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ON OR OFF THEIR PEDESTALS? AN ESSAY ON THE FUTURE OF CIVIL WAR STATUES

Opinion

By Harold Holzer

The widely reported act of destruction was swift, violent, and spontaneous. A group of angry demonstrators surrounded the once-sacred statue, tied ropes to its neck, hauled it down into the street, and smashed it to pieces. No, this particular act of desecration did not occur in Durham, North Carolina, or in Charlottesville, Virginia. Rather, it took place at Bowling Green in Lower Manhattan on July 9, 1776. And the icon that aroused the outrage was not a century-old statue of a Confederate soldier or general, but a sculpted tribute to England's King George III.

That statue fell soon after George Washington ordered the new Declaration of Independence read aloud to New Yorkers. Its words provoked quite a response. The Sons of Liberty immediately marched down Broadway and toppled it. Since the statue was made of lead, it was chopped to bits and made into bullets. It supposedly yielded 42,000 cartridges to battle the King's troops in the Revolutionary War.

Iconoclasm is nothing new, either in America or elsewhere. The powerful impulse to eradicate unpleasant or unpopular historical memory dates back to the Egyptians who tried obliterating effigies of its

Pharaonic

queen, Hatshepsut. The Romans systematically melted down portraits of recently deposed or deceased emperors. Twentieth-century Germans understandably erased all vestiges of their Nazi past.

For the last several years, American historians have been engaged in a much-needed discussion about what to do—or say—about monuments to the likes of Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson, and Jefferson Davis, which remain atop their pedestals throughout the Old Confederacy. Maybe these talks began too late. This past May, Mayor Mitch Landrieu decided to purge four such statues in New Orleans: not only Lee, Davis and Louisiana-born Gen. P. G. T. Beauregard, but an odious tribute to the so-called “Battle of Liberty Place,” an insurrection launched by white supremacists against an interracial, post-Civil War government. In that particular case: good riddance.

As we well know, the Confederate statue controversy accelerated, to put it mildly, in August, after white supremacists launched a “demonstration” around the false premise of preserving a Lee statue near the University of Virginia. The protest began with racist and anti-Semitic chants and ended in violence and death. In short order, North Carolina protestors toppled a statue of a Rebel soldier in Durham. Then the mayor of Baltimore ordered that town's own Confederate memorials hauled away, while in New York, Governor Andrew Cuomo removed busts of Confederate generals at the old NYU Hall of Fame in the Bronx.

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The Lee Statue in Charlottesville



Designed and sculpted by Thomas Ball and erected in 1876, this monument depicts Abraham Lincoln in his role as the “Great Emancipator”

COURAGE IN LEADERSHIP



MESSAGE from the CHAIR

spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial for which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation."

General/ President Grant's reputation is back on the rise, too, after over a century of abuse and erroneous evaluations of his eight years in the White House. Two great new biographies, by Ronald White, Jr., and Ron Chernow, have helped (through brilliant scholarship, analysis, and forceful narrative writing), to restore the luster to a leader whose reputation exceeded Lincoln's following the Civil War. The war produced a strategic genius.

Despite his obstinacy in maintaining loyalty to good friends long after they deserved it, Grant's presidency was full of accomplishments. His virtues outweighed his flaws. Americans now see how fortunate we were [are]

to have him:
to save the
Union, to

lead our country, and, on his deathbed, to write one of the finest memoirs in American letters.

Washington, Lincoln, and Grant. An 1865 lithograph showing the three of them together gave this trinity of leaders the title they deserved: "Columbia's Noblest Sons." Once again we explore that continuum of American idealism and leadership at the Lincoln Forum. Once again we honor the past and hope for what Lincoln called a "vast future also." **I**

Frank Williams

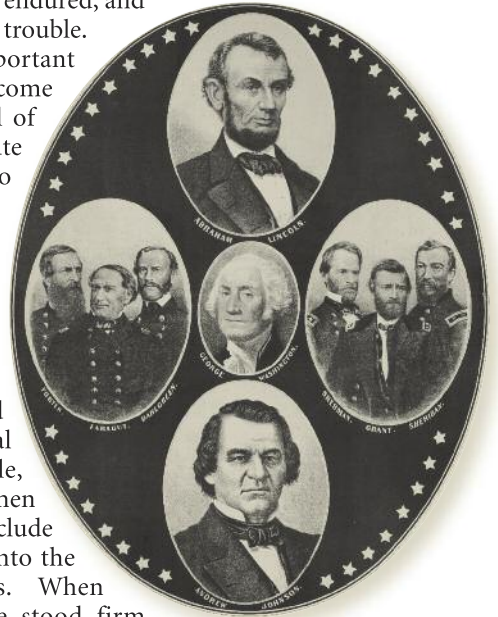
Frank J. Williams
Chairman

In this year of rancor, division, and shameless deceit, we still find, in the examples of George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and, yes, Ulysses S. Grant, high standards well worth following. These men and their records have endured, and when they cease to matter to us, we will be in trouble.

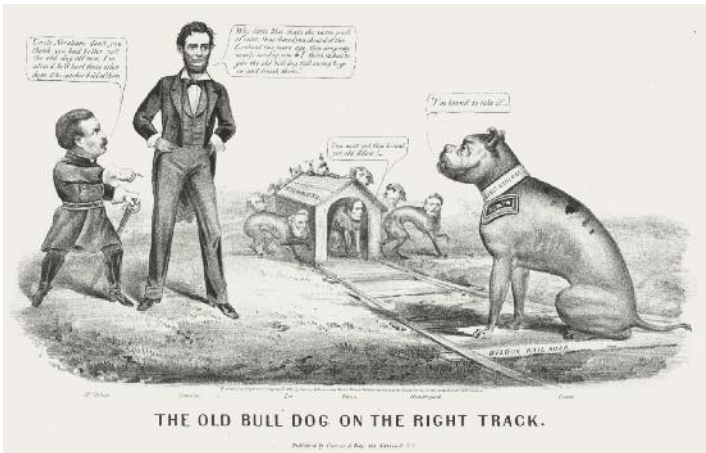
George Washington's most important contribution to the new nation may have come from the example he set. He was a model of integrity, self-discipline, courage, absolute honesty, resolve, and decision, but also forbearance, decency, and respect for others.

Abraham Lincoln was born poor yet proceeded to rise to the top with the kind of sureness and dignity that does honor to a democratic country. He educated himself into a command of the English language that puts modern speechwriters to shame. He was a practical politician and sometimes did things he found distasteful. But on the vital issues of his day, he was knowledgeable, eloquent, and solidly principled. In a time when a large national party had been pushing to exclude the Irish Catholics and Germans pouring into the country, he voiced praise for immigrants. When Southern leaders threatened secession, he stood firm against the expansion of slavery. He shared with Washington the virtues of honesty, integrity, and respect for his fellow citizens. In the months since the incumbent president's inauguration, it is possible that he has learned, the hard way, that, as Lincoln knew, the presidency is not a part-time job.

"We cannot escape history," Lincoln said in 1862. "We... will be remembered in



G.P.A. Healy's "The Peacemakers" – Lincoln and Grant's final council of war



A Currier & Ives cartoonist visualizes Lincoln's appreciation for his "dogged" new general

ON OR OFF THEIR PEDESTALS?

AN ESSAY ON THE FUTURE OF CIVIL WAR STATUES

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In due course, President Trump warned that if not condemned, the new American iconoclasm would ultimately threaten monuments to George Washington and Thomas Jefferson. False equivalency? Hopefully. Although he stoked the crisis himself by refusing to condemn the extremists who rampaged in Charlottesville, the President is not completely off base about the danger now facing icons of the founders—and the history lessons they provide. Rev. Al Sharpton has already called on the federal government to de-fund the Jefferson Memorial in Washington.

Ironically, the extremists who organized their Charlottesville march around the fake trope of saving the Lee Statue—together with President Trump, who suggested that the haters had no agenda other than preservation—may have done more to propel the Lee statue's removal than a thousand voices sincerely finding it offensive. The Charlottesville marchers may have the same impact on Confederate memorials as Dylan Roof's murderous rampage in Charleston so quickly exerted on the display of the Confederate battle flag in South Carolina.

In the remote chance there may still be a way to dial back the heat and search for solutions that respect history, memory, art, and understandable human emotions, there may be other paths worth taking—or, at least, considering.

First, we might indeed consider relocating Confederate statues that sit in public space outside the old Rebel States. Why did a Lee-Jackson “Last Meeting” statue ever get built on public land in Baltimore, anyway? Yes, Baltimore was a hostile, racist city for most of the Civil War. President-elect Lincoln avoided it en route to his inauguration in February 1861 for fear of being assassinated there. Massachusetts troops passing through town a few months later were attacked on its streets. But Maryland did *not* secede from the Union. Rebel “icons” have no place there—or, for that matter, in Arizona or Montana, where Confederate heritage groups have stealthily erected monuments in states where little or no Civil War action occurred. At the least, we should consider moving these statues to schools or museums and use them to educate, not celebrate. As for truly offensive statues like the Memphis equestrian of Gen. Nathan Bedford Forrest—a slave dealer who massacred unarmed African-Americans during the Civil War and led the KKK after—they belong in the dust heap of history and art alike.



