

Abraham Lincoln as Political Scientist

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Abraham Lincoln was many things during his lifetime, including being a family man, friend, and lifelong student of law, culture, and history. He was a clerk and frontiersman, was admired as an athlete (particularly wrestling and moving heavy objects) and yes, briefly worked as a rail-splitter. He was an amateur poet, and a widely admired orator. And Lincoln was, of course, a successful politician who served in the Illinois General Assembly (1834-42), U.S. House of Representatives (1847-49), and as President of the United States of America (1861-65). While controversial during his lifetime, the martyred Chief Executive would ultimately be judged one of the foremost leaders in American – and indeed world – history. These observations, among others, are rather obvious about this great human being.

In the pages to follow, we ask a different and somewhat novel question (in that we find it nowhere in the vast Lincoln literature). Can Abraham Lincoln be seen as a member of the fraternity of political scientists? Is there a case to be made that in this regard he was one of us?

We approach the topic with both enthusiasm and caution. We are enthusiastic that the endeavor enables us to pursue our mutual interests in the life of Lincoln; and it allows us the opportunity to participate in Professor Holden's Symposium featuring so many leading presidential scholars, and even offers us the potential chance to influence, however modestly, the context in which subsequent presentations are considered. Or, that's our hope. The bottom line is that we pursued the topic because we thought it both relevant and likely to be a whole lot of fun.

Nevertheless, we approach the subject with our eyes wide open. Reasonable people might ask why we would care, considering that the topic is largely one of semantics and does not address the great substantive issues pertaining to the life of Lincoln. Reasonable people also know that when writers make the mistake of setting out to find something, they usually do (particularly when the "analysis" as such, is so subjective). We acknowledge the validity of both concerns. Yes, the topic is rather esoteric and somewhat artificial. And work such as this can be criticized on many fronts and for many reasons, including the prospect of cherry-picking the "evidence" to find what we might hope to find.

Straight up, we would tell the reader-listeners to draw their own conclusions about this endeavor. Please know, as well, that we believe our objectivity to be intact and fully realize that our inquiry is beside the point or points of Lincoln's greatness. We are reminded of the intellectual tendencies of William Jefferson Clinton the "policy wonk," who seemingly found enrichment in the joy attending to the pursuit of ideas for their own sake. It is with these thoughts in mind that we undertake an examination of whether the Poly Sci Hall of Fame of the future will have erred in not admitting Lincoln as a charter member.

Two sections follow. We begin by seeking a definitional standard to apply to our subject. What is political science and what essentially do its practitioners do?

Next, we examine the extent to which these fundamental tenets of political science are or are not found in the life of Lincoln, based in the writings of leading Lincoln biographers. We conclude with our own answer regarding the extent to which Abraham Lincoln may be considered a political scientist.

The Scope of Political Science

At the outset of his text on the Scope and Methods of Political Science, Alan C. Isaak asserts:

Probably the first question that a present-day student of politics ought to ask is, “What is political science?” Or putting it in more answerable form... “What is the scope of political science?” This can be reduced to, “What kinds of activities interest those who call themselves ‘political scientists’?” There are a number of ways to answer this question (1985:3).

We began our quest to address these questions by examining the meaning of “politics” and “science.” On the meanings of politics we were reminded of the classical thinkers, such as Aristotle, Plato and Socrates, Machiavelli, Hume, Hobbes, Rousseau, Locke and beyond. While timelessly interesting, these works – based in the broadly based nature of power, the state, ethics, the social contract, and beyond – were not central to our inquiry, in that they provide no obvious framework for our subject. As the classics of political philosophy they are, we believe, the very foundation upon which the more rigorous study of political science was built. But they are just that, political “philosophy” ... a valued precursor to political “science.” Likewise our pursuit of an understanding of science led us to the National Academy of Sciences’ offering that science is “The use of evidence to construct testable explanations and predictions of natural phenomena, as well as the knowledge generated through this process” (2008:10). Finding this avenue equally abstract, we abandoned this rather isolated approach to the concept and turned instead to the more integrated concept of “political science.”

