of Randall's provocative 1936 state-of-the-field essay in the *American Historical Review*.² Such questions about topics being "exhausted" are never easy for academic historians to contemplate, and they become even more difficult to swallow when they are asked decades *before* the completion of yet another biography on the subject.

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This essay was written prior to the death of David Herbert Donald in May 2009 but is now dedicated to his memory. Professor Donald was a mentor to me and to several of the Lincoln scholars mentioned in the following pages. To most of the rest, he was either an inspiring model or an intimidating rival, but to everybody who wrote about Lincoln over the last six decades, he was someone whose latest work always had to be read.

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¹ Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait through His Speeches and Writings* (1964; Stanford, 1977). David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York, 1995).

² J. G. Randall, "Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?," *American Historical Review*, 41 (Jan. 1936), 270–94.



In the late 1980s, David Herbert Donald helped pioneer the use of full-text searching within the field of Lincoln studies by overseeing the compilation of floppy disks containing files with dozens of Abraham Lincoln's writings. Today, most students of the subject can access millions of online pages of Lincoln-related documents instantly from their desktops. *Photo by John Osborne. Courtesy House Divided Project, Dickinson College.*

Even though Randall's answer, coming about seventy years after Lincoln's death, was a "confident negative," the question about whether the field is exhausted has continued to haunt Lincoln studies. After all, what could scholars claim about a subject that Randall labeled in the 1930s as "the most overworked in American history"? Though the great revisionist had dismissed much of the previous material on Lincoln as uninformed and unimportant, noting primly that "the hand of the amateur has rested heavily upon Lincoln studies," such was not the case in the decades between Randall's article and the preparation of Donald's 1995 biography. Responding to Randall's "call" with his own widely discussed state-of-the-field essay in 1979, Mark E. Neely Jr. observed that "Professionalism has been the major development in" Lincoln studies. Thus when Donald entered the arena in the late 1980s after a career spent "around the periphery of Lincoln," as he put it, armed with diskettes and databases (and even with his own personal microfilm reader), the prize-winning biographer had an obvious determination to find something new to write about a figure who had been overworked by amateurs and thoroughly reworked by professionals.³

Yet the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth in 2009 marks nearly fifteen years since the publication of Donald's supposedly definitive treatment, and there has never been a more active or creative period in Lincoln studies. Since 1995, the number of major adult nonfic-

³ *Ibid.*, 272, 270; Mark E. Neely Jr., "The Lincoln Theme since Randall's Call: The Promises and Perils of Professionalism," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 1 (1979), 10–70, esp. 10; Roger G. Kuo, "Daring to Do Lincoln: At 70, Warren Professor of American History David H. Donald Is Not Retiring to Play Golf," *Harvard Crimson*, March 14, 1991, <http://www.thecrimson.com/article.aspx?ref=129924>.

tion books published on Lincoln and his family is approaching three hundred volumes or about twenty per year.⁴ Although the Great Subject has provoked fatigue among some academic journals and history departments, this bewildering Lincoln renaissance demands an explanation—and the answer does not just come down to profiteering. Remarkably, the main reason for this resurgence is new evidence, or, more precisely, the recovery of old evidence. By identifying and publishing once-obscure source material, various institutions and individuals have restored lost connective tissue essential for a more dynamic portrait of Lincoln. They have also contributed to a growing experiment in digital history that offers a model for historians in other fields. The results suggest a Lincoln renaissance that is not cresting with the 2009 bicentennial, but rather, in some ways, is just beginning.

Defining the Lincoln Theme

Randall's essay on the "Lincoln theme" provides a useful reminder of the primitive state of the field through the first half of the twentieth century. Lincoln's personal and presidential papers were still closed to scholars and would not be opened by the Library of Congress until 1947. There was also "no definitive edition of the works," as Randall complained, a problem not rectified until the publication of Roy P. Basler's multivolume *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* in 1953 (with important supplemental volumes issued in 1974 and 1990). The diaries and papers of Lincoln's political intimates and cabinet officers were just starting to be published.⁵ There was no collection of Mary Lincoln's letters nor a published version of John Hay's invaluable White House diary. Most of the newspaper correspondence from Lincoln's time could be found only in archival collections. This was the dawn of the microfilm era so that unpublished material almost always had to be navigated in person at repositories scattered across the country. The interviews and recollections of Lincoln pulled together by his law partner, William H. Herndon, were not yet available to the public. Even worse, a decent amount of popular source material from this period was fraudulent. In short, it is difficult to see how any of the thousands of books and articles published on Lincoln before World War II retain much value beyond their merit as historiographical markers, recollected testimony, or literature.

The situation had improved by the time Mark Neely reviewed the field in 1979, but many primary sources remained strikingly difficult to use. There was *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* and various published material from other leading Civil War figures, but the ninety-seven microfilm reels constituting the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection

⁴ This estimate on works on Abraham Lincoln excludes children's books, self-published volumes, monographs about Lincoln's peers, or general works on the Civil War. Nor does the figure include articles, conference papers, or public presentations over the same period. For the bibliography of Lincoln works from 1995 to 2009 that informed this article, see *Building the Digital Lincoln*, <http://journalofamericanhistory.org/projects/lincoln/medial>.

⁵ Randall, "Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?," 272; Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (9 vols., New Brunswick, 1953–1955); Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Supplement, 1832–1865* (Westport, 1974); Roy P. Basler and Christian O. Basler, eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Second Supplement, 1848–1865* (New Brunswick, 1990). For a fascinating discussion of the troubled history of Lincoln's collected works and for an argument about the need for yet another supplement, see Thomas F. Schwartz, "Lincoln's Published Writings: A History and Supplement," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 9 (1987), 19–62; and Thomas F. Schwartz, "Whither *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*? More Unpublished Lincoln Letters," *ibid.*, 13 (1992), 47–56. For an example of the published diaries and papers of Lincoln's political intimates, see one of the few contemporary collateral sources that covers Lincoln's career in both Illinois and Washington: Theodore C. Pease and James G. Randall, eds., *The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning, 1850–1881* (2 vols., Springfield, Ill., 1925–1931).

and the fifteen reels from the Herndon-Weik Collection, both at the Library of Congress, proved daunting even for the best scholars. David Donald even made a credible claim in the 1990s that he was the first modern biographer with “full access to [Lincoln’s] private papers.” Civil War-era newspapers offered another example of filmable evidence that had become more available by the mid-twentieth century but was never quite accessible enough in the predigital age. Moreover, much of the essential Lincoln evidence had not been filmed. Randall wrote in 1936 that there was “both spade work and refining work to be done” when it came to Lincoln manuscripts; by 1979 Neely concluded that this was “no longer true,” but even he acknowledged there was a need for “spade work” in “the area of legal history,” where there was still a lamentable absence of “both basic collecting and editing of documents.” Neely also revealed with *The Fate of Liberty* (1991), his Pulitzer Prize-winning study of habeas corpus suspension and rule by military law, gaps in the collection of key presidential documents from the Civil War. On an issue as fundamental as the extent of wartime political arrests, the National Archives had yet to yield a definitive answer.⁶

The erection of subtle barriers against lazy research might not sound like such a bad idea to readers of the *Journal of American History*, but the general inaccessibility of historical source material came with a high hidden cost. Several precise analytical questions and many of the collateral lines of research suggested by Randall and Neely remained unaddressed when Donald was completing his Lincoln biography. Moreover, even when major topics were tackled, especially in the first couple of decades following Randall’s stirring call to arms, the work was not always comprehensive enough in assessing evidence to settle fundamental issues.

Neely claimed in 1979 that key aspects of Lincoln’s political career had been distorted by what he described as deep revisionist hostility toward American political parties and a subsequent failure to take partisan evidence seriously. He observed that there had been no “study to place Lincoln’s pre-presidential career firmly within the context of the Whig party” until Gabor S. Boritt’s seminal work, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (1978), and even then Neely pointed out that Boritt noted several additional topics from Lincoln’s Whig party career still desperately in need of further research. Neely also claimed that the Lincoln-Douglas debates, “known to every schoolchild in America,” nonetheless lacked a comprehensive treatment that put the famous oratorical exchanges into “local political and social context.” “We need new studies of the election of 1864,” he added, complaining that the sole monograph on that critical election, *Lincoln and the Party Divided* (1954) by William Frank Zornow, was the “unfortunate fruit” of overzealous revisionism. Yet by 1995 little had changed. Donald listed a couple of important additions to the study of Lincoln’s Whig years, but they did not address the unanswered research questions. He cited a few recent works on the Lincoln-Douglas debates but none that even attempted to meet Neely’s demand for a comprehensive treatment. And the

⁶ On the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection, see “Abraham Lincoln Papers: Provenance and Publication History,” *Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress*, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alprov.html>. Mary M. Wolfskill and David Mathisen, “The Herndon-Weik Collection of Lincolniana: A Register of the Collection in the Library of Congress,” revised by T. Michael Womack (Washington, 1997), *Library of Congress: Manuscript Division*, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/mss/eaddxmlmss/eaddpdfmss/2001/ms001002.pdf>; Kuo, “Daring to Do Lincoln”; Randall, “Has the Lincoln Theme Been Exhausted?,” 272. Neely, “Lincoln Theme since Randall’s Call,” 29. Mark E. Neely Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York, 1991).

biographer still described Zornow's monograph as "the standard account of the political campaign of 1864."⁷

Even less progress had been made on the collateral research agenda. Ten out of the nineteen historical figures whom Randall identified in 1936 as needing study still lacked published biographical treatment over forty years later. Neely added another fifteen names to that list, but only two of these two dozen plus targets had been covered by the time Donald's *Lincoln* was published in 1995. Most of these "Lincoln men" had never been household names, but they were essential witnesses to his story.⁸

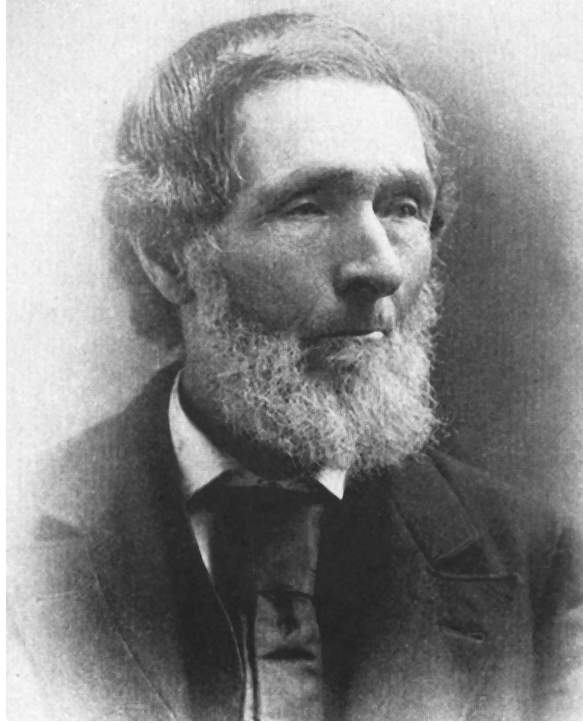
Donald's *Lincoln* thus illustrated both the great progress and the unfulfilled promise of the professional era in Lincoln studies. The biography did not reinvent Lincoln or radically alter the landscape of available evidence, but with enviable efficiency Donald documented every major episode in the complicated story, employing an astonishing variety of primary sources while also demonstrating in nearly ninety pages of source notes an acute understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the vast secondary literature on his subject's life and times. The result was a complex Lincoln for modern times—a contradictory blend of ambition and passivity, idealism and pragmatism, faith and doubt. The biography spent months on the best-seller lists, and reviewers sometimes appeared in awe, especially by the level of craftsmanship. "Donald's 'Lincoln' is so lucid and richly researched, so careful and compelling," gushed Geoffrey C. Ward in his *New York Times* book review, "that it is hard to imagine a more satisfying life of our most admired and least understood President, at least for the foreseeable future."⁹ Yet some historians stubbornly pushed back. Lincoln scholarship since 1995 has been undertaken largely in response to Donald's magisterial work. Some works have been shaped and encouraged by his road map, but the historiography has been mainly defined by those trying to move beyond his authoritative summation.