The Shaw Memorial by Saint-Gaudens

Second, in some cases let's consider context over condemnation. Can we not surround century-old statues with explanatory texts that place them firmly within the historical periods that inspired them? Most Confederate memorials rose not in the immediate aftermath of the Civil War. They got installed once white supremacists regained power after Reconstruction, overturned federally mandated rights for African Americans, and created a false historical narrative to sanctify the “late unpleasantness.” In the eyes of the Jim Crow-era revisionists, secession had occurred to preserve not slavery but states’ rights (study the records of the original secession conventions to learn otherwise). The South had not really lost the war; it had merely been overpowered by greater numbers. And great generals like the “martyred” Jackson (in truth killed by friendly fire) and the noble Lee (so gallant that his battlefield errors were overlooked) symbolized the master race at its zenith.

Nor were Northern image-makers innocent of the blame for the sanctification. The postwar South had no picture-publishing industry to speak of, so New York and Philadelphia artists took up the slack and produced heroic print portraits of Lee and Jackson for profitable export to the Old Confederacy. As one observer said, white Southerners “gave of their poverty gladly.”

It is high time that historical markers, videos, plaques, and texts truthfully report what should be obvious: that “Lost Cause” statues were built not just to venerate white men but to intimidate black ones—to warn them that their aspiration for equality was the only truly Lost Cause in the South. Lee, it might be noted, at least surrendered to Ulysses S. Grant. His finest moment came when he urged his soldiers to go home and fight no more, preventing bloody guerilla resistance. It should also be acknowledged that Lee also discouraged post-war veneration. He advised against the very Confederate Memorials that now extoll him. A slave-owner and traitor he may have been, more loyal to his state than to his country, but it's worth taking a fresh look, not a wrecking ball, to his record and image. Davis, wildly unpopular in his own time, ended the war as a much-mocked caricature, portrayed as a coward trying to escape Union captors by wearing hoopskirts. Yet he emerged as a post-war hero when he resisted efforts to chain him at Fort Monroe.

Third, what about the idea of “counter memorials”? In Richmond, the lily-white Monument Avenue statues of Lee and other Confederates now lead toward a powerful response installed only recently: a statue of African-American tennis great Arthur Ashe. In Baltimore, the statue of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, author of the shameful Dred Scott decision that rejected citizenship for African Americans, was “answered” by a statue of Thurgood Marshall, the first African American to sit on the high court Taney once led. Maryland officials now say Taney's statue will be removed. What a loss to those who could profit by tracing American progress from intractable racism to glorious achievement. Why not build new statues of Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Nat Turner near those of Confederate generals—to celebrate the triumph of their ideas, and by extension, the defeat of those against which they struggled? Their presence would surely prove more powerful than empty pedestals and barren space.

Such efforts do not always succeed without opposition. Some years ago, a Richmond civic leader had the wonderful idea of installing a statue of Lincoln in the onetime Confederate capital. It would not—could not, for all the pushback—show the Union leader striding into the fallen city on April 4, 1865, even though Lincoln came that day out of curiosity, not as a conqueror. Instead the new sculpture would portray Lincoln resting *continued on page 4*

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continued from page 3 on a bench with his young son, Tad, who had accompanied him on the trip. I well remember the dedication day—at which angry white protestors interrupted former Governor Doug Wilder to shout “*Sic Semper Tyrannus*” (“Death Ever to Tyrants,” the line from the assassination scene of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, which John Wilkes Booth had shouted after shooting Lincoln). It was an ugly scene, another extraordinary reminder of the emotions mere bronze and marble can lay bare. Yet many of these same white citizens never consider the impact that statues of pro-slavery Confederates have on people of color.

Fourth, let’s respect the intrinsic value of art for art’s sake. Not all Confederate statuary is worthy. Most of the 1,500 surviving monuments are, in fact, terrible. But the Mercie Lee equestrian in Richmond is a spectacular work. Why not consider moving the meritorious ones to other spots: to battlefield sites, cemeteries where Confederate soldiers are buried, or museums where they can be fully analyzed? Many will look cartoonish close-up, since they were deeply carved to be seen from below. But sacrificing ideal perspective is a small price to pay for preserving good art and using it to illuminate history. The Taliban blew up the glorious Bamiyan Buddhas in Afghanistan and ISIS destroyed Palmyra in Syria because such works glorify rival religions; let’s not reduce our own best statues to rubble solely because we disagree with what they represent.

The Lincoln community must come to terms with evolving messages as well. True, the Thomas Ball Freedom Memorial in Washington was funded entirely by free people of color. But whether it shows an enslaved person kneeling before Lincoln, or rising to his feet under the Emancipator’s blessing, has become irrelevant. The statue, dedicated in 1876 by Ulysses S. Grant and Frederick Douglass, is now frequently misunderstood, and occasionally reviled. We can at least contextualize it with an explanation of evolving iconography. Or it might be the next memorial under attack.

Fifth, let’s firmly counter the false equivalency now dangerously morphing to threaten statues of other American presidents, slaveholders included. To be sure, the Virginia-born founding fathers were flawed. Jefferson wrote magisterial words to define freedom, but never lived by his own credo that “all men are created equal.” Washington fought heroically for liberty, but enslaved human beings. Still, the American experiment matured beyond the laboratory stage only because such imperfect men formed a more perfect union. To erase their memory would be a catastrophic crime against history, knowledge, and progress. In recent weeks, the iconoclasts have escalated their attacks: Columbus statues should go because of his cruelty to Native peoples; the Sherman monument outside New York’s Plaza hotel deserves destruction because the general disliked people of color. The Theodore Roosevelt statue outside the American Museum of Natural History denigrates Native Americans and African Americans. New York Mayor Bill de Blasio recently named a

commission, led by “experts” like Harry Belafonte (whom I otherwise admire), to decide which statues deserve to go and which merit preservation. Do we really want them to wield a cultural sledgehammer?



Jefferson Davis Monument, Richmond

Sadly, statues honoring rebellion and white supremacy far outnumber those celebrating black freedom. Only four or five tributes to the U. S. Colored Troops exist (compared to more than a thousand honoring Confederate white troops). But what statues they are, among them the fine bronze outside the U. S. Colored Troops Memorial in Washington and the rifle-toting soldier complementing the Lincoln statue in Cleveland. Towering above them all, in artistry, is Augustus Saint-Gaudens relief sculpture of Robert Gould Shaw and the 54th Massachusetts in Boston—copies of which stand in Cornish, NH and the National Gallery of Art in the capital. It may be the greatest of all Civil War sculptures, and it might still serve to inspire additional tributes.

Let’s try to build more statues, not destroy the ones we have.

(Holzer, the 2017 speaker at the Gettysburg Soldier’s Cemetery on the anniversary of the Gettysburg Address, published a version of this article in the *New York Daily News* in August. The *Lincoln Forum Bulletin* welcomes responses.) 📌

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EDWIN STANTON: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

By Walter Stahr

Who was Edwin M. Stanton? Why was he important? Why was he interesting?

Edwin Stanton was the northern secretary of war during the Civil War. He was Lincoln's military right hand, whom Lincoln referred to (with a smile) as his "Mars." Together, in Stanton's telegraph office, Lincoln and Stanton received telegraphic reports from the battlefield and gave instructions to the generals. Stanton's great contribution was organization: organizing the war department, and the million-man army, and the northern railroads and telegraphs, to bring them all to bear against the South.

Stanton was also secretary of war in the months and years just *after* the Civil War. Stanton organized the military trial of those accused in the murder of Lincoln and attempted murder of Seward, which ended in the execution of four of those involved, including Mary Surratt. Stanton transformed the Union army from a fighting force into an army of occupation, to occupy and pacify the South. Reading the almost daily reports of violence in the South, Stanton believed that the Army had to remain in the South, to protect southern blacks and Union sympathizers. President Andrew Johnson believed that the Army had to leave the South, so that Southerners could govern the South. Their disagreement grew so intense that Johnson attempted to remove Stanton, which led to the impeachment and near removal of the president. So to understand the nation's first impeachment of a president, one has to understand Stanton, for Stanton was at the center, he was *the cause*, of the Johnson impeachment.

So Stanton was important; but why was he interesting?

A few days after Stanton died, George Templeton Strong, a New York lawyer who knew him well, wrote that "good and evil were strangely blended in the character of this great war minister. He was honest, patriotic, able, indefatigable, warm-hearted, unselfish, incorruptible, arbitrary, capricious, tyrannical, vindictive, hateful, and cruel." Strong was right: Stanton was all of those things. a strange blend of good and evil, and that is what makes him such a fascinating, challenging subject for a biographer.

Let us back up a bit and ask again: who was Edwin Stanton? Where was he from? What did he do for a living? What about his family?

Stanton was born in Steubenville, Ohio, on the banks of the Ohio River, not far from Pittsburgh, in late 1814. His father was a doctor, but his father died when Edwin was only thirteen, and as the oldest son Stanton had to work in a bookstore, to help feed the family. A friend recalled that young Edwin was a good employee with one fault; he was often so busy reading a book that he paid no attention when a customer came in to the bookstore. Money was so tight that Stanton was only able to go to college for three terms, to Kenyon College in Ohio, and then he "read law" in

order to become a lawyer. He soon became a successful lawyer, the county prosecutor for several years, and he was involved in politics as a die-hard Democrat. Stanton's friend and law partner, Benjamin Tappan, was a United States senator in these years, and Stanton served as his Ohio eyes and ears: giving speeches, writing resolutions, attending conventions.