Beginning again, we turned to the Internet’s seemingly limitless variety of definitions. Many of these definitions were of little help, such as Your Dictionary.com, which uses “science” and “political” in their definition of “political science (i.e. “the science of political institutions, or of the principles, organization, and methods of government”). Other leads were very helpful, such as information provided by The Writing Center of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. The Writing Center’s discussion explains:

At its most basic level, politics is the struggle of “who gets what, when, how.” This struggle may be as modest as competing interest groups fighting over control of a municipal budget in Small Town, U.S.A., or as overwhelming as a military stand-off between

international superpowers. Political scientists study such struggles, both small and large, in an effort to develop general principles or theories about the way the world of politics works... The diverse structure of political science reflects the diverse kinds of problems the discipline attempts to analyze and explain. In fact, political science includes at least eight major sub-fields...

Although political scientists are prone to debate and disagreement, the majority view the discipline as a genuine science. As a result, political scientists generally strive to emulate the objectivity as well as the conceptual and methodological rigor typically associated with the so-called "hard" sciences (e.g., biology, chemistry, and physics). They see themselves engaged in revealing the relationships underlying political events and conditions. And from these revelations they attempt to construct general principles about the way the world of politics works. Given these aims, it is important for political scientists' writing to be conceptually precise, free from bias, and well substantiated by empirical evidence. They want to build and refine ever more precise and persuasive theories...theory-building serves as the cornerstone of the discipline... Most political scientists adhere to a simple model of scientific inquiry when building theories. The key to building precise and persuasive theories is to develop and test hypotheses...then political scientists avoid the use of impressionistic or metaphorical language, or language which appeals primarily to our senses, emotions, or moral beliefs. In other words, rather than persuade you with the elegance of their prose or the moral virtue of their beliefs, political scientists persuade through their command of the facts and their ability to relate those facts to theories that can withstand the test of empirical investigation...

With this, we were making progress. Politics and/or political science involves "who gets what, when, how." It may involve conflict ("struggles," "fighting"). It seeks to "develop general principles or theories" and involves a "diverse structure" based in "subfields." Political science is dynamic ("prone to debate and disagreement") and sees itself "as a genuine science" in that it requires "objectivity," "methodological rigor," and that it must be "well-substantiated by empirical evidence" in pursuit of "theory building." Political scientists use language which "persuade(s) through their command of the facts..." So we were on the right track, but nevertheless lacked a rigorous template by which to examine Lincoln.

Perhaps, we reasoned, a review of the discipline's various writings on the meaning, scope, activities, and history of political science would provide the guidance we sought. Gabriel A. Almond's (1990, 1996) work taught us much about the competing approaches and schools of thought and gave us rather firm grounding in the pertinent history. Almond's discussion of "Recurring Themes" in political science tempted us to stop our search there (1996:17-20). Charles Lindblom (1990,

1997) gave us pause to consider various criticisms of the discipline's accomplishments and methods. And Austin Ranney (1971) pointed us toward seven "Special Concerns" regarding the scope of the discipline. With Almond's recurring themes and Ranney's special concerns we felt emboldened. Still, we pressed on in the hope that a more recent assessment of the subject was out there. We found what we were looking for in Ira Katznelson and Helen Milner's historically based and quite rigorous examination of the field's developmental state and status (2002). With this we had our template.

Conceptually, we asked ourselves what Katznelson and Milner (with help from Ranney) see as the most essential or fundamental pursuits of the discipline ... beyond theory (a separate topic). These essentials, as we see it, are the state, liberal democracy, and empiricism (See Sidebar 1). Viewing the subject from the perspective of the discipline's historical periods – studies of the state, behavioralism, and choice – we sought to determine various objects of study within the periods. During the first phase (state), for instance, studies of law and liberal democracies flourished; the second (behavioral) period witnessed the rise of voting studies, for example; and during the third period (choice), studies of conflict and justice are typical, among others (See Sidebar 2).

Sidebar 3, then, is a composite of various topics that we, speaking on behalf of Katznelson and Milner, see as leading aspects of the scope of the discipline. This is our template. For Abraham Lincoln to be considered a political scientist in addition to wrestler, rail-splitter, and all the rest, we hold that clear evidence must be found of his having approached these topics (Sidebar 3), much like scholars have. We did say, please recall, that we thought this would be fun.

