

**THE SECOND WEPNER SYMPOSIUM ON THE LINCOLN LEGACY AND
CONTEMPORARY SCHOLARSHIP**

October 21 – 22, 2011

Report of the Proceedings

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****5 November Draft****

Introduction

The second Wepner Symposium on the Lincoln Legacy and Contemporary Scholarship was held on October 21 and 22 in Springfield, Illinois. The 2011 theme, marking the sesquicentennial of the American Civil War, was “Civil War: Causes, Conduct, and Consequences.” Scholars from a variety of specializations and from around the country took part in the discussion on how the legacies of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War are related to today’s world and contemporary scholarship.²

In the call for papers, both in 2011 and in 2010, three objectives were specified.

The first objective was to bring contemporary political science theories and methods to the examination of the Lincoln legacy, and to encourage new study both using and refining those theories and methods. “Lincoln’s political legacy,” said Merrill D. Peterson, “was twofold: first, the supremacy of the national government. And second, its responsibility to

¹ . Footnote insertions by Matthew Holden, Jr.

² . In 2010, the first Wepner Symposium was dedicated to contemporary political science. In principle, the scope was widened to include other contemporary scholarship.

advance the freedom and equality of all its citizens.”³ The 2010 objective was to place the study of the Lincoln legacy within contemporary political science, but that interest was not narrow.

The second objective is to encourage intellectual communication about the Civil War across as many disciplines as practical. Accordingly, the invitation is extended to not only to political scientists in any of the major fields of the discipline; but is also extended to scholars in any fields in the humanities and social sciences (African American studies, American Studies, anthropology, economics, literature, psychology, and sociology), and in law.

The third objective is dissemination to, and exchange with, colleagues who teach in K-12 history, government, and social studies. For reason of all the objectives, the invitation is also extended to K-12 teachers, independent scholars and political journalists.

FRIDAY, OCTOBER 21, 2011

The Symposium was convened on the evening of Friday, October 21 at 7 p.m. on the campus of the University of Illinois at Springfield. The opening session centered on the question of *why* the Civil War occurred, specifically why the North decided to use force against the South once it had seceded. Paul Poast, a Rutgers political scientist whose specialty is international relations, presented his paper **“Lincoln’s Gamble: How the Southern Secession Crisis Became the American Civil War.”** His thesis is that Lincoln’s decision to use force at Manassas in July 1861 was a case of preemptive war. Poast argues that the primary concern for the Lincoln Administration was the possibility of British recognition of the South, which would potentially alter the dynamics of the war and widen its

³ . Merrill D. Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994,

scope. Contrary to the common information-oriented explanations for the war, Poast contends that the U.S. elites *did* have accurate information about the South's force levels, preparedness, and expectations regarding strategy. The Civil War was *not* a case of stupidity, misunderstanding, or miscommunication, but instead was the product most directly of this foreign policy fear and the desire to act quickly before the British could recognize the South as an independent state. Lincoln's war council had reason to believe a preemptive attack would serve the purpose of forestalling this eventuality and prevent British intervention. Poast also notes that despite the North losing the battle, the British did not recognize the South.

Responding, Dan Monroe, a historian from Millikin University, contended that Lincoln was a very political animal who, while perhaps concerned with preempting British intervention, was likely more concerned with public opinion in his decision to use force. Lincoln's memos to himself show that he was cognizant of the need to hold the Republican coalition in the North together after the blow dealt by the loss of Fort Sumter. Once Congress returned on July 4, 1861, the pressure to use force heightened. Monroe argues that there seemed to be a sentiment among Union elites that things were generally okay between the U.S. and Great Britain, and the primary concern was that of addressing public opinion: the perception of "doing nothing" could have been disastrous.

Christopher Z. Mooney, professor of state politics at the University of Illinois at Springfield, agreed that Lincoln was definitely a political animal, but he commended Poast for his fresh look at an event that is often taken for granted and

for the unique approach to studying history - as it happened, from the perspective of the actors involved. While agreeing with Monroe, he also noted that there were indeed concerns over British and French recognition of the South throughout the Civil War.