Stanton married Mary Lamson in late 1836 and they had two children. Their daughter died and then, in early 1844, Stanton's wife Mary died. For several weeks he was near madness, wandering around the house at night, wailing "where's Mary, where's Mary?"

Two years later Stanton's brother Darwin, a doctor, in a fit of "brain fever" used his scalpel to commit suicide. Death was a constant part of Stanton's life.

Leaving his young son in the care of his mother and sisters, Stanton moved to Pittsburgh in 1848, at the time a dark, dirty, brash, booming industrial center. Stanton's most famous case from this period was the Wheeling Bridge case, in which he argued that the span was an unlawful impediment to interstate commerce, to the steamboat traffic on the Ohio River, because the tallest steamboats could not pass under the bridge at high water. The case went on for a decade, back and forth among different courts, including several trips to Washington, to argue in the Supreme Court. There was also a political battle in which the bridge company secured a statute from Congress declaring the road across the bridge a postal road, and then claimed this protected the bridge from Stanton's efforts to have it removed or raised. At one point the bridge blew down in a storm, leading to questions about whether and how it could be rebuilt. The bridge Stanton wanted to see removed is still standing there, a national historic landmark, but in another sense Stanton won, for steamboat traffic continued, and Pittsburgh did not (as some had feared) lose its status as the regional center to Wheeling.

Not long after he moved to Pittsburgh, Stanton met Ellen Hutchison, daughter of a prominent Pittsburgh merchant. Some of the love letters that Edwin wrote to Ellen in the months before their marriage, are in the National Archives in Washington. We usually think of the National Archives as having only official government records, but there are exceptions, and these letters are exceptional.

In December 1854, for example, Edwin writes to Ellen from Washington, describing a dinner party. "It was chiefly a gentleman's party, and they are excessively stupid generally. While ladies are present the conversation is usually upon general or interesting topics but after their departure wine and segars, drinking, eating and political topics neither elevating or refining in their tendency ensue. I would never attend such assemblages if it could be avoided. I cannot but contrast the sensations produced by such associations with the feelings after spending the same length of time with a cultivated and refined woman like yourself dear Ellen."

In September 1855, Stanton went to Cincinnati to be part of a legal team in a patent case, a team that included Lincoln. In one of his letters Stanton writes to Ellen that "last evening I was very anxious for Mr. Harding had been unwell several days and I was apprehensive he would not be able to be in court so that the scientific part of the case to which I had given no attention would also fall upon me. Accordingly by sitting up all night I got ready for it. This morning, however, he was much better and acquitted himself so admirably that a great burden is taken from me." Stanton was supposedly rude to Lincoln at this their first meeting, but *continued on page 6*



Edwin McMasters Stanton

EDWIN STANTON: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

continued from page 5 there is no trace of that in these letters, or in other contemporary sources, only in memoirs written years later, by people who were not there. So although Stanton was often rude, I am not sure that he was rude to Lincoln when they first met.

In June 1856, on the morning of the day they would wed, he wrote her: “I salute you with assurances of deep and devoted love, that this evening will be attested by solemn vow before the world and in the presence of God. With calm and joyful hope, disturbed by no conflicting feeling, quiet and peaceful, I await the happy hour that shall witness our Union—to be thereafter parted no more until death part us, living only for each other; you a true and loving wife to me, I a true and devoted husband to you.”

The Stantons moved to Washington in late 1856, and Stanton was soon a sort of informal member of the Buchanan administration, doing legal work for the attorney general, Jeremiah Black. At Black’s request, Stanton went to California for a year, to represent the federal government in major land cases, including one in which half of San Francisco was in dispute. Stanton loved California; he just did not like the people who lived there. “With all its advantages of climate, soil and minerals,” Stanton wrote home in one letter, “California is heavily cursed with the bad passions of bad men and I would not like to make my permanent abode upon its soil.” In another letter he wrote to Black that when “California becomes settled with a new race of people and all the thieves, forgers, perjurers, and murderers that have invested it beyond any spot on earth shall be driven off, the coast will breed a race of men that have had no equal for physical & intellectual capacity.” One of the murderers whom Stanton had in mind was my ancestor, Clancey John Dempster, leader of the 1856 vigilance committee which had “tried” and hanged several men for alleged murder. Easterners like Stanton viewed the vigilantes as mere murderers.

After he returned to Washington in early 1859, Stanton was part of the defense team for Daniel Sickles, a member of Congress, accused of murdering Philip Barton Key in broad daylight in Lafayette Square. There was no question that Sickles had shot and killed Key; there were dozens of witnesses. But Sickles had a good reason to kill Key, who was sleeping with the young wife of Sickles, and the jury acquitted Sickles, in part because of Stanton’s passionate plea that they should “defend the family” and exonerate Sickles.

In 1860, just after the election of Lincoln, as the southern states were seceding, Buchanan brought Stanton into his cabinet as attorney general. Stanton was part of the debate over whether Buchanan should yield up Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, as the Southerners and their northern allies demanded. Stanton insisted that Buchanan could not yield up Fort Sumter; to do so, Stanton told Buchanan, would be treason, making Buchanan just as bad as Benedict Arnold.

When Lincoln became president in March 1861, Stanton returned to his private legal practice here in Washington. In private letters, Stanton was quite critical of the way in which Lincoln was

handling the first few months of the war. He wrote that there was “no sign of any intelligent understanding by Lincoln, or the crew that groom him, of the state of the country, or the exigencies of the times. Bluster & bravura alternate with timidity & despair—recklessness and hopelessness by turns rule the hour. What but disgrace & disaster can happen?”

Lincoln probably heard rumors about Stanton’s comments and yet, in early 1862, when he needed a new and better war secretary, Lincoln turned to Stanton. Why? Partly politics; by appointing a leading Democrat Lincoln said that this was not just a Republican war; this was a Union war. Partly for personal reasons; Lincoln did not know Stanton well but some of his friends and advisers (including Seward and Chase) knew and praised Stanton. Partly Stanton’s reputation; he had a reputation for energy, efficiency, diligence, determination.

Stanton soon proved that his reputation was right. Within weeks of his appointment, for example, he had secured federal legislation to authorize the president to take control of the nation’s rail and telegraph systems. In theory Lincoln could have nationalized the railroads and telegraphs, seized them from their private owners and compensated them only after the war’s end. Instead, Stanton summoned the rail leaders to Washington, told them that he would work with them, but only if they would work closely with the War Department and charge reasonable (read very low) rates. Stanton moved the Washington hub of the telegraph lines to his own office, so that served as the central command post for Lincoln and Stanton during the war.

The prime example of how Stanton used the rails and telegraphs during the war was the Tennessee troop movement. In the fall of 1863 it looked like the South would capture Chattanooga, Tennessee, along with thirty thousand northern troops there under General William Rosecrans. Stanton summoned Lincoln and others to the War Department for a midnight meeting.

Stanton proposed to transfer 20,000 troops in a week’s time from northern Virginia to southern Tennessee.

The Men who won the War—Grant, Lincoln, and Stanton—in the statuary group *Council of War* by John Rogers

Lincoln laughed; he said that it would take at least a week’s time to transfer the troops the thirty miles from northern Virginia into Washington. Stanton insisted the situation was “too serious for jokes.” Stanton persuaded Lincoln, then Stanton spent the remainder of the night, and the *next few nights*, in his telegraph office, sending and receiving messages. It was an incredibly complex, nearly impossible task, involving half a dozen different rail companies and several rail widths, two crossings of the Ohio river, which was not bridged at the relevant points, and erratic, imperfect telegraph communication. Stanton managed; the troops reached Chattanooga in a week; they not only saved the city but enabled Grant (soon placed in command) to advance from there.

Researching and writing the story of the rail movement involved, again, original documents. Stanton kept a complete set of every telegram that arrived in, and every telegram that was sent *from*, his war department telegraph office. Some but not all of these telegrams are printed in the Official Records; there are many interesting messages that can *only* be seen on National Archives microfilm, in a microfilm set known as M473. For the week of the rail movement, there are hundreds of messages in M473, such as a request by Stanton that an aide at *continued on page 15*



FRANK AND VIRGINIA WILLIAMS OF RHODE ISLAND GIFT THEIR FAMOUS LINCOLN AND CIVIL WAR COLLECTION TO MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY

The unparalleled private Lincoln and Civil War collection amassed over the past 50 years by former Rhode Island Chief Justice—and nationally known Abraham Lincoln authority—Frank J. Williams will be donated to Mississippi State University, it was announced this summer by the school.



MSU President Mark E. Keenum and Judge Williams today [June 20] announced the extraordinary gift that Keenum said will transform MSU into one of the nation's leading destinations for scholars and students of the American Civil War.

Williams, founding chairman of The Lincoln Forum and longtime president of the Ulysses S. Grant Association, was instrumental in relocating the latter group and its own archives—now the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library—to MSU nine years ago. By donating his extraordinary Lincoln collection, Williams has helped elevate MSU into a presidential research center of national prominence.