A number of scholars have chosen to pursue topics that did not primarily interest Donald or earlier generations of professional historians, often relying on evidence that had once been ignored. There has been a veritable explosion of books on Lincoln's private life that rely on a controversial body of reminiscent material. Numerous studies on the public Lincoln deploy new types of evidence to chronicle his less familiar roles as lawyer, public intellectual, and professional writer. In doing so, these works have pushed deeper into the narrative of Lincoln's self-propelled rise. In addition, a growing body of scholarship on Lincoln in the popular memory has emerged. While this scholarship has not created

⁷ Neely, "Lincoln Theme since Randall's Call," 30; Gabor S. Boritt, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (Memphis, 1978); Neely, "Lincoln Theme since Randall's Call," 31, 19, 18. William Frank Zornow, *Lincoln and the Party Divided* (Norman, 1954). Joel H. Silbey, "'Always a Whig in Politics': The Partisan Life of Abraham Lincoln," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 8 (1986), 21–42; Donald, *Lincoln*, 669n. David Herbert Donald noted that David E. Long's *The Jewel of Liberty* "appeared too late" for him to consult in the research of his biography, *ibid.* David E. Long, *The Jewel of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln's Re-election and the End of Slavery* (Mechanicsburg, 1994).

⁸ The full list of figures lacking biographical treatment through 1979 is as follows: Isaac N. Arnold, George Ashmun, John C. Bagby, Sidney Breese, Salmon P. Chase, Jacob Collamer, John Covode, Edgar Cowan, William Dennison, Jesse K. Dubois, Dennis Hanks, Ozias M. Hatch, Andrew Johnson, Norman B. Judd, Amos Kendall, John McClelland, Hugh McCulloch, Richard J. Oglesby, John M. Palmer, John Sherman, James Shields, Caleb B. Smith, James Speed, Leonard Swett, and Elihu B. Washburne. Of these 25 men, only Chase, Johnson, and Oglesby have since been studied in full-length published biographies. Mark A. Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail-Splitter: Governor Richard J. Oglesby* (Urbana, 2001); Frederick J. Blue, *Salmon P. Chase: A Life in Politics* (Kent, 1987); John Niven, *Salmon P. Chase: A Biography* (New York, 1995); Hans L. Trefousse, *Andrew Johnson: A Biography* (New York, 1989).

⁹ Geoffrey C. Ward, "Before He Became a Saint," *New York Times*, Oct. 22, 1995, <http://www.nytimes.com/1995/10/22/books/before-he-became-a-saint.html>.



William Henry Herndon (1818–1891) collected oral histories of Abraham Lincoln, his longtime law partner. These stories are now being used to examine Lincoln's private life. *Reprinted from Abraham Lincoln (New York, 1909), 1.*

an entirely new Lincoln, it nonetheless has revealed a Lincoln different from the already complicated figure depicted in Donald's biography.

The Private Lincoln

The story of the newly exposed private Lincoln might well begin with Ann Rutledge, a young woman who had something of a coming out party in Donald's *Lincoln*. Her name was familiar to historians and to an older generation of Americans who knew the legend of Lincoln's tragic love affair with the daughter of a tavern-keeper in New Salem, the small central Illinois village on the Sangamon River where the future president lived during his early twenties. Rutledge had been engaged to another young man, but local gossip maintained that during one of his extended absences, she and Lincoln fell in love, plotting secretly to marry, until she suddenly became sick and died. Lincoln was so distraught that he nearly killed himself, or so the story went until a generation of historians led by James Randall essentially destroyed it by exposing numerous contradictions in the accounts. Donald became the first major Lincoln biographer in the professional era to give the story any credence, with what he later termed "a mild endorsement," relying mainly on two brilliant essays by Douglas L. Wilson and John Y. Simon.¹⁰ By the

¹⁰ James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President: Springfield to Gettysburg* (2 vols., New York, 1945), II, 321–42. David Herbert Donald, *We Are Lincoln Men: Abraham Lincoln and His Friends* (New York, 2003), 21; Douglas L. Wilson, "Abraham Lincoln, Ann Rutledge, and the Evidence of Herndon's Informants," *Civil War History*, 36 (Dec. 1990), 301–24; John Y. Simon, "Abraham Lincoln and Ann Rutledge," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*,

mid-1990s, these scholars and a handful of others working with reminiscent material had begun to restore the credibility of what everyone in the field would soon be calling “Herndon’s informants.”

The restoration of the Rutledge story signaled a newfound respect for Lincoln’s often-maligned law partner, William Herndon, as well as renewed interest among scholars in Lincoln’s personal life. After Lincoln’s death, Herndon spearheaded an effort that resulted in more than 250 oral history interviews and written statements from people who had known Lincoln, mostly during his youth and professional career in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois. The stories were gritty, to say the least, including tales about not only Ann Rutledge but also prostitutes (apparently, Lincoln once expressed a desire to “get *some*”) and a knife-wielding and object-throwing Mary Todd Lincoln, as well as much gossip about Lincoln’s alleged illegitimacy.¹¹ The material constituted the bulk of what became the Herndon-Weik Collection at the Library of Congress, which was made public in the 1940s but was never fully transcribed and annotated until the publication of Douglas Wilson and Rodney O. Davis’s *Herndon’s Informants* (1998). Their book was a milestone and helped trigger a resurgence of interest in what Herndon once called “‘the inner life’ of Mr. L.”¹²

Herndon’s pose as a frontier Sigmund Freud had long contributed to the poor reputation of his materials, but twentieth-century historians had other reasons for being skeptical. “I was trained to think of reminiscences as nuclear waste,” Rodney Davis once confessed to the journalist Joshua Wolf Shenk. That is what made the publication of *Herndon’s Informants* so decisive. It came at the right moment. Michael Burlingame was in the middle of editing his own influential series of volumes containing testimonies, recollected and otherwise, from Lincoln’s various White House aides. The University of Nebraska Press was reprinting several key memoirs and early Lincoln biographies, all with new introductions by leading historians. But most important was the long-anticipated release of *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln* (1996), an invaluable reference source compiled by Don Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher that attempted to catalog and even assign grades for accuracy for numerous statements attributed to Lincoln over the years. Taken together, these developments in the 1990s effectively placed a good-historian seal of approval on the use of recollections within the Lincoln field.¹³

11 (1990), 15–34.

¹¹ On Ann Rutledge, see Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., *Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, 1998), 13, 21, 25, and passim; on prostitutes, see *ibid.*, 719; on Mary Todd Lincoln, see *ibid.*, 722; on illegitimacy, see *ibid.*, 82–84, 637–39, and passim.

¹² *Ibid.*, xiv.

¹³ Rodney Davis quoted in the afterword of Joshua Wolf Shenk, *Lincoln’s Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness* (Boston, 2005), 241. Note, however, that earlier in the book, Shenk appears to attribute a similar statement to Michael Burlingame, see p. 6. For Michael Burlingame’s series on the materials from Lincoln’s White House aides, see Michael Burlingame, ed., *An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays* (Carbondale, 1996); Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettlinger, eds., *Inside Lincoln’s White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* (Carbondale, 1997); Michael Burlingame, ed., *Lincoln’s Journalist: John Hay’s Anonymous Writings for the Press, 1860–1864* (Carbondale, 1998); Michael Burlingame, ed., *Lincoln Observed: The Civil War Dispatches of Noah Brooks* (Baltimore, 1998); Michael Burlingame, ed., *With Lincoln in the White House: Letters, Memoranda, and Other Writings of John G. Nicolay, 1860–1865* (Carbondale, 2000); Michael Burlingame, ed., *At Lincoln’s Side: John Hay’s Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings* (Carbondale, 2000); Michael Burlingame, ed., *Inside the White House in War Times: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln’s Secretary* (Lincoln, 2000); Michael Burlingame, ed., *Dispatches from Lincoln’s White House: The Anonymous Civil War Journalism of Presidential Secretary William O. Stoddard* (Lincoln, 2002); and Michael Burlingame, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: The Observations of John G. Nicolay and John Hay* (Carbondale, 2007). James Rawley wrote the introduction for David Homer Bates, *Lincoln in the Telegraph Office: Recollections of the United States Military Telegraph Corps*

The reeducation of Lincoln scholars on reminiscent material spurred a host of new work. Douglas Wilson led the way with *Honor's Voice* (1998), a nuanced study of Lincoln's coming-of-age period, which Wilson defined as roughly the eleven years from 1832 to 1843, when the awkward, lonely young man struggled to transform himself into a professional success and respectable husband. Wilson rejected the scholarly tendency "to paraphrase the primary source materials," instead promising to convey the expression of historical testimony, "as much as possible in the language and terms of the evidence itself." The result was a Lincoln who appeared in the collective memory of his peers to have gained a "rock-solid ability to keep his resolves."¹⁴ Wilson's graceful work established a new paradigm for more extensive treatment of the private Lincoln.