Professor Fred Greenstein, emeritus professor of Princeton University, pointed out that Lincoln did not want to fire the first shot and said that the story does not begin at Bull Run, but rather with Fort Sumter. Lincoln's thinking around the time Sumter was lost is important to consider. Poast replied that in Lincoln's mind, they still had not "crossed the Rubicon" and could yet avoid a major war. Indeed, all of the major elites still believed by the summer months that both sides could pull back and end up with another minor Toledo War-like moment.

The issue of Queen Victoria's neutrality proclamation was raised as well. By declaring her government neutral in the American conflict, she was essentially recognizing the Confederacy as a state. Such a declaration meant that there was a war between two independent entities, not a domestic squabble - or, at least, that is how the U.S. elites perceived it. Lincoln was upset at this implicit recognition because, as he saw it, it meant that there were "two sides" when as far as he was concerned this was emphatically *not* the case: there was one country, with a sizable rebellion on its hands. Thus, this action by the Queen encouraged Northern fears that the British would explicitly recognize the South. When confronted, Lord Palmerston, the British Prime Minister, backtracked the proclamation and denied it held such significance, but it remained unclear as to its origins or actual intentions.

Dave Robertson, political scientist from the University of Missouri-St. Louis, pointed to a key issue that arises in studying the politics of history - the sincerity of statements that are used as data. Can we trust statements as accurate reflections of the actor's intentions? Poast replied that *private* correspondence is probably a good indicator, as opposed to public statements. Stewart Winger, historian from Illinois State University, raised the point that conflict studies and Civil War studies have much to learn from one another, with which Poast agreed, given the sizable Civil War literature available to mine.

Holden questioned *why* it's the case that political science has essentially closed the door on studying the Civil War, a point that Greenstein challenged. Holden responded that a review of the American Political Science Association's programs shows that papers presented are overwhelmingly all about contemporary and recent civil wars outside the United States, with no reference to the American Civil War. Poast offered the view that political science does not have anything equating to economic history in the study of economics. In addition, he noted the bias toward wanting to understand current events, but also said that in studying the case of Lincoln's decision to use force, he gained newfound respect for George W. Bush's decision to go to war in Iraq and Barack Obama's decision to kill Osama bin Laden, and the uncertainty involved in making decisions of such magnitude. Winger commented that contrary to the usually straightforward image, the Civil War looks more like Afghanistan - messy and without a clear endpoint. Poast noted that even though he looked at Lincoln as the primary decision-maker, others had to follow

orders. The situation was thus more complex and drawn out than normally perceived.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2011 – MORNING SESSION

Saturday morning's session was held at the Old State Capitol in downtown Springfield. This session centered on issues related to Lincoln's Presidency during the Civil War. Fred Greenstein, the preeminent senior scholar on the Presidency and professor emeritus at Princeton University, opened with remarks from a chapter on Lincoln in his upcoming book on presidential leadership in the mid-nineteenth century, entitled "**Abraham Lincoln: Consummate Leader.**" Greenstein's criteria for assessing presidential leadership consist of the following diagnostic categories: public communication, organization capacity, political skill, policy vision, cognitive style, emotional intelligence. Professor Greenstein's conclusion is that Lincoln was a "consummate leader," excelling in each of the leadership qualities he identifies. He also noted that the period of American-Mexican War and Civil War should possibly be seen as one long war, rather than as two distinct conflicts.

Stewart Winger, a professor of history at Illinois State University, followed with "**Do Crucify Their Feelings': Lincoln's Leadership as *Kenosis* and Tragedy,**" a talk on Lincoln's attitude and leadership on the issue of slavery and civil rights. Outlining the critiques from the left and right of Lincoln, exemplified by Eric Foner on the left and Allen Guelzo on the right, Winger concludes that the gap

is really almost nonexistent and instead a case of the “narcissism of small differences.” Winger argues that the Civil War, rather than the usual narrative of national triumph, was instead tragedy. He says that Lincoln’s leadership is more of a case of *kenosis*, or “emptying” as in Christ emptying himself on the cross.