Considered the nation's largest privately owned holding of Lincoln research and display material, as well as the country's most comprehensive privately owned Lincoln and Civil War library, the Frank J. and Virginia Williams Collection boasts rare historical memorabilia; priceless artifacts; original, signed documents; ephemera; books published over a span of 150 years; and both original one-of-a-kind, and early mass-produced, artwork relating to Lincoln and the Civil War era.

The collection, which Judge and Mrs. Williams will officially gift to the Mississippi State University Libraries, has been valued at nearly \$3 million.

Committing themselves to providing perpetual support to maintain, study and publicly display highlights from the collection, the Williamses have also offered a promised gift of \$500,000 for the creation of the Frank J. and Virginia Williams Research Fund—an endowment to Mississippi State to curate the material in the years to come.

Additionally, the Williamses have pledged to fund a new, annual Frank and Virginia Williams Lecture in Lincoln and Civil War Studies at Mississippi State. And in an extraordinary gesture, they will continue to make acquisitions to add to the collection at MSU.

"Mississippi State University is immensely proud to receive the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana, a truly unique and comprehensive collection that provides unprecedented insight into the life and times of our 16th president and the Civil War era," Keenum said. "With this incredibly generous donation and their guiding hand in bringing what has become the U.S. Grant Presidential Library to our campus, the Williamses have made MSU one of the nation's foremost repositories for research into this pivotal period in our nation's history."

Chief Justice Williams said: "As a longtime supporter of the Ulysses S. Grant Association—which I am so proud to say is now permanently housed at MSU—I believe the college is the perfect repository for the material that my wife and I have spent a lifetime gathering, preserving, studying and making available on request to research scholars among our countless friends in the Lincoln world. MSU's commitment to the study of Grant, the Civil War—and, now, Abraham Lincoln—in the heart of the Deep South takes us a giant step forward in our ever-challenging quest for civility, common purpose, and national unity."

"When we brought Grant to Mississippi, some doubters scoffed that neither Civil War scholars nor a Southern campus would welcome the change. But the reverse has been true. I feel privileged to have the opportunity now to invite Grant's commander-in-chief to join his most famous general on a campus that is so manifestly committed to scholarship, research and interpretation of this historical period and its greatest figures," he said.

The Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana comprises more than 17,000 items, including artifacts, photographs, statues, paintings, popular prints, broadsides, philately, collectibles and miniatures, as well as numismatics. Nearly 100 original manuscripts and the entire, legendary Claude Simmons collection, which consists of a dozen bankers' boxes of Lincoln-related materials and scrapbooks, also is included. In addition, the gift includes some 12,000 published volumes (many of them exceptionally rare), separated into two collections: the Lincoln Book and Pamphlet Collection and the Civil War/Collateral Book and Pamphlet Collection, comprehensively covering historical writing on the Civil War era from 1860 to the present, and including nearly every title ever published on Lincoln.

Chairman Williams said he began his Lincolniana collection as a sixth-grade student in his native Rhode Island. "I used my lunch money—all 25 cents a day—to buy used Lincoln books. That's how I started collecting. With the encouragement and help of Virginia, this passion has never abated."

His early interest in Lincoln, sparked by daily exposure to a portrait of the 16th president hanging in his Rhode Island classroom, evolved into a deep admiration of the 19th century's most prominent historical figure and also inspired Williams to follow in Lincoln's footsteps and pursue a career in law. Lincoln's legacy remains inspirational, he said, "because of his exemplary character, his strong leadership in crisis, his unwavering political courage, and the fact that he trusted his own judgment, even after he made mistakes, which we all do. Lincoln continues to be ranked by historians as our greatest-ever president, and he should continue to be studied and appreciated in the future." *continued on page 8*

FRANK AND VIRGINIA WILLIAMS OF RHODE ISLAND GIFT THEIR FAMOUS

continued from page 7

Asked to name his best-loved Lincoln artifact, Williams emphasized that while he has been able over time to acquire more and more precious items, “it’s really difficult to put a finger on one particular favorite, when you are entrusted with, and love, so many of them.”

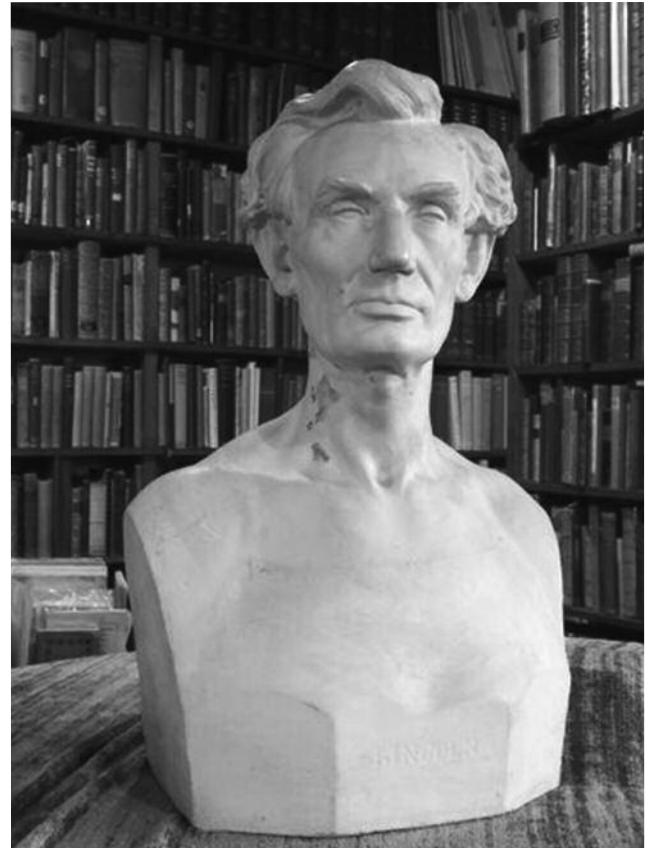
He said that among his most treasured pieces are a first edition, first printing of the 1858 Lincoln-Douglas debates, signed by Lincoln as President in 1863, as well as a full-length Lincoln portrait by James Montgomery Flagg, creator of the iconic Uncle Sam “I Want You” military recruiting posters for both World Wars. Also among the most prized items is an early copy of the Emancipation Proclamation, printed in miniature for distribution by Union soldiers in the South. Williams said that although many copies were printed during the Civil War, very few have survived. Among the statuary to be donated are superb early casts of the Lincoln busts from life by Leonard Wells Volk (1860) and Thomas Dow Jones (1861).



Lincoln by James Montgomery Flagg

In 2006, MSU’s Pre-Law Society awarded Williams its prestigious Distinguished Jurist Award, and in 2011, Williams gave Mississippi State’s fall commencement address. He told graduates that young leaders of America, “are charged with an important duty – the preservation of democracy.” He is also the winner of the Illinois Order of Lincoln, that state’s highest honor, presented during the bicentennial year of 2009. Williams served as well on both the national U. S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission (appointed by then-Mississippi Senator Trent Lott in his role as

Senate Majority Leader), and as a board member of its successor organization, the Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation.