Though it departs from some of Wilson's central contentions, the best example of this new focus is Kenneth J. Winkle's *The Young Eagle* (2001), which also traces Lincoln's rise. What separates Winkle's study from so many others is his determination to place the young Lincoln within the context of the communities and trends that helped shape him. The book contains a revealing table that illustrates patterns of American migration through the Lincoln family's experiences. Winkle points out that Abraham Lincoln and his father, Thomas, had more combined residential moves (11) that covered a greater distance (1,800 miles) than the total of the four generations of American-born Lincolns before them.¹⁵ Winkle also provides a compelling history of Springfield's black community that employs deft synthesis and original research to situate Lincoln's complicated attitudes toward race in the context of antebellum Illinois. These contributions illustrate Winkle's argument about Lincoln biographers: that in their zeal to fashion Lincoln as a self-made man, they have sometimes lost sight of his connections to the world around him. Where Wilson defines Lincoln's coming of age as primarily an internal struggle to establish "the gem of his character," Winkle posits Lincoln as a more representative figure, "in true connection with the people," one whose journey actually "mirrored" theirs.¹⁶

Though *Honor's Voice* and *The Young Eagle* stand apart as compelling recent portraits of the young Lincoln, other works have challenged some of their peripheral claims. In a surprising twist, David Donald reversed himself on the Ann Rutledge romance in "*We Are Lincoln Men*" (2003) and with help from other scholars has established a reasonable case against the Rutledge revival. Joshua Wolf Shenk's *Lincoln's Melancholy* (2005) remains agnostic on this issue but shrewdly argues that the Rutledge story developed mainly as way for New Salem residents to explain what they recalled as a nervous breakdown by Lincoln following her death. Informed by insights from modern psychology but decidedly not of-

during the Civil War (1907; Lincoln, 1995); John Y. Simon wrote the introduction for Francis F. Browne, *The Everyday Life of Abraham Lincoln: A Narrative and Descriptive Biography, with Pen-Pictures and Recollections by Those Who Knew Him* (1913; Lincoln, 1995); Mark E. Neely Jr. wrote the introduction for F. B. Carpenter, *The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House* (1866; Lincoln, 1995); Allen C. Guelzo wrote the introduction for J. G. Holland, *Holland's Life of Lincoln* (1866; Lincoln, 1998); Rodney O. Davis wrote the introduction for Ward Hill Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln: From His Birth to His Inauguration as President* (1872; Lincoln, 1999); Michael Burlingame wrote the introduction for Burlingame, ed., *Inside the White House in War Times*. Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, eds., *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln* (Palo Alto, 1996).

¹⁴ Douglas L. Wilson, *Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1998), 8, 323.

¹⁵ Kenneth J. Winkle, *The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln* (Dallas, 2001), 3, table 1.1.

¹⁶ On Lincoln's complicated attitudes toward race, see *ibid.*, 249–68. For some of the several studies Kenneth J. Winkle used for this insightful portrait see, Richard E. Hart, "Honest Abe and the African Americans: A Ground-breaking Study of How Blacks in Early Springfield Influenced Lincoln's Views on Race and Society," *Illinois Times*, Feb. 12, 1998. For a revised and expanded version of that article, see Richard E. Hart, "Springfield's African Americans as a Part of the Lincoln Community," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 20 (Winter 1999), 35–54. Winkle, *Young Eagle*, x. Wilson, *Honor's Voice*, 323. Winkle, *Young Eagle*, 315.

fering a psychobiography of the type that once polarized Lincoln scholars in the 1970s and 1980s, Shenk's work then quietly explores Lincoln's own words and recollected accounts about his bouts of depression to reveal a portrait of a man "who forged meaning from his affliction." Richard Lawrence Miller also uses recollected accounts by Herndon's informants and other archival material, but, at least in terms of sheer detail, his works go beyond competing monographs. Miller has produced two volumes of a projected multi-volume biography of Lincoln that so far take the subject only up to age thirty-two. An independent scholar, Miller does not offer bold reinterpretations, but he is an indefatigable researcher who uncovered, for example, an anonymous suicide poem allegedly written by Lincoln in 1838 that Shenk uses to powerful effect in *Lincoln's Melancholy*. Robert Mazrim also makes novel contributions to this period in Lincoln's life with his archaeological study *The Sangamo Frontier* (2007). Mazrim's book illustrates that New Salem was a more complicated and bustling place than historians have supposed. Using the latest digital technology to enhance a faded document, Mazrim and Illinois state historian Thomas F. Schwartz also claim that Lincoln owned property in the village—something nobody has previously asserted. They argue convincingly that a writ of execution from the well-known 1835 sheriff's sale of Lincoln's possessions includes a reference to a "house" and not just a "horse" as long assumed.¹⁷

Debating such details might seem trivial when considered in isolation, but they matter greatly when forging a thick narrative of Lincoln's rise. Future studies of the young Lincoln will have to address these latest developments but only by placing them in broader context. Revised and expanded social portraits of both New Salem and Springfield are needed. Even more pressing is the need to expand knowledge of the social and cultural context of Lincoln's childhood. Although there are some useful and well done recent works on Lincoln's connections to his birthplace in Kentucky and on his fourteen years in southern Indiana, there is still room for additional archival and archaeological research about those communities.¹⁸

What we lack most on this early period is a sophisticated understanding of fraternity on the antebellum frontier, and this is the main insight missing from C. A. Tripp's widely discussed monograph on Lincoln's affection for men. *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln* (2005) argues that Lincoln was "predominantly homosexual" and claims his orientation shaped "the qualities of his genius." Such speculation has been offered before, but, because of the range of his evidence, Tripp captured attention for his claims about the import of Lincoln's bed-sharing with men. Despite the book's many flaws, the author was enterprising in his research.¹⁹ A retired psychologist, Tripp built a massive database of

¹⁷ Donald, "We Are Lincoln Men," 20–24; C. A. Tripp, *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Lewis Gannett (New York, 2005), 67–89; Lewis Gannett, "'Overwhelming Evidence' of a Lincoln–Ann Rutledge Romance?: Reexamining Rutledge Family Reminiscences," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 26 (Winter 2005), 28–41. Shenk, *Lincoln's Melancholy*, 8. Richard Lawrence Miller, *Lincoln and His World: The Early Years, Birth to Illinois Legislature* (Mechanicsburg, 2006); Richard Lawrence Miller, *Lincoln and His World: Prairie Politician, 1834–1842* (Mechanicsburg, 2008). For the story behind the alleged suicide poem, see Joshua Wolf Shenk, "Eureka Dept.: The Suicide Poem," *New Yorker*, June 14, 2004. In Shenk's article, Donald expresses hesitation about accepting Lincoln's authorship as settled. I share his concerns, but Shenk makes a plausible case. Robert Mazrim, *The Sangamo Frontier: History and Archeology in the Shadow of Lincoln* (Chicago, 2006). Carol Woodrum, "Historians: Lincoln Owned Second Home," *Springfield (IL) State-Journal Register*, Feb. 12, 2005, p. 1.

¹⁸ See Lowell H. Harrison, *Lincoln of Kentucky* (Lexington, 2000); and William E. Bartelt, *There I Grew Up: Remembering Abraham Lincoln's Indiana Youth* (Indianapolis, 2008).

¹⁹ Tripp, *Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Gannett (New York, 2005), 20, 214. The book's flaws include occasional plagiarism, slipshod citations, and boorish asides such as one comparing Mary Lincoln to Adolf Hitler. For more details on the plagiarism, which was distinct from other allegations of misconduct leveled by a former

Lincoln texts—even outsourcing the typing to India—and shared digital files with leading Lincoln scholars who returned the favor with material from their own research, creating what became a powerful search engine.²⁰ Yet the resulting monograph sorely lacks context. Tripp cites sex studies from his mentor Alfred Kinsey over two dozen times, but offers no references to works on nineteenth-century masculinity and ignores the customs of male friendship in that era.²¹

David Donald begins to address the issue of fraternity in *"We Are Lincoln Men"* (2003), but limits himself to a handful of Lincoln's closest friends. Yet it is difficult to see how we can reach a full understanding of Lincoln's rise to power without asking more wide-ranging questions about his abilities to seduce other men. Lincoln always attracted passionate supporters, from New Salem to the White House, and yet practically none of these men carried over from one stage of his life to the next. Lincoln was perpetually at the center of attention, yet often struck his contemporaries as lonely. Even his closest friends found him cold and mysterious. Lincoln's relationships with his father, step-brother, and with his sons, especially eldest son, Robert, were even more ambiguous. We need new perspectives on Lincoln and the men in his life and more dialogue about the cultural meaning of his male relationships.

By contrast, there has been almost an excess of conversation on the subject of Lincoln's marriage. Many of these exchanges appear provoked by almost visceral reactions to Mary Lincoln; yet beneath the surface of the increasingly tired "Mary as victim or villain" debate, there are compelling questions about context. Was the Lincoln marriage, whatever its strengths and weaknesses, representative or exceptional? Since the publication of Donald's *Lincoln*, which was admirably balanced in its depiction of the relationship but gave little space to comparative exploration, there have been several finely wrought efforts aimed at this underlying question. Two recent biographical studies of the first lady from Jennifer Fleischner and Catherine Clinton usefully supplement Donald's effort and Jean H. Baker's *Mary Todd Lincoln* (1987) by focusing on how married identity represented both a mark of pride and a crippling loss of identity for an ambitious nineteenth-century woman. Both Fleischner and Clinton drop "Mary Todd" from their titles, for example, and simply label their subject "Mrs. Lincoln." Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals* (2005) accomplishes something equally revealing by comparing the Lincoln marriage to the marriages of his cabinet members. The contrast between the "undemonstrative" Lincolns and the "effusive" Seward offers particular resonance and illustrates why the book focuses more on Lincoln's "political genius" than his domestic talents. Daniel Mark Epstein's *The Lincolns: Portrait of a Marriage* (2008) turns the focus inward but still finds evocative ways to situate the marriage in its time and place.²²

writing partner, see Matthew Pinsker, review of *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln* by C. A. Tripp, *Journal of American History*, 92 (March 2006), 1442–43.

²⁰ Joshua Wolf Shenk, "The True Lincoln," *Time*, July 4, 2005, p. 39. Dinittia Smith, "Finding Homosexual Threads in Lincoln's Legend," *New York Times*, Dec. 16, 2004, p. E1. C. A. Tripp's database is now available at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum in Springfield, Illinois.

²¹ See, for example, E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York, 1993); Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York, 1996); Stephen M. Frank, *Life with Father: Parenthood and Masculinity in the Nineteenth-Century American North* (Baltimore, 1998); and Caleb Crain, *American Sympathy: Men, Friendship, and Literature in the New Nation* (New Haven, 2001).