Before moving to Lincoln, we have two things to point out about our sidebars, particularly #3. First, because we have accepted their configuration of historical periods in the discipline, we should acknowledge that they find the emphasis on periods misleading (pp. 25-26). The field of leadership studies (a first cousin to power-based political science) regularly depicts its first period as studies of leadership traits that supposedly ended 100 years ago. Nevertheless a review of leadership literature shows that literally hundreds of traits studies have been conducted during the past 15-20 years alone. The period of emphasis has passed, but the relevance of traits within the scope of leadership continues. The same may be said of political science; as a discipline we have largely moved beyond the emphasis on the state, but formal studies of institutions continue. We get their point.

We also realize that none of the concepts, terms, or subfields listed in the sidebars or utilized in the corresponding discussions is completely self-contained. The study of elections, for instance, could be conducted as an institutional matter of safeguarding results, or how participants make voting decisions during elections, or Electoral College biases against Latino representation. Clearly, the scope of political science is not made up entirely – if at all – of discreet subfields of study. As

Katznelson and Milner note, “For better or worse, political science within and across its subfields has operated as an interwoven branch of knowledge” (p. 3).

With that we turn to the really fun part of our endeavor ... the tall guy ... sometimes with whiskers.

Lincoln as Political Scientist

At the onset of what we hope is the “reasoned speculation” to follow, we believe we should address one issue head on: namely, is it likely that we are about to confuse those who study a subject (i.e. political scientists) with those who practice that subject (i.e. practicing politicians)? Our response is that in all likelihood we will. As we address Lincoln and public opinion, for instance, potential critics of our approach might readily say that while Lincoln effectively used public opinion to his advantage as successful politicians do, he nevertheless did not impartially examine the subject as would a scholar. We appreciate the distinction and – although we find it rather arbitrary and narrow – will address it as we proceed.

And with that, we should perhaps defend our sense that absolute distinctions between practitioners and scholars are rather “arbitrary and narrow.” We do not see the two as either/or distinctions, any more that political science can be described or defined as absolutely distinct from the fields of history, law, economics, or administration. We concur with WORDIQ.com’s discussion of the field, which notes:

The study of Political Science is complicated by the frequent involvement of Political Scientists in the political process, since their teachings often provide the frameworks within which other commentators, such as journalists, special interest groups, politicians, and the electorate analyze issues and select options. Political Scientists may serve as advisors to specific politicians, or even run for office as politicians themselves. Political Scientists can be found working in governments, in political parties or as civil servants. They may be involved with non-governmental organizations (NGOS) or political movements. In a variety of capacities, people educated and trained in Political Science can add value and expertise to corporations. Private enterprises such as think tanks, research institutes, polling and public relations firms often employ political scientists... (7-20-10).

Surely, we reason, Woodrow Wilson (Ph.D. in Political Science, Johns Hopkins University, 1886) was no less of a political scientist because he occupied the American presidency. Surely, we assert, the 49 members of the 111th Congress serving in the U.S. House of Representatives who hold degrees in political science – including 36 BAs, 6 BS’s, 6 MA’s, 1 MS, and 4 Ph.D.s – are not diminished as political

scientists because of their unique hands-on perspectives (Regarding Congress, see Scientists and Engineers for America at <https://www.SHARP.SEFORA.ORG.ISSUES/111PH-CONGRESS-DEGREES-BY-TYPE/>).

So, while acknowledging that the practitioner-scholar distinction complicates matters somewhat, we nevertheless believe that it can be, and often is, bridged by the thoughtful perspectives and approaches of those scholars who seek to enhance their insights through experiential learning (i.e. personal experience). Likewise, we believe that practitioners can and often do enhance their perspectives through rather rigorous examinations of their participation in our political system(s).

We begin, then, with Sidebar 3 and whether the key elements of political science are to be found in the life of Lincoln; our starting point being to consider whether Lincoln is known to have met the political science requirement of having an empirically-based, methodological decision-making perspective.

Empiricism and Objectivity

The prominent Lincoln biographers reviewed for this project are clear on at least three points regarding Lincoln's analytical mind. First, nearly everyone who has explored the subject would agree with James M. McPherson's assessment that Lincoln possessed "a keen analytical mind," of the variety that allowed him to master Euclidean geometry "for mental exercise" (2008:19). Second, as would be expected of an analytical mind, Donald asserts that "Despite a deep poetic streak, Lincoln's mind was coolly logical, and he longed for the day when reason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason' would rule the world" (Donald, 2003, from Basler, V.1:386). Third, the logical analysis that Lincoln regularly employed was consistent with the standard – and developing – political science objects of the day; that being, the law.