Lincoln bust by Leonard Wells Volk

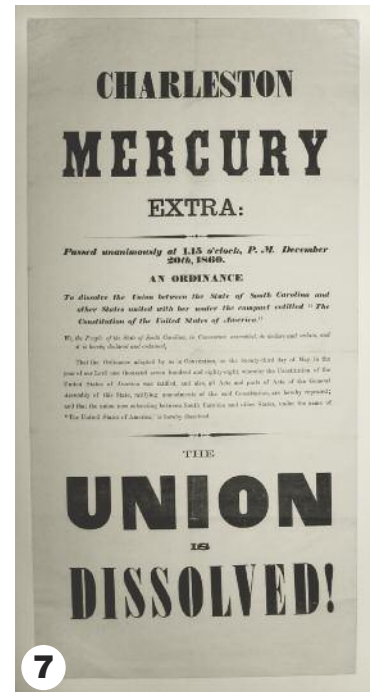
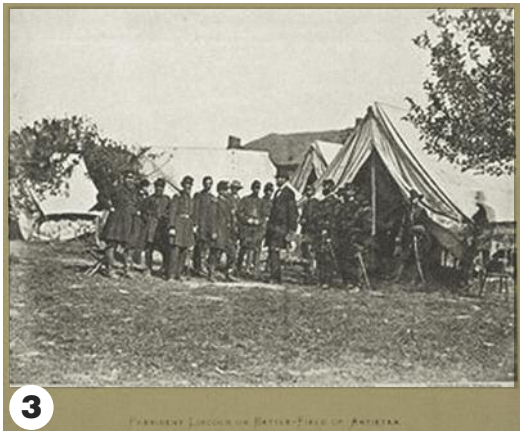
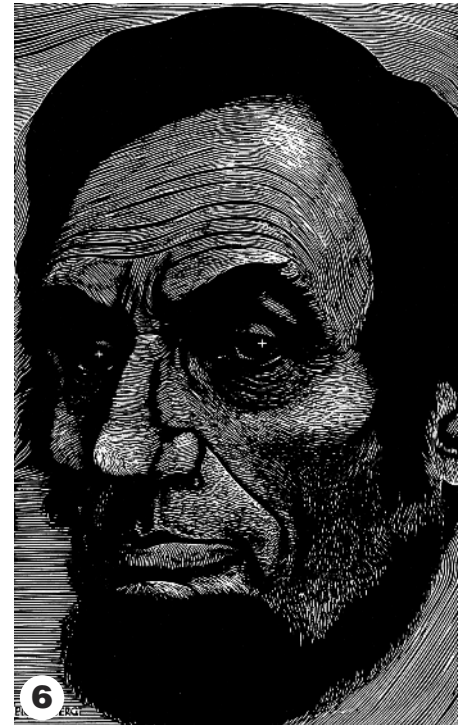
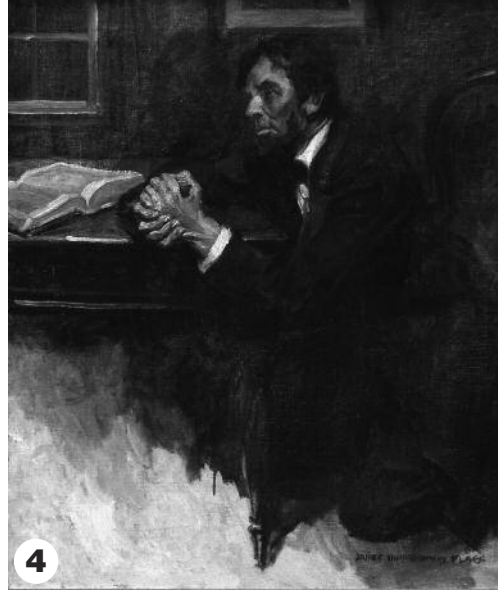
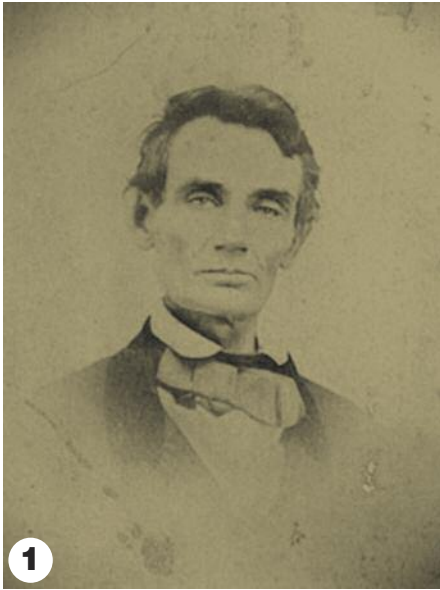
At MSU, the Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana will be housed in the new \$10 million addition to Mitchell Memorial Library, scheduled to open later this year. More than 100 items from the collection will be showcased in a nearly 1,200-square-foot gallery, organized around themes such as family, politics, the law, the presidency, the Civil War, slavery, assassination, and Lincoln in popular culture. The new space will be designated as the gallery for “The Frank and Virginia Williams Collection of Lincolniana.” The library addition will also house the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library, the Ulysses S. Grant Association, and the Congressional and Political Research Center.

“The Mississippi State University Library is indebted to Frank and Virginia Williams for entrusting this unique and precious collection of Lincolniana to our care,” said MSU Dean of Libraries Frances Coleman. “Our goal is to display its great treasures on a rotating basis while making the entire archive available to researchers throughout the world by cataloging each piece, digitizing the unique materials, and developing a website for the collection.”

John F. Marszalek, who in addition to being an MSU professor emeritus serves as executive director and managing editor for the Ulysses S. Grant Association and the Ulysses S. Grant Presidential Library, said Williams is one of the nation’s leading Lincoln scholars and his collection is the best private collection in the nation.

Marszalek emphasized: “This donation will make MSU a true national center for the study of Lincoln, Grant, and the Civil War.” 

LINCOLN AND CIVIL WAR COLLECTION TO MISSISSIPPI STATE UNIVERSITY



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

By Jonathan W. White

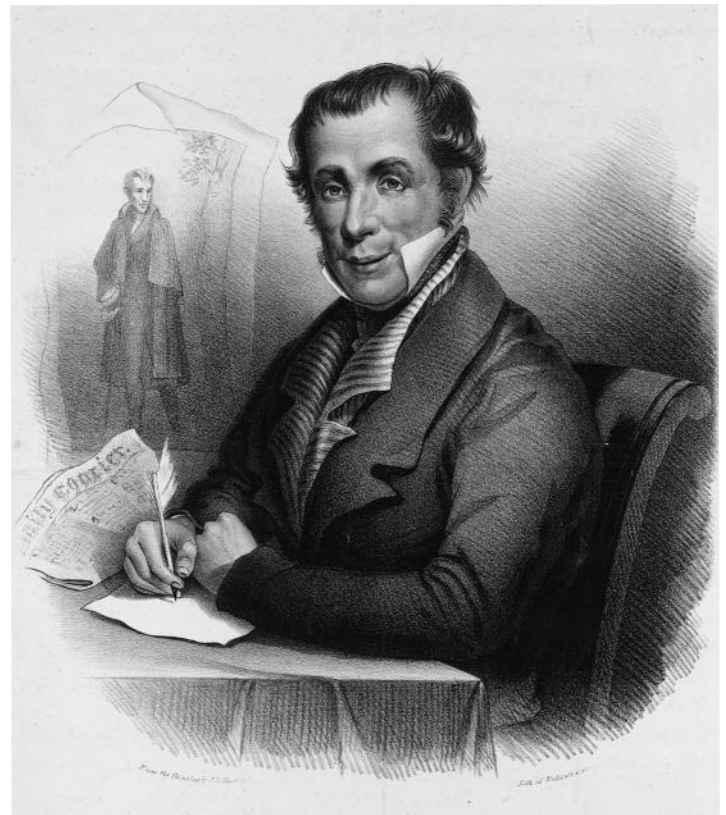
Few moments in Abraham Lincoln's political life appear as regrettable as his August 14, 1862 meeting with a delegation of black leaders at the White House. Lincoln enthusiasts cringe when they read the president's condescending words of so-called greeting. He blamed African Americans for the war and urged them to colonize other nations because they would never attain full equality in the United States. Frederick Douglass thought the remarks made Lincoln "appear silly and ridiculous, if nothing worse . . . showing all his inconsistencies, his pride of race and blood, his contempt for Negroes and his canting hypocrisy."¹ Lincoln's harshest modern critics, from Lerone Bennett to Thomas DiLorenzo, have used this moment to bludgeon Lincoln as a racist. Indeed, Lincoln's support for colonization, writes Allen C. Guelzo, "has done more than almost anything else to erode his reputation as 'the colored man's president.'"²

Over the years Lincoln's meeting with the black delegation has caused discomfort for many Lincoln scholars. James Garfield Randall omitted any mention of it in his monumental *Constitutional Problems under Lincoln*, but did include a short discussion in his later biography of Lincoln. In the volume published posthumously in 1957, Randall noted that this "curious scene" seemed "almost to have been forgotten" by the mid-20th century. "To one who thinks of the Emancipator in terms of abolitionist stereotypes the words of his remarkable address to this group, preserved in his published works, will come as something of a surprise," observed Randall.³

In recent years historians have grappled for ways to explain this exchange to readers with 20th and 21st-century sensibilities. Eric Foner calls the meeting "one of the most controversial moments of his entire career," arguing that "Lincoln failed to consider that his remarks might reinforce racism and encourage racists to act on their beliefs."⁴ Mark E. Neely, Jr., contends that the meeting is evidence that Lincoln's movement toward emancipation was "not methodical." Lincoln, in this view, was fumbling toward his preliminary proclamation and this meeting was just one of several public missteps. It was, Neely argues, "embarrassing at the time and remains so to this day." According to Neely, "the meeting seems like the culmination of Lincoln's long-standing interest in colonization," not something "to pave the way for emancipation."⁵

Other historians contest this view, maintaining that this event was part of Lincoln's broader strategy for persuading a hostile northern public to support emancipation. James Oakes concedes that "Lincoln's behavior was shocking. Normally a good listener, on this occasion he instead read his guests a high-handed statement that was insulting in both its tone and its substance." But, continues Oakes, "There was something calculated, not to say demagogic, about Lincoln's performance. In many ways his behavior was out of character." Unlike his many other meetings with African Americans, Lincoln did not treat these black men as equals. Oakes suggests that Lincoln may have been attempting to appease northern white racists, the Border States, or War Democrats to support his soon-to-be-announced emancipation policy. "For those people a strong statement of support for colonization—especially if framed as a condescending lecture to a group of black leaders—might make emancipation more palatable." The meeting, for Oakes, represented both Lincoln's shrewd political calculations and his belief "that the voluntary emigration of blacks was the best thing for everybody." Put another way, "Lincoln proclaimed his commitment to racial discrimination not because it mattered to him but because it did not. He was using racism strategically, raising the issue because he wanted to eliminate it."⁶