²² Jennifer Fleischner, *Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Keckly: The Remarkable Story of the Friendship between a First Lady and a Former Slave* (New York, 2003). Catherine Clinton, *Mrs. Lincoln: A Life* (New York, 2009). Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York, 1987). Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of*

As a general rule, Mary Lincoln has fared better when she has been examined in context. Her difficult personality and erratic behavior seem more forgivable, and her husband's shortcomings as an emotional partner appear in sharper relief. But if there has been a trend toward more balanced treatments of the Lincoln marriage, then Michael Burlingame's monumental two-volume biography threatens to reverse that tendency. With a dizzying array of evidence, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (2008) argues that Mary Lincoln was a physically abusive, ethically challenged, manic depressive who suffered from premenstrual syndrome and made her husband's life practically a living hell.²³ Though Burlingame's judgments sound harsh when cataloged in this manner, his well-researched narrative will be influential. Yet his provocative interpretation raises many questions because the vast majority of the most graphic testimony on the marriage is not only recollected but also second-hand. This massive biography also represents a special challenge for Lincoln scholars who have become accustomed to defending the credibility of reminiscent informants. Burlingame's strong opinions will force scholars to confront their increasing reliance on recollected material in ways that might alter the ongoing reinterpretation of Lincoln's private life.

The Public Lincoln

The debates over Lincoln's public career have been just as intense as the back-and-forth regarding his private life, but the topics are so much more wide-ranging and the evidence so diffuse that the arguments lack the same claustrophobic feel. Lincoln had many public roles over a longer period than most people realize. He was a local politician first, then a leading Illinois lawyer. He acted as a party leader for two or three different political parties, depending on how you count them. He was a part-time journalist, even briefly the owner of a newspaper. He was a self-made polymath who published poetry but also received a patent for a proposed invention. A legislator, congressman, and president, Lincoln, the former militia captain who joked that he had only killed mosquitoes, became most famous (or infamous from certain perspectives) for his actions as commander in chief. He was also the victim of the most consequential murder conspiracy in American history.

Nearly every aspect of his career has been the subject of major new research and revised interpretations since 1995. The recollections have done their part, but the bulk of the new evidence has come from other types of sources, such as the Lincoln Legal Papers (which have been available on DVD-ROM since 2000) and the Index Project, a determined effort by a retired couple in Virginia to catalog more than 75,000 Union court-martial cases and all of Lincoln's presidential pardons. Some evidence that is not new has been made to seem new through the ability to conduct instant searches across tens of thousands of

Abraham Lincoln (New York, 2005), 540–41. Daniel Mark Epstein, *The Lincolns: Portrait of a Marriage* (New York, 2008). Other recent studies on Lincoln's domestic life that have added their own evocative context for the marriage include David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln at Home: Two Glimpses of Abraham Lincoln's Domestic Life* (Washington, 1999); Matthew Pinsker, *Lincoln's Sanctuary: Abraham Lincoln and the Soldiers' Home* (New York, 2003); Jerrold M. Packer, *The Lincolns in the White House: Four Years That Shattered a Family* (New York, 2005); Stephen Berry, *House of Abraham: Lincoln and the Todds, a Family Divided by War* (New York, 2007); and Kenneth J. Winkle, "The Middle-Class Marriage of Abraham and Mary Lincoln," in *Lincoln's America: 1809–1865*, ed. Joseph R. Fornieri and Sara Vaughn Gabbard (Carbondale, 2008). See also Jason Emerson, *The Madness of Mary Lincoln* (Carbondale, 2007).

²³ Michael Burlingame, *Abraham Lincoln: A Life* (2 vols., Baltimore, 2008).

pages. This technology has resulted in fresh interpretations of Lincoln's career, partly by giving a wide network of scholars access to an ever greater array of evidence. The Abraham Lincoln Association has made the 1953 *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* available online since 1999. By 2002 the Library of Congress had posted most of the Abraham Lincoln Papers at its American Memory Web site. During this period, many academic libraries also began subscribing to historical newspaper databases from providers such as ProQuest and Gale, giving many scholars their first full-text searchable access to the period's leading journals.²⁴

The new focus on Lincoln's legal career provides a good illustration of the inherent connection between more evidence and revisionist interpretations. Lincoln spent about twenty-five years as a practicing attorney based in Springfield and working with a succession of three partners. The staff of the Lincoln Legal Papers Project, organized in 1986, spent fifteen years gathering records from the roughly 5,600 cases in which Lincoln was involved. The sheer number of cases and the extent to which they were commercial in nature (mostly involving debt litigation) diverged sharply from previous estimates. Donald was the first biographer to benefit from access to the Lincoln Legal Papers database, but others have since had opportunity to mine the information. In *An Honest Calling* (2006), Mark E. Steiner creates a portrait of Lincoln as a Whig lawyer devoted to personal integrity and public order who found those values challenged in a fast-changing nation. Brian R. Dirck's *Lincoln the Lawyer* (2007) describes a more pragmatic professional who learned the importance of "grease" or easing friction within a nation increasingly rent by conflict. These authors make a strong argument that Lincoln's law practice shaped him in ways that mattered far beyond the courtroom. Several engaging new works examine Lincoln's better known cases, but we still need more complete studies on his role as an antebellum railroad lawyer and lobbyist. The area that demands the most attention is Lincoln's experiences on the Eighth Judicial Circuit. Everyone acknowledges the connections between Lincoln the circuit-riding attorney and Lincoln the aspiring Illinois politician, but nobody has fully documented the nature of those relationships or their impact on his rise to power.²⁵

Allen C. Guelzo's intellectual biography, *Abraham Lincoln: The Redeemer President* (1999) does not rely on any new type of evidence, but does bill itself as "a new way of speaking about Abraham Lincoln" because it attempts "to read Lincoln seriously as a man of ideas." There is some hyperbole in that claim, but the book still delivers a sophisticated

²⁴ The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency spearheaded the Lincoln Legal Papers Project, led for years by Cullom Davis and more recently by Daniel W. Stowell, as part of the reorganized Papers of Abraham Lincoln Project. Martha L. Benner and Cullom Davis, eds., *The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition* (3 DVDs, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 2000); Daniel W. Stowell, ed., *Papers of Abraham Lincoln: Legal Documents and Cases* (4 vols., Charlottesville, 2007). Thomas P. Lowry and Beverly A. Lowry created the Index Project, one of the most useful databases in recent memory; see Thomas P. Lowry, *Don't Shoot That Boy! Abraham Lincoln and Military Justice* (Mason City, 1999). Abraham Lincoln Association, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/>; "Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress," *Library of Congress: American Memory*, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>; "ProQuest Historical Newspapers," *ProQuest*, <http://www.proquest.com/en-US/catalogs/databases/detail/pq-hist-news.shtml>; "19th Century U.S. Newspapers," *Gale*, <http://www.gale.cengage.com/pdf/facts/19CentUSNews.pdf>.

²⁵ On the Lincoln Legal Papers Project, see Benner and Davis, eds., *Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln*; and Stowell, ed., *Papers of Abraham Lincoln*. Mark E. Steiner, *An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln* (DeKalb, 2006). Brian R. Dirck, *Lincoln the Lawyer* (Urbana, 2007). See also Allen D. Spiegel, *A. Lincoln, Esquire: A Shrewd, Sophisticated Litigator* (Macon, 2002). For studies of particular Lincoln cases, see John Evangelist Walsh, *Moonlight: Abraham Lincoln and the Almanac Trial* (New York, 2000); Daniel W. Stowell, ed., *In Tender Consideration: Women, Families, and the Law in Abraham Lincoln's Illinois* (Urbana, 2002); and Julie Fenster, *The Case of Abraham Lincoln: A Story of Adultery, Murder, and the Making of a Great President* (New York, 2007).

explanation of how Lincoln's inherent fatalism, what Guelzo terms his "lifelong dalliance with Old School Calvinism," struggled to coexist with his more open embrace of Lockean liberalism and how that intellectual battle prepared him to view emancipation as a form of national redemption. Guelzo's dissection of Lincoln's fatalism sparked much discussion, but little consensus. Stewart L. Winger, in his 2002 work *Lincoln, Religion, and Romantic Cultural Politics*, defines Lincoln instead as a nineteenth-century moralist with romantic sensibilities, while Ronald C. White Jr., in *Lincoln's Greatest Speech* (2002), describes Lincoln as moving away from fatalism long before the Civil War and warns against putting too much emphasis on his youthful ideas about what Lincoln himself termed his "Doctrine of Necessity." William Lee Miller goes even further by positing Lincoln's moral choices as an illustration of Max Weber's "ethic of responsibility." Miller's Lincoln is a natural-born moral statesman who rejects perfectionism and fatalism from his earliest days. By contrast, James Tackach finds Lincoln more mortal and distinctly less moral in his pre-presidential period than after, asserting through an exposition of the second inaugural address that Lincoln was not redeemed or transformed until late in the Civil War.²⁶

Other recent monographs have focused more intently on situating Lincoln's *use* of ideas and faith within the Protestant culture of the period. In *Lincoln's Sacred Effort* (2000), Lucas Morel offers a deft account of how Lincoln strove to incorporate elements of Christian morality into his public writings even as he acknowledged their limits as doctrine for a republican society. Joseph Fornieri describes Lincoln's synthesis of politics and religion as "Biblical Republicanism" and traces its earliest expression to Lincoln's 1854 Peoria speech against slavery. Richard Carwardine provides a penetrating examination of Lincoln's outreach to northern evangelical audiences and goes so far as to claim that his "effective channeling of the forces of mainstream Protestant orthodoxy" provided the foundation for his greatest political achievements as president.²⁷

The subject of Lincoln and his audiences has been the focus of a series of monographs on Lincoln's speechwriting talents. Since 2000 alone, there have been at least sixteen major books on Lincoln speeches or his development as a writer. Of these efforts, Harold Holzer's depiction of his 1860 Cooper Union speech, Gabor Boritt's work on the Gettysburg Address and its legacy, and Ronald White's analysis of the second inaugural address probably rank as the finest historical examinations of individual speeches. Boritt's *The Gettysburg Gospel* (2006) is a particular wonder because it came after the model for this type of book—Garry Wills's prize-winning *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992)—and analyzes

²⁶ Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids, 1999), xi, 19, 18. For a reaffirmation of this argument and an extension of its principles throughout American intellectual history, see John Patrick Diggins, *On Hallowed Ground: Abraham Lincoln and the Foundations of American History* (New Haven, 2000). For other surveys of intellectual history for Lincoln's particular world view, see Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge, Mass., 1997); and Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2002). For a narrative narrowly focused on Lincoln's lifelong struggle over his faith, see Wayne C. Temple, *Abraham Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet* (Mahomet, 1995). On Lincoln's political thought in the context of his day, see Thomas Schneider, *Lincoln's Defense of Politics: The Public Man and His Opponents in the Crisis over Slavery* (Columbia, Mo., 2006). Stewart L. Winger, *Lincoln, Religion, and Romantic Cultural Politics* (DeKalb, 2002). Ronald C. White Jr., *Lincoln's Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural* (New York, 2002). William Lee Miller, *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography* (New York, 2002). See also William Lee Miller, *President Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman* (New York, 2008). James Tackach, *Lincoln's Moral Vision: The Second Inaugural Address* (Jackson, 2002).

