

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND THE COLLIDING MEMORIES OF RECONCILIATION
AND EMANCIPATION IN THE MEMORY OF THE CIVIL WAR

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND HISTORIOGRAPHY

Americans have always sought to commemorate the nation's history, but the enduring remembrance of the Civil War is instrumental in the development of memory studies. As historian Robert Penn Warren stated in 1961, "The Civil War is our only 'felt' history—history lived in the national imagination."¹ The memory of the Civil War is vivid in the minds of many Americans who have differed sharply in remembrance of the war. It is undeniable that the memory of the Civil War has influenced the individual lives of Americans and the nation as a whole.

While there is a growing body of literature on the memory of the Civil War, the literature on Abraham Lincoln in Civil War memory is lacking. Although there are thousands of books written on Lincoln's life and leadership, his place in Civil War memory is somewhat ignored. Merrill Peterson's *Lincoln in American Memory* is the only historical work to focus solely on Lincoln's place in American memory and Civil War memory. Barry Schwartz's work, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* is a sociological overview of Lincoln's place in American memory. Additionally, historian Thomas J. Brown dedicates a short chapter in his work, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration to Lincoln*.

¹ Thomas J. Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2004), 3.

Civil War memory studies have focused on the Southern Lost Cause myth, reconciliation of the North and South, and the battles and soldiers, rather than the memory of emancipation and Lincoln's place in the memory of the Civil War. Immediately following the Civil War and the Lincoln assassination, many Americans focused on Lincoln's preservation of the Union and his Emancipation Proclamation as his greatest legacies. At the end of the 19th century, the efforts to memorialize Lincoln centered on an emancipationist legacy of the president, which is evident in early monuments to Lincoln such as the Freedmen's Monument and the Lincoln burial site in Springfield, Illinois. At the turn of the century, sectional animosities lessened, and white Americans sought national reconciliation. As North and South reconciled, the remembrance of the Civil War emphasized a reconciliationist memory. As this white reconciliationist memory dominated Civil War sites for the greater part of the 20th century, the emancipationist legacy faded from the public memory until the Civil Rights Era.

In examining Lincoln in American memory, the oppositional reconciliationist and emancipationist memories of the Civil War converge in the person of Lincoln. All the authors to be discussed have argued that emancipationist views and reconciliationist views battle to control the memory of the Civil War, but neglect to illustrate how the memory of Lincoln influences the struggle between emancipationist and reconciliationist memories. Since Lincoln represents both emancipation and reconciliation, the study of Lincoln in Civil War memory has presented historians with an interesting paradox. Consequently, many historians have focused their attention on other aspects of the Civil War---aspects that can be clearly classified as either emancipationist or reconciliationist.

The examination of Civil War memory at Ford's Theatre, the Lincoln Memorial, and the Richmond statue of Lincoln illustrate that the memory of Lincoln represents both a consensual and conflicted memory of the war and proves that reconciliationist and emancipationist memories can coexist.

Ford's Theatre initially was shunned by the American public because it represented grief and Southern betrayal. As the nation reconciled, the public's perceptions of Ford's Theatre shifted dramatically. The theater was viewed as sacred memorial in the midst of the Civil Rights Era when African Americans finally were awarded some of the rights they had been fighting for since the Civil War. Furthermore, in recent years the theater has come to adopt an emancipationist memory of the war in addition to the already promoted reconciliationist memory.

Just as with Ford's Theatre, the historical meaning attached to the Washington and Richmond tributes to Lincoln have shifted over time. The Lincoln Memorial was constructed solely to foster the view of Lincoln as Savior of the Union and to promote sectional reconciliation. The vernacular memory upheld by African Americans challenged the official memory of the Lincoln Memorial and emerged successful as the Lincoln Memorial was transformed from a site promoting only reconciliation to one advocating emancipation as well. Lastly, the statue of Lincoln in the former Confederate capital is a blatant representation of reconciliation, although the largely African American population of Richmond fought for the remembrance of Lincoln as Great Emancipator as well. Through these important sites, the memory of Lincoln presents the opportunity for the oppositional emancipationist and reconciliationist memories to coexist.

Matthew J. Grow's article, "The Shadow of the Civil War: A Historiography of Civil War Memory" helps to explain Civil War memory studies and why they emerged. Grow asserts that histories of memory thrust off the standard constraints in evaluating the Civil War era and that memory studies are one of the "most vibrant fields of Civil War studies in the past two decades."² Grow essentially argues that certain factors within and outside the historical profession have encouraged the boom in memory studies as a new subfield in American history. Most importantly, the author illustrates the evolution of reconciliationist and emancipationist memories of the Civil War.

Grow insists that several factors have encouraged the recent growth of Civil War memory studies in the historical profession. First, the debate over Confederate symbols has revived controversial memories of the war. Second, trends such as multiculturalism, postmodernism, and the rise of cultural and social history also have encouraged memory studies within the American historical profession. More specifically, the author maintains that there has been a proliferation of memory studies on the Civil War centered around four major themes: the Southern Lost Cause, Northern culture of reunion, the development of literature, and race relations. Both Northerners and Southerners downplayed the causes of the Civil War and racial issues in order to celebrate the valor of Blue and Gray in a complex dance of reunion.³ Grow alludes to the adoption of reconciliationist memories instead of a focus on emancipation, in efforts to unite both North and South.

² Matthew J. Grow, "The Shadow of the Civil War: A Historiography of Civil War Memory." *American Nineteenth Century History* 4, no. 2 (Summer 2003), 78.

³ *Ibid*, 82.

Grow identifies themes of Civil War memory that are employed by many Civil War historians, and explains why memory studies developed in the historical field. His analysis examines why the Civil War played such a prominent role in the minds of so many Americans, but gives no mention to Abraham Lincoln, a central figure in this conflict. Grow's review of Civil War memory studies indicate the work of David Blight as an indication of the "topic's rapid maturation."⁴

In the most notable study on Civil War memory, David Blight's *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* examines the interdependent relationship of race and reunion and the impact it has on the memory of the Civil War. Blight's argument is that African American-white relations and national reconciliation are trapped in a tragic mutual dependence and as the North and South reconciled, the races further divided. Blight further argues that in remembering some aspects of the Civil War, Americans choose to forget other aspects. He chooses to focus on race and reunion, while knowingly neglecting other topics such as presidential politics.

In addition to limiting his focus to specific Civil War issues, Blight also narrows his time frame to 1863-1915. He examines race and reunion from the turning point of the Civil War to the semi centennial at the beginning of the twentieth century. During this time frame, Blight asserts three overall visions of the Civil War memory collided and combined over time.⁵ First, the reconciliationist vision "took root in the process of dealing with the dead from so many battlefields, prisons, and hospitals and developed in

⁴ Ibid, 77.

⁵ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: the Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2001), 2.

many ways earlier than the history of the Reconstruction has allowed us to believe.”⁶ The grieving process served to unite both North and South. Second, the white supremacist vision, “which took many forms early, including terror and violence, locked arms with reconciliationists of many kinds, and by the turn of the century delivered the country a segregated memory of its Civil War on Southern terms.”⁷ Lastly, the emancipationist vision “embodied the African Americans’ complex remembrance of their own freedom, in the politics of radical Reconstruction, and in conceptions of the war as the reinvention of the republic and the liberation of blacks to citizenship and Constitutional equality.” Blight contends that these three visions competed against each other, but that the reconciliationist vision joined forces with the white supremacist vision and overwhelmed the emancipationist view, thus proving that reunion trumped race.

According to Blight, in addition to these competing visions, ideas of healing and justice emerged when Americans were forced to address emancipation after the Civil War. Several years after the Civil War, Northern and Southern whites desired healing and reconciliation, and blacks longed for a simple justice that would allow for basic rights and protection under the law. The nation’s need for reconciliation in the fifty years following the Civil War proved that the justice that blacks desired would not be obtained for years to come. The memory of the Civil War thus proved to be the story of the reconciliation of the nation caused by the subjugation of blacks once again through tactics of white supremacy. This “peace for whites” as Frederick Douglass called it, left the country with a kind of Southern victory in the long struggle over Civil War memory.⁸

⁶ Ibid, 2.

⁷ Ibid, 2.

⁸ Ibid, 397.

Although Blight strongly supports his argument throughout the work, he neglects a central figure in the Civil War: Abraham Lincoln. In a work that centers on race issues and reconciliation of the Union that Lincoln fought so hard to preserve, Lincoln's role in the American memory is not discussed. Blight briefly discusses Lincoln's Gettysburg address in the beginning of the book, but he gives no further significant mention to Lincoln in the latter part of book. Since Blight focuses narrowly on the turbulent fifty years following the Civil War, it is evident why Blight would not address Lincoln. As the North attempted to appease Southerners during the reconciliation process, Lincoln would not have been the most consensual topic.

In *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture*, editors Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh explore the complexity of Civil War memory and the political and social impact that it still has today. The editors compiled a variety of essays that demonstrate the conflicting views of the Civil War in American memory. The purpose is to link the military history with cultural history of the war to produce new insights on the impact of the Civil War in American memory. The editors illustrate how the memory of the Civil War provided new perceptions on national identity and as individuals. The result is that the memory of the Civil War can be viewed holistically where a variety of memories can coexist at the same time.

The editors chose a variety of essays that indicate the opposing reconciliationist and emancipationist memories of the Civil War. Opposing views are demonstrated through the examination of public monuments, parades, soldier's memoirs, political campaigns, textbook publishing, and children's literature. The editors assert that analysis of these varying sources demonstrates how the Civil War has been employed in

American memory, and collectively the sources comprise the “geography of Civil War memory.”⁹ The geography of Civil War memory includes physical and symbolic places and the meanings behind them.

The most notable opposing views that the editors investigate is the contrast between the North and South. Instead of comparing Union President Abraham Lincoln and Confederate President Jefferson Davis, the editors focus on Union General Ulysses S. Grant and Confederate General Robert E. Lee. The memory of these two generals is utilized to exemplify the difference between the North and South. The editors also consider the views of North and South in textbooks demonstrating that there is a shift in the writing of textbooks from a northern point of view to a more southern point of view of the Civil War during the time that the nation focused on reconciliation. Similar to David Blight, Fahs and Waugh focus heavily on the reconciliation of North and South, while neglecting Lincoln’s place in Civil War memory.

Despite the author’s several previous works on southern topics, University of Virginia professor Gary W. Gallagher, in *Causes Won, Lost, & Forgotten*, explores the Civil War in American memory in a manner similar to David Blight. Like Blight, Gallagher argues that memories of the Civil War are based on four traditions. First, the Lost Cause tradition focuses on the admirable struggle of the Confederacy against hopeless odds. It also downplays slavery, exalts states’ rights, and promotes Confederate gallantry in battle. Second, the Union Cause tradition maintains the continuance of a viable republic that ensured the future of democracy. Third, the Emancipation tradition

⁹ Alice Fahs and Joan Waugh, eds, *The Memory of the Civil War in American Culture* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 2004), 12.

focuses on the Civil War as the struggle to liberate millions of slaves and rid the country of slavery. Lastly, the Reconciliation Cause represents the struggle to find American virtues on both sides, exalts a restored nation after the war, and mutes the role of the African American. Gallagher argues that these four traditions are the lens through which Civil War films and artwork from the last two decades have been analyzed.

Using these four interpretive traditions, Gallagher analyzed fourteen films and 2,750 advertisements and artwork in an attempt to illuminate American's perceptions of the Civil War.¹⁰ Gallagher discovered that these four traditions overlapped in many ways, but that over time the Lost Cause and the Union Cause faded away. Gallagher promoted the Emancipation and Reconciliation Causes as the most prominent in Civil War films and artwork from the past two decades. Unlike the other authors, Gallagher points to Lincoln as a source of reconciliation for North and South, although he gives little mention to Lincoln throughout the work. In the conclusion, Gallagher points to the prominent Lincoln statue in Richmond, Virginia as symbolic of national reconciliation. The statue was dedicated in 2003 to commemorate the 138th anniversary of Lincoln visiting Richmond after the Civil War ended. The statue portrays Lincoln sitting with his son Tad on a bench, with the words "to bind up the nation's wounds" in the background.¹¹ Gallagher argues that Lincoln came to Richmond with reconciliation in mind and that the statue represents the binding up of the nation's wounds.

Similar to Gallagher, Thomas J. Brown assesses public art, primarily monuments, and their place in Civil War memory. In *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration*,

¹⁰ Gary W. Gallagher, *Causes Won, Lost, & Forgotten: How Hollywood and Popular Art Shape What We Know About the Civil War* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 10.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 210.

Brown maintains the necessity of commemoration in America. The author traces commemorations as early as colonial America, but stresses how important the remembrance of the Civil War was in the development of memory studies. Brown conducts five case studies in Civil War remembrance: the citizen-soldier, women of the war, Robert E. Lee, the 54th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment, and Abraham Lincoln. Civil War commemorations from the time of the war to the present represent the shifts in American's recollections of the war.

In his five case studies in Civil War commemoration, Brown illuminates four major themes in Civil War commemoration. The themes include: martyrdom of fallen soldiers through honoring battlefields and patriot graves; an increased tendency to look favorably upon the Confederacy, Northern focus on reunion and the negligence of the rights of African Americans, and the Lost Cause theory exemplified by white Southerners. Brown asserts that these major themes express the shifting attitudes towards commemoration of the war.

Unlike many of the other authors, Brown dedicates an entire chapter to the place of Abraham Lincoln in American memory of the Civil War. The author examines the important monuments dedicated to Abraham Lincoln and claims "no figure holds a more prominent place in American memory than Abraham Lincoln."¹² Brown relates the four major themes of Civil War commemoration to Lincoln's place in American memory and argues that the shifting attitudes of Americans towards remembrance of the Civil War are reflected in the monuments to Lincoln. Brown analyzes how early statues to Lincoln focused on his emancipationist legacy, but as the nation focused on reconciliation

¹² Brown, 139.

commemoration of Lincoln shied away from promoting emancipation. The author illustrates the Freedman's monument, Clark Mill's proposed monument to Lincoln, and Lincoln's burial monument as early representations of emancipation.