Harold Holzer largely agrees, pointing out that this meeting must be understood within the political context of 1862. With elections in several important northern states looming that fall, Lincoln's "stunt" was aimed "not [at] free and aspiring blacks but free and fearful whites." To put it bluntly, Holzer writes, "Lincoln clearly meant his White House performance to remind Northern whites that he was no friend of black people." For this reason, white voters could feel comfortable voting for Lincoln and his Republican allies because they would not make blacks equal with whites. "That is why, sensing military victory, Lincoln made sure his harsh speech did not just leak but poured. There is no question he wanted his message publicized. . . . He was not disappointed then, even if the episode disappoints us now."⁷



Seba Smith, a/k/a "Major Jack Downing"

Often lost in this debate is the success—or lack thereof—of Lincoln's strategy. If Lincoln's desire was to reach northern Democrats (which I believe it was), he at best achieved mixed results. Shortly after Lincoln's meeting with the black delegation, one antiwar Democrat, writing under the pseudonym, "Major Jack Downing," recorded a fictionalized conversation with Lincoln, whom he dubbed "the Kernel."⁸

"Downing" was a fictional character invented during the Jacksonian era by Seba Smith, a humorist whose nom-de-plume enjoyed a revival during the Civil War (possibly without his knowledge or consent; he was 72 years old). A new edition of "his" book and a rash of racially-tinged anti-Lincoln cartoons were published for the 1864 campaign by Bromley & Co. of New York, a firm that worked closely on this and other pro-Democratic projects with the anti-Lincoln *New York World*.⁹ The "conversation" reveals just how difficult a time Lincoln would have in bringing northern Democrats over to support emancipation. *continued on page 11*

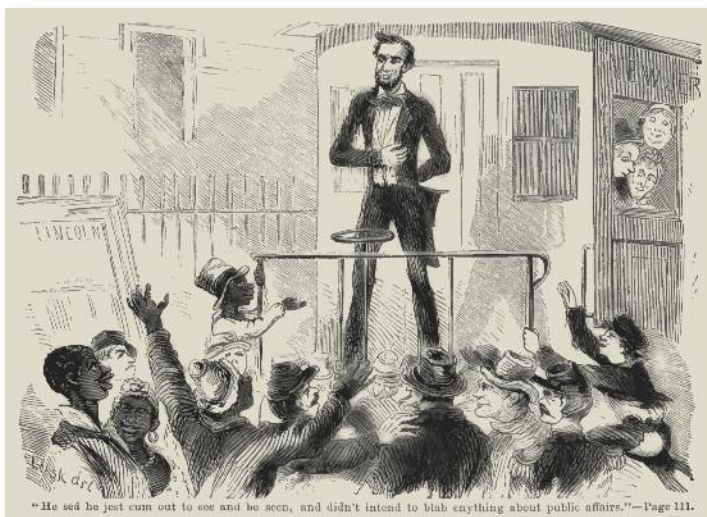
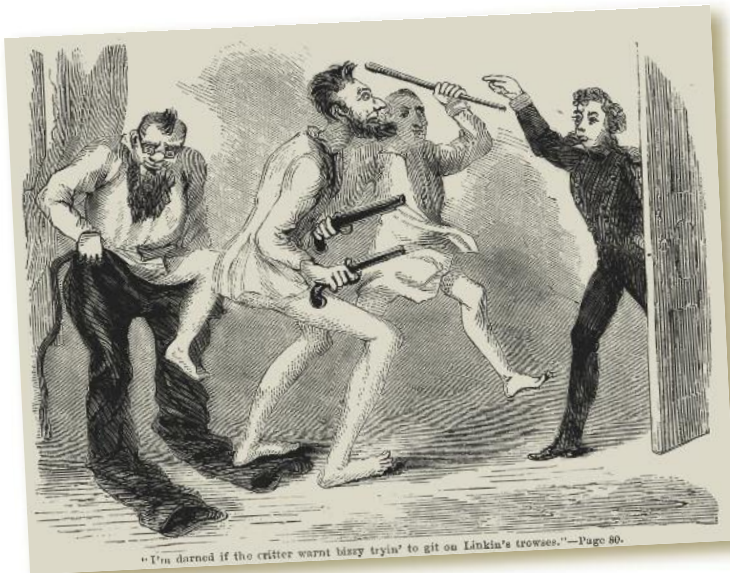
AND THE BLACK DELEGATION

continued from page 10 For in this Democrat's view, it was not that Lincoln was too condescending, but that he showed too much empathy for the black men at the meeting.

"I told the Kernel that when he got niggers to immigrate, that the next thing he could do would be to get the kinks out of their hair. Ses he, 'Why not, Majer?' 'Wal,' ses I, 'because it ain't their natur.' Ses I, 'Kernel, you talk to these niggers jest as if they were white people, all except their color. You seem to think that they will do something for their posterity, sacrifice something, but they won't. The nigger only cares for the present. The mulattoes have some of the talents of the white men, but the nigger not a bit.'" In this fictional conversation, "Linkin" accuses Downing of being "prejudiced," but Downing replies, that African Americas will always be "the same uncivilized, heathin people when white folks did not have control of 'em. You send 'em to Centril America, an in a gination or so they will be again eatin lizards an worshipping snakes, as they do in Africa now."¹⁰ *continued on page 12*



Lincoln mocked as a fool, a jokester, a radical abolitionist, and a tyrant – all in "Jack Downing" cartoons in 1864.



155 YEARS AGO: LINCOLN

continued from page 11

The racism of this satire is disturbing, but it can help 21st-century readers recapture the social, cultural and political context of Lincoln's meeting. From this Democrat's perspective—a Democrat who reflected the views of a large voting bloc in the North—it was not that Lincoln offered his black visitors too little respect, but that he treated them as equals.

(Jonathan W. White is the author of three new books, including *Midnight in America: Darkness, Sleep and Dreams in the American Civil War*.)

¹ Douglass, "The President and His Speeches," in Philip S. Foner and Yuval Taylor, eds., *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1999), 510-13.

² Allen C. Guelzo, *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation: The End of Slavery in America* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 160-61.

³ James G. Randall, *Mr. Lincoln*, ed. Richard Nelson Current (1926; rev. ed., New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1957), 342-45.

⁴ Eric Foner, *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2010), 225-26.

⁵ Mark E. Neely, Jr., *Lincoln and the Triumph of the Nation: Constitutional Conflict in the American Civil War* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 125-27.

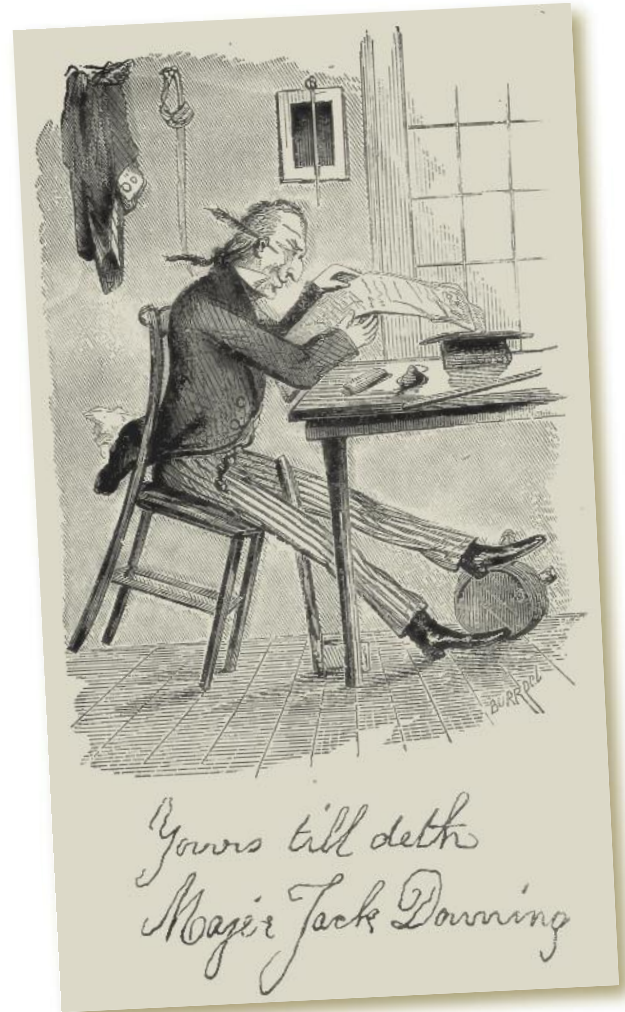
⁶ James Oakes, *Freedom National: The Destruction of Slavery in the United States, 1861-1865* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2013), 308-10; Oakes, *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Antislavery Politics* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2007), 126.

⁷ Harold Holzer, *Emancipating Lincoln: The Proclamation in Text, Context, and Memory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012), 41, 44.