Ranney notes that by the 18th century politics, government, law, and political economy were sometimes taught in European and American universities, "as branches of moral philosophy" seeking to understand and instruct students "in the principles of right conduct." Ranney continues:

In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries many areas of study began to win academic status independent from moral philosophy. Among the first to be differentiated were the studies of law and political economy. Neither, however, contributed much to the development of the specialized study of politics and government. The newly independent law schools were concerned only with questions of what rules courts really applied and dealt little or not at all with the institutions and processes that made the law...

During that same period (i.e. early 1800s), however, the growing intensity of the constitutional crisis in the United States that ultimately led to the Civil War produced a large volume of studies of

the Constitution that were neither pure “law” nor pure “history” but rather analyses of the proper form and role of Constitutions and governments in human affairs. This development led an increasing number of writers and teachers to think of the study of politics and government as quite distinct from either the study of history or the study of law.

In 1856 a significant episode occurred. Francis Lieber, a German-born scholar who had made his career in the United States and had published in 1838 his *Manual of Political Ethics* (a work regarded by some scholars as the first systematic treatise in political science published in this country), was elected to the chair of history and political economy at Columbia College. Lieber asked the college’s trustees to change the name of his chair to “history and political science,” and they agreed to do so. This change signaled the emergence of the study of politics and government separately from the study of history.

Lieber’s innovation came to full flower after the Civil War, when political science finally emerged in the United States as a distinct academic discipline. By the early 1880s a number of American institutions were offering courses in “government,” as distinct from history or political economy, and in the late 1880s and early 1890s many created separate “government” and “political science” departments. In 1886 the *Political Science Quarterly*, the first specialized political science journal, was established by Columbia. During the same period a number of political science treatises, in the modern sense of the term, were published, the most notable being Theodore Dwight Woolsey’s *Political Science* (1878), Woodrow Wilson’s *Congressional Government* (1885) and *The State* (1889), John W. Burgess’ *Political Science and Comparative Constitutional Law* (1890), and James Bryce’s *The American Commonwealth* (1888), the last by an Englishman.

Finally, in 1903 the American Political Science Association was founded, with Frank J. Goodnow (Johns Hopkins) as its first president, and in 1906 it began publishing the *American Political Science Review*. Political science in the United States had become established as a distinct discipline and has remained so ever since (1971:306-7; see Haddow, 1939 and Somit and Tanenhaus, 1967).

The point here is this: the evolution of political science as a discipline transitioned from earlier roots in moral philosophy to law at roughly the time Lincoln began to study and then practice law in 1839. Lincoln’s application of a “strong, logical mind” (Donald, 1995:41) to the study of law before the further emergence of the discipline as a separate entity – and before the rise of empiricism spawned by scholars at the University of Chicago beginning in the 1880s – seems consistent with the notion that Lincoln did indeed practice a rather rudimentary empiricism of the day. In contrasting the Lincoln-Herndon law partners, for

instance, Donald continues, “The senior partner disliked generalities, and his mind cautiously moved in logical progression from one fact to the next, while his junior leapt ahead, using intuition to arrive at his conclusions” (1995:102).

And if we are correct in this contention, Lincoln’s approach to the logical study of law appears to have been largely based in the case method. Donald cites a frequently repeated observation by Herndon:

Lincoln never did become a devoted reader of general texts or theoretical books on the law. Years later Herndon claimed that Lincoln “never thoroughly read any elementary law book. In fact ... I never knew him to read through and through any law book of any kind.” The charge was largely true. “I cannot read generally. I never read text books for I have no particular motive to drive and whip me to it,” Lincoln explained. “I don’t, and can’t remember such reading.” But Herndon’s remark was really beside the point, for Lincoln spent night after night in the Supreme Court Library, searching out precedents that applied to the cases he was working on. This was work he enjoyed. “When I have a particular case in hand,” he explained, “I ... love to dig up the question by the roots and hold it up and dry it before the fires of the mind.” Logan’s final judgment on Lincoln’s legal accomplishments was more perceptive than Herndon’s: “I don’t think he studies very much. I think he learned his law more in the study of cases. ... He got to be a pretty good lawyer though his general knowledge of law was never very formidable. But he would study out his case and make about as much of it as anybody” (1995:99).