²⁷ Lucas E. Morel, *Lincoln's Sacred Effort: Defining Religion's Role in American Self-Government* (Lanham, 2000); Joseph R. Fornieri, *Abraham Lincoln's Political Faith* (DeKalb, 2003), 35. Richard J. Carwardine, *Lincoln: Profiles in Power* (Harlow, Eng., 2003), 306; reprinted in the United States as Richard J. Carwardine, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (New York, 2006).

the most famous speech in the American canon yet manages to contribute something new in almost every chapter. Similarly, both Douglas Wilson's *Lincoln's Sword* (2006) and Fred Kaplan's *Lincoln: The Biography of a Writer* (2008) offer fresh perspectives on Lincoln's prose skills. Wilson is especially adept at explaining Lincoln's writing method, while Kaplan offers an engaging portrait of his improbable self-made literary education.²⁸

The only problem with this incredible outpouring of work on Lincoln's ideas and his prose is that it can make him appear too much of a philosopher/poet and not enough of a politician. Even those scholars who focus on his political speeches are sometimes guilty of misrepresenting the nature of nineteenth-century politics. As important as stump-speaking and oratory was in that era, campaigns and public life were still dominated by other work—the secret meetings, raucous conventions, horse-trading sessions, and vast mobilization efforts that defined the mechanics of the system. Lincoln was always in the middle of that business even when he denied it. Yet recovering his role in such affairs has proven enormously difficult for historians. The evidence is hard to find and elusive when it does exist. Neither the new political history nor the old has ever quite been able to overcome these obstacles. There is no longer open academic hostility toward past partisans, but there are precious few recent studies of Lincoln's partisan career that do not read like exercises in exegesis.

The cost of these erudite tendencies has been especially high for the Illinois period of Lincoln's political career. The best book on Lincoln's four terms in the state legislature was written by the state senator, and future U.S. senator, Paul Simon in 1965 (and then revised in 1971). The standard treatment of Lincoln's sole congressional campaign was produced in 1948 by Donald W. Riddle, and the two most cited works on his troubled congressional term date from 1957 (also by Riddle) and 1979 (by Paul Findley). The research agenda that Gabor Boritt and Mark Neely outlined in the late 1970s for Lincoln's Whig years has not been addressed. Don Fehrenbacher produced what remains the finest study of Lincoln in the 1850s—*Prelude to Greatness*, a slim volume published in 1962. There is no book on Lincoln's dramatic first U.S. Senate contest in 1855, nor one that fully explains his role in the formation of the Illinois Republican party. We do finally have several good studies of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, including what seems to be a definitive text from the Lincoln Studies Center, edited by Rodney Davis and Douglas Wilson, as well as Allen Guelzo's studious narrative *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates That Defined America* (2008). Yet Guelzo's work is about the debates and not the 1858 Illinois legislative contests those discussions were attempting to influence. The field would still benefit from an analysis that puts the 1858 campaign in "local political and social context," as Neely once urged.²⁹

²⁸ On Lincoln's speeches and his development as a writer, see Harry V. Jaffa, *A New Birth of Freedom: Abraham Lincoln and the Coming of the Civil War* (Lanham, 2000); Kent Gramm, *November: Lincoln's Elegy at Gettysburg* (Bloomington, 2001); Tackach, *Lincoln's Moral Vision*; White, *Lincoln's Greatest Speech*; Carl F. Wiecek, *Lincoln's Quest for Equality: The Road to Gettysburg* (DeKalb, 2002); Fornieri, *Abraham Lincoln's Political Faith*; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech That Made Abraham Lincoln President* (New York, 2004); John Channing Briggs, *Lincoln's Speeches Reconsidered* (Baltimore, 2005); Ronald C. White Jr., *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln through His Words* (New York, 2005); Gabor S. Boritt, *The Gettysburg Gospel: The Lincoln Speech That Nobody Knows* (New York, 2006); Douglas L. Wilson, *Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words* (New York, 2006); Timothy S. Good, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates and the Making of a President* (Jefferson, 2007); Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates That Defined America* (New York, 2008); Lewis E. Lehrman, *Lincoln at Peoria: The Turning Point* (Mechanicsburg, 2008); and Fred Kaplan, *Lincoln: The Biography of a Writer* (New York, 2008). Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America* (New York, 1992).

²⁹ Paul Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness: The Illinois Legislative Years* (1965; Urbana, 1971); Donald

There are recently published books that tell the broad story of Lincoln's rise to power, but none that grapple with the full dimensions of what he had to accomplish outside of public view to make it possible. The best narratives on the 1860 election are simply too condensed.³⁰ We need a new monograph on that contest, an election that most historians consider one of the most important in American history. A related issue concerns the absence of adequate treatment on Lincoln's complex relationship with the antebellum Know-Nothing movement. Everyone quotes a handful of letters to figures such as Republican ally Owen Lovejoy and longtime Kentucky friend Joshua Speed, which illustrate Lincoln's personal hostility toward nativism, but there is much more to consider. For example, nobody has yet looked past the usual suspects to study Lincoln's connections to figures such as William W. Danenhower, a Chicago bookseller who led the Illinois Know-Nothings and then became allied with the future president.³¹

The near-complete absence of obscure role players such as Danenhower in political studies about the antebellum-era Lincoln illustrates the depth of the problem concerning collateral research. Randall and Neely had identified over two dozen supporting figures from Lincoln's story who still lacked biographical study by the end of the 1970s. Vice President Andrew Johnson and Secretary of Treasury Salmon P. Chase were the two people of that twenty-five covered before Donald's 1995 biography. Only one more name from that list has been studied extensively since 1995 (Richard J. Oglesby, an Illinois governor and U.S. Senator).³² Nor was that list of two dozen plus complete. Neither Randall nor Neely mentioned Danenhower or any local Know-Nothing as figures worthy of additional research. Moreover, the men who have been excluded from serious biographical examination are often essential for understanding the overlapping stories of the expansion of the Eighth Judicial Circuit and the breakdown of the second party system. We cannot fully assess Lincoln's behavior in the 1850s or his rise to power generally without knowing more about (and from) his supporting political cast.

The situation improves markedly during Lincoln's presidential years. We now have richly detailed and updated studies of his relations with cabinet, White House aides, generals, admirals, soldiers, Congress, the Supreme Court, the press, foreign governments,

W. Riddle, *Lincoln Runs for Congress* (New Brunswick, 1948); Donald W. Riddle, *Congressman Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana, 1957); Paul Findley, *A. Lincoln: The Crucible of Congress* (New York, 1979). Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (Stanford, 1962). Rodney O. Davis and Douglas L. Wilson, eds., *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates: The Lincoln Studies Center Edition* (Urbana, 2008); Guelzo, *Lincoln and Douglas*. Other recent studies include Good, *Lincoln-Douglas Debates and the Making of a President*; and Roy Morris Jr., *The Long Pursuit: Abraham Lincoln's Thirty-Year Struggle with Stephen Douglas for the Heart and Soul of America* (New York, 2008).

³⁰ On Lincoln's rise to power, see William C. Harris, *Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency* (Lawrence, 2007); and John C. Waugh, *One Man Great Enough: Abraham Lincoln's Road to the Civil War* (New York, 2007). On the 1860 nomination battle, see Gary Ecelbarger, *The Great Comeback: How Abraham Lincoln Beat the Odds to Win the 1860 Republican Nomination* (New York, 2008); Timothy S. Good, *Lincoln for President: An Underdog's Path to the 1860 Republican Nomination* (Jefferson, 2009); and Bruce Chadwick, *Abe Lincoln for President: Behind the Scenes in the 1860 Campaign* (Naperville, forthcoming). For the best, most up-to-date accounts of Lincoln's role in the election, see Donald, *Lincoln*, 230–56; and Harris, *Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency*, 151–247.

³¹ "About us here, [Know-Nothings] are mostly my old political and personal friends; and I have hoped their organization would die out without the painful necessity of my taking an open stand against them." Abraham Lincoln to Owen Lovejoy, Aug. 11, 1855, in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, II, 316; "I am not a Know-Nothing. That is certain. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes, be in favor of degrading classes of white people?" Lincoln to Joshua F. Speed, Aug. 24, 1855, *ibid.*, 323. For more on William W. Danenhower, his relationship with Lincoln, and newly published correspondence between them, see Matthew Pinsker, "Not Always Such a Whig: Abraham Lincoln's Partisan Realignment in the 1850s," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 29 (Summer 2008), 27–46.

³² Mark A. Plummer, *Lincoln's Rail Splitter*.