Professor Winger counters what he sees as the typical Randian view of leaders as dominant and near-god-like, arguing that leadership in a democracy is instead a very political thing that requires compromise and an understanding and acknowledgement of public opinion.

Chad Newswander, a political scientist from the University of South Dakota, presented his paper on presidential protection during the Lincoln years and its historical evolution, “**The Lincoln Exception: Overcoming a Plebian Fear of a Praetorian Guard.**” Secret Service protection bestows an amplified image on a candidate, as in the case of Barack Obama receiving protection during the 2008 campaign. Protection in this regard becomes something of a spectacle. In the 19th century, presidents were not protected in a systematic way. Part of this had to do with the cultural bias against the idea that leaders would need to be protected, and also a preference for openness as opposed to leaders who would be walled off from the public. Lincoln once responded to a threat by using a bodyguard, and was criticized in the press for being unmanly, but for the most part he was very accessible and this became a security concern. There was also criticism of presidential protection as anti-democratic and as a sort of “imperial guard.” The fear in the 19th and early 20th century was that presidents would use their

bodyguards as a private police force. Newswander also points to three changes in the public perception of the Presidency over time: a more majestic and higher-status view of the office; security begins to take precedence over liberty; there is increasingly greater separation between “the people” and their leaders.

Thomas Schneider, a political scientist at the University of Saint Francis, presented the paper “**Lincoln on Colonization: A Reappraisal.**” Schneider noted that during the mid-nineteenth century, colonization was the second best option as far as solving the question of what to do once slavery was abolished. Black citizenship would have been the best option, but at the time it seemed an almost impossible one. According to Schneider, public opinion on this issue changed because of the war, despite Lincoln declining to use the bully pulpit of the Presidency. Schneider also points to Martin Delany, a friend of Frederick Douglass, whose reasoning about the consequences of colonization for black Americans led him to support it. Schneider noted that in following the symposium theme of widening the scope of inquiry for contemporary political science theories and methods, his paper “represents an attempt to look with a theorist’s eye at one aspect of Lincoln’s presidential decision making.”

Angela Winand, professor of African American Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield, and Pinky Wassenberg, political scientist and dean of the College of Public Affairs at the University of Illinois at Springfield, offered commentary on the morning talks. Winand found the biographical approach to studying the colonization issue an intriguing one and also pointed to Lincoln’s

relationship with the black delegation. Wassenberg touched on the fact that political science as a discipline socializes scholars into thinking about contemporary events over historic ones, producing a bias in scholarship toward current events to the detriment of wider-scope studies.

Opening up the floor to questions from the audience, there was first an inquiry as to whether politicians today are any better or worse than earlier in history. The consensus response was no; while circumstances change, politics remains fairly similar. In response to a question about first ladies and security, Newswander replied that Eleanor Roosevelt had refused protection because it represented death, and that the Secret Service responded to pushback from the Clintons by leaking information about fights between the first couple to force them to ease up and accept protection. In response to a question touching on the Secret Service's institutional history, Newswander discussed the organization's growth out of the Congressional authorization in 1906, following McKinley's assassination five years prior. It was not until the Kennedy assassination in 1963 that the Secret Service applied protection more consistently, ensured close proximity to the president at all times, and, after the attempt on Reagan's life in 1981, they implemented layers of security on a more consistent basis. Another question on security pertained to funding for presidential protection. Newswander noted that the Federal government picks up the tab, with a Secret Service budget that has grown exponentially since the Kennedy assassination. The final question was on Lincoln's leadership and the consequentialist aspect of his thinking. In response, Winger stated that despite

popular opinion to the contrary, politicians who say what they mean and mean what they say are not always ideal.