From the outset, then, Lincoln appears to meet our first pertinent test, or at least he does if we adequately parse our terms and concepts, match him with the applicable historical period, and select just the right expert quotations. Earlier we said that we hoped not to do a lot of cherry picking ... at no time did we promise to do none.

Liberal Democracy

We find ourselves on more solid ground regarding Lincoln and three related “scope of political science” elements, beginning with his commitment to liberal democracy and extending to his theoretical views of public opinion and justice. Much has been written regarding Lincoln’s faith in the American people; in fact, this faith is a key component in the legend of Lincoln. Sean Wilentz explains that, “Having come of age in the 1820s, Lincoln, a paragon of the self-made man, upheld certain democratic precepts that distinguish his generation from that of the founders, and that Whigs of his persuasion shared with the Jacksonians” (Wilentz, in Foner, 2008:65). Regarding the personal views of Lincoln, Wilentz continues to explain that “Hierarchy offended” the democrat in Lincoln (2008:65). Burlingame

adds that “he wanted everyone to have a chance to escape the soul crushing poverty and backwardness that he had experienced as a quasi-slave on the frontier” (2008, V1:73). In fact, Lincoln’s faith in democracy helps to explain his reliance upon at least two of the pillars by which he understood the great American experiment: the philosophies of Henry Clay and the Declaration of Independence.

In Clay, Lincoln found “his own views,” which he addressed during remarks made in 1852. Lincoln advised:

Mr. Clay’s predominant sentiment, from first to last, was a deep devotion to the cause of human liberty – a strong sympathy with the oppressed everywhere, and an ardent wish for their elevation. With him, this was a primary and all controlling passion.” That description fits Lincoln as well as it did Clay. From first to last, Lincoln’s political goal was to free the oppressed, starting with the kind of frontier people whose conditions he knew first-hand; in time, the scope of his sympathies would broaden (Basler, vol. 1:509; also, Burlingame, 2008:73).

Lincoln’s second pillar of democratic thought and understanding was the Declaration of Independence. As Donald explains, when the young man’s reliance upon “reason (for) guidance ... proved inadequate” he turned to “the law and in the Constitution, but after the Dred Scott decision he could no longer have unqualified faith in either.” Consequently, Donald continues, “The concept of the Union, older than the Constitution, deriving from the Declaration of Independence with its promise of liberty for all, had become the promise on which all his other political beliefs rested” (1995:269).

Lincoln’s concerns for and with liberal democracy likewise demonstrates his repeated examination of the nature of public opinion. Carwardine explains that “Lincoln took the common view that the people were sovereign and that American government rested on public opinion. Even the most capable of public officers, he noted in 1850, ‘are wholly inefficient and worthless, unless they are sustained by the confidence and devotion of the people.’” Later, Lincoln would assert, “In this age, and this country, public sentiment is everything” (Basler, vol. 2:89, 255-56, 552-53; also Carwardine, 2008:46). Douglas Wilson goes on to say that, in fact, “Lincoln had a theory about public opinion” which as “He told a meeting of his fellow Republicans in 1856” was that public opinion” always has a ‘central idea’ which propels “a steady progress towards the practical equality of all men (and in keeping with the Declaration of Independence) (Wilson, 2006:202; also, Basler, vol. 2:385).

Lincoln’s attention to (i.e. studies of) public opinion – as well as his reliance upon the philosophy of Clay and the Declaration – have considerable bearing upon the discussion at hand. For instance, Carwardine suggests that Lincoln’s approach to “Swaying public opinion by reasoned argument rather than feeding prejudice remained a constant all of his political career” (2003:46), suggesting more than a

little attention to objectivity on his part. William L. Miller contends that Lincoln's philosophy based in equality was a "moral guide" which was "unusually persistent" in creating "a natural sense of Justice" as a basis for his opposition to slavery and beyond (2002:297). We leave this topic, then, fully satisfied that Lincoln did indeed depict an individual – much like a political scientist – who both carefully and deeply examined the nature of liberal democracy and in so doing, likewise explored the dynamics of public opinion and justice.

Affairs of State

Of all the political institutions Lincoln impacted (including the Illinois General Assembly, judiciary, Congress, Whig and Republican parties and more), he undoubtedly left his mark on the American presidency to an extent matched by few others. As Carwardine notes, "Lincoln's circumstances gave him opportunities for using and expanding presidential power in ways of which his predecessors would never have dreamed (2003:256). In fact, Lincoln's Civil War exercise of executive authority was unprecedented in American history. A partial list of these unprecedented actions includes the following actions, orders and authorizations (and, it should be noted, almost always without congressional authorization). Lincoln: In preparation for war, called up additional volunteers for extended periods of three years (ordering up 8 regiments of infantry, 1 of cavalry, another of artillery, and 18,000 seamen); ordered the blockade of 9 confederate states; he ordered an armed revenue ship to escort California ships hauling Union gold; ordered Navy yards in New York, Philadelphia, and Boston to produce 15 armed steamships in order to control communications by sea; authorized the New York Governor and an aide to forward troops and supplies to Union troops; ordered \$2,000,000 advanced to a committee in New York for the purpose of paying requisitions in support of Union war efforts; and Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus in broad expanses of America (Donald, 1995:301-304). Donald adds, "The next years would see greater infringements on individual liberties than in any other period in American history" (1995:304).

With these actions noted, and acknowledging the fact that Lincoln was widely criticized, at least three points should be made here. First, Lincoln was unequivocal in this being a national emergency which required forceful executive action (i.e. speed and unity). Donald explains:

Lincoln's July 1861 message, together with his proclamations, ... made it clear that he considered the prosecution of the war primarily a function of the Chief Executive, to be carried out with minimal interference from the other branches of the government and without excessive respect to constitutional niceties protecting individual rights. To carry out his duties as commander-in-chief, he believed that he could exercise powers normally reserved to the legislative branch of government. Proclaiming a blockade, extending the period for volunteer enlistment to three years, increasing the size

of the regular army and navy, and entrusting public funds to private persons for the purchase of arms and supplies would ordinarily require the prior approval of Congress, but the emergency required the President to act before such authorization was granted. "It was with the deepest regret," he explained, "that the Executive found the duty of employing the war-power, in defence of the government, forced upon him." "These measures, whether strictly legal or not," he informed Congress in July, "were ventured upon, under what appeared to be a popular demand, and a public necessity; trusting, then, as now, that Congress would readily ratify them." "It is believed," he added, "that nothing has been done beyond the constitutional competency of Congress" (1995:303).

Milkis and Nelson add that "Lincoln considered his early measures to be ad interim, emergency decisions, which would require subsequent ratification by Congress to become fully valid" (1999:143).

Second, Lincoln articulated that his execution of these extraordinary emergency powers, grounded in his duties as commander in chief, were in keeping with a conceptualization "of the constitution that, although respectful of procedural regularity and formal legality, was concerned above all with the president's responsibility to uphold the basic principles of constitutional order." He was, in other words, not claiming dictatorial powers (Milkis and Nelson, 1999:143-144). And third, it is worth noting that Lincoln's exceptional claims upon and uses of executive authority were, in fact, upheld by the federal courts (including the Supreme Court), Congress, public opinion, and even history.

And the point of this brief history for the inquiry at hand? As countless historical assessments attest, Lincoln did not casually stumble into these quite radical actions. Each was carefully and rigorously assessed by this most reflective president. In a word, these actions were carefully "studied." The two foremost examples of such extreme measures – suspension of the writ of habeas (see Goodwin, 2005:354-55, 523-25; Burlingame, 2008:v. 2:532-33; Donald, 1995:303-5, 441-43; Neely, Jr. in Foner, 2008:37-61 for a sampling of leading reviews) and issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation (see Goodwin, 2005:497-501; Burlingame, 2008,v.2:360-64, 407-18; Donald, 1995:362-69) – serve as indisputable examples of Lincoln's studies of affairs of state, we assert.

Notice, too, that Lincoln the student of the state was also a student of power and its role in our system. The fact that Lincoln "possessed formidable political power" (Delbanco, in Foner, 2008:214) goes without saying, but is largely beside the point being made here. What is pertinent here is that, again, Lincoln is depicted by biographers as a student of power. In this regard, William L. Miller is instructive. Writing about Lincoln in the context of his readings of the Founders, Miller notes:

Abraham Lincoln had absorbed all this in his reading and in his American environment. Like the American Founders, he was neither an anarchist nor a pacifist; he did believe in the necessity and possibility of government. One element – not the only one – defining government is coercion: the imposition of some will on the community. Part of the genius of a free republic is that the people impose that “coercion” on themselves, through their representatives; they are ruled by themselves through the “gentle coercion of the magistracy,” in Madison’s phrase. Lincoln will have occasion in the winter of 1860-61, in matters of highest consequence, to think through and write out his argument on these matters: majority rule and the rights of those who disagree; “anarchy” and “coercion.” On some February days in 1861 he and William Seward, these two politicians in this republic, sitting together in the Willard Hotel in Washington, will work out a statement of ultimate government authority under the Constitution of this free republic, finally arriving at this complicated but adequate formulation: “A majority held in restraint by constitutional checks and limitation and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments is the only true sovereign of the people.” This is government not only of and for the people, but also by the people: through a continuous process of mutually deliberating power-seeking and power-yielding collaboration – through politics (2002:104-5).

And More

As we near the end of this project, we are struck by the remaining sidebar topics which also support our central argument, particularly Lincoln’s involvement with – and we believe studies regarding – elections, political parties, and political communications and language. We take for granted that the reflective analyst Lincoln, who largely rejected the thinking of ideologues (Donald, 1995:452), does indeed depict the “better-documented reality of Lincoln the party organizer, pragmatic leader, and shrewd strategist” (Carwardine, in Foner, 2008:224; also see Schwartz, 2009:18-23).

What we find less obvious and of considerable interest is Lincoln’s talent as political communicator and his use of language. Carwardine captures the essence of Lincoln’s oratorical skills nicely, writing:

Lincoln’s power over his audiences derived far less from his physical attributes than from the clarity and directness with which he appealed to their understanding. Taking pains to provide cogent explanations of complex or obscure subjects had been a hallmark of his youth. Anne C. Gentry remembered how, as ‘the learned boy among us unlearned folks’, he patiently explained to her the movement of the earth, the moon and the planets. Preparing his

addresses, whether to juries or to political rallies, he devoted enormous attention to making himself understood by all, however poorly educated. He spoke extemporaneously, though he prepared notes for the most important of his speeches, and used the clearest, simplest language. It was this concern for clarity that chiefly prompted his anecdotes, not for merriment for its own sake. Observing his developing rhetorical control over a period of three decades, Joseph Gillespie recognized that Lincoln 'confined himself to a dry bold statement of his point and then worked away from sledge hammer logic at making out his case'. When the young New Englander Edward L. Pierce encountered Lincoln for the first time, in Chicago in the mid-1850s, he was powerfully struck with the Illinoisan's 'logical and reflective power, and the absence of all attempt throughout this speech to produce a sensational effect (2003:50).

And once again, although the author is depicting the style of a largely successful politician, we see the trappings of a scholar: "clarity and directness," appeals to "understanding," "cogent explanations," "clearest, simplest language," sledge hammer logic," and "logical and reflective power."

There are, of course, numerous other matters from both the history and scope of political science which could, and perhaps should, be considered here. While acknowledging this fact, we are ready to render our quite obvious verdict on the admittedly rhetorical matter of whether Abraham Lincoln was in fact a political scientist.

Conclusion

And with that, we write the briefest conclusion either one of us has ever crafted. Bearing in mind our caution that researchers universally are able to establish something if they in fact set out to establish that something, we ask: So, what do you think was Abraham Lincoln a political scientist in addition to the many other features of legend? You will decide for yourself, of course. But our answer – in bold and uncompromising terms is – you bet ... sort of.

Sidebar 1
Political Science:
It's Definition and Essential Elements*

A Beginning Point (from the authors and A. Ranney, 1971)

- Political science is a discipline that seeks to examine, for the purpose of understanding and theory building, the nature of politics and government. In the phrasing of Austin Ranney (1971), “Every political scientist should walk humbly with his profession, and most do. Ambitious as are the objectives of the physical sciences, the ultimate goals of political science are even more so, for they are nothing less than to acquire an understanding of government and politics that will enable us to use the instruments to realize our vision of the good life” (p. 323).

Essential Elements of Political Science (adapted from Katznelson and Milner, 2002)

- The state is the primary object of analysis:
“Bearing the marks of its origins, the discipline has been infused by prevailing assumptions about political values about how to conceptualize and study the modern state” (p. 4).
- Political liberalism of western democracies is the foremost value:
“Most significant has been the discipline’s attention to political liberalism (not in the partisan sense but in the sense of the doctrine fashioned in early modern Europe to guide relations between states and their citizens”) (p. 4).
- Empiricism is the paramount methodological perspective:
(Per Walter James Shepard, 1925) “...political science as a concern to develop both a science and a philosophy of the state... Now, speculative and deductive political theory was complemented by studies of the state that increasingly were grounded in data, history, and comparison. Treating the scientific method as entailing the systematic accumulation of fact, the elaboration of data into causal sequences, and generalization from these sequences, Shepard concluded that the discipline was making ‘distinct progress toward a really scientific character’”
(p. 11).

*The authors acknowledge that the “essential elements” and corresponding interpretations in the sidebars are their own. We likewise acknowledge that other interpretations of the material cited in the sidebars could be arrived at, and might readily be both as – or more – useful and accurate.

Sidebar 2
A Brief History of Modern Political Science: (with critical connotations)
Typical Ways It is Told
(Adapted from Katznelson and Milner, unless otherwise cited)

1st Period, Studies of the State (mid 19th century – late 1930's ... and beyond

- Essence: “An early legal-formal constitutionally oriented discipline” arose, as political science sought to distinguish itself from the formal disciplines of philosophy and economics (Ranney, 1971: 305-09).
- Initial Studies: “Characterized by a focus on formal institutions, public administration, and law, the core of the country’s new political science was infused with an emphasis on the elements of political liberalism articulated by Wilson” (p. 9).
- Across Time, Grew to Include:
 - “interactions between the national state and civil society, which occurred through processes such as those governing interest representation, public opinion, and elections ...” (p. 9). Studied as institutional procedures.
 - Would lead to formal studies of institutions, including: power, electoral rules, parties and party systems, the executive branch (U.S. presidency, parliamentary systems), legislatures (e.g. uses of the veto), collective action, checks and balances, etc. (pp 18-22).

2nd Period, Behavioral Studies (“emerged in the 1940s, was dominant in the United States until the early 1970s, and is still influential,” McLean, 1996:32).

- Essence: “a more scientific, behavioral impulse” (p. 7).
“Behaviouralism is a movement in political science which insists on analysing (only) the observable behaviour of political actors” (McLean, 1996: 32).
- Initial Studies: “beginning in the late 1930s Paul F. Lazarsfeld pioneered the use of large-scale sample surveys or polls to study voting behavior ... applied survey research methods...” (Johnson, 2005:41).
- Across Time, Grew to Include:
 - Behavioral political science assumes and advocates the search for fundamental units of analysis that can provide a common base for the investigation of human behavior by all social scientists. Some political scientists, for instance, suggest that groups are an important unit on which to focus, while others are more interested in decision-making and decisions (Johnson, 2005:42).
 - Psychology of power.
 - Psychology of transactions, e.g. voting behavior, public opinion, political parties, legislative behavior, etc. (p. 12).
 - Political culture studies including socialization (Almond, 1996:69).

3rd Period, Studies of Choice (Post W.W. II origins, peak period 1970s – present.

- Essence: “political scientists have been concerned to understand the state as a bundle of norms, a site of power, and an ensemble of institutions...” (p. 15). Diversity in choice selection. “The theme of individual choice has reappeared throughout the history of the discipline... Voting and elections are meaningful only if some options are available” (p 16). “social scientists urgently need to study the relational constraints within which all individual action takes place” (Tilly, 1998:34, see Katznelson and Milner, p. 16).
- Studies include:
 - “power and choice in tandem with a concern for the functioning of political institutions” (p. 17).
 - “A focus on overt conflict and behavioral causality can neglect power as agenda setting and as shaping world views and preferences, even language itself” (p. 15).
 - Conflict, justice, political language and communications, relations between branches, systems theory, etc. (pp. 13-24).

Sidebar 3
The Scope of Political Science:
An Interpretation of Katznelson and Milner (2002)

The scope of political science has and/or does include configurations examining the following, and more (the list is not comprehensive):

- Studies of the state
- Studies of liberal democracies
- Studies of methods/empiricism
- Studies of political institutions, public administration, law and international relations
- Studies of power elections, political parties, interest groups, political executives, legislatures, collective action, checks and balances
- Studies of voting behavior, political psychology, groups and political/psychological transactions, public opinion, political culture and socialization
- Studies of choice, elections, power-choice in tandem, conflict, justice, political communications/language, inter-branch relations, and systems
- Studies of political theory/philosophy
- Studies based in the discipline's subfields

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