Indian nations, the Republican party, and even his political enemies.³³ There are also several well-written parallel-lives studies that shed light on Lincoln as president, including Brian Dirck's dual portrait of Lincoln and Jefferson Davis, Roy Morris Jr.'s comparison of Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas, James F. Simon's work on Lincoln and Roger B. Taney, James Oakes's and John Stauffer's studies of Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, and Daniel Mark Epstein's book on Lincoln and Walt Whitman.³⁴ We could still use additional studies on Lincoln's relationships with particular journalists, war governors, and midlevel organizers of his own party, but the extent of knowledge on the sociology of the Lincoln administration has expanded faster over the last dozen years than over any comparable period in the professional era.³⁵

The consensus view emerging from these recent studies is one of near constant growth for Lincoln as president. With few exceptions, the portraits depict a national leader who was thoroughly unprepared for the grave executive challenges that faced him but who struggled mightily (and successfully) to meet them. This focus on what Donald called Lincoln's "enormous capacity for growth," is not new, but the emphasis on the president's own agency in his career evolution does represent a subtle departure from previous evaluations. Earlier historians tended to portray Lincoln's public greatness as almost natural-born. In his 1952 study of Lincoln and his generals, T. Harry Williams labeled the improbable commander in chief "a great natural strategist, a better one than any of his generals." James M. McPherson calls this view "misleading," noting that Lincoln "worked hard to master this subject, just as he had done to become a lawyer." The sharp focus on

³³ Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*; Daniel Mark Epstein, *Lincoln's Men: The President and His Private Secretaries* (New York, 2009); Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *Lincoln's Generals* (New York, 1995); Geoffrey Perret, *Lincoln's War: The Untold Story of America's Greatest President as Commander in Chief* (New York, 2004); James M. McPherson, *Tried by War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief* (New York, 2008); Craig L. Symonds, *Lincoln and His Admirals* (New York, 2008); William C. Davis, *Lincoln's Men: How President Lincoln Became Father to an Army and a Nation* (New York, 1999); Pinsker, *Lincoln's Sanctuary*; Bruce Tap, *Over Lincoln's Shoulder: The Committee on the Conduct of the War* (Lawrence, 1998); Heather Cox Richardson, *The Greatest Nation on Earth: Republican Economic Policies during the Civil War* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998); Brian McGinty, *Lincoln and the Court* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008); Harry J. Maihafer, *War of Words: Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War Press* (Washington, 2001); Dean B. Mahin, *One War at a Time: The International Dimensions of the American Civil War* (Dulles, 1999); Howard Jones, *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom: The Union and Slavery in the Diplomacy of the Civil War* (Lincoln, 2002); David A. Nichols, *Lincoln and the Indians: Civil War Policy and Politics* (1978; Urbana, 2000); Michael S. Green, *Freedom, Union, and Power: Lincoln and His Party during the Civil War* (New York, 2004); Joanna D. Cowden, "Heaven Will Frown on Such a Cause as This": *Six Democrats Who Opposed Lincoln's War* (Lanham, 2001); Jennifer L. Weber, *Copperheads: The Rise and Fall of Lincoln's Opponents in the North* (New York, 2006). All of these works supplement Donald's biography as well as an important study of Lincoln's presidency by Phillip Shaw Paludan that slightly predated it; see Phillip Shaw Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln* (Lawrence, 1994).

³⁴ Brian R. Dirck, *Lincoln and Davis: Imagining America, 1809–1865* (Lawrence, 2001); Morris, *Long Pursuit*; James F. Simon, *Lincoln and Chief Justice Taney: Slavery, Secession, and the President's War Powers* (New York, 2006); James Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York, 2007); John Stauffer, *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2008); Daniel Mark Epstein, *Lincoln and Whitman: Parallel Lives in Civil War Washington* (New York, 2004). Other parallel studies include Bruce Chadwick, *The Two American Presidents: A Dual Biography of Abraham Lincoln and Jefferson Davis* (Secaucus, 1998); William D. Pederson and Frank J. Williams, eds., *Franklin D. Roosevelt and Abraham Lincoln: Competing Perspectives on Two Great Presidencies* (Armonk, 2002); David R. Contosta, *Rebel Giants: The Revolutionary Lives of Abraham Lincoln and Charles Darwin* (New York, 2008); and Adam Gopnik, *Angels and Ages: A Short Book about Darwin, Lincoln, and Modern Life* (New York, 2009).

³⁵ For other notable recent studies on the sociology of the Lincoln administration, see Gabor S. Boritt, ed., *The Lincoln Enigma: New Perspectives at the Dawn of the Millennium* (New York, 2001); Hans L. Trefousse, "First among Equals": *Abraham Lincoln's Reputation during His Administration* (New York, 2005); Elizabeth Smith Brownstein, *Lincoln's Other White House: The Untold Story of the Man and His Presidency* (New York, 2005); Tom Wheeler, *Mr. Lincoln's T-Mails: The Untold Story of How Abraham Lincoln Used the Telegraph to Win the Civil War* (New York, 2006); Brian Lamb and Susan Swain, eds., *Abraham Lincoln: Great American Historians on Our Sixteenth President* (New York, 2008); and Eric Foner, ed., *Our Lincoln: New Perspectives on Lincoln and His World* (New York, 2008).

Lincoln's hard work also represents a small rebellion against Donald's view of Lincoln's growth. Donald attempted to reconcile Lincoln's evolving leadership skills with what the biographer termed "the essential passivity of his nature" while creating an interpretation that emphasized "chance, or accident" as a factor important in Lincoln's success. Other presidential scholars have appeared underwhelmed by this Zen-like notion. While Donald celebrates Lincoln's political genius but still concludes that his "disorderly" approach to cabinet-making "ensured that the cabinet would never be harmonious or loyal to the President," Doris Kearns Goodwin insists that he built a "team of rivals" through "an extraordinary array of personal qualities" and "an acute understanding of the sources of power." Ronald White offers an important synthesis for this version of the hard-working, self-made Lincoln in his one-volume biography, *A. Lincoln* (2009).³⁶

Yet there is something unsteady about this newfound consensus regarding Lincoln's earnest growth. Reading these recent books together almost induces vertigo. The Lincoln that emerges never seems to stop growing and does not retreat much either. Even more worrisome, when scholarship clashes over particular episodes, the consensus often breaks apart quite easily. For instance, we now have two excellent but competing visions of Lincoln's actions during the secession crisis, with Harold Holzer's vivid, focused 2008 portrait of an effective President-Elect Lincoln standing against Russell McClintock's more wide-ranging critique of an uncertain leader in *Lincoln and the Decision for War* (2008). On the subject of Lincoln's suspension of habeas corpus and other wartime challenges to the Constitution, the scholarship presents a wide range of opinion, including Daniel A. Farber's thoughtful defense in *Lincoln's Constitution* (2003), James Simon's earnest, balanced study, *Lincoln and Chief Justice Taney* (2006), and William Marvel's harsh critiques in *Mr. Lincoln Goes to War* (2006) and *Lincoln's Darkest Year* (2008). Other historians have addressed Lincoln's efforts to meet the final challenges of his administration and have come away with diverging points of emphasis. John C. Waugh's *Reelecting Lincoln* (1998) offers the 1864 contest as Lincoln's great turning point. William C. Harris locates the transformation elsewhere, in the struggle over wartime reconstruction and even during Lincoln's last months. In *April 1865* (2001), author Jay Winik places the weight of the war and Lincoln's great accomplishment in a single month.³⁷

Yet the subject producing the most vigorous recent debate has been emancipation. Lerone Bennett's long-awaited critique of Lincoln's emancipation policy, *Forced into Glory* (2000), unleashed a flurry of notable responses. Bennett argues that Lincoln was a typical nineteenth-century white racist who was "forced into glory" mainly by the actions of slaves themselves and through political pressure from more egalitarian-minded Republi-

³⁶ Donald, *Lincoln*, 14; T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (New York, 1962); McPherson, *Tried by War*, 4; Donald, *Lincoln*, 14, 267; Goodwin, *Team of Rivals*, xvii; Ronald C. White Jr., *A. Lincoln: A Biography* (New York, 2009). For other biographical studies that have also embodied this synthesis of the self-made Lincoln, see William E. Gienapp, *Abraham Lincoln and Civil War America: A Biography* (New York, 2002); Matthew Pinsker, *Abraham Lincoln* (Washington, 2002); Thomas Keneally, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2003); George S. McGovern, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2008); Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln: A Very Short Introduction* (New York, 2009); and James M. McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln: A Presidential Life* (New York, 2009).

³⁷ Harold Holzer, *Lincoln President-Elect: Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter, 1860–1861* (New York, 2008); Russell A. McClintock, *Lincoln and the Decision for War: The Northern Response to Secession* (Chapel Hill, 2008); Daniel A. Farber, *Lincoln's Constitution* (Chicago, 2003); Simon, *Lincoln and Chief Justice Taney*; William Marvel, *Mr. Lincoln Goes to War* (New York, 2006); William Marvel, *Lincoln's Darkest Year: The War in 1862* (New York, 2008); John C. Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: The Presidential Election of 1864* (New York, 1998); William C. Harris, *With Charity for All: Lincoln and the Restoration of the Union* (Lexington, Ky., 1997); William C. Harris, *Lincoln's Last Months* (Cambridge, Mass., 2004); Jay Winik, *April 1865: The Month That Saved America* (New York, 2001).

can leaders on Capitol Hill. A series of works have followed, attempting to explain the nuances of Lincoln's wartime antislavery policy, beginning with Michael Vorenberg's terrific study of the Thirteenth Amendment, *Final Freedom* (2001), and culminating with George M. Frederickson's measured appraisal in *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent* (2008). We now have several fine narratives of Lincoln's emancipation policy, although Allen Guelzo's study of the proclamation stands out as the most significant direct response to Bennett. However, the most thought-provoking new work on emancipation comes from Burrus M. Carnahan's *Act of Justice* (2007). He explains how evolving principles of nineteenth-century international law, brought to the president's attention by Republican radicals, helped Lincoln see the policy as a sweeping declaration of human freedom. What began as a mere confiscation order became instead by January 1, 1863, an "act of justice" for an oppressed people, borrowing a concept that originated with the Swiss legal theorist Emmerich de Vattel—a detail unmentioned in previous studies of the subject.³⁸

Bennett's full-frontal attack on a central element of Lincoln's iconic legacy, and the widespread attention it generated, has helped galvanize other critics of the president. A range of present-day concerns over issues such as the imperial presidency, out-of-control government spending, and even political correctness have also mobilized Lincoln critics. Not since the days of the *Chicago Times* and *Charleston Mercury* has there been such an intense onslaught of aggressive, well-documented criticism of Lincoln and his policies. Libertarian and neo-Confederate authors have vilified Lincoln as a national fraud who destroyed federalism and wreaked havoc on the Constitution. This version of the Great Emancipator hated blacks and committed war crimes against whites. The best known of these critics is Thomas J. DiLorenzo, a libertarian economist who labels Lincoln the Great Centralizer. Yet DiLorenzo reserves his greatest animus for the "Lincoln cult," which he sees as a vast left- and right-wing conspiracy of scholars determined to suppress the truth about Lincoln's more unsavory conduct. Members of this growing anti-Lincoln coalition understand enough about the demands of academic history to focus on real evidence and to present themselves as true revisionists. Although their arguments usually lack context and balance, they are not mere diatribes. Scholars such as Thomas L. Krannawitter have begun responding directly and carefully to their claims, launching a feisty dialogue that will undoubtedly only escalate through the Civil War sesquicentennial.³⁹

³⁸ Lerone Bennett Jr., *Forced into Glory: Abraham Lincoln's White Dream* (Chicago, 2000). For a widely discussed article that originally outlined Lerone Bennett's argument 32 years earlier, see Lerone Bennett Jr., "Was Abe Lincoln a White Supremacist?," *Ebony*, 23 (Feb. 1968), 35–42. For other studies on emancipation and Lincoln's views on race, see Michael Vorenberg, *Final Freedom: The Civil War, the Abolition of Slavery, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (Cambridge, Eng., 2001); William K. Klingaman, *Abraham Lincoln and the Road to Emancipation, 1861–1865* (New York, 2001); Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York, 2004); Richard Striner, *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery* (New York, 2006); Burrus M. Carnahan, *Act of Justice: Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Law of War* (Lexington, Ky., 2007); Brian R. Dirck, ed., *Lincoln Emancipated: The President and the Politics of Race* (DeKalb, 2007); Harold Holzer and Sara Vaughn Gabbard, eds., *Lincoln and Freedom: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Thirteenth Amendment* (Carbondale, 2007); and George M. Frederickson, *Big Enough to Be Inconsistent: Abraham Lincoln Confronts Slavery and Race* (Cambridge, Mass., 2008).