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 22, 2011 – AFTERNOON SESSION

The Saturday afternoon session was held at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. It began with a presentation by William Furry, executive director of the Illinois State Historical Society, on the historical markers across the state as a contemporary commemoration of the Civil War in Illinois.

Shamira Gelbman, political scientist from Illinois State University, discussed the Civil War and its aftermath in comparative context against the case of the Boer War and South Africa's political development in "**Civil War and Race-Making in South Africa and the United States.**" In particular, she spoke on the issue of "race-making," an effort by the dominant race to smooth over conflict, which codifies and strengthens the existing racial hierarchy. Motivated by the general question of how civil wars affect the development of racially-divided countries, she outlined the differences between the aftermath of the two wars. In the United States, the Republican Party dominated politically following the war, while in South Africa, the Afrikaners *did* in fact "rise again."

In "**Executive Use of Mercenaries in Kansas Territory,**" Richard Lawrence Miller, an independent scholar who has written a four-volume series on Lincoln's life before his presidency, discussed the violence in Kansas Territory in the 1850s ahead of statehood. Presidents Pierce and Buchanan both used

mercenaries to intimidate the anti-slavery elements in the Territory ahead of elections for the state constitutional convention. The pro-slavery mercenaries sparked a war with anti-slavery forces in Kansas Territory, with the abolitionist John Brown led a guerilla war against the mercenaries. But despite all of this, once the pro-slavery side won the election and thus ensured the new state would enter the union allowing slavery, Buchanan declared that it was legitimate because it had been held per constitutional requirements. Miller argues that the civil war in Kansas was a “rehearsal” for the national Civil War.

Douglas Nehring, an undergraduate student at Millikin University, presented a paper on “**Lincoln and the Secession Crisis in Missouri,**” focusing on the president’s use of his generals in response to an internal civil war in the state. After a vote to remain in the Union, Missouri’s Governor, Claiborne F. Jackson, tried to intimidate the state into joining the Confederacy by establishing the Missouri State Guard. The instability in the state required martial law, and during the course of the Civil War, there was a good deal of turnover in the position of commanding general there. But despite this, Lincoln was able to keep Missouri in the Union.

Janet Martin, political scientist of Bowdoin College, reflected on the role of presidential leadership in advancing civil rights in “**Lincoln’s Use of the Presidency to Effect Change – A Model for Presidents in Advancing Rights for Women?**” She notes that despite presidents not having a direct role in the amendment process, there is still much they can do in drumming up support for amendments. Martin touches on Edward Kennedy’s 1980 primary challenge of

Jimmy Carter as an example of discontent with a president's efforts in this regard - here, it was a perception that Carter had not done enough to rally support for the Equal Rights Amendment. Martin argues that Lincoln's model for leading in the amendment process is one that might be useful for presidents, although it did not succeed in the case of the Equal Rights Amendment. Lincoln could not do much directly to advance the "Civil War amendments," but he did lay the groundwork through the Emancipation Proclamation and ensuring that abolition would be included in the 1864 Republican platform. This Lincoln model of taking alternate routes to civil rights reforms was matched when Kennedy advanced equal rights for women through his capacity as head of the executive branch, through establishment of a President's Commission on the Status of Women, which led to changing requirements for job postings so that sex-specific postings had to be justified.

Matthew Holden, Jr., the Wepner Distinguished Professor of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Springfield and the convener of the Symposium, provided "**Comments on the Civil War and the Problem of Civil War.**" The intellectual problem is to see how the Civil War can be interpreted in relation to problem of civil war in a generic sense. Most political scientists in the "hot" subject of civil war in contemporary political science explicitly find no relevance of what *they* want to study. Calling the generic civil war phenomenon "one of the most common human experiences," he lists five questions that political scientists might explore.