Historian Robert Cook also finds value in examining important Civil War commemorations in his book, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965*. Cook argues that an investigation of the Civil War Centennial will produce a greater understanding of the development of Cold War culture, the successes and failures of the Civil Rights movement, and the role of historical memory in the development of modern America, especially the modern South. The author illustrates how a reconciliationist memory of the war overrode emancipationist efforts during the centennial. Cook enhances his argument through the analysis of the work of three historians: Michael Kammen, John Bodnar, and Richard Fried. Kammen and Bodnar essentially argue that study of the contested nature of the American past illustrates how a national identity was formed. Fried argues that the celebration of the Civil War Centennial was just a weak effort to promote patriotic pageantry in opposition to communist threats of the era.¹³

Cook illustrates a unique factor in the analysis of historical memory, which is consensus memory vs. counter or conflict memory. Cook argues that the formation of a "new nationalist orthodoxy" promoted a consensus memory amongst Northerners and Southerners and perpetuated the acceptance of a Southern view of the war by many

¹³ Richard Fried, *The Russians are coming! The Russians are coming! Pageantry and Patriotism in Cold War America* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992); Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

Northerners in the years following the Civil War.¹⁴ Cook promotes a theory explored by many other historians when he contends that the need for sectional reconciliation drove the North to gradually accept a more Southern view of the war. Also, the reconciliation of the North and South produced counter memories most significantly perpetuated by African Americans, who viewed the reconciliation of whites as a severe obstacle to the security of the achievement of equal rights. African Americans objected to the consensual memory of the Civil War proposed by white Northerners and Southerners and sought to produce a memory of the Civil War that included the struggle of African Americans.

This incessant struggle over memory of the Civil War and the influence of Cold War culture caused the Civil War Centennial to be somewhat neglected by the nation. Most emphasis of the centennial is focused on the struggle of African Americans to pervade the typical consensual memories of the Civil War. Cook references the exclusion of African Americans at a Gettysburg celebration in 1913 and the racially segregated dedication of the Lincoln memorial in 1922. Other than this mention of the Lincoln memorial, Cook fails to mention Lincoln's place in the celebration of the Civil War Centennial.

In *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century*, John Bodnar explores the unique relationship between patriotism and public memory. Bodnar contends that an official culture promoted by elites and government officials focused on nationalism, unity, and patriotism. In contrast, vernacular culture supported by the "ordinary people" of America sought to preserve

¹⁴ Robert Cook, *Troubled Commemoration: The American Civil War Centennial, 1961-1965* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University, 2007), 5.

local and community histories while adhering to the nation-state.¹⁵ The struggle between official and vernacular memory is evident in Civil War memory. Patriotism infused both cultures, but displayed more prominently in the official discourse of the American past. Similar to Gallagher, Bodnar argues that the construction of public memory in America was a political process and that the tension between the official and vernacular was resolved through commemorations throughout the years.

Bodnar argues that official culture climaxed with the creation of the National Park Service in 1916, the celebration of the Civil War Centennial, and the American Revolution Bicentennial. The National Park Service incorporated a number of historical sites throughout the nation and attempted to restore many Civil War battlefields. The NPS became a “powerful shaper” of American history and selectively represented the official memory of history, although the official culture was forced to incorporate challenges from the vernacular culture.¹⁶ Official culture prevailed most notably in the Civil War Centennial and the American Revolution Bicentennial. During a time of conflict and divisiveness, the two large celebrations attempted to foster order and national unity. The Civil War Centennial promoted the heroism of both North and South, while the American Revolution Bicentennial reinterpreted rebellion as a positive, patriotic action. Although local celebrations sprung from both of these larger celebrations, the official memory prevailed, thus proving that the construction of public memory was primarily a political process.

¹⁵ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 13.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 170.

Bodnar makes compelling arguments about the role of official memory vs. vernacular memory, while briefly mentioning Lincoln. Although Bodnar only alludes to Lincoln on few occasions, his lesson on official and vernacular memory proves useful in examining historical sites pertaining to Lincoln. In sites like the Lincoln Memorial and the Lincoln statue in Richmond, vernacular memory has fiercely opposed the official memories, at times quite successfully. Bodnar's study proves to be a foundational work in the field of memory studies.

Historian John Latschar assesses Gettysburg's role in Civil War memory in his article, "Coming to Terms with the Civil War at Gettysburg National Military Park." Latschar argues that to understand the importance of Gettysburg, Americans need to grasp the significance of the national memory of the Civil War. The importance of Gettysburg has been influenced largely by the Lost Cause myth, which has attempted to portray the battlefield in the light of "southern sympathy."¹⁷ Latschar points to the work of David Blight as instrumental in understanding the struggle of promoting Civil War memory at Gettysburg. More specifically, Latschar refers to the three overall visions that Blight explores in *Race and Reunion* and argues that Gettysburg has only presented a reconciliationist view to the American public, while neglecting the emancipationist view.

Latschar promotes the necessity of the emancipationist vision rather than solely focusing on the reconciliationist vision of Civil War memory. In relation to Gettysburg, Latschar explains that many Americans do not understand the causes and consequences of the Civil War. American memory has only served to promote the reconciliationist

¹⁷ John Latschar, "Coming to Terms with the Civil War at Gettysburg National Military Parks," *CRM Journal* 4, No. 2 (Summer 2007), 12.

vision in which Union and Confederate soldiers are extolled for their honor and bravery. African Americans have been completely neglected in the reconciliationist view that is advocated at so many Civil War battlefields. Latschar concludes that for Americans to fully understand the significance of Gettysburg they must understand that these brave men fought and died for a cause directly related to African Americans. As a result, Gettysburg battlefield is now endorsing the emancipationist vision of Civil War memory based on Lincoln's words in the Gettysburg address. The new mission at Gettysburg will now include an emphasis on a "new birth of freedom" expressed eloquently in Lincoln's Gettysburg address.¹⁸

While Latschar has highlighted Lincoln's importance in the remembrance of Gettysburg, historian Merrill Peterson discusses Lincoln's broader role in Civil War memory in his work, *Lincoln in American Memory*, and is one of the few historians to actually do so. Peterson claims that Lincoln's tragic assassination at the end of a turbulent four years of war deified Lincoln in American memory. Peterson proposes five major themes in the memory of Lincoln: Savior of the Union, Great Emancipator, Man of the People, First American, and Self Made Man.¹⁹ The author argues that these major themes have explained Lincoln's role in American memory over time and his relation to the Civil War.

Peterson's work is unique to the historical field of memory because it is the first to examine Lincoln exclusively. Peterson also illuminates concepts that other Civil War memory historians do not fully emphasize, such as Lincoln's role as Savior of the Union

¹⁸ Ibid, 13.

¹⁹ Merrill Peterson, *Lincoln in American Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 27.

and Great Emancipator. Most Civil War memory studies focus on the reconciliation of North and South, but Peterson evaluates the Union cause and Lincoln's role in freeing the slaves, which according to Latschar are neglected topics when analyzing Civil War memory. Peterson also explores the effect Lincoln's memory had on the reconciliation of North and South, as both Northerners and Southerners came to appreciate Lincoln's legacy. By analyzing the role of Lincoln in American memory, Peterson begins to fill an important gap in the field of Civil War memory.

Sociologist Barry Schwartz is the second author to examine Lincoln's role in American memory in his work, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*. Schwartz provides a distinctive view of Lincoln's role in American memory because he analyzes it strictly from a sociological point of view. Schwartz stresses the importance of understanding collective memory, which he defines as "what is in the minds of individuals and to emergent conceptions of the past crystallized into symbolic structures."²⁰ Schwartz also asserts that Americans have few memories that are common to all and that American heroes serve as the vehicle to explore these common memories. According to Schwartz, Abraham Lincoln is the most appropriate vehicle to examine the collective memory of Americans because he personifies so many American ideals such as liberty, equality, and individualism.

Schwartz's main argument is that analyzing the collective memory of the nation will produce a better understanding of why Lincoln transformed from a controversial president to a national deity. Schwartz divides the subject of collective memory into two

²⁰ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 8.

parts: politics of memory and cultural memory. Schwartz's goal is to illustrate that Lincoln was not always considered a national deity, because American politics and culture did not promote this perception until after Lincoln's assassination. Schwartz's view of Lincoln is much different than the other authors because he focuses on the sociological importance of Lincoln as opposed to his historical significance. Schwartz is more concerned with understanding collective memory and how it affects American's perceptions of the past rather than Lincoln's place in Civil War memory. In Schwartz's analysis, Lincoln is simply a vehicle through which he proves his sociological objectives.

Historian Gabor Boritt approaches Lincoln's place in American memory in an even more starkly different way in his book, *The Lincoln Enigma: the Changing Faces of an American Icon*. Like Schwartz, Boritt moves away from Lincoln's place in Civil War memory and focuses solely on the changing perceptions of Lincoln in American culture and memory. Boritt argues that Lincoln has become an American icon that all types of people rally around and that the memory of Lincoln is alive and well today in many different expressions of culture. Boritt points to women, African Americans, and gays as examples of groups that have invoked Lincoln's memory in efforts to further their causes. The purpose of Boritt's work is to emphasize that Lincoln is ubiquitous in American memory and culture.

Throughout the work, Boritt explores various controversial topics in Lincoln's life ranging from Lincoln's marriage to whether he was a white supremacist. More than half of the work is dedicated to public representations of Lincoln in contemporary modern art, whether in monuments or paintings. Boritt collaborated with prominent Lincoln historian Harold Holzer to produce a large collection of Lincoln images that portray American's

changing perceptions of the American president. Also, like many Lincoln historians, Boritt addresses Lincoln's role as the Great Emancipator and his utmost goal of preserving the Union. Boritt provides an insightful look at American's changing perceptions of Lincoln, but he does not fully connect Lincoln to many of the issues of concern to many Civil War memory historians.

Through the exploration of Civil War memory, it is evident that some themes and topics are prominent while others are neglected. A majority of Civil War memory historians focus on the evolution of the Lost Cause myth and the reconciliation of the North and South as key points in Civil War memory, while issues of race and slavery are considered counter memories. The most prominent Civil War memory historian, David Blight argues that reconciliation trumped race in the struggle to preserve Civil War memory. Most Civil War memory historians, in fact, have argued that commemorations and monuments have represented a reconciliationist vision of Civil War memory. African Americans opposed this consensual view of the Civil War by demonstrating that slavery was a root cause of the Civil War. They protested the emphasis on "states rights" perpetuated by the Lost Cause myth. In the interest of sectional reconciliation, however, Northerners and Southerners shunned the emancipationist vision of the Civil War, denying the role of slavery and African Americans in the Civil War.

In studying the life and presidency of Abraham Lincoln, it is apparent that by the end of the war Lincoln fully supported two issues: emancipation and the preservation of the Union. As Merrill Peterson's work on Lincoln emphasizes, Lincoln has been extolled as the Savior of the Union and the Great Emancipator. Yet while Lincoln's role as the Savior of the Union has been somewhat acknowledged, the role of Great Emancipator has

been neglected in memory studies. If the words of Blight ring true that reconciliation did indeed trump race, then Lincoln's greatest accomplishments during the Civil War will be ignored in Civil War memory. As argued by Cook in *Troubled Commemoration*, the consensual memory of the Civil War, which included reconciliation and the formation of a new national identity, is constantly promoted over a conflicted memory, which emphasizes slavery and emancipation.

The issue is that Lincoln represents both a consensual and conflicted memory in the Civil War, which is why some historians have touched on his place in Civil War memory while others have completely neglected it. Lincoln illustrates the formation of a new national identity, reconciliation, and many American ideals, while also representing the emancipation of millions of slaves and the end of slavery. Even though most Civil War memory studies have gravitated towards illustrating the reconciliationist view of the past, Civil War memory is shifting towards an emancipationist point of view. This is evident, for example, in the way Gettysburg has shifted to advancing a more emancipationist view of Civil War memory. The field of Civil War memory studies is also in its early stages. As the field expands it will most likely include examination of more emancipationist views.

CHAPTER 2

FORD'S THEATRE: PLACE OF SORROW OR CELEBRATED MEMORIAL?

Ford's Theatre, which stands in the middle of the United States' capital, operates as a living memorial to Abraham Lincoln. It is a reminder of the horrific assassination that occurred there on April 14, 1865. Ford's Theatre is also a functioning theater that annually commemorates the grand reopening in 1968, and pays tribute to the memory of Abraham Lincoln and his love of the arts. It is one of the longest standing and most sacred memorials to Lincoln in Washington, D.C., a city where the Lincoln memorial and other reminders of his sacrifice for the Union are prominent landmarks.

The restored Ford's Theatre, which still attracts hundreds of visitors every day, testifies to the significance of the Civil War and Lincoln's role in the memory of that conflict. The grand reopening of the theater coincided with the period of the Civil War Centennial, which was celebrated just three years before the reopening and focused heavily on the reconciliation of North and South. In addition, it re-opened during the Civil Rights Era, which forced the theater to grapple with an emancipationist memory of the war and the complexity of race relations at the time. The theater symbolizes the strength of American democracy to endure remarkable tragedy and come out victorious. It also represents a channel through which the nation grieved a bloody war and the loss of its first assassinated president.

Over time, the theater became a therapeutic place for a grieving nation. Initially, Americans did not want the theater reopened as an operating theater so soon after the assassination. Several years after the assassination, the nation healed and some Americans focused on emancipationist memories, as well as reconciliationist memories, which forced a shift in the attitudes of Americans towards Ford's Theatre. Due to the reconciliation of the North and South, the changing values of the nation towards the memory of African American emancipation, and the necessity to form a new national identity, Ford's Theatre was transformed from a place of inexplicable sorrow shunned by the public, into a sacred memorial to America's first assassinated president.

Ford's Theatre gained a place in American history on April 14, 1865. Prior to the assassination, the theater was just one of many owned by John Ford. In examining the background of this important site it becomes evident why the federal government viewed this theater as an important part of American history. Also, the impact of the assassination in American memory transformed Ford's Theatre from a regular theater to a sacred memorial.