³⁹ See Thomas J. DiLorenzo, *The Real Lincoln: A New Look at Abraham Lincoln, His Agenda, and an Unnecessary War* (Roseville, 2002); and Thomas J. DiLorenzo, *Lincoln Unmasked: What You're Not Supposed to Know about Dishonest Abe* (New York, 2006). For other highly critical accounts of Lincoln's presidency, see Jeffrey Manber and Neil Dahlstrom, *Lincoln's Wrath: Fierce Mobs, Brilliant Scoundrels, and a President's Mission to Destroy the Press* (Naperville, 2005); and Robert P. Broadwater, *Did Lincoln and the Republican Party Create the Civil War?: An Argument* (Jefferson, 2008). For an example of the neo-Confederate indictment of Lincoln, see Walter Brian Cisco, *War Crimes against Southern Civilians* (Gretna, 2007). Thomas L. Krannawitter, *Vindicating Lincoln: Defending the Politics of Our Greatest President* (Lanham, 2008).

In 1995, David Donald followed professional custom by ending his biography of Lincoln with the president's Peterson House deathbed scene and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton's famous (and naturally since disputed) pronouncement, "Now he belongs to the ages." It would seem odd to end the story with this particular flourish today since many readers have been trained to expect nuanced discussions of the murder and its aftermath. Understanding Lincoln's assassination as a political act has become an important element in explaining his public career and the antipathy he generated. This trend is all the more remarkable given that J. G. Randall did not list the assassination as a legitimate topic of inquiry in his 1936 state-of-the-field essay, and, although Mark Neely did list it in 1979, he did so mainly to acknowledge that professional historians had much work left to do. Amateurs continue to dominate scholarship about the assassination, but there are now several first-rate biographical narratives of the participants and their pursuers by historians trained and untrained, with the most important being Michael W. Kauffman's study of John Wilkes Booth, *American Brutus* (2004). Kauffman's work is noteworthy especially for his use of database technology to uncover "new relationships among the plotters" and "unnoticed patterns in Booth's behavior." The author believes that Booth used elaborate misdirection to hide his intentions and ensnare potential collaborators and witnesses. Although marveling at Kauffman's method, most assassination mavens continue to believe that the conspiracy went far beyond Booth, reaching all the way to Richmond.⁴⁰ Much of the discussion on this elusive subject in the future will involve exhaustive efforts to authenticate acts of Civil War sabotage and terrorism, termed "black flag warfare," that allegedly preceded the murder plot.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Donald, *Lincoln*, 599. In typical fashion, Donald carefully noted all of the competing accounts of Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton's words. See *ibid.*, 686n. For an elegant summary of this issue and its larger meaning, see Adam Gopnik, "Angels and Ages: Lincoln's Language and Its Legacy," *New Yorker*, May 28, 2007, http://www.newyorker.com/porting/2007/05/28/070528fa_fact_gopnik. Michael W. Kauffman, *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies* (New York, 2004), xiii. For a much different view of the conspiracy and of the involvement of peripheral figures such as Dr. Samuel Mudd, the Maryland surgeon who set John Wilkes Booth's broken leg, see Edward Steers Jr., *The Escape and Capture of John Wilkes Booth* (Gettysburg, 1996); Edward Steers Jr., *His Name Is Still Mudd: The Case against Dr. Samuel Alexander Mudd* (Gettysburg, 1997); Edward Steers Jr., *Blood on the Moon: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Lexington, Ky., 2003); and Edward Steers Jr., *The Trial: The Assassination of President Abraham Lincoln and the Trial of the Conspirators* (Lexington, Ky., 2006). Neither Michael W. Kauffman nor Edward Steers Jr. are academic historians. For a general study, see Thomas R. Turner, *The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Malabar, 1999). For an essential collection of Booth's writings, see John Rhodehamel and Louise Taper, eds., *"Right or Wrong, God Judge Me": The Writings of John Wilkes Booth* (Urbana, 1997). For a compendium of eyewitness accounts, see Timothy S. Good, *We Saw Lincoln Shot: One Hundred Eyewitness Accounts* (Jackson, 1995). For the best edition of assassination images and artifacts, see James L. Swanson and Daniel R. Weinberg, eds., *Lincoln's Assassins: Their Trial and Execution* (New York, 2001). For the papers of the officer who commanded the prison where the conspirators were held, see Edward Steers Jr., and Harold Holzer, eds., *The Lincoln Assassination Conspirators: Their Confinement and Execution, as Recorded in the Letterbook of John Frederick Hartranft* (Baton Rouge, 2009). Other important biographical studies include Elizabeth D. Leonard, *Lincoln's Avengers: Justice, Revenge, and Reunion after the Civil War* (New York, 2004); and Kate Clifford Larson, *The Assassin's Accomplice: Mary Surratt and the Plot to Kill Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2008). For an engaging narrative of the pursuit of Booth, see James L. Swanson, *Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer* (New York, 2006). For a nuanced account of southern reaction to Lincoln's assassination, see Carolyn L. Harrell, *When the Bells Told for Lincoln: Southern Reaction to the Assassination* (Macon, 1997). For a neo-Confederate view of the assassination, see John Chandler Griffin, *Abraham Lincoln's Execution* (Gretna, 2006). For a creative study of the assassination in popular memory, see C. Wyatt Evans, *The Legend of John Wilkes Booth: Myth, Memory, and a Mummy* (Lawrence, 2004).

⁴¹ On the fascinating debate, for example, over Lincoln's potential involvement in the 1864 Dahlgren raid which threatened to free prisoners of war in Richmond and perhaps kill Jefferson Davis and members of his cabinet, see Duane Schultz, *The Dahlgren Affair: Terror and Conspiracy in the Civil War* (New York, 1998); and Stephen W. Sears, "Raid on Richmond," *MHQ: The Quarterly Journal of Military History*, 11 (Autumn 1998), 88–96. The military historian Eric Wittenberg has plans to publish a biography of Ulric Dahlgren. For a discussion of "black flag warfare," see Joseph George Jr., "Black Flag Warfare: Lincoln and the Raids against Richmond and Jefferson Davis," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, 115 (July 1991), 291–318. See also Edwin C. Fishel, *The Se-*

A topic that neither Randall nor Neely addressed in detail was scholarship about Lincoln in the popular memory. In 1994, Merrill D. Peterson produced an invaluable survey of this topic, and there has been more work in the area since, no doubt as part of the flowering of memory studies. The sociologist Barry Schwartz has led the way with *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (2000) and *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era* (2008). Christopher Thomas wrote *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* (2002) on the evolving place of the Lincoln Memorial in American culture and the ways its grandeur has helped reaffirm enduring civic beliefs. Yet some of the best works in this burgeoning area have been quirkier and more personal. Some examples include: Frank J. Williams's reflective collection of essays, *Judging Lincoln* (2002); Thomas J. Craughwell's romp, *Stealing Lincoln's Body* (2007), about the nineteenth-century plot to rob the president's Springfield tomb; the journalist Andrew Ferguson's wickedly funny exposé of modern-day Lincoln buffs in *Land of Lincoln* (2007); the Kunhardt family's elegant *Looking for Lincoln* (2008); James A. Percoco's moving travelogue, *Summers with Lincoln* (2008), about a high school teacher and his students encountering the nation's Lincoln monuments; and the scholar Gerald J. Prokopowicz's deft and insightful study of public misperceptions of the great president, *Did Lincoln Own Slaves?* (2008).⁴²

With the ascendancy of Barack Obama to the presidency in 2009 during the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth, and amid the new president's regular invocations of Lincoln as a predecessor and source of inspiration, there is sure to be additional focus on the political uses of Lincoln's legacy. David Donald famously referred to this process as "getting right with Lincoln," but the reality is probably better understood as the perennial effort to get Lincoln right with us.⁴³ The eagerness to project Lincoln onto ceremonial occasions, into so many different types of policy and tactical discussions, or as validation for life-style choices reveals far more about the present than the past—more about each successive generation of Americans than about Lincoln himself. Yet besides illustrating the evolving values of collective memory, scholars must continue to explore what the Lincoln fixation suggests about contemporary American politics or, for that matter, global politics, since invocations of Lincoln have by no means been limited by national boundaries.

cret War for the Union: The Untold Story of Military Intelligence in the Civil War (Boston, 1996). For the origin of the groundbreaking work on the alleged involvement of the Confederate secret service in the assassination plot, see William A. Tidwell, *Come Retribution: The Confederate Secret Service and the Assassination of Lincoln* (Jackson, 1988).

⁴² Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (New York, 1994). Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago, 2000); Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth-Century America* (Chicago, 2008); Christopher A. Thomas, *The Lincoln Memorial and American Life* (Princeton, 2002). For an evocative photographic essay on the Lincoln Memorial, see Carol Highsmith, *The Lincoln Memorial* (New York, 1998). Frank J. Williams, *Judging Lincoln* (Carbondale, 2002); Thomas J. Craughwell, *Stealing Lincoln's Body* (Cambridge, Mass., 2007); Andrew Ferguson, *Land of Lincoln: Adventures in Abe's America* (New York, 2007); Phillip B. Kunhardt III, Peter W. Kunhardt, and Peter W. Kunhardt Jr., *Looking for Lincoln: The Making of an American Icon* (New York, 2008); James A. Percoco, *Summers with Lincoln: Looking for the Man in the Monuments* (New York, 2008); Gerald J. Prokopowicz, *Did Lincoln Own Slaves? And Other Frequently Asked Questions about Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 2008). See also Ray Broadus Browne, *Lincoln-Lore: Lincoln in the Popular Mind* (Bowling Green, 1996); Philip R. Reilly, *Abraham Lincoln's DNA and Other Adventures in Genetics* (Cold Spring Harbor, 2000); Michael Burkholder, *100 Essential Lincoln Books* (Nashville, 2003); Pamela Oldham and Meredith Bean McMath, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to Lincoln's Legacy* (New York, 2005); Edward Steers Jr., *Lincoln Legends: Myths, Hoaxes, and Confabulations Associated with Our Greatest President* (Lexington, Ky., 2007); Mark S. Reinhart, *Abraham Lincoln on Screen: A Filmography of Dramas and Documentaries including Television, 1903–2008* (1998; Jefferson, 2008); and Charles Lachman, *The Last Lincolns: The Rise and Fall of a Great American Family* (New York, 2008).