(1) Why do civil wars happen? Theories of international politics have concepts of why interstate war occurs. Civil war is less clearly treated, even in some important work as Raymond Aron, *Peace and War*,⁴ although Aron has at least some minimal definitions of civil war. One way of looking at it is to hypothesize that, more than anything else, civil wars emerge from conflicts among existing elites.⁴ There may be a challenge that existing elites see to their continuance in office, as the Southern elites in U. S. politics saw their dominance challenged by the forces that produced the Republican party. There may also be new interests that have arisen, but have not yet attained a secure place and so are excluded from office and power. When civil war occurs as a rebellion of the truly suppressed against the dominant, such a situation warrants close thinking.

(2) Holden suggests some attention to “the importance of ‘the outside’” in the sense that civil wars seem virtually always to offer opportunities for, and sometimes possibly to be precipitated by, outside forces. This may suggest some opportunity to bring into play the ideas of Harold D. Lasswell or E. E. Schattschneider.

3) What are the levels and forms of violence in civil wars (e.g., in the U.S., violence occurred in different forms, not just as military conflict)?

(4) How do civil wars end? Is it in military defeat, from psychological exhaustion, and/or from economic exhaustion? Some of the elements of exhaustion in the civilian population are touched in Armstead Robinson’s *The Bitter Fruits of Bondage*. In the case of the United States Civil War, there was the formal surrender of General Robert E. Lee to General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox

⁴ . This intersects, in principle, with the paper by Richard Miller.

Court House in Virginia. But the Confederate Government never surrendered. President Jefferson Davis fled southward, with an entourage, and in possession of gold--presumably the Federal gold that had been seized at secession—until he was finally arrested in Florida.

(5) What happens after the war ends? When is there settlement between the contending parties, and who were really the contending parties? Holden observed that the 13th, 14th, and 15th Amendments were the formal constitutional redefinition of the Union. The Reconstruction period never saw anything like a full agreement between white North and white South on what Reconstruction should mean about the third major demographic element, the more or less 4, 000, 000 African Americans. But the “reunion of the Blue and the Gray,” ultimately meant a verbal acceptance of “the end of slavery,” an acceptance of the fact of undivided Government with no possibility of secession, and a social acceptance of “white supremacy” as the national norm.⁵

With all the varied civil wars that have occurred, and are occurring, there is considerable intellectual opportunity and need to understand “civil war” in terms that will include the experience of the United States, and to understand the United States in terms that will take account of the rest of the world.

The Symposium concluded with a roundtable discussion on **“The Legacy of the Civil War: How Should We Sum Up and Think Ahead?”** Chairing the panel was Dave Robertson, political scientist at the University of Missouri-St. Louis, who specializes in American political development. He touched on the bias in

political science toward stability, and the trouble the discipline has had in dealing with and explaining the major changes in recent political history, specifically pointing to the 2006, 2008, and 2010 “wave” elections. Robertson said he saw the 2010 election as similar to the 1862 election, but that contemporary political science often misses such historical context. He argued that more work needs to be done in the vein of David B. Truman, V. O. Key, and Aaron Wildavsky, namely in coping with the “presence of the past.”⁶ Based on the weekend discussion, he identified five specific areas of American politics for political science to examine with a fresh view: (1) race has had an enduring impact on American politics and there is a need to address race as fundamental to politics in the United States; (2) polarization, especially in light of the fact that the contemporary political climate is more polarized than it’s been in a very long time; (3) presidential character and power; (4) federalism; (5) international relations, which have mattered from the start and matter even more today. Robertson also identified Lincoln as a “pragmatic idealist” and said that we need to be more attentive to that sort of combination in political leaders.

John Phillips, political scientist from Benedictine University Springfield, identified three things upon which he would like to be further educated: Noting that most of our models of decision-making focus on crises and not routine matters, he said that scholars of decision-making need to look at the following: (1) a greater

⁵ . See Gelbman paper and possible discussion of the two interpretations.