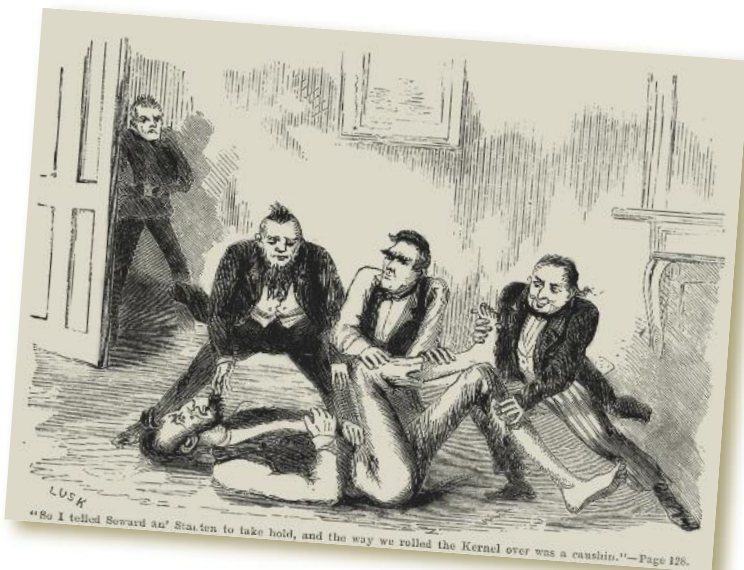
⁸ "Jack Downing" was a satirical figure created by journalist Seba Smith in the 1830s.

⁹ See "Bromley & Co's [sic] Publications: Letters of Major Jack Downing of the Downingville Militia, on the War..." in Mark E. Neely and Harold Holzer, *The Union Image: Popular Prints of the Civil War North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 153.

¹⁰ [Seba Smith?], *Letters of Major Jack Downing of the Downingville Militia* (New York: Bromley & Co., 1864), 135-36. 📖



Jack Downing caricatures assail Lincoln—part of a suite of cartoon attacks published by the *New York World* for the campaign of 1864.



BROMLEY & CO'S PUBLICATIONS.



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Major Jack Downing*

LETTERS

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OF THE
DOWNINGVILLE MILITIA,
ON THE WAR.

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POLITICAL CARICATURES, No. 1.

(Price of each Caricature Twenty-five Cents per copy: five copies, \$1, eleven copies, \$2, post-paid. By Express, \$15 per hundred.)

Major Jack Downing's Dream; or, The Grave of the Union.

This picture shows at a glance the entire object and design of the Abolition or Republican party. Ben. Butler, D. S. Dickinson, John Cochrane, Horace Greeley, Lincoln, Stanton, Chase, Seward, Sumner, Welles, Beecher, etc., figure in it. Greeley, in his old white hat and spectacles, rejoicing over the grave of the Union, and Beecher, with a negro baby in his arms, are irresistibly comic and amusing.



"I've feared if the effier worst 'Nigger style' to get on Lincoln's trousers."—Page 85.

No. 2.

Miscegenation; or, the Millennium of Abolitionism

This is a capital bit upon the new plank in the Republican platform. It represents society as it is to be in the era of "Equality and Fraternity." Lincoln, Sumner, Greeley, a female Lecturer, and a large number of "colored ladies and gentlemen," with white drivers and servants, show what society is to be in the millennium of Abolitionism. No description can do justice to the bits contained in this picture. Both Caricatures are excellent campaign documents.



"So I told General 'or' Stanton to take hold, and the way we pulled the General over was a caution."—Page 112.

No. 3.

The Abolition Catastrophe; or, The November Smash Up.

This picture represents the leading politicians of both political parties as engaged in a railway race for the Capital at Washington. One train is engineered by Gen. McClellan—the other, by Mr. Lincoln. The latter train runs into the obstructions of "Emancipation, Coercion, Public Debt, To Whom it may Concern," &c., &c., and is smashed into thousands of pieces; while the McClellan train with the Constitution for an engine, rides triumphantly into power. The leading men of both parties figure in the scene.

Any of the above sent promptly on the receipt of price. Write plainly your post-office address, County and State.

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A choice selection of Democratic Poems and Songs for the use of Political Clubs and the Democratic Social Circle.

These Poems embrace all the best pieces, whether satirical, sentimental, or humorous, which have appeared during the progress of this most cruel and unnatural war. One object of the work is to preserve in book-form, the most thrilling, beautiful, and witty songs which have been published in Democratic papers since the reign of Lincoln. It will be a "reminiscence" of these unhappy times.

Prices: Single copies, 25 cents, or five copies for \$1, sent post-paid. Fifty copies, \$8. One hundred, \$15, per express, at expense of purchaser. For any number less than fifty, at the rate of five for a dollar, post-paid.



"He had to get run out to see and be seen, and didn't intend to make anything about public affairs."—Page 111.

The Copperhead; or, Badge of Liberty.

This is a neat Pin, just the shape of the head and bust of the "Goddess of Liberty" on the old cent, made of pure copper, highly polished, and artistic and suitable either for ladies or gentlemen, who are fearless enough to declare their devotion to Free Speech, Free Press, and the Rights of White Men.

Price: Single Badges, 15 Cents; eight for \$1, post-paid.



"Major, that is what I call gain' to the bottom of a subject."—Page 141.

Figure 75.

Advertisement for Bromley and Company's publications. New York, 1864. Wood-engraved broadsheet. Surviving mid-nineteenth-century advertisements for political cartoons are rare. This example provides several insights into the marketing of these caricatures, revealing, for example, their rather cheap price (from twenty-five cents apiece to as low as eleven for two dollars if purchased in quantity) as well as their availability in bulk, which strongly suggests their uses by political organizations, not individuals. The ad also touted a humorously illustrated book by "Major Jack Downing," a fictional character familiar to American audiences since the Jacksonian era. Figures 77–80 show the four cartoons offered in the ad. (*The Library of Congress*)

HUNDREDS AT COOPER UNION AS HAROLD HOLZER

Founding Vice Chairman Harold Holzer received the 2017 Empire State Archives and History Award on September 6 at a conversation and ceremony held in the Great Hall of Cooper Union, site of what Holzer has described as “the speech that made Lincoln President.”

The award, a plaque from the New York State Archives Partnership Trust, on whose board Holzer has served for 22 years, was preceded by a one-hour conversation moderated by actor Stephen Lang. The actual plaque was presented by Holzer’s grandson, Charles.



Grandson Charles, Harold Holzer & Stephen Lang (Photo: Henry F. Ballone)

Among the attendees were actors Richard Dreyfuss and Rufus Collins, Hunter College President Jennifer J. Raab, local elected officials, and historians Ron Chernow and Barnet Schecter, as well as novelist Jeff Shaara.

Other noted historians, performers, and Empire State History Award laureates sent comments for the program—some of which are reproduced below:

Harold Holzer, a giant among Abraham Lincoln scholars, shares many of the wonderful traits of our best president — extraordinary empathy, a warm and generous heart, kindness and strength of character, a tireless work ethic, and a great sense of humor. Harold is a cherished friend and colleague, who is so very deserving of this wonderful honor.

Doris Kearns Goodwin

Harold Holzer is a true polymath, omnivorous in his hunger for knowledge and illumination. He has directed his formidable intellect and critical eye to our Civil War and the quintessential American genius who emerged from it, Abraham Lincoln. These works will endure for generations and will make us all collectively wiser. Harold is so deserving of this award.

Ken Burns, filmmaker

Harold Holzer is a great Lincoln expert and a great friend. He’s a wonderful writer. He arranged the treat of a lifetime for me: with Harold setting the scene and giving the historical context, the chance for me to read the full text of Lincoln’s Cooper Union speech, AT Cooper Union, FROM the podium Lincoln used, IN the hall where Lincoln spoke, BEFORE a packed house that Harold knew how to fill — and seeing the surprise and delight Harold took in the whole

experience. Not to mention taking me and a presentation of Lincoln’s photographs and speeches (“Lincoln Seen and Heard”), which Harold WROTE, to the Met and to the White House. He knows the Civil War period like the back of his hand. He has a fine sense of irony, which, in him, lives happily hand in hand with hope and determination. He’s never stopped working for change (have you read “A Just and Generous Nation”?). He’s never stopped writing books about Lincoln. He’ll always be in the game, because he’s good at it, and I think he really loves it. He stands with his friends. He’s a good guy. He almost deserves Edith.

Sam Waterston, actor

After pondering this mystery for some time, I have come to the conclusion that Harold Holzer was secretly cloned at an early age and that several Harold Holzers walk the streets of New York. Otherwise I am hard pressed to account for his extraordinary output of more than fifty books and myriad accomplishments in one lifetime. You could honor Harold for one set of accomplishments this year and then for an entirely different set next year and still not do him justice. Will the real Harold Holzer please stand up and take a bow this evening.

Ron Chernow, author



Ron Chernow & Harold Holzer (Photo: Henry F. Ballone)

Congratulations to the amazing Harold Holzer my generous, kind, funny, smart friend. Author of more than fifty books on his favorite president, Abraham Lincoln, Harold is also Director of Roosevelt House Public Policy Institute at Hunter College. It is here he keeps the history flame burning with the story of the great leader who brought us Social Security - and the end, with his colleague Winston Churchill - of WWII. Harold keeps good company: unique amongst men as well as historians, he is part of the heart of the city of New York. Whether at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, where he spent many years, or at his new address on 65th, where he presides over the once home of Eleanor and Franklin. Love and congratulations to you.

Judy Collins, singer and songwriter

EARNs NEW YORK STATE HISTORY AWARD

To anyone who loves American history, Harold Holzer is someone very special. His expertise and integrity shine forth on every page of the books with which he has so notably deepened our understanding of the country we live in.