⁴³ David Donald, "Getting Right with Lincoln," *Harper's Magazine*, 202 (April 1951), 74–80. This article was republished in David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era* (1956; New York, 1989), 3–18.

Toward a Digital Lincoln

There have been two broadly defined eras in the examination of the Lincoln theme—a participant era and a professional era. The first stage was defined by participants and their memories and was dominated by figures such as Lincoln’s law partner and biographer William Herndon, and former White House aides and quasi-official administration scribes, John G. Nicolay and John Hay. The second stage was driven by professional historians, such as Randall and David Donald, who focused their efforts on successive rounds of interpretive revisionism and practiced their devotion to methodological rigor.

It now appears that we have entered a third stage, what might be called the project era, which is being shaped by a series of innovative digital projects that will eventually make the vast majority of Lincoln-related evidence accessible electronically for scholars anywhere on the globe. In some ways, we are already there. Any student of Lincoln with a broadband Internet connection and a little bit of digital moxie can now search the *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* online, access both images of pages and transcripts for most of his personal and presidential papers, browse his extant day-by-day schedule from his birth to death, search and view the *Congressional Globe* for any period of his career, find articles from hundreds of period newspapers, read practically any memoir or published recollection ever written about Lincoln through Google Books or from one of several other digital text databases, and examine many of the best-known images, illustrations, and cartoons from the period. There are also examples of other nineteenth-century letters, diaries, and manuscripts scattered across the Web. The *Official Records of the War of the Rebellion*, most of the Civil War pension files, and all of the era’s census records are now just a few mouse-clicks and maybe a subscription fee or two away. Finally, there is also a host of reference sources available digitally, including the American National Biography, Encyclopedia Britannica, and all types of nineteenth-century biographical directories, almanacs, gazetteers, and cyclopedias.⁴⁴

Yet as impressive as all that sounds, these new possibilities for research represent only a fraction of the digital spade work to be done. Many Lincoln scholars of the next generation will devote themselves to expanding these digital resources. One of the most essential projects will be the Papers of Abraham Lincoln, an ambitious effort by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency to build on the success of the Lincoln Legal Papers by creating an integrated, comprehensive electronic gateway that makes all documents written by and to Abraham Lincoln available online with full annotations and prepared to the highest editorial standards.⁴⁵ Thousands more nineteenth-century newspapers, including most notably the *Springfield Illinois Daily Journal*, need to be digitized. Perhaps millions of documents written by Lincoln’s peers have never been scanned and are nowhere near Internet-ready. Many Civil War-era government records, including practically all of the material from Illinois and much from the federal archives, are not available online. Researchers need easier access to digital data sets, such as county- and precinct-level elec-

⁴⁴ *Congressional Globe*, *Library of Congress: American Memory*, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwgc.html>; *Google Book Search*, <http://books.google.com/>; U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies* (1880–1901), *Cornell University Library: Making of America*, <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/browse.monographs/waro.html>; U.S. Naval War Records Office, *Official Records of the Union and Confederate Navies in the War of the Rebellion* (1894–1922), *ibid.*, <http://cdl.library.cornell.edu/moa/browse.monographs/ofre.html>.

⁴⁵ Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, *The Papers of Abraham Lincoln*, <http://www.papersofabrahamlincoln.org>.

tion returns. A determined effort to improve spatial understanding of the period through Geographic Information System (GIS)-enhanced maps and digital atlases would also be invaluable. We now have the ability to re-create historic structures in rich detail using 3-D modeling software. All of these projects will require extensive partnerships between academic and public historians, and scholars must be invested in these efforts from the beginning and help see them through to the end.

This level of investment should be easy to encourage since these digital innovations have the potential to reshape the way historians approach subjects such as Abraham Lincoln. Previous generations of Lincoln scholars have been like Ahab stalking his whale, engaged in a lonely, somewhat doomed endeavor. Their inability to fully traverse the vast oceans of data does not reflect poorly on those scholars but rather on the impossibility of their task. No single biography of Lincoln or any historical subject can ever incorporate every document, map each relationship, or define all possible contexts. The Internet will not alter that fact of scholarly life, but an evolving digital platform does provide the capacity both to process and to present information on a scale previously unimaginable by scholars whose work up to now has been defined mainly by the journey from three-by-five note cards to 350-page monographs. Quite simply, no medium seems better suited to the needs of biographers, especially political biographers, than the ever-flexible digital domain.

The paradigm shift begins with research. The Internet offers a powerful way for historians to overcome the challenge of daunting collateral investigation. The study of Lincoln illustrates well the great paradox of biography—to study one life you must study many lives. Imagine how much easier it will be to incorporate the lost peripheral figures in Lincoln's story once more of their papers and records have been digitized and made searchable. Consider also the extraordinary value in storing vast amounts of information in online databases that can then serve as time-efficient tools for generating sophisticated analyses of relationships among people, events, places, and documents. The analytic concepts will not be revolutionary—whether in refining the sociology of a presidential administration or in seeking to define the impact of a social network, such as the Eighth Judicial Circuit—but the ability to accomplish these analyses has been revolutionized over the last few years.

What this will mean for ongoing reinterpretations of Lincoln is not entirely clear yet, but the digital era already promises to impact narrative history and biography much as the advent of photography once altered landscape painting and portraiture. The photographic revolution of the nineteenth century liberated painters to experiment with more abstract forms and more radical subjects. In the case of digital history, however, the trend appears to be reversed. In some ways, twentieth-century Lincoln scholars acted almost as modernist painters or impressionists who conveyed deep narrative meaning from slightly indistinct objects and with splashes of color. Realism proved difficult when the materials for composition were so fragmented. Thus, even though modern-day interpretations of Lincoln steadily evolved from apotheosis and hagiography toward ever finer degrees of revisionism, much work in Lincoln studies was still conducted with quite broad strokes. The emerging digital canvas makes possible a trend toward tightly focused studies with sharp clarity produced by vastly enhanced data points.

With this greater ability to make precise connections also comes an unparalleled capacity to present those connections. The digital revolution offers powerful new methods of

presentation that could make biographies of figures such as Abraham Lincoln both more sophisticated and understandable. The challenge with the print Lincoln, for example, is always a matter of space. There is inevitably too much information to include, evaluate, and digest in a straightforward linear fashion. Print narratives usually strip away complexity and often paper over too many gaps and inconsistencies in the evidence. Douglas Wilson complained about this problem in *Honor's Voice* when he commented on the incomplete use of recollected material, and Michael Kauffman tried to address it with his Booth conspiracy spreadsheets in *American Brutus*. Yet the digital Lincoln might offer a better way out—an opportunity to layer competing testimonies in a fashion that could tell a coherent story while also engaging readers with the thrill of historical investigation.⁴⁶

Lincoln's broad, enduring appeal makes his biography an ideal test case for the emerging medium of digital history. It is not just that people care about Lincoln. The study of Lincoln has long been one of the more open fields in academia and perhaps the most oriented toward the general public. Enthusiasts mingle regularly with scholars at conferences, such as those hosted by the Abraham Lincoln Association or the Lincoln Forum, and often contribute new knowledge and important ideas. Major Lincoln books usually sell well, and leading Lincoln scholars are familiar public figures. If any historians are prepared to lead an experiment that involves a new form of popular history, it should be Lincoln scholars. Still, the field will have to adapt. The emphasis on professionalism must evolve. In this vision of the field's future, the distinction between amateur and professional matters less than the one between analog and digital. In other words, Lincoln scholars who decline to participate in the digital revolution, to promote digital projects, or to train their graduate students to work with digital sources will increasingly be left behind. Academic historians working with Lincoln also need to condition themselves to build on the openness that already defines their field and embrace a world that will be defined by shared knowledge, remote input, and flattened hierarchies. This is what some Internet enthusiasts and digital apostles have been hyping as "Web 2.0" (loosely defined as the Internet's second generation, one that emphasizes its interactive and collaborative possibilities). The principles of this "wiki" age need to be addressed and managed, not simply dismissed, although they often seem to run counter to some of the deepest ingrained habits of historians.⁴⁷ In particular, Lincoln scholars have an obligation to experiment with ever-larger forums and group projects as a way to promote new knowledge about a historical figure whom nearly everyone seems to want to understand.

Two hundred years after this great president's birth, the state of Lincoln studies is thriving but nevertheless poised for change. In recent years, Lincoln the man has been poked and prodded. Lincoln the writer has been edited and revised. Lincoln the commander in chief has been second- and even third-guessed. But Lincoln the politician remains elusive. We understand surprisingly little about his most acute tactics and find ourselves divided over basic questions regarding his key policies. This astonishing situation, coming as it does on his bicentennial and about four score years into the professional era of

⁴⁶ For examples of emerging styles of digital presentation, see the Web-based digital supplement to this article, *Building the Digital Lincoln*.

⁴⁷ See the *Journal of American History* online discussion, "Interchange: The Promise of Digital History," *Journal of American History*, 95 (Sept. 2008), <http://www.journalofamericanhistory.org/issues/952/interchange/index.html>; and Tim O'Reilly, "What Is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software," Sept. 30, 2005, *O'Reilly Media*, <http://www.oreillyn.com/pub/a/oreilly/tim/news/2005/09/30/what-is-web-20.html>.

Lincoln studies, reveals a great deal about the need for new directions in political biography. The most obvious path ahead is digital. No other medium offers as much promise for connecting disparate evidence or for inviting fresh perspectives on its meaning. No other medium seems as well suited to capturing nineteenth-century politics and its multidimensional system of simultaneously moving parts. Lincoln scholars who feel uneasy about this strange leap forward should realize that the digital revolution has been building for a longer time and promises to have more practical impact in their field than in many others. They also might find comfort in Lincoln himself, who always seemed to embrace new technology with the infectious enthusiasm of the amateur inventor that he was. He understood the inherent advantages in opening knowledge to the widest possible community. Speaking about an earlier communications revolution, he once said its great achievement was that "a thousand minds were brought into the field where there was but one before."⁴⁸ There has never been a more succinct summary of Web 2.0 principles, nor a wiser admonition about the craft of biography.

⁴⁸ For Lincoln's comment on the printing revolution, see Abraham Lincoln, "Second Lecture on Discoveries and Inventions," [Feb. 11, 1859], in *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Basler, III, 362.