The Ford brothers initially opened Ford's Theatre in December 1861. John T. Ford, theater entrepreneur, came from Baltimore to Washington, D.C. in 1861 in search of a location for a new venue.²¹ In Baltimore, he managed the Holliday Street Theatre, or "Old Drury," as it was more commonly known, and the Academy of Music in Philadelphia. Throughout the course of his career, Ford owned successful theaters in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Washington, and Richmond. He was a central figure in

²¹ Victoria Grieve, *Ford's Theatre and the Lincoln Assassination*. (Fort Washington, PA:Eastern National, 2005), 23.

nineteenth-century American theater.²² John's brother, James Ford, became the manager at Ford's Theater and was in charge the night Lincoln was assassinated. Harry Ford, another brother, was responsible for decorating the State Box the night Lincoln attended the theater for the last time.

The site of Ford's Theatre was constructed in 1833 and occupied by First Baptist Church of Washington.²³ The church eventually joined with another Baptist congregation in 1859, and the old church building was deserted. Since the building was designed as a church, it was easy to transform it into a venue for plays and concerts. This is what attracted John Ford to the building in 1861. Despite the prediction by a member of the church board of a dire fate for anyone who turned the former house of worship into a theater, Ford leased the building for five years on December 10, 1861, with an option to buy the property at the end of the lease.²⁴ He shut down the theater for renovations in February and reopened on March 19, 1862, under the name "Ford's Atheneum."²⁵

The predicted dire fate of Ford's Theatre appeared to come true late in 1862. About five o'clock on the evening of December 30, 1862, fire caused by a defective gas meter broke out in the cellar under the stage.²⁶ Much of the theater burned to the ground and it had to be completely gutted. No one was injured, but Ford estimated about \$20,000 in losses. Despite this setback, he immediately set out to build a larger and grander theater, which opened in August 1863. The new Ford's Theatre brought in many of the best actors of the time, such as the infamous John Wilkes Booth.

²² Ibid, 23.

²³ George Olszewski, *Restoration of Ford's Theatre*. (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, 1963), 5.

²⁴ Ibid, 7.

²⁵ Ibid, 9. Furthermore, in the 19th century, theaters were in the process of trying to shift to middle/upper class behaviors and values.

²⁶ Olszewski, 11.

Abraham Lincoln attended an event at Ford's Theatre on May 28, 1862 for the first time, thus adding considerable prestige to the theatre's list of distinguished patrons.²⁷ Lincoln often attended the theater and worried that "some think I do wrong to go to the opera and theater, but it relieves my heavy burden" in the dark days of the war.²⁸ President Lincoln attended performances at Ford's Theatre eight times. Lincoln loved Shakespeare, and he enjoyed the acting of Edwin Booth, brother of John Wilkes Booth. On November 9, 1863, he watched John Wilkes Booth perform in *The Marble Heart*.²⁹ In this play, Booth portrayed a villain, and every time he delivered a menacing line, he glared at Lincoln and shook his finger. Lincoln's companion stated, "He looks as if he meant that for you," and Lincoln replied, "Well, he does look pretty sharp at me, doesn't he?"³⁰

John Wilkes Booth, famous actor and close friend of John Ford, enjoyed special privileges at Ford's Theatre. Not only did Booth perform there several times, but he had his own mailbox at the theater. Since Booth frequented the theater often, he was thoroughly familiar with the layout of the building. On the morning of April 14, 1865, while he was picking up mail, he learned that Lincoln would attend the theater that night. He was a Confederate sympathizer who hated Lincoln and the thought of emancipation for slaves. Lincoln was a threat to the Confederacy, and Booth planned to do something about it. Booth would finally be able to execute his plan to assassinate Lincoln and he would be able to accomplish it in a building very familiar to him.

²⁷ Ibid, 11.

²⁸ Grieve, 23.

²⁹ Olszewski, 53.

³⁰ Dorothy Meserve Kunhardt and Philip B. Kunhardt Jr., *Twenty Days* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1993), 31.

Despite the previous interaction with Booth and premonitions that he should stay home, Lincoln still attended the theater on April 14, 1865. A week prior to the performance, Lincoln had a dream that he had been assassinated. His wife Mary Lincoln urged him not to go to the theater that night because she believed tensions were still high from the war and that it was not safe for Lincoln to be in a public place. Also, prior to going to the theater, Lincoln had an eerie conversation with his guard, William Crook. Kunhardt and Kunhardt reported the exchange:

‘Crook, do you know,’ he said, ‘I believe there are men who want to take my life.’ Then he lowered his voice, as though talking to himself. ‘And I have no doubt they will do it.’ ‘Why do you think so, Mr. President?’ asked Crook. ‘Other men have been assassinated,’ Lincoln answered. ‘I know no one could do it and escape alive. But if it is to be done, it is impossible to prevent it.’³¹

Lincoln, unwilling to disappoint the public who expected him, attended the performance of *Our American Cousin* on April 14, 1865. Lincoln arrived to the play late that evening and actress Laura Keane stopped mid-sentence and cued the band to play “Hail to the Chief.” Lincoln bowed and took his seat. With Mary Lincoln close at his side, the President relaxed and enjoyed the first joyous evening since the beginning of the Civil War. The play reached its most comedic moment when actor Asa Trenchard was left alone on stage and uttered the words, “Don’t know the manners of good society, eh? Well, I guess I don’t know enough to turn you inside out, old gal--you sockdologizing old mantrap!”³² These were the last words that President Lincoln ever heard. At that moment, the crowd erupted into laughter and John Wilkes Booth used the opportunity to burst into the President’s box and shoot Lincoln in the head. From that time forward, Ford’s

³¹ Kunhardt and Kunhardt, 28.

³² Grieve, 54.

Theatre became a focal point of sorrow for the Union and a representation of Southern animosity towards Lincoln.

Immediately after Lincoln's death, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton closed Ford's Theatre and canceled all performances until an investigation was completed. John Ford was in Richmond at the time of the assassination and did not learn of the event until the next morning. When Ford returned to Washington, he was arrested and put in prison for 39 days. Since Ford was in the Confederate capital at the time of the murder and was a close friend of Booth, he was initially under suspicion. The other Ford brothers would later be questioned, but they were never accused of participation in the conspiracy plot.

Ford's Theatre remained closed. In the aftermath of the assassination, the Federal Government finally released Ford and gave him permission to reopen the theater on July 7, 1865, on the same day the convicted conspirators were hung for their involvement in the conspiracy. Ford attempted to stage another grand reopening of the theater, but the public was outraged and pressured Ford to shut down the theater for good. One citizen wrote Ford:

Sir: You must not think of opening tomorrow night. I can assure you that it will not be tolerated. You must dispose of the property in some other way. Take even fifty thousand for it and build another and you will be generously supported. But do not attempt to open it again. —One of many determined to prevent it.³³

The assassination was too fresh on the minds of the public. The Union was not prepared to let go of the grief and animosity of the Civil War, the murder of their president, and Southern involvement in the conspiracy, all which would be symbolized in the reopening

³³ Olszewski, 62.

of Ford's Theatre. The War Department, aware of the historical importance of the building, intervened and seized the theater, turning it into an anonymous government building. The nation's grief would not be publicly displayed and was temporarily masked by the anonymity of this government building. Eventually, in June 1866, the government purchased the building from Ford for \$100,000, which was provided by the Deficiency Appropriation Acts of July 7, 1865, and April 7, 1866.³⁴

As soon as the federal government acquired the building, Ford's Theatre once again underwent renovation and restoration. When the renovations were finished, the War Department's Record and Pension Bureau occupied the building, along with the Army Medical Museum, located on the third floor between 1867 and 1887. Catastrophe again struck Ford's Theatre on June 9, 1893, when the front of the building collapsed, killing twenty-two government workers and injuring sixty-eight. Once again the theater was restored, and from 1893 to 1931 it served as a publications depot for the Adjutant General. In 1931, the building was turned over to the Department of Interior, and the following year the Lincoln museum opened on the first floor of the building. Finally, in 1933 the National Park Service took control of the building, opening a new chapter for Ford's Theatre and the American memory of Lincoln. Through all the catastrophes, Ford's Theatre continued to be restored and the government refused to part with such an important building in our nation's history.

The American public also refused to part with the memory of Lincoln's assassination. It occupied an important place in American memory for most of the twentieth century. As the nation focused on reconciliation, Lincoln as a prominent white

³⁴ Grieve, 84.

leader came to be appreciated by both North and South. On July 15, 1905, the death of William S. Withers, Ford's Theatre orchestra leader on the night of the assassination, brought attention to the theater's place in American history.³⁵ Withers engaged in a drink with Booth prior to the assassination. He had witnessed the death of Lincoln, and Booth stabbed him on his escape out of the theater. His death sparked memories of the assassination among the American population. In the aftermath of Withers' death, the *Washington Post* recounted the story of the last survivor who was on the stage the night Lincoln was assassinated. Former actor, W. J. Ferguson stated, "No event in my life has left an impression more keen and lasting than the assassination of President Lincoln... I witnessed the tragedy, the most lamentable that has ever befallen our great nation."³⁶ The newspaper followed the stories of many of those connected to the tragedy at Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865.

In 1909, the celebration of Lincoln's 100th birthday once again revived the memory of Lincoln in whites and blacks. The *Washington Post* covered many stories of living Americans who had some sort of interaction with Lincoln. The newspaper also raised many questions about personal aspects of Lincoln's life and explored the possibility of constructing different memorials to him. In 1909, the creation of the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People sparked an emancipationist memory of Lincoln amongst African Americans. Most notably, the newspapers examined the evolution of race issues that Lincoln precipitated during his presidency, such as the

³⁵ "Booth Stabbed Him: Death of W.S. Withers, Leader of Ford's Orchestra. His Story of Assassination: Was Coming from Behind the Scenes and Barred Way of Wilkes Booth as He Fled from Theater -- Angry Mob Clamors for His Death -- Arrested by a Detective -- Drank with Wilkes Booth." *Washington Post*, July 15, 1905, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/> (accessed October 3, 2010).

³⁶ "Saw the Assassination of President Lincoln." *Washington Post*, September 24, 1905, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/> (accessed October 3, 2010).

Emancipation Proclamation and the formation of the 13th amendment. In the midst of national reconciliation, the focus on emancipationist memories illustrates the complexity of American's attitudes towards the memory of the Civil War. In the year prior to the centennial, a poetic appeal appeared in the *Washington Post* begging for the preservation of the house where Lincoln died, which stood across the street from Ford's Theatre. The unknown author of this article asked for the federal government to take control of the house so that businesses did not overtake an important piece of American history. This article also shows the shift in the attitudes towards Ford's Theatre and the memory of Lincoln.

No American sees this little house, knowing its history, without profound emotion; and the fact that the current of business and everyday life flows by seems to the imagination greater play. The very humbleness of the scene appears to have been designed by Providence in order to impress the mind. The visitor leaves with a chastened spirit, bearing the reminder that immortal souls may move in the daily throng, and that glimpses of eternal things are not absent, even in the crowded street. The nation should own and protect this little house in which Lincoln died. It should be a sacred shrine under the care of the government...the people of this country would not willingly permit the removal of this sacred landmark and if they were aware of the circumstances they would ask Congress to provide the modest sum necessary to preserve the place.³⁷

Greater sentiment would be expressed about Ford's Theatre in the coming years. The government did acquire the Petersen house where Lincoln died, and it came under the control of the National Park Service in 1933 along with Ford's Theatre. Furthermore, the Lincoln memorial was dedicated in 1922, thus demonstrating that Lincoln remained a national symbol worthy of commemoration.

³⁷ "Where Lincoln Died." *Washington Post*, June 21, 1908, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/> (accessed October 9, 2010).

In addition to Lincoln's place in the general public's memory, white political leaders, in efforts to promote reconciliation and gain political support, thoroughly utilized Lincoln's memory. On February 12, 1908, Secretary of War William H. Taft gave a speech in Grand Rapids, Michigan to the Lincoln Club extolling President Lincoln, claiming that "if Lincoln were living today he would be a Republican."³⁸ This statement intended to legitimize Republican policies by bestowing some of Lincoln's prestige and integrity on the party. Taft imagined what Lincoln would have done in the Philippines and asserted that he would have supported the expansionist policies of Presidents William McKinley and Theodore Roosevelt. In 1909, President Theodore Roosevelt became responsible for making Lincoln the first American president to appear on a coin. Roosevelt proposed that Lincoln's face appear on the penny because it is the "commonest of all coins."³⁹ Roosevelt believed that Lincoln represented the common people of America, and the public responded well to this comparison. So great was the demand for the Lincoln penny in 1909 that vendors sold it at a premium and enterprising tradesmen inserted it on metal casings advertising.⁴⁰ Also in 1909, the centennial of Lincoln's birth, President Woodrow Wilson gave a speech extolling Lincoln as "Man of the People."⁴¹

Presidents and other political leaders used the memory of Lincoln to further their political goals and looked to Lincoln's presidency as a model, thus proving that he held a special place in American political memory. On February 12, 1935, former President

³⁸ "Taft Extols Lincoln: Secretary Says Martyr Would Be Republican if Alive. With McKinley on Colonies: Roosevelt Policies Toward the Business Situation, the Speaker Says, Would Win the War-time President's Approval -- Makes Point That He Did Not Advocate Votes for Negroes. Taft on the Philippines." *Washington Post*, February 13, 1908, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/> (accessed October 3, 2010).

³⁹ Merrill Peterson. *Lincoln in American Memory*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 182.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, 182.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 183.

Herbert Hoover addressed the Republican Club at the Waldorf Astoria and reiterated Lincoln's role in promoting American democracy. He informed the audience that "the faith of Abraham Lincoln was built upon freedom of the human spirit, and whatever violates, infringes, or abrogates fundamental American liberty violates the principles of America as a nation."⁴² While political leaders utilized Lincoln's image to promote democracy and reconciliation, emancipationist memories were ignored.

A few years shy of turning the theater over to the National Park Service, white political leaders debated the complexity of Lincoln's memory, and what it meant for the restoration of the theater. In 1927, Representative Charles Lee Underhill of Massachusetts and Ulysses S. Grant III debated the issue of restoring Ford's Theatre. Grant was the director of the public buildings and public parks in Washington, D.C., and would be in charge of the restoration. Underhill argued that Northerners believed that restoring Ford's Theatre would glorify the despicable actions of John Wilkes Booth, rather than honor Lincoln. Despite efforts towards national reconciliation, many in the North still blamed the South for the assassination and feared that restoration would glorify the South's betrayal. Grant responded to this position:

While I appreciate Mr. Underhill's abhorrence of the crime committed in this building. I believe it already occupies such an important place in history and is so associated in the public mind with Mr. Lincoln that I doubt if any ignoring of the site and physical remnants would tend to efface the memory of the crime. In my opinion, the reconstruction of the box and, in a general way, of the

⁴² "Hoover Denounces Curbs on Liberty: Cheered by Republicans Here, He Implies Lincoln Would Oppose President. Col. Roosevelt Caustic: Throng at Springfield Tomb as Grand Army and Legion Men Pay Tribute. Hoover Denounces Curbs on Liberty." *New York Times*, February 13, 1935, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/> (accessed October 9, 2010).

theatre auditorium, together with the location of the relics there, would most suitably enshrine the collection.⁴³

Another political leader who had a special connection to the Lincoln assassination was U.S Representative Henry Rathbone of Illinois, the son of the couple that witnessed Lincoln's assassination in the President's Box. In the year prior to the Grant and Underhill debate, Rathbone introduced a bill to purchase Osborn Oldroyd's Lincoln collection for \$50,000.⁴⁴ Osborn Oldroyd was the most notable Lincoln memorabilia collector at the time. The bill passed, giving the United States the world's largest collection of Lincoln memorabilia. The government previously had purchased the Peterson house in 1896, paying \$30,000 for the structure, making it the first historic house purchased by the government for museum purposes. Oldroyd remained as the live-in custodian of his memorabilia. In 1932, Oldroyd's collection served as the core of the Lincoln museum in the Ford's Theatre's basement. The museum was comprised of Oldroyd's 3,000 piece collection of Lincoln memorabilia that had served as an informal exhibit at the Petersen House since 1893.⁴⁵ In the midst of national reconciliation, both Northerners and Southerners could appreciate the numerous Lincoln relics as opposed to exploring the controversial assassination.

Due to the continuing reconciliation of North and South, the Lincoln museum initially provided only a brief overview of the assassination in efforts to avoid sectional animosity. The first floor comprised of pictorial exhibits that told of Lincoln's life and presidency. There also was a model of the theater and photos to give visitors an impression of what the theater looked like the night of the assassination. Black outlines

⁴³ Ford's Theatre Papers, Ford's Theatre Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴⁴ Grieve, 94.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 94.

on the stage and in the presidential box marked the exact spots where Lincoln and his guests were sitting. The markings also showed the escape route used by John Wilkes Booth.

The establishment of the museum at Ford's Theatre masked the bitterness of the assassination, perpetuated reconciliation, and illustrated the public's captivation with the memory of Lincoln. The nation had moved past grief and sought to commemorate the American icon. The day before Lincoln's birthday in 1946, the public gathered outside Ford's Theatre to commemorate the 137th anniversary of his birth. The *Washington Post* recounted one American with significant ties to the Lincoln assassination:

Among those present yesterday was Mrs. Newton Ferree, who had with her half a collar that was worn by Lincoln at the time of his assassination according to a yellowed diary which was kept by her grandfather-in-law, Newton Ferree. Ferree, who was employed by the Treasury for 60 years, [and] was a member of the audience that saw Tom Taylor's comedy, 'Our American Cousin,' April 14, 1865.⁴⁶

Not only did Lincoln remain active in American memory in 1946, but the government introduced a bill that was significant to the memory of the assassination. On February 6, 1946, Senator Milton R. Young of North Dakota, encouraged by Melvin Hildreth, a prominent Washington attorney and fellow North Dakotan, introduced Joint Resolution 139 to the U.S. Senate.⁴⁷ Between 1933 and 1946, members of Congress debated the restoration and organized possible funding for the project. The purpose of the resolution was to propose an estimated cost of restoring Ford's Theatre to its original appearance on April 14, 1865. In July 1951, Senator Milton Young explained the

⁴⁶ "Crowd Throngs Ford's Theater to Honor Memory of Lincoln" *Washington Post*, February 11, 1946, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/> (accessed October 3, 2010).

⁴⁷ Grieve, 88.

importance of restoring Ford's Theatre. Young stated, "Unfortunately, most everyone who visits Ford's Theater is disappointed because of its present state. In sharp contrast to many well-preserved shrines, this one has degenerated to a point where a person must rely on his imagination almost completely to realize that it ever existed as a theater."⁴⁸

Senator Young's work paid off on May 28, 1954, when President Dwight Eisenhower signed Joint Resolution 139 into law. With the impending Civil War Centennial, the public's emotions were stirred once again, and the Americans sought to commemorate the martyred president. Congress appropriated \$200,000 for research in 1960, and another \$2 million dollars in 1964 for construction costs.⁴⁹ Ford's Theatre would now undergo full restoration to its appearance on April 14, 1865. The government's approval of restoration indicated a definite shift in the national attitudes towards this theater. What had previously been viewed as a focal point of sorrow for the nation was now viewed as a sacred historical site.

Three years of extensive reconstruction and restoration followed. Except for a few items, all the interior furnishings throughout the theater were reproduced based on contemporary photographs, sketches, drawings, newspaper articles, official reports, and samples of wallpaper and curtain fabric from museum collections.⁵⁰ The outside walls had to be replaced, but the interior was reconstructed precisely to its appearance the night Lincoln was assassinated, with the exception of modern additions such as larger seats and fire safety precautions. The Presidential Box also was reconstructed to the exact appearance of April 14, 1865. The only original items restored to the Presidential Box

⁴⁸ "Ford Theater Restoration Is Proposed." *Washington Post*, July 21, 1951, <http://www.proquest.com.libproxy.txstate.edu/> (accessed October 9, 2010).

⁴⁹ Grieve, 88.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 88.

were the crimson red sofa and the framed engraving of George Washington. All other items were exact replicas based on pictures from Civil War photographer Matthew Brady. The two original items were donated by the Ford family in the 1940s. The original blue Treasury flag, which hung from the Presidential Box on the night of the assassination, is displayed in the downstairs museum. Restoring the theater to its original appearance represented an effort to memorialize this important time in our history, without the bitterness of southern betrayal or grief tainting the theater any longer.

In July 1964, the funds were finally available to begin restoration in November, with the grand reopening scheduled for 1968. Ford's Theatre Society, a nonprofit organization, handled the responsibility of finding plays from Lincoln's time to run at the new theater. The NPS decided that not only would the theater be reopened as a memorial to Lincoln, but it also would be reopened as an operating theater. The American National Theater Academy and the National Repertory Theater facilitated the staging of plays once again at the infamous theater. The NPS established a formal Board of Trustees to gather financial support for the grand reopening. Frankie Hewitt was a major force on the Board of Trustees and the Producing Director. Hewitt was the heart and soul of the push for the restoration and reopening of Ford's Theatre in 1968. On the 25th anniversary of the reopening of Ford's Theatre, the *Washington Post* published an article describing her work: "The day's events were a celebration of Mrs. Hewitt's commitment and vision in keeping the theater running as a living memorial to Abraham Lincoln's love of the performing arts. It was through her almost single-handed efforts that it reopened in 1968, after being dark for more than 100 years following Lincoln's assassination there in

1865.”⁵¹ Ford’s Theatre successfully reopened on January 21, 1968, with several important figures in attendance, including Vice President Hubert Humphrey, other government officials, and celebrities. President Lyndon Johnson did not attend. Ford’s Theatre had clearly transformed from a place of sorrow to a sacred and celebrated memorial to Abraham Lincoln.

Not only had the theater transformed, but the museum transformed as well to promote a more emancipationist point of view. The size and focus of the Lincoln museum evolved through the years. In 1968, when the theater reopened after restoration, the museum focused more heavily on Lincoln’s life and contained nothing about the assassination. This occurred because the nation was still affected by the sorrow caused by the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, and more recently Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert Kennedy in 1968. The National Park Service did not want to inflict such a blatant reminder of the present grief of the nation. In 1988, the Lincoln museum closed for two years of restoration. In 1990, the museum reopened once again and for the first time answered many disturbing questions surrounding the assassination and the conspiracy. The exhibit addressed five different themes: “The Temper of the Times,” “The Lincoln Assassination and the Aftermath,” “The Lincoln Family in the White House,” “The Legacy of Lincoln,” and “The History and the Restoration of Ford’s Theatre.”⁵² After the most recent restoration in 2009, the museum more closely examined Lincoln’s presidency. It presented a more inclusive memory of the war by promoting an emancipationist memory, which emphasized Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the formation of the 13th amendment.

⁵¹ Ford’s Theatre Papers, Ford’s Theatre Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁵² Ibid, 96.

The nation clearly moved past grief and now commemorates the assassination at Ford's Theatre. Several conclusions can be drawn by examining the shift of the federal government's attitudes towards Ford's Theatre. The significance of Ford's Theatre in American memory was convoluted directly after the assassination, but as America changed, reconciled and unified, Ford's Theatre played a different symbolic role in American memory. The historical significance of the theatre would be determined by changing attitudes and reactions of Americans to Lincoln's assassination. The public initially wanted to forget about the grief associated with the theater, but the tragedy marked Ford's Theatre as an important historical site. The federal government followed the trend towards reconciliation in the early twentieth century and then later to emancipation, Americans attitudes towards the theater remained complex. Public historian Kenneth Foote describes the tension between the desire to remember and to forget:

A society's need to remember is balanced against its desire to forget... If a tragedy seems to illustrate a lesson of human ethics or social conduct worth remembering, or if it demands that warnings be forwarded to future generations, tension may resolve in favor of a permanent monument or memorial. If the violence fails to exemplify an enduring value, there is greater likelihood of the site... being effaced, either actively or passively.⁵³

The transformation of Ford's Theatre into a sacred historical site took place over decades and corresponded with the changing values of Americans from the post Civil War Era to the Civil Rights Era. The most notable change in commemorations included the federal government's response to the memory of African American emancipation.

⁵³ Kenneth Foote, "To Remember and to Forget: Archives, Memory and Culture." *American Archivist* 53 [1990]: 385-387.

After Lincoln initially freed the slaves and cleared the way for the Thirteenth Amendment, Lincoln's memory would forever be intertwined with the struggle of the African American in the United States. Many African Americans viewed Lincoln as the Great Emancipator after the Civil War and bitterly mourned his death. They also viewed Emancipation day on January 1, 1863 as their independence day. No people had more cause to mourn the President's death; like Christ of "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," he had died to make them free.⁵⁴ This sentiment was reiterated by many freedmen and women as Lincoln marched through Richmond after the surrender of the Confederacy. Many African Americans approached Lincoln and fell at his feet thanking him for their freedom. One former slave stated, "Glory to God! Glory! Glory! I know that I am free, for I have seen Father Abraham and felt him."⁵⁵

The view of Lincoln as emancipator remained resilient in the African American memory as the years passed. Eleven years after the assassination, a prominent African-American leader and friend of Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglass, gave a speech on April 14, 1876 at the dedication of the Freedmen's Monument. On the anniversary of Lincoln's assassination and in the same year as the U.S. centennial, the Freedmen's Monument was dedicated in Washington, D.C. to the memory of Abraham Lincoln. Douglass recalled the memory of Lincoln:

The name of Abraham Lincoln was near and dear to our hearts in the darkest and most perilous hours of the Republic. We were no more ashamed of him when shrouded in clouds of darkness, of doubt and defeat than when crowned with victory, honor and glory. Our faith in him was often taxed and strained to the uttermost, but it

⁵⁴ Peterson, 30.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 12.

never failed...we came to the conclusion that the hour and the man of our redemption had somehow met in the person of Abraham Lincoln.⁵⁶

Although African Americans like Douglass viewed emancipation as Lincoln's greatest accomplishment, white Americans did not always view him in the same light.

The Freedmen's monument represented the complexity of Americans attitudes towards emancipation in the early twentieth century. The East Capitol Street axis suffered a dramatic fall from grace as its more major monuments—Greenough's Washington in front of the Capitol building and the Freedmen's Memorial in Lincoln Park—were also eclipsed by the far more grandiose spatial configuration of the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial.⁵⁷ The Lincoln Memorial caused the Freedmen's Memorial to look “more and more like a lonely outpost in a residential neighborhood passing out of vogue.”⁵⁸ The Freedmen's Memorial faded from view on the National Mall due to its clear emancipationist legacy of the Civil War, and even though emancipation retained some of its iconic power, the Freedmen's Memorial was no longer the essential monument to Lincoln that it had been in the late nineteenth century.⁵⁹ The shift from the Freedmen's Memorial of 1876 to the Lincoln Memorial of 1922 marked a sea change in the history of the public commemoration.⁶⁰

In 1952, commemoration at Ford's Theatre shifted towards promoting an emancipationist legacy of the war by allowing African Americans to attend the theater,

⁵⁶ Thomas Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration: A Brief History with Documents*. (Boston: Bedford/St. Martins, 2004), 152-153.

⁵⁷ Kirk Savage, *Monument Wars: Washington, D.C., the National Mall, and the Transformation of the Memorial Landscape* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 215.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

despite the complexity of the public's response to race relations in America. Prior to 1952, African Americans were excluded from attending Ford's Theatre and faced racial segregation in most public places in America. Ironically, African American actors performed at the theater. African Americans protested outside of the Ford's Theatres in Washington, D.C. and Baltimore. The protestors employed the assistance of the NAACP. In 1952, with the help of the NAACP, African Americans secured the abolition of racial segregation at Ford's Theatre, despite the federal government still enforcing segregation throughout the nation. Now the race that Lincoln fought to emancipate was able to honor Lincoln in the racially unified memorial. With the inclusion of African Americans at Ford's Theatre, there would be a greater push towards an emancipationist legacy at the theater.

In addition, the Lincoln Memorial became a rallying point for the Civil Rights movement. In 1963, Martin Luther King Jr., prominent Civil Rights leader, gave his famous "I Have a Dream" speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial, directly alluding to Lincoln by beginning his speech with "five score years ago" and reiterating the role of Lincoln in emancipation. By 1964, the same year the restoration of Ford's Theatre was funded, the Civil Rights Act passed, giving more rights to African-Americans only a few years shy of the reopening of Ford's Theatre.

Ford's Theatre reopened in 1968, restored to the exact appearance of the night of the assassination, an era in which the African American enjoyed very limited rights. In 1968, the values of many Americans had shifted since the Civil War, and the reopening of Ford's Theatre portrayed reconciliation and emancipation as it was a racially unified celebration. Having secured the emancipation of millions of African Americans, the

racial unification represented the ideals Lincoln had hoped would be realized one day. It added significance to the building, and ensured its prominence as a national historical site. At the dedication in 1968, Vice President Hubert Humphrey reminded Americans how this building represented the “price of freedom” for all, including African Americans, and he alluded to the changing values that underlay American’s views towards of Ford’s Theatre as a sacred memorial. Humphrey stated, “It’s also a living reminder of the price of freedom...I believe that this theatre will do much not only to recall the great yesterdays, but because it will be a living theatre, it will do much to bring us even greater days.”⁶¹ The Vice President also stated that in celebrating the memory of Lincoln, “we should rededicate ourselves, even as we restore the Ford’s Theatre” to the principles that Lincoln instilled in America, which included support for the freedom and prosperity of the African-American.⁶²

In evaluating the history of Ford’s Theatre, it can be concluded that the reconciliation of the North and South influenced the presentation at the theater and affected the historical significance of the theatre in the American memory. Directly after the assassination, the theater was shunned as a place of inexplicable sorrow to the Union. The North immediately blamed the Confederacy for playing a role in the assassination of Lincoln. Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles, uttered after the assassination, “Damn the rebels, this is their work!”⁶³ Jefferson Davis, specifically, was implicated in the assassination plot.

⁶¹ Ford’s Theatre Papers, Ford’s Theatre Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ William Hanchett, *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies*. (Chicago: The University Press of Illinois, 1983), 60.

Secession and the Civil War had severely fractured the nation and Lincoln's assassination contributed to the continuation of this state. Lincoln's death served to further unify the North, revive sentiment for the preservation of the Union, and alienate the South. Lincoln became synonymous with the preservation of the Union and rose in the American mind to an equal stature with Washington, who was worshipped as its founder.⁶⁴ Many Americans believed the re-opening of Ford's Theatre so soon after the assassination of Lincoln would only glorify the murder that the Union believed the Confederacy committed. The assassination served as a catharsis for the North's grief and anger, which was focused against the Confederacy. Ford's Theatre became a focal point of this grief and anger. Also, Lincoln's death was disruptive to the celebration of the end of the war and Easter Sunday, which represented the shift from "death to life, from defeat to victory – resurrection – a perfect occasion for consolation as well as celebration."⁶⁵ Many Christians emphasized how Lincoln's death corresponded with Good Friday and exalted Lincoln as a Christ-like figure.

As North and South reconciled, attitudes towards Ford's Theatre reflected a healing nation and the dissipation of anger. Even by 1869, the initial reconciliation of North and South was evident. President Andrew Johnson, a Southerner, stated, "The cruel murder of Mr. Lincoln excited so violent a rage against the defeated South, whose chiefs and leaders were stupidly accused by the War Secretary, Mr. Stanton, of having abetted and instigated it...that he (Mr. Johnson) without the slightest warrant accused seven high-

⁶⁴ Barry Schwartz, "Mourning and the Making of a Sacred Symbol: Durkheim and the Lincoln Assassination," *Social Forces* 70 [1991]: 347.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 349.

minded gentlemen, as innocent of murder as himself, of complicity in the foulest crime of the age.”⁶⁶

The Southern attitude continued to shift early in twentieth century, as the nation observed the centennial of Lincoln’s birth. While some Southern states refused to recognize the occasion, states like Texas and Arkansas joined in the celebration. Southerners realized that Lincoln symbolized the ideal white leader, who was of Southern birth. A notable celebration took place in Atlanta, as both Union and Confederate veterans joined together in a ceremony to honor Lincoln.

The Reverend James W. Lee, son of the Confederacy, and the church’s pastor delivered an address in which he attributed the Union triumph to divine favor and thanked God that the soldiers both in blue and gray were now united on earth as in heaven and together regarded ‘the martyred president their commander-in-chief to all eternity.’⁶⁷

Southern historian J.G. de Roulhac Hamilton distinguished three phases that defined the evolution of the Southern attitude. First, initially Southerners viewed Lincoln as the “Black Republican.” Second, from the moment of his assassination through Reconstruction and beyond, Lincoln’s death was the South’s deepest regret, but for whom it still had no liking. Third, the Lincoln of the New South generation was admired for his Southern birth and blood, for his democracy, even for his nationalism, since it no longer threatened the South and its traditions.⁶⁸

Northerners initially experienced a “feeling of betrayal” by Southerners, with regards to the assassination, but clearly this attitude shifted over the years. This sectional

⁶⁶ Thomas Turner, *Beware the People Weeping: Public Opinion and the Assassination of Abraham Lincoln*. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982), 133-134.

⁶⁷ Peterson, 191.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 191.

reconciliation caused Ford's Theatre to no longer be viewed as a place of Southern betrayal, but rather a sacred memorial that could be appreciated by Northerners and Southerners alike. On the grand reopening in 1968, Secretary of the Interior Stewart Udall summed up the sentiment of the occasion: "I think this is a day of great pleasure for the lovers of Lincoln, and I suppose that includes all of us: all of us here, all of us in this country, because a new chapter in the Lincoln tradition begins today."⁶⁹ It began with the reconciliation of the North and South, continued with the inclusion of emancipationist memories, which in turn ensured the endurance of the nation Lincoln fought to preserve and the historical significance of Ford's Theatre as a sacred memorial.

In addition to reconciliation of North and South, the triumph of American democracy and the defining of a new national identity influenced the changing attitudes towards Ford's Theatre. As the nation emerged from the Civil War a stronger and more democratic nation over time, Ford's Theatre transformed from a place of death and sorrow into a sacred memorial, remembering Lincoln who eloquently defined democracy in his Gettysburg address. Lincoln became a "sacred possession of the nation" and an "expression of national genius in pursuit of a national ideal."⁷⁰

Lincoln became the democratic ideal through which America unified and established its new identity. The Civil War was ultimately a test of whether American democracy could endure opposition. Since Lincoln was responsible for securing the continuation of the Union, the memory of Lincoln would be instrumental in creating a new national identity, as Lincoln's ideals and principles were called upon to identify America. Politicians and presidents called on Lincoln's politics to further define

⁶⁹ Ford's Theatre Papers, Ford's Theatre Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁷⁰ Peterson, 141.

democracy. Lincoln offered an image of democratic process that promoted national unity, which transcended disagreement.⁷¹ Lincoln was also elevated to the status of George Washington, thus making him a symbol of nationhood. This newly defined symbol of nationhood unified the country and strengthened the nation, thus allowing Americans to feel confident in re-opening Ford's Theatre as an operating theater. Senator William Fulbright stated, "This is the brightest thing the government has done in years."⁷²

In conclusion, Ford's Theatre initially provided a focal point for the sorrow, grief, and anger of the nation at the close of the Civil War. The Lincoln assassination produced a catharsis of all these emotions, which forced the American public to initially shun Ford's Theatre. Unwilling to reconcile with the South, the Union viewed Ford's Theatre as a place of betrayal because of the implication of the South in the assassination. Thus, Ford's Theatre disappeared from the minds American public, although the memory of Lincoln remained evident. It re-emerged as America's values changed, especially with regard to African Americans in the Civil Rights Era. A century later Americans could promote Ford's Theatre as a celebrated sacred memorial to Abraham Lincoln and both emancipationist and reconciliationist memories.

⁷¹ Brown, 165.

⁷² Ford's Theatre Papers, Ford's Theatre Archives, Washington, D.C.

CHAPTER 3

RACE, RECONCILIATION, AND THE LINCOLN MEMORIAL

The creation of the Lincoln Memorial in the early twentieth century is an example of how the theme of reconciliation initially trumped emancipation in white memories of the Civil War. White government officials proposed the Lincoln Memorial with concepts of Union and sectional reconciliation in mind, while African Americans cried out for the completion of the emancipationist effort begun by Abraham Lincoln in the midst of the Civil War. Ultimately, African Americans proved that reconciliationist and emancipationist memories of the Civil War could coexist by rallying around the legacy of Abraham Lincoln. In the long struggle for civil rights, African Americans utilized the memory of Abraham Lincoln and the site of the Lincoln Memorial as a political weapon to combat white reconciliationists and in the process skillfully transformed the Lincoln Memorial from a symbol of reconciliation to also a representation of emancipation.

In examining the memory of the Civil War, historian David Blight asserts that both an emancipationist and a reconciliationist memory of the Civil War exist and often these two views are in complete opposition to each other. A reconciliationist view of the Civil War focuses on the reunion of North and South, and downplays slavery and emancipation. The oppositional viewpoint focuses on race, slavery, and emancipation as

the important legacies of the Civil War. According to Blight, reconciliation trumped race in the memory of the Civil War.⁷³

The story of the Lincoln Memorial illustrates how white reconciliationist memories came into conflict with emancipationist memories of African Americans and supporters of Civil Rights. The 1909 centennial of Lincoln's birth and the rise of the NAACP aroused African American interest in pursuing an emancipationist memory of the Civil War, and they began to publicly challenge the reconciliationist narrative. Events like the Marian Anderson concert of 1939 and the March on Washington of 1963 proved to African Americans that an emancipationist memory was equally as valuable in the remembrance of the Civil War.

Shortly after the assassination of Lincoln the government proposed a memorial to the slain president, a project that would take years to complete. In 1867, Congress created the Lincoln Monument Association and called upon American sculptor Clarke Mills to make tentative plans for a memorial.⁷⁴ Mills envisioned a monument 70 feet in height that told the story of the Civil War. It would include 35 figures consisting of war heroes and slaves alike, with Lincoln in the center signing the Emancipation Proclamation.⁷⁵ Despite Northern reverence for Lincoln, the proposal for a memorial to the president remained a sensitive subject for a nation still divided and healing from the Civil War. Thus, the emancipationist memorial proposed by Mills was unsuccessful and the erection of a memorial to Lincoln was not considered again until 1896.

⁷³ David Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2001), 2.

⁷⁴ Suzanne Gordon, *In This Temple: A Guidebook to the Lincoln Memorial* (Washington, D.C.: Museum Press, 1973), 35.

⁷⁵ Records of the Lincoln Memorial Commission. National Archives. Washington, D.C.

From Reconstruction to the turn of the century, the Republican Party encouraged and reshaped the memory of Abraham Lincoln. After the Republican victory in the election of 1896, one of the most dramatic elections in history, the reputation of Lincoln as the party's founder soared. The election of 1896 further defined the party system and set the stage for nearly forty years of Republican domination. The image of Lincoln became a useful partisan symbol, which incidentally helped the Republican Party.⁷⁶ Due to the resurgence of Republican political dominance, and the reshaping of the memory of Lincoln, the Senate Park Commission, or McMillan Commission, developed a new plan in 1901 to erect a memorial to Lincoln on the National Mall. The thoroughly Republican McMillan Commission struggled to plan an extensive memorial to Lincoln, and on June 28, 1902, the Lincoln Memorial Commission was created, which appropriated \$25,000 for the design of the monument.⁷⁷ The Commission included a mixture of Northerners and Southerners, most notably Secretary of War William Howard Taft and Secretary of State John Hay. Despite the initial success of the McMillan Commission and Republican domination, the proposal for the memorial was unsuccessful due to contention in the House of Representatives, and the issue was not revisited until the Lincoln centennial in 1909.

The 1909 centennial of Lincoln's birth coincided with the Progressive Era in America. Since public sentiment during the Progressive Era focused heavily on democracy and the common people, Lincoln's reputation soared during this period. Progressive Jane Addams recalled how her father's reverence for Lincoln influenced her

⁷⁶ Christopher A. Thomas, *The Lincoln Memorial & American Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 13.

⁷⁷ Gordon, 37.

opinion of the sixteenth President.⁷⁸ Lincoln, known as the Man of the People, fit with the ideals of Progressivism, and he became a unifying figure for both Republicans and Democrats. Lincoln was revered as a national symbol during the Progressive Era, and his legacy transcended the real Lincoln. Lincoln was an American whom many politicians wished to emulate and many Americans admired.

During the 1909 centennial, whites and blacks both fervently sought to memorialize Lincoln. The centennial was a major event for the reconciling nation, and Congress attempted to pass legislation to honor Lincoln. It also wanted to recognize Lincoln's birthday as a national holiday, erect smaller statues for schools, and purchase the property of Lincoln's birthplace in Kentucky. While the federal government and white America recognized Lincoln through various celebrations emphasizing reconciliation during the centennial, African Americans struggled to present an emancipationist legacy of Lincoln. The creation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) furthered African American equality, but it also helped African Americans promote an emancipationist memory of Lincoln.

The creation of the NAACP came in response to the racial injustice and segregation that continued to plague the nation. African Americans still lacked full citizenship, and their ability to vote was diminished by racist whites who intimidated blacks through violence. In some states lynching was practiced, and blacks were murdered for seemingly minor infractions. Even in the hometown of Lincoln, racial violence erupted. The Springfield Race Riot of 1908 began when an angry mob of whites attempted to remove two black prisoners from the jail so that they could be lynched.

⁷⁸ Jane Addams, *Twenty Years at the Hull House* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 6.

When the two prisoners were protected by the local law enforcement the mob proceeded to wage war on the city, destroying black neighborhoods and businesses, and even some white businesses. The Springfield Race Riot is just one example of the hardships endured every day by the African American population. African Americans cried out for justice, and the NAACP attempted to rectify the injustice.⁷⁹

In the midst of violence and racial injustice, the NAACP was symbolically created on Lincoln's birthday in 1909. In the midst of the Lincoln Centennial, African Americans invoked Lincoln's memory to combat segregation, lynching, and disfranchisement. The NAACP's mission became entwined with the legacy of Abraham Lincoln, as it made clear in one of its founding statements: "Abraham Lincoln began the emancipation of the Negro American. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People proposes to complete it."⁸⁰ Also in January 1909, a founding document of the NAACP expressed the need to recognize Lincoln as the Great Emancipator.

The celebration of the Centennial of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, widespread and grateful as it may be, will fail to justify itself if it takes no notes of and makes no recognition of the colored men and women for whom the great Emancipator labored to assure freedom. Besides a day of rejoicing, Lincoln's birthday in 1909 should be one of taking stock of the nation's progress since 1865.⁸¹

The NAACP's emphasis on Lincoln as the Great Emancipator illuminated a neglected topic and directly contributed to the transformation of the Lincoln Memorial from a site that focused primarily on reconciliation to one that fostered an emancipationist memory

⁷⁹ For further reading, see James Krohe, *Summer of Rage: The Springfield Race Riot of 1908* (Springfield, Ill.: Sangamon County Historical Society, 1973) and Roberta Senechal De La Roche, *In Lincoln's Shadow: The 1908 Race Riot in Springfield, Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2008).

⁸⁰ Philip B. Kunhardt III, Peter W. Kunhardt, and Peter W. Kunhardt Jr. *Looking for Lincoln: The Making of an American Icon* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 410.

⁸¹ Kunhardt III, Kunhardt, and Kunhardt Jr., 410.

as well. Although African Americans acknowledged Lincoln as the Emancipator, they also realized that emancipation only began when Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation. The NAACP's employment of Lincoln as a symbol for their struggle served to further the memorialization of the President.

By 1911, President William Howard Taft had created the Lincoln Memorial Commission, and the planning and construction of the Lincoln Memorial was in full force. In addition, the government created the Commission of Fine Arts in Washington, D.C. to oversee the construction of statues, monuments, and fountains in the United States' capital. In 1912, the Lincoln Memorial Commission appointed Henry Bacon as architect and Daniel Chester French as sculptor.

In 1913, the Congress decided to construct the memorial on the Potomac River site on the main axis of the National Mall. Many powerful government officials criticized the remoteness of the Potomac River site and called it a "barren swampland" unsuitable for a monument to Lincoln. Secretary of State and former associate of Lincoln John Hay defended the site:

As I understand it, the place of honor is on the main axis of the plan. Lincoln of all Americans, next to Washington, deserves this place of honor. He was of the immortals. You must not approach too close to the immortals. His monument should stand alone, remote from the common habitations of man, apart from the business and turmoil of the city, isolated, distinguished and serene. Of all the sites, this one, near the Potomac is most suited to the purpose.⁸²

Another interesting aspect of the site of the Lincoln Memorial was its situation at the juncture of the Memorial Bridge in Washington, D.C. and the former Confederate

⁸² Records of the Lincoln Memorial Commission, National Archives of the United States, Washington, D.C.

state of Virginia. The Lincoln Memorial reminded Southerners of sectional reconciliation when entering the nation's capital. The Lincoln Memorial also intended to foster healing and reunion. ⁸³ By chance or design the shrine straddled boundaries between North and South, black and white, and between official and vernacular memory. ⁸⁴ Construction began in 1914, but was not completed until 1922.

The nation at this time focused primarily on regional reconciliation, as opposed to racial reconciliation. The Lincoln Memorial was conceived as a symbol of national consensus, linking North and South on holy, national ground. ⁸⁵ The U.S. Congress, with the full support of its Southern members, built the Lincoln Memorial with this in mind. ⁸⁶ Sectional reconciliation abounded in many commemorations of the early twentieth century.

The reunion at Gettysburg in 1913 illustrates the reconciliationist focus of the early twentieth century. The Gettysburg event was considered a ritual of national reconciliation, an event in which race, black participation in the war, and the very idea of slavery as cause and emancipation as result of the war might be said to be thunderously conspicuous by their absence. ⁸⁷ As the sections reconciled, the races divided and race and reunion were "trapped in a tragic mutual dependence."⁸⁸ Americans in the early twentieth century celebrated the economic and political reconciliation of North and South, and

⁸³ Kunhardt III, Kunhardt, and Kunhardt Jr., 441.

⁸⁴ Scott Sandage, "A Marble House Divided: The Lincoln Memorial, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Politics of Memory, 1939-1963." *Journal of American History* 80, no. 1 (June 1993): 143.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 141.

⁸⁶ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5.

⁸⁷ David W. Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory, and the American Civil War* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 127.

⁸⁸ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 4-5.

Lincoln's ties to black freedom waned as politicians and scholars sculpted him into a "pro-Southern conservative" honored on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line.⁸⁹

This sentiment was evident in the construction of the Lincoln Memorial. White-washed views of Lincoln guided the design of the memorial. Even its Potomac River site opposite Robert E. Lee's former Virginia home bespoke of sectional reunion.⁹⁰ Symbols of North-South reunion abounded in the architecture. The building was supported by thirty-six grand columns representing all the states at the time of Lincoln's death, both Northern and Southern. Between the carved names of the thirty-six states were symbolic stone wreaths of interwoven Northern laurel and Southern pine.

In the spirit of fostering sectional reconciliation, the government intended the Lincoln Memorial to focus solely on Lincoln's role as Savior of the Union. Above the statue of Lincoln, an inscription on the memorial reads, "In this temple as in the hearts of the people, for whom he saved the Union, the memory of Abraham Lincoln is enshrined forever." Art critic Royal Cortissoz authored the famous words that appear in the memorial explicitly emphasizing Lincoln's role as Savior of the Union. In a conversation with architect Henry Bacon, Cortissoz noted the importance of his inscription: "The memorial must make a common ground for the meeting of North and South. By emphasizing his saving the Union, you appeal to both sections. By saying nothing about slavery you avoid rubbing old sores."⁹¹ Bacon hoped that visitors to the memorial would acknowledge it as a "symbol representing the Union, surrounding the memorials of the man who saved the Union" and that it would "give to them a great significance that will

⁸⁹ Sandage, 139.

⁹⁰ Sandage, 140.

⁹¹ Ibid, 141; Records of the Lincoln Memorial Commission. National Archives of the United States. Washington, D.C.; Sandage, 141.

strengthen in the hearts of the beholders the feelings of reverence and honor for the memory of Abraham Lincoln.” Bacon also asserted that the columns surrounding the memorial represented each state as a “symbol of the Union.” Not only is the purpose of the Lincoln Memorial evident in the words of the artists responsible for the memorial, but also in the government planning of the memorial. The Taft Commission’s forty-one page report to Congress made clear which Lincoln they honored, alluding twenty times to “the man who saved the Union,” but to “emancipator” just once in discussion of a rejected design.⁹² With emancipation regarded as “hopelessly old-fashioned,” the clear purpose of the Lincoln memorial was to promote sectional reconciliation and to honor Lincoln as Savior of the Union.

One of the few statues that did recognize Lincoln’s emancipation efforts was the Freedmen’s Monument in Washington, D.C, which was dedicated in 1876. Although focused on Lincoln’s role as Emancipator, the slave on the monument is bowing down to Lincoln. Frederick Douglass and many African Americans disapproved of the black man kneeling down to Lincoln since they believed emancipation came about due to their own efforts as well as Lincoln’s Emancipation Proclamation. Douglass emphasized in his celebratory speech at the dedication of the Freedmen’s Monument that Lincoln was primarily the “white man’s President, entirely devoted to the welfare of the white men.”⁹³ In the view of white America emancipation was affixed indelibly to this one image; the monumental Lincolns of the future no longer needed to represent it. Once Lincoln had his

⁹² Records of the Lincoln Memorial Commission. National Archives of the United States, Washington, D.C.

⁹³ Thomas J. Brown, *The Public Art of Civil War Commemoration: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2004), 151.

kneeling slave, the slave could then disappear from the commemorative stage.⁹⁴ With Reconstruction completed, a monument to emancipation was seen as “hopelessly old-fashioned” and the commemorative efforts focused on Lincoln as Savior of the Union. Therefore, commemorators “emancipated Lincoln from emancipation, and thereby emancipated white viewers from its historical burden.”⁹⁵

The dedication of the Lincoln Memorial on May 30, 1922, also advocated sectional reconciliation and the saving of the Union, while neglecting emancipation and race issues. On Memorial Day in 1922, more than 50,000 people gathered around the memorial for the dedication ceremonies. Chief Justice William Howard Taft, chairman of the Commission, had decreed the ceremonies be kept simple. The Grand Army of the Republic presented the colors, in addition to Union veterans who participated in the flag ceremony. Lincoln’s former pastor, Dr. Radcliff, led a prayer. The speakers of the day included Chief Justice Taft, President Warren G. Harding, Dr. Robert R. Moton, President of Tuskegee Institute, and poet Edward Markham.⁹⁶ Moton was the only African American speaker, and he spoke first to allow the following speakers to “correct” him if necessary.⁹⁷ Another reason the Commission intentionally arranged for Moton to speak first was so that the lasting impression of the day would be on sectional reconciliation, and not emancipation. Moton appeased his white listeners by acknowledging that “Lincoln died to save the Union,” but countered that statement by asserting that Lincoln’s greatness stemmed from the fact that he “put his trust in God and spoke the word that gave freedom to a race, and vindicated the honor of a nation

⁹⁴ Kirk Savage, *Standing Soldiers, Kneeling Slaves: Race, War, and Monument in the Nineteenth Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 121.

⁹⁵ Savage, 125, 128.

⁹⁶ Gordon, 10.

⁹⁷ Thomas, 156.

conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.”⁹⁸ Moton was the only speaker to allude to emancipation, and his message fell largely on deaf ears as, ironically, African Americans were ushered to the rear of the crowd to a “colored section.”⁹⁹

The dedication ceremony reflected the neglect of emancipation and the racial injustice that continued to plague the nation. The ceremony was a microcosm of the strained race relations of its day, marked by the rhetoric of good intentions and the behavior of bigotry.¹⁰⁰ The colored only section to which African Americans in attendance were rudely directed did not even appear on the official seating plan. Former Confederate soldiers guarded the colored section. One soldier commented on his rudeness to an African American, remarking, “That’s the only way you can handle these damned niggers.”¹⁰¹ Although blatant racial discrimination occurred at the dedication, President Harding ignored the issue and spoke of the “rejoicings of the succeeding half-century.”¹⁰² The success clearly did not include African Americans at this time. Harding proceeded to distract attention from Moton’s speech, claiming that Lincoln’s greatness lay in “saving the nation, not emancipating the slaves, an act that, though noble, was but a means to his salvific end of creating peace and concord between the two sections, by which they meant whites of the two sections.”¹⁰³ Taft’s speech most clearly emphasized the mindset of the nation regarding the significance of the dedication of the Lincoln Memorial:

⁹⁸ *Washington Post*, June 22, 1922.

⁹⁹ Thomas, 157.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, 157.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 157.

¹⁰² *Ibid*, 157.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, 157.

Therefore fit to commemorate a people's love for the Nation's savior and its great leader... Visible in its distant beauty from the Capitol, whose great dome typifies the Union which he saved; seen in all its grandeur from Arlington, where lie the Nation's honored dead who fell in the conflict, Union and Confederate alike, it marks the restoration of the brotherly love of the two sections in this memorial of one who is dear to the hearts of the South as to those of the North.¹⁰⁴

The dedication of the Lincoln Memorial appeased white Northerners and Southerners by emphasizing sectional reconciliation and Lincoln's role as Savior of the Union, and even years after the dedication Southerners were still proclaiming Lincoln as "the South's best friend."¹⁰⁵ Meanwhile, African Americans remained highly unsatisfied.

African Americans felt slighted at the dedication ceremony and expressed their dissatisfaction, which in turn illustrated the growing divide between whites and blacks with regards to the memory of Abraham Lincoln. As early as 1922, the Lincoln Memorial became racially contested ground. Newspaper accounts of the dedication ceremony further insulted African Americans by ignoring Robert Moton's speech. When the speech was acknowledged, it was either inaccurate or put in a negative light. The *Washington Post's* lead story on May 31 read, "Harding Lauds Lincoln as Nation's Savior," and concerning Moton's speech stated only that "a representative of the race for which the great emancipator did so much likewise lifted his voice in gratitude for the freedom of so many in America from serfdom."¹⁰⁶ The paper did not use the term "slavery," and it presented Moton as fully supporting the dedication, when in reality he acknowledged that racial injustice still existed in America.

¹⁰⁴ Gordon, 12.

¹⁰⁵ "Lincoln South's Best Friend," *Washington Post*, February 14, 1928.

¹⁰⁶ "Harding Lauds Lincoln as Nation's Savior," *Washington Post*, May 31, 1922.

The black press denounced the biased speeches and segregated seating as a mockery of Lincoln's ideals. Prominent national newspapers simply ignored the furor and headlined Moton's remark that blacks were obliged to justify emancipation by being loyal citizens.¹⁰⁷ The *Chicago Defender* concluded that "Moton's words fell on ears closed and deaf to reason" and that Harding's hypocrisy was sufficient to "open" Lincoln's memorial officially but not to "dedicate" it.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, the editor urged a boycott and uttered a remarkable prophecy: "With song, prayer, bold and truthful speech, with faith in God and country, later on let us dedicate that temple thus far only opened."¹⁰⁹ Although, the officials at the dedication ceremony neglected to acknowledge Lincoln as emancipator, African Americans immediately recognized that the monument offered a valuable fulcrum in the struggle for racial justice.¹¹⁰

In the mid-twentieth century African Americans still lacked full citizenship and utilized the Lincoln Memorial as a symbol of their struggle. By invoking and interpreting a national icon, black protestors explored the ambiguities and the possibilities of their role in American society. Their protests at the Lincoln Memorial were repeated, standardized rituals that evolved from experience and ultimately constituted a formidable politics of memory.¹¹¹ Historian Scott Sandage explains the significance of this type of protest:

Exploiting a range of possibilities in the memorial's form and iconography, in the remembered Lincoln, and in American political ideals, protestors challenged the existing political ideals; protestors challenged the existing political

¹⁰⁷ Sandage, 141.

¹⁰⁸ *Chicago Defender*, June 10, 1922.

¹⁰⁹ Thomas, 158.

¹¹⁰ Brown, 165.

¹¹¹ Sandage, 143.

order from within, turning its discourse upon itself to dramatize its internal inconsistencies and contradictions. The essence of politics of memory was to bring politics into the temple, but in a way that preserved the temple's holiness and conferred upon them its power as a national site. They appropriated as their own the holiness of Lincoln and his memorial within American civil religion.¹¹²

This appropriation of Lincoln's image was accomplished for the first time in the celebrated Marian Anderson concert of 1939. The Marian Anderson concert exposed the ironic existence of racial injustice in a country claiming to adhere to the ideals of Abraham Lincoln. In 1939, the world famous African American contralto Marian Anderson planned to give a concert in Washington, D.C. On January 9, the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) barred Anderson from singing at Constitution Hall and stated that it was open to "white artists only."¹¹³ After this setback, organizers of Anderson's concert and officials of the NAACP promoted the possibility of an outdoor concert at the Lincoln Memorial. By using the Lincoln Memorial site, organizers intended to remind Americans of Lincoln's role as Emancipator, which the dedication had singularly neglected.¹¹⁴ On March 13, 1939, the leaders of the NAACP voted on a resolution proclaiming that "it would be far better for Miss Anderson to sing outdoors, for example, at the Lincoln Memorial, erected to commemorate the memory of Abraham Lincoln, the Great Emancipator, or not to sing in Washington at all until democracy can surmount the color line in the nation's capital."¹¹⁵ Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes

¹¹² Thomas, 158-159.

¹¹³ Sandage, 143.

¹¹⁴ Thomas, 160.

¹¹⁵ National Association for the Advancement of Colored People Papers, University of Texas, Austin, Texas.

quickly secured permission for the concert from President Franklin Roosevelt, who exclaimed, “She can sing from the top of the Washington Monument if she wants to!”¹¹⁶

NAACP secretary, Walter White, effectively planned a concert dedicated to honoring the Great Emancipator at a site that previously had only promoted sectional reconciliation. White hoped to direct the attention of the nation to the symbolism involved in an African American singing at the Lincoln Memorial. He arranged for Anderson to begin by singing “America” because of the “ironic implications” of honoring a country that considered her a second class citizen.¹¹⁷ The organizers of the concert recruited white and black Boy Scouts to hand out programs with the Gettysburg Address prominently displayed on the cover. In addition, a script was provided to radio commentators covering the event, which read, “It is both fitting and symbolic that Anderson should be singing on Easter Sunday on the steps of the Memorial to the Great Emancipator who struck the shackles of slavery from her people seventy-six years ago.”¹¹⁸

On Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939, Anderson performed a free half-hour concert to nearly 75,000 people gathered around the Lincoln Memorial and turned the attention of the nation to Lincoln’s role as Great Emancipator. A majority of high government officials supported and attended the concert, although one Louisiana Senator attempted to protest the concert a few days prior to the event.¹¹⁹ Secretary of the Interior Harold Ickes introduced Anderson with a short speech, “which in brevity and force is destined to rival

¹¹⁶ Sandage, 144.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 144.

¹¹⁸ NAACP Papers.

¹¹⁹ “Senator Protests Negro Singing at the Lincoln Memorial,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, April 8, 1939.

the famous Lincoln's Gettysburg Address."¹²⁰ Ickes stated, "Today we stand reverently and humbly at the base of this memorial to the great emancipator while glorious tribute is rendered to his memory by a daughter of the race from which he struck the chains of slavery."¹²¹ Many who attended the concert spoke of it in religious terms, referring to it as a "spiritual experience" and a "beautiful awakening."¹²² In one bold stroke, the Easter concert swept away the shrine's official dedication to the Savior of the Union and made it a stronghold of racial justice.¹²³ Not only did the concert remind the public of Lincoln's role as emancipator, but it also illuminated the racial issues still plaguing the nation. Many white Americans applauded Anderson's nationalistic concert, and African American patriotism, and shunned organizations like the DAR, branding them as unpatriotic.

Anderson's concert marked a turning point in the history of the Lincoln Memorial and the civil rights movement. The concert attracted the world's attention to the hypocrisy of America's continued tolerance of racial injustice and at the same time suggested a plan of action to bring about change. With the concert, the civil rights movement developed a strategy of mass, symbolic protest that used ritual and appealed to memory to make race a national issue.¹²⁴ Civil rights attorney Joseph L. Rauh, Jr. believed that the event "was a beautiful awakening of blacks in the city there" and further stated that, "Everyone was there in their best clothes... You got this feeling, there she was

¹²⁰ *Journal of Negro Education*, "Marian Anderson sings to 75,000 at the Lincoln Memorial." *Journal of Negro Education* 8, No. 2 (April 1939): 260.

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 260.

¹²² Thomas, 160.

¹²³ Sandage, 146-147.

¹²⁴ Thomas, 160.

in front of Lincoln, and what a great step forward this was.”¹²⁵ By 1939, whites and blacks both realized that Abraham Lincoln was a coveted cultural and political symbol of the American way of life and used his legacy to promote their respective causes.¹²⁶ Many of these large protests resembled religious services, which made it difficult for the federal government or the white public to object without violating freedom of religion. The Anderson concert cemented the importance of utilizing the Lincoln Memorial to promote the African American struggle, while still appeasing white America by advocating American ideals.

For African Americans, the Anderson concert promoted the Lincoln Memorial as a site of emancipation and civil rights, but whites were divided in their opinions. A portion of white Americans construed the concert as proof of the racial hierarchy existent in the country. Others focused on Anderson’s endorsement of American ideals and dismissed any association with emancipation or civil rights claiming the “emancipation moment” had passed. According to white America the emancipation moment validated the status quo: Lincoln’s noble work is done and the Negro now must remember his place.¹²⁷ With Lincoln’s work completed, African Americans should simply be grateful for the freedom they received. Paradoxically, the white public focused on Lincoln as Savior of the Union, while wanting African Americans to remember Lincoln as Great Emancipator and be grateful for his sacrifice for them. Lincoln as a representation of nationalism and “white magnanimity” overshadowed the African American struggle for

¹²⁵ Sandage, 145.

¹²⁶ Ibid, 145.

¹²⁷ Ibid, 148.

the completion of Lincoln's emancipation efforts.¹²⁸ Despite white objection to the Lincoln Memorial as a symbol of emancipation, black leaders "regarded public appeals to Lincoln and national memory as the only symbolic language available to them to communicate with white America."¹²⁹

Throughout the mid-twentieth century, black leaders pressed for the symbolic use of the Lincoln Memorial to advocate civil rights and racial justice despite white objection. It was evident to the federal government and white America that African Americans pursued a counter memory of Lincoln as Emancipator. After 1939, in efforts to protect the white memory of Lincoln in America, President Roosevelt repeatedly denied African American usage of the Lincoln Memorial for rallies and religious gatherings before finally giving into the requests of African Americans. In 1941, African American civil rights leader A. Philip Randolph petitioned President Franklin Roosevelt for the use of the memorial to lead a peaceful prayer rally. Roosevelt avoided Randolph's request, providing black activists the opportunity to perfect a "standardized civil rights protest ritual," which according to historian Scott Sandage,

evolved from the elements in Marian Anderson's concert, such as using mass rallies instead of pickets, performing patriotic and spiritual music, choosing a religious format, inviting prominent platform guests, self-policing the crowds to project an orderly image, alluding to Lincoln in publicity and oratory, and insisting on using the memorial rather than another site. The civil rights ritual absorbed the profane into the sacred, coating politics with civil religion. It confronted racism powerfully but indirectly, shrewdly emphasizing national values over direct political criticism.¹³⁰

¹²⁸ Sandage, 149.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 150.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 152.

By pressing for a prayer pilgrimage to the Lincoln Memorial, Randolph left President Roosevelt no legitimate grounds for denying the request.

After initial hesitancy, the federal government conceded to the requests of civil rights leaders petitioning for use of the Lincoln Memorial, which allowed black activists to develop a brilliant strategy for inconspicuously promoting the commemoration of emancipation. In 1943, Randolph's request was granted, and a prayer rally was held at the Lincoln Memorial. Again in 1957, black leaders gathered around the Lincoln Memorial for a civil rights rally. The rally, although political in nature, was masked by nationalism and religion. The program forbade applause during a "religious service" and many religious songs were sung.¹³¹ During the event Civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. affirmed his role as spokesman for the African American population. King appealed to American nationalism by referring to the Constitution and proclaiming the unity of all Americans. The event concluded with a pledge inviting all Americans to fight racial injustice. By adding a pledge to the civil rights ritual, it "completed the underlying pattern of nonviolent action that had been evolving at the Lincoln Memorial."¹³²

By 1957, it was difficult for white America to argue that the emancipation moment had passed, since black leaders had successfully furthered their emancipationist view through a politics of civil religion and nationalism. Although the Lincoln Memorial was considered a contested site at this time, it was quickly becoming associated with civil rights and emancipation. In the mid-1960s, Vice President Hubert Humphrey reflected on the civil rights movement, stating that "the secret of passing the bill is prayer groups."

¹³¹ Ibid, 155.

¹³² Ibid, 154.

“Who could ban a church picnic?”he asked.¹³³ African American leaders had effectively established a peaceful strategy for using the Lincoln Memorial as a site promoting emancipation and racial equality.

As African American leaders gained momentum in their civil rights struggle, the 1963 March on Washington culminated the emancipationist efforts at the Lincoln Memorial. In 1961, King met with President John F. Kennedy at the White House. Noticing a framed copy of the Emancipation Proclamation, King asked President Kennedy to “sign a Second Emancipation Proclamation outlawing segregation, one hundred years after Lincoln.”¹³⁴ Kennedy remained non-committal about issuing a Second Emancipation Proclamation. By 1963, the civil rights struggle had reached a pinnacle in America. Leaders like King and Randolph pushed the administration of John F. Kennedy for the passage of civil rights bills, with little success. As a result, the NAACP organized a nonviolent march on Washington to celebrate the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation, and once again they brought the attention of the American public to the uncompleted emancipation work of Abraham Lincoln. King hoped that the march would be “the greatest demonstration for freedom this country has ever seen.”¹³⁵ The march proved to be the largest gathering to ever occur in Washington, D.C.

The March on Washington occurred on August 28, 1963, and was the event that “drew the greatest attention of the white majority of Americans and thus did the most to alter popular perception of the Lincoln Memorial.”¹³⁶ The event drew in over 400,000 people and once again appeared religious in nature while advocating American ideals

¹³³ Sandage, 159.

¹³⁴ Peterson, 354.

¹³⁵ “Rev. King Urges Civil Rights,” *Chicago Daily Tribune*, August 28, 1963.

¹³⁶ Thomas, 160.

such as fairness and justice. The message the march communicated was that the restoration and enforcement of full civil rights for all persons, regardless of skin color, represented reform from within the American tradition, which the memorial symbolized.¹³⁷ The climax of the event was King's "I have a dream" speech. The speech acknowledged the hero in the temple behind him with the words, "Fivescore years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand today, signed the Emancipation Proclamation."¹³⁸ King also stated that the African American was still not free and that he had a dream that one day the nation would honor Lincoln's proclamation. King's speech commemorated the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation by reminding Americans that "it was still not too late to reclaim the promise of emancipation, to reopen the doors that were closed after Reconstruction, and to march through toward a better destiny."¹³⁹ Thus King, like Lincoln at Gettysburg, dedicated the country to a new birth of freedom. This speech, more than any other single event, legitimized the ongoing black revolution in the eyes of most Americans and came to symbolize a historic national turning point, lifting King into the pantheon of great American heroes.¹⁴⁰ The march culminated the politics of memory begun in 1939. No event since Marian Anderson's concert created a more indelible memory of the civil rights movement or, indeed, of the Lincoln Memorial.¹⁴¹

The March on Washington successfully promoted African American equality, promoted Lincoln as Great Emancipator, and transformed the Lincoln Memorial in American memory. African American leaders adamantly pushed for the use of the

¹³⁷ Thomas, 160.

¹³⁸ Peterson, 355.

¹³⁹ Savage, 213.

¹⁴⁰ Peterson, 356.

¹⁴¹ Sandage, 156.

Lincoln Memorial for the large rally because Lincoln was a symbol cherished by all Americans, and because they wanted to “transform the memorial’s meaning into an affirmation, again, that Lincoln was not only or even primarily Savior of the Union but, more important, was Emancipator. The March on Washington cemented the connection between his memorial and the ideal of freedom for all, reconstructing it as a metaphor in Americans’ minds.”¹⁴² African Americans accomplished this by appealing to American ideals, assembling a variety of national symbols at the march, and utilizing the image of Abraham Lincoln. Black activists had successfully turned the Lincoln Memorial into a “Supreme Court of the Public Opinion,” choosing to affirm certain cherished principles while not alienating the policy makers who had the authority to change the system.¹⁴³ The rally at the Lincoln Memorial united black activists and legitimized black political action. The march helped facilitate the introduction of the Civil Rights Bill of 1964, which had been formulated under the Kennedy administration. African Americans considered it a considerable step towards equality. In addition, King and the civil rights movement are forever associated with the memorial by a plaque placed at the memorial commemorating King’s “I have a dream” speech and the March on Washington. Therefore, visitors to the memorial are unavoidably reminded of the Lincoln Memorial’s association with the civil rights movement and emancipation.

After 1963, although African Americans drifted away from exulting Lincoln, the Lincoln Memorial continued to serve as inspiration for politicians and a backdrop for political action. After the March on Washington and the Civil Rights era, African Americans had progressed significantly towards their goal of equality. Although many

¹⁴² Thomas, 162.

¹⁴³ Sandage, 160.

African Americans still admired Lincoln, he no longer was needed as a political intermediary between them and white America. African Americans abandoned Lincoln in a sense, and adopted their own political heroes such as Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcolm X. African Americans' usage of Lincoln as a political weapon had come to an end.

By the 1960s, black activists had so effectively connected themselves to the Lincoln Memorial that government officials fervently sought to “recapture Lincoln and his memorial”¹⁴⁴ and other groups turned to the monument to help them espouse their causes. The government organized a commemoration of the centennial of the Civil War at the memorial. Furthermore, during their presidential crises, Presidents Lyndon Baines Johnson and Richard Nixon both spoke at the memorial to defend their policies and compare themselves to Lincoln.¹⁴⁵ In 1970, entertainer Bob Hope and evangelist Billy Graham organized a rally called Honor America Day, where 30,000 people gathered to hear Graham give a sermon that was a “remarkable response to the protest tradition that began when Marian Anderson politicized a national hymn.”¹⁴⁶ Graham appealed to American nationalism by proclaiming that America should still sing “My Country Tis of Thee” and never give in to violent protestors in the radical Black Power movement. Ironically, the following year anti-Vietnam war protestors rallied around the Lincoln Memorial in an appeal to American nationalism and were arrested. African Americans had effectively established a peaceful strategy for appealing to American nationalism through the image of Lincoln and the memorial, which came to be utilized by various

¹⁴⁴ Sandage, 163.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid, 163.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid, 163.

political organizations just as black activists abandoned the use of Lincoln to obtain their goals.

From the 1960s to the present, a majority of United States presidents have found solace in the Lincoln Memorial. When Kennedy was assassinated, his brother Robert Kennedy organized the funeral to mimic that of Lincoln's and, after the funeral, the Kennedy family took solace in the solitude of the memorial. President Nixon made a private pilgrimage to the memorial after his resignation. In 1993 at the inauguration of President Bill Clinton, the "American Reunion" concert occurred at the memorial honoring civil rights and emancipation. A similar concert occurred for current President Barack Obama. Also, President Obama and his family privately toured the Lincoln Memorial prior to his inauguration.

The Lincoln Memorial created to honor the Savior of the Union forced the nation to grapple with the centrality of race in the making of American public memory. The memorial was built to foster reconciliation, promote Lincoln as Savior of the Union, and to uphold universal American ideals, which African Americans latched onto in efforts to oppose the dominant values of the nation. White Americans, however, soon found themselves forced to address racial equality and the legacy of emancipation. While government representatives clung to their original purposes for the memorial in the early twentieth century by endorsing a racially segregated dedication of the monument and almost completely ignoring the dedication speech of African American spokesman Robert Moton, African Americans asserted their right to honor Lincoln in their own way. African Americans felt that while the Lincoln Memorial had been constructed, it was far from being properly dedicated. The emancipation moment had not passed for African

Americans who still cried out for the completion of Lincoln's emancipation work and would work tirelessly to see it completed.

Although most white Americans regarded the Lincoln Memorial as a symbol of reconciliation and Union, African Americans successfully used the site of the Lincoln Memorial as a political weapon to affirm the role of their race in national life and to push for the completion of emancipation. Black activists successfully cloaked political goals in prayer rallies and religious services, while advocating universal values that no American could dispute. They practiced a "politics of memory," which turned the political discourse of the civil religion of the white majority inside out to make it speak for their own cause.¹⁴⁷ Black activists most notably grabbed the attention of white America through the Marian Anderson concert of 1939 and the March on Washington in 1963. The 1939 concert was the first event that alluded to the fact that Lincoln could be both Savior of the Union and Emancipator, while the March on Washington forever intertwined the civil rights struggle with the Lincoln Memorial. African Americans proved that through utilizing the image of Lincoln in their struggle, both reconciliation and emancipation could coexist at the Lincoln Memorial. The appropriation of the memorial by civil rights demonstrators, which weakened its official Republican dedication to Lincoln as Savior of the Union in favor of a more liberal image of the Emancipator, most colors our perceptions of the memorial today.¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Thomas, xxv.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid, xxviii.

CHAPTER 4

RICHMOND'S ONGOING STRUGGLE FOR RECONCILIATION

The erection of a statue of Abraham Lincoln in Richmond, Virginia, immediately caused controversy in the former Confederate capital. Despite Richmond's African American majority, a significant number of neo-Confederates reside in the city. Completed in 2003, the Lincoln statue caused the city of Richmond to revisit the painful memory of the Civil War. The controversial Lincoln statue in Richmond, created to bring peace and reconciliation to the former Confederate capital, has sparked a variety of responses, which has forced the nation to once again grapple with concepts of reconciliation and emancipation in relation to the memory of the Civil War.

The city of Richmond has struggled to present a history of the city that would satisfy both black and white residents and also draw visitors and customers to the city's historic, cultural, and commercial sites.¹⁴⁹ The city chooses to focus on the Civil War as a source of tourism in the historic city. During the 19th century, Richmond was an industrial and commercial center. In the early 20th century, federal housing, transportation policies and Supreme Court decisions on segregation forced many American cities, including Richmond, to lose middle-and working-class white populations to black

¹⁴⁹ Marie Tyler-McGraw, "Southern Comfort Levels: Race, Heritage Tourism, and the Civil War in Richmond," in *Slavery and Public History: The Tough Stuff of American Memory* edited by James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton (Chapel Hill: North Carolina Press, 2006), 153.

families restricted from buying in the suburbs.¹⁵⁰ In the mid 20th century the city turned to tourism to compensate for the loss of industrialization. To revive tourism, the city planned a canal walk along the James River, a Civil War exhibition and visitor center housed in a 19th century iron works, and an outdoor recreational space.¹⁵¹

Despite Richmond's large African American population within the city limits, the white local elites overwhelmingly promoted the Confederate version of Civil War history, which has prevailed in Richmond. Richmond's history is displayed through monuments, memorials, plaques, buildings, cemeteries, and streetscapes that commemorate the drama of the Civil War years with a Confederate bias.¹⁵² Historian Marie Tyler-McGraw explains the significance of the Lost Cause myth in Richmond:

This version argued for the relatively benign nature of slavery, the states' rights origins of the Civil War, the ruthlessness of military Reconstruction and the necessity for keeping the race separate. It was a white, patrician and self-justifying narrative known collectively as the 'Lost Cause.' This historical emphasis obscured Richmond's long history as a commercial and industrial city.¹⁵³

Richmond promoted this "Lost Cause" version of the war in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. In 1890, the city placed a statue of Robert E. Lee on Monument Avenue. Also in the 1890s, the Valentine Museum prominently displayed Civil War collections that catered solely to the local elites. At the turn of the century, the Museum of the Confederacy opened and the wartime home of Jefferson Davis was restored along with the Confederate White House. In 1919, Confederate supporters placed a statue to Stonewall Jackson on Monument Avenue. In the era of Confederate

¹⁵⁰ Ibid, 156.

¹⁵¹ Ibid, 151.

¹⁵² Ibid, 153.

¹⁵³ Ibid, 153.

monuments, there was little room for monuments that promoted African American history.

Although the white Confederate version of the Civil War dominated Richmond, black citizens eventually made their presence known. Blacks expressed an alternative history through “parades, protests, oral traditions, counter interpretations of historic sites and events, and a private mental geography of the city with its own sacred spaces.”¹⁵⁴ Blacks hoped to counter the Lost Cause history of the Civil War through the promotion of African American history. Black resistance to the dominant narrative was a particularly difficult task given the city’s six generations as the center of the romanticized version of the Old South and the Civil War. The heightened historical awareness in Richmond, however, encouraged a more “engaged and sophisticated” counter memory by Richmond’s black population.¹⁵⁵

As the city struggled to present parallel histories of the Civil War, Richmond’s black citizens became increasingly influential. In the 1950s and 1960s, as the local white elites moved to the suburbs, black citizens came to dominate the inner city. By the late 1970s, Richmond had a black mayor and the City Council was predominantly black. In addition, black and white businessmen made their first attempts to work together to revitalize the downtown shopping area. In the 1980s, the city’s racially balanced Richmond Renaissance association linked the two sides of Broad Street with a symbolic overpass, hoping to bridge the differences between the white and black communities that lie on either side of the street. Paradoxically, by the 1990s, even though black citizens

¹⁵⁴ Ibid, 155.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid, 155.

heavily influenced the city's politics, Lost Cause advocates still dominated public space in Richmond.¹⁵⁶

White government officials hoped to incorporate African American history into the city's landscape, without erasing the Lost Cause history that continued to draw tourists. The city hoped that the two oppositional histories could coexist and that the addition of African Americans monuments would help to heal wounds and promote reconciliation. The white majority, however, still was not ready for African American monuments to share public space with prominent Confederate monuments. In 1993, Richmond faced the ultimate test in regards to the coexistence of the Lost Cause and African American memories. That year, professional tennis player and African American Richmond native Arthur Ashe died. An educational foundation associated with Ashe proposed a statue to the tennis player in Richmond, and the city decided to place the statue on Monument Avenue near the most prominent Confederate monuments. Some African Americans thought Ashe was too good for "Rebels Row," while others concluded that it would be a painful reminder of black subjugation. Southern heritage groups were also outraged by the placement of a statue. While the city was ready for African American history, some were not ready to abandon segregated spheres of memorialization.¹⁵⁷

The erection of the Ashe statue engendered protest from Southern heritage groups who demanded more Confederate statues in return for the allowance of an African American statue on Monument Avenue. Southern heritage groups demanded a mural of

¹⁵⁶ Ibid, 156-157.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 159.

Robert E. Lee be put up on Canal Walk by the James River, a site which displays the history of Richmond through a series of murals. If the Ashe statue invaded the avenue of Confederate heroes, then protestors wanted something in return. In 1999, the city allowed for the mural of Lee to be placed at Canal Walk, but it mandated that Lee would have to appear in civilian clothes and appear next to a black Union soldier and Abraham Lincoln. Grudgingly, protestors accepted this compromise. Since that 1999 compromise, the interpretation of Richmond's long history of slavery, the Civil War, Reconstruction, and Jim Crow segregation has remained contentious, unpredictable, and very public.¹⁵⁸

In 2003, Richmond once again faced a proposal of a monument contrary to the Lost Cause tradition. In 2003, the life-size statue of Abraham Lincoln and his son, "Tad" Lincoln was erected at the Tredegar Ironworks site situated on the James River. This represented the first statue of Lincoln in the Deep South. The Lincoln statue is just one part of the interpretation of the Civil War at historic Tredegar. Francis B. Deane founded Tredegar Ironworks in 1836 and named it for a Welsh town and ironworks. Deane hired 28-year-old Joseph Reid Anderson in 1841 as commercial sales agent. By 1847, Anderson owned the company, obtaining U.S. government contracts for cannon. Tredegar also manufactured locomotives, train wheels, spikes, cables, ships, boilers, naval hardware, iron machinery, and brass items. Anderson employed skilled Northern and foreign workers as well as slaves and some free blacks. During the Civil War, Tredegar produced iron for the CSS Virginia and for the Confederate forces. Over the years, Tredegar produced iron for all of America's subsequent wars. The Ethyl Corporation purchased the site in 1957, and in the 1970s, restored all the historical

¹⁵⁸ Ibid, 161-162.

buildings. In 2000, the National Park service purchased the site with plans of building the American Civil War Center.¹⁵⁹

The National Park Service cooperated with the Tredegar National Civil War Center Foundation to construct the American Civil War Center, which was completed in 2006. The Tredegar National Civil War Center Foundation is a tax exempt, nonprofit educational corporation whose mission is to tell “the *whole* story of the conflict that still shapes our nation.”¹⁶⁰ The purpose of the Center is to allow Americans to explore one of America’s most important wars by “knitting Union, Confederate, and African American narratives into a single story that includes everyone.”¹⁶¹ The all-inclusive interpretation of the Civil War is reflective of an important bill passed in 1999. In 1999, Congress approved a bill requiring the park service “to encourage Civil War battle sites to recognize and include in all their public displays...the unique role that the institution of slavery played in causing the Civil War.”¹⁶² Historian Charles Dew commented on the role of the Civil War Center saying, “I can see the Tredegar National Civil War Center playing a healing role for our country by treating the history of this era in an open, forthright, and all-inclusive manner.”¹⁶³

In the fall of 2002, the United States Historical Society (USHS) announced that it had commissioned a statue of Abraham Lincoln. The statue commemorated Lincoln and his son Tad’s visit to Richmond on April 4, 1865, the day following the formal surrender

¹⁵⁹ American Civil War Center, “The History,” <http://www.tredegar.org/civil-war-tredegar-history.aspx> (accessed August 2, 2011).

¹⁶⁰ “The Tredegar National Civil War Center Foundation and Its Work,” in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Andrew Ferguson, “When Lincoln Returned to Richmond,” *The Weekly Standard*, December 29, 2003/January 5, 2004, 34.

¹⁶³ Tyler-McGraw, 166.

of Richmond to federal troops.¹⁶⁴ The Richmond-based USHS is a “non profit organization that works on behalf of museums, education institutions, foundations, and other organizations to authorize projects that have historic significance, artistic value, and authenticity.”¹⁶⁵ Chairman Robert Kline formed the USHS in the early 1980s with the intention of creating a Lincoln statue. Kline stated, “This idea first came to me 20 years ago...And I thought: Lincoln in Richmond! What an event! What a symbol! The visit to Richmond should be a big thing in the history of our country. It stands for peace, for reconciliation, all those things that we need more of.”¹⁶⁶

Many individuals participated in the statue’s construction. Kline initially brought his idea to former mayor and then Lieutenant Governor Tim Kaine with the intent of commissioning and donating the statue to the National Park Service as a “symbol of reconciliation and unity in Richmond.”¹⁶⁷ Kaine supported the project. He stated “We claim Abraham Lincoln as a brother. We claim Abraham Lincoln as a Virginian.”¹⁶⁸ Kaine was referring to the fact that a part of Lincoln’s family was from Virginia. NPS representative Cynthia MacLeod stated the Park Service would accept the donation and place the statue at the historic Tredegar site. The USHS appointed Martin Moran as president of the society. The USHS also commissioned David Frech, a noted New York sculptor, to design the Lincoln statue and Doug Harnsberger, well known Richmond

¹⁶⁴ “History of the Lincoln Statue at Tredegar” in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶⁶ Ferguson, 25.

¹⁶⁷ “History of the Lincoln Statue at Tredegar” in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁶⁸ *Washington Post*, April 6, 2003 in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

architect/historian, to design the installation and base structure for the monument.¹⁶⁹

Prominent Lincoln historians such as Harold Holzer and Ronald C. White Jr. both supported the project as well.

The monument was funded almost completely by private sponsors. Kline orchestrated the creation of limited edition bronze miniature replicas of the larger Lincoln statue, which would sell for \$875 apiece.¹⁷⁰ The USHS received the support of the Virginia Historical Society. The society permitted mail solicitation of its membership for purchase of the Lincoln replicas and sponsored a Lincoln symposium the morning of the dedication. Richmond Renaissance, the leading downtown private economic development and promotion organization, permitted a similar solicitation of its membership. The USHS received a total of 750 private sponsors and \$45,000 from the city of Richmond, but a majority of the cost was covered by the USHS and Kline himself.¹⁷¹

The USHS created the Lincoln statue to commemorate Lincoln's historic visit to Richmond after the fall of the city at the end of the Civil War. On April 4, 1865, President Lincoln, his young son Tad, and a minimal security detail entered the still burning city of Richmond. Historian James McPherson wrote in his work