Robert Caro, historian

Harold Holzer is himself an inspired ‘manufacturing center’ of outstanding American historical studies. Lincoln scholarship would not have been so outstanding during the past generation without Harold Holzer’s unique contribution. In addition to the distinction of the Lincoln Prize, he has been honored by many institutions for his scholarship and unstinting devotion to the study of American history.

Lewis Lehrman, Co-Chairman of the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History

No one can place you in the same room with Lincoln more vividly – or with greater authenticity – than Harold Holzer. Without a doubt, he is ‘Father Abraham’s’ most prolific biographer. But he is more than that. For, despite everything I know to be true – that Lincoln died nearly a century before Harold was born – whenever I read his books or listen to him lecture, my senses betray me, and I become convinced Harold has, by some miracle, shadowed Lincoln in every room – in every carriage, train, lecture hall, photographer’s studio, cemetery, and theater – he occupied, in all the great and quiet moments of his life. With his encyclopedic knowledge, practical political experience, and tireless devotion to his subject, Harold keeps alive for all of us the story of Lincoln and the America he transformed with ‘a new birth of freedom’ during the Civil War. For that, and so much more, we owe Harold Holzer our own ‘full measure’ of gratitude and respect.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., Professor, Harvard University



Edith and Harold welcome Richard Dreyfuss to Cooper Union

I’ve read his books, well, a number of them anyway, and he’s got an extremely hearty intellect and sense of inquiry. I’ve shared many meals with him and he’s got a hearty appetite. We’ve joked around a lot and he’s got the heartiest laugh going. I mean the man has heart! Had he been a king in olden days he would be remembered as Harold the Hearty.

Stephen Lang, Tony Nominated Actor and Friend. 1

EDWIN STANTON: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

continued from page 6 the Washington railroad station provide him with hourly reports regarding the troops arriving from northern Virginia and departing on the Baltimore & Ohio railroad heading west.

I could go on and on with examples of Stanton the efficient, Stanton the diligent, but what about those other terms: “arbitrary, capricious, tyrannical, vindictive, hateful, and cruel.” Let us talk about the arrest of General Charles Stone, a distinguished graduate of West Point with a long Army record. Not long after Stanton became secretary of war he heard complaints from members of Congress about General Stone; they claimed that Stone had inappropriate communications with rebel generals; they accused him as well of returning fugitive slaves to their Maryland masters. Stanton arranged for Stone to be arrested, for him to be transported to Fort Lafayette and kept in solitary confinement. Stanton leaked to the newspapers the “charges” against Stone but, in spite of repeated requests from Stone, Stanton never presented formal charges to a military court martial. Stanton kept Stone in prison for half a year and, when Congress finally forced Stanton to release Stone, Stanton denied Stone the chance to redeem himself on the battlefield.

Dennis Mahoney is another example of Stanton the tyrant. Mahoney was the editor of an anti-administration paper in Dubuque, Iowa. When Stanton issued an order, in the summer of 1862, authorizing the arrest of those who were “discouraging

volunteer enlistments” Mahoney was among those arrested. The Democrats of his district responded by naming Mahoney as their candidate for Congress; Stanton’s response was to leave Mahoney in jail until after the election. In the next year, Mahoney published a book on his prison experience, and he dedicated the book to Stanton, saying Stanton had earned the distinction by his “acts of outrage, tyranny and despotism.”

Stanton was an early advocate for an emancipation proclamation. Stanton was also concerned about the former slaves who crowded around the Union Army camps; he wanted to put the slaves to work, ideally putting the men into uniform as Union soldiers. Stanton wanted black soldiers not just because he needed more soldiers; Stanton understood the ways in which serving in the Union Army would change the lives of the former slaves. Stanton also pressed Congress for legislation, ultimately passed in early 1865, to create within the War Department a Freedmen’s Bureau to look after the black women and children. For Stanton this was a moral issue; the federal government could not just free the slaves and leave them on their own to cope without resources and without education.

What was Stanton’s relationship with Lincoln? In some senses they were similar: both from the Midwest, both lawyers, both political leaders, both opposed to slavery. In some sense they were very different: Lincoln always ready to listen, always ready to tell a story; Stanton always *continued on page 16*

EDWIN STANTON: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

continued from page 15 impatient, often rude. There is a scene in Spielberg's Lincoln movie that captures this well; Lincoln and Stanton are in the telegraph room, and Lincoln is reminded of a story. Stanton blurts out: "you're going to tell one of your stories! I can't stand to hear another one of your stories!" And Stanton storms off to deal with a report, while Lincoln settles down to tell a rather risqué story. But the two men worked so well together. There was a lot of pressure on Lincoln, starting only weeks after he appointed Stanton, to remove Stanton, but Lincoln never removed him, never considered it, because he knew and valued Stanton's work. Lincoln's secretary John Hay put this well in a letter to Stanton not long after Lincoln's death. "Not everyone knows, as I do, how close you stood to our lost leader, how he loved you and trusted you, and how vain were all efforts to shake that trust and confidence, not lightly given and never withdrawn."

Let us turn to April 14, 1865, the night John Wilkes Booth shot Abraham Lincoln. Stanton learned of the attack, and the almost simultaneous knife attack on Secretary of State William Henry Seward and others in the Seward household, at about ten that night. Stanton went immediately to Seward's house, where he saw the blood-stained but surviving Seward, and the other victims, six in all in the house soaked in blood. Stanton then went over the protests of his advisers, to the Petersen House, on Tenth Street, to which soldiers had borne the dying Lincoln. Stanton did not linger with Lincoln and the doctors; he went into the next room and went to work. He summoned and questioned witnesses, attempting to identify the assassins and their accomplices. He sent orders to arrest those suspected, and those who might have useful information. And he sent out a series of messages, press releases really, to inform the nation about the attacks, the condition of Lincoln and Seward, the early results of the investigation.

Early the next morning, just after Lincoln died, Stanton supposedly said "Now he belongs to the ages." I say "supposedly" because the first time those words appeared in print was twenty-five years later, when Lincoln's secretaries John Hay and John Nicolay published in serial form their biography of Lincoln. Unfortunately, none of the accounts of Lincoln's death published just after his death, none of the letters and news stories, mention Stanton saying anything right at that moment. So I am compelled, sadly, to conclude that Stanton probably never said "now he belongs to the ages," the only quote for which he appears in Bartlett's *Familiar Quotations*.

The new president, Andrew Johnson, and the carry-over secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, worked reasonably well together for the first few months. Indeed, it is remarkable to read the newspapers of late 1865 and early 1866, to see how popular Johnson was with almost everyone, North and South, Democrat and Republican. The first real break was in February 1866, when Johnson vetoed a bill to extend and strengthen the Freedmen's Bureau. And then a few weeks later, Johnson vetoed a civil rights

bill, arguing that the federal government had no role to play in civil rights, that these were purely questions for the states.

Johnson wanted to leave the government of the southern states to southerners, by which he meant of course *white* southerners. So Johnson wanted, as soon as possible, to remove the Union Army from the South. Stanton disagreed; he saw the daily reports from the South, reports of southern blacks and northern sympathizers attacked and in some cases murdered by southern whites. Stanton knew that without the Union army, without the military courts, there would be no protection from such violence. So Stanton insisted that the Union Army had to remain in the South, for years if necessary.

This was the key disagreement between Johnson and Stanton; this was why Johnson wanted to remove Stanton from his position. But Congress complicated Johnson's life by passing the Tenure of Office Act, which provided that the president generally needed Senate consent to remove an officer whose appointment required Senate approval. It was not quite clear whether this law applied to cabinet members, like Stanton, but finally Johnson was fed up, and in the spring of 1868, he informed Stanton that he was no longer secretary of war, that he should yield up his office to the new secretary, General Lorenzo Thomas.

Stanton refused, boarded himself up in the War Department and called upon his allies in Congress to impeach Johnson. The House impeached just a few days later, and the action then moved to the Senate for the trial. This was the first but not the last time that the nation focused on the vague words of the Constitution; what exactly were "high crimes and misdemeanors" which would justify convicting a president and removing him from office? Johnson's defenders argued that the Tenure of Office Act was unconstitutional—a position with which most modern legal scholars agree—and that surely a president could not be convicted and removed for failing to follow an unconstitutional statute. Not only arguments but bribes were involved; Seward and others raised a large legal defense fund, relatively little of which was paid to Johnson's lawyers; it now seems clear that several senators sold their votes. A majority of voted to convict, but not the required two-thirds majority, so Johnson survived, barely.

On the day of the final Senate vote, May 26, 1868, Stanton walked out of his office and never again visited the War Department. Stanton's health was broken; he had suffered all his life from asthma and he now had progressive, congestive heart failure. Stanton spent several weeks, in the fall of 1868, on the political campaign trail for Ulysses S. Grant, who was chosen president in that violent, vicious election. He hoped and expected that Grant would find a suitable place for him, either again at the head of the War Department or in the Supreme Court. Grant eventually named Stanton to the Supreme Court in December 1869, but it was too late; Stanton died within days after the Senate confirmed his nomination. He was only 55.

(Walter Stahr is the author of the new biography from Simon & Schuster, *Stanton: Lincoln's War Secretary*.) ■

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