⁶ . In the first decade of the 21st century, the intensity of “polarization” may reinforce Robertson’s argument. Is it plausible, even, to ask how much contemporary polarization should remind scholars of the political crises of the 1850s?

emphasis is needed on presidential decision-making from the perspective of the president and his own self-conscious model of decision-making, compared to the usual after-the-fact models⁷; (2) the interplay of structure and personality, i.e., how do institutional structures facilitate or inhibit decision making. In particular, does the provision of a greater security apparatus hamper a particular president's leadership style, as touched on in the Newswander paper or, in the case of presidents who also served as governors, are there differences in executive structures and functions of the governorship as compared with the presidency that affect the quality of decision-making? And (3) the use of language in decision-making (e.g., the case of the Queen's neutrality declaration and what it meant – what it was intended to mean, what it was construed as meaning, and the “wiggle room” that government officials made use of after it had been issued).

An example of what he had in mind is Brian Cook's (2007) study of Woodrow Wilson (*Democracy and Administration: Woodrow Wilson's Ideas and the Challenges of Public Management*), an excellent comparative analysis of Wilson's routine decision making compared to his crisis decision making in war-time, his self-conscious modeling of British cabinet style decision making, and his relative successes and failures in the offices of governor and president. More studies along these lines would complement the broader studies of presidential personality and decision-making such as those of Fred Greenstein, James David Barber, Richard Neustadt, and others.

⁷ . This may lead to further consideration of the papers and discussion in the 2010 Wepner Symposium, where the organizing theme was “Presidential

Eileen Mackevich, the executive director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, concluded the round table with some remarks on what she believed were understudied aspects of Lincoln's presidency. First, she noted that there is a need for more study of Lincoln and his Congresses.⁸ As is evident in the contemporary case of Obama, the Congress leads - constitutionally it is tasked with passing laws, and practically it is all too easy to frustrate a president's designs. Lincoln had said himself that his tenure was a case of events leading him rather than the other way around, and this is likely true of any president. She also notes that it would be interesting to study presidents who had been generals, like Eisenhower, touching on a point made by Phillips on how presidents' previous careers may affect their leadership styles. Mackevich also touched on immigration and political violence as important areas of study, both in terms of American politics and history, and in civil wars more generally. The question of how Americans saw the rest of the world during the Civil War (or, indeed, other points in American history) is another one worthy of further examination. Lincoln, for example, was constantly concerned that the Civil War would become a wider conflict, as discussed in the opening session on Friday evening.

In the final question-and-answer and commentary period, Winger noted that with the press so fragmented today, it might be interesting to look at how the similarly fragmented media in the Civil War period affected politics, and the relevance of that case to today. Wassenberg agreed, citing her research on the

Decision-Making, Presidential Options, and Social Consequences."

⁸ . This comment may lead back to work by the historian Allen Bogue, where

military use of media to push particular narratives in more recent times. There is clearly historical precedent to examine and comparing the present to the past in this regard can illuminate both the political nature of the past and the dynamics of modern political life. On the issue of the press in the Civil War period, Mackevich noted that there was an increase in ethnic newspapers at the time and wondered what the effect on the political world might have been. Newswander also raised the issue of the way the war was framed from a bureaucratic and propaganda standpoint. How did those in power try to sway the public opinion? Winger also pointed out that there is a sizable literature on “why soldiers enlist” and that this might hold some insight on this question, as well. A comparative study of the interplay between media and politics, and the messages that elites and the public promote and support, thus appears to be one worthwhile additional jumping-off point.

Concluding Note

The Department of Political Science at the University of Illinois at Springfield will conduct further activity related to the Lincoln legacy and contemporary scholarship, and invites comments and suggestions on the papers and ideas summarized above. This is particularly important as we try to bring the accumulated concepts, data, questions from political science and other fields, to the Lincoln legacy, in this period of the Civil War sesquicentennial. Comments are welcome at any time, but would be especially useful by December 1, 2011.

there is a certain interconnection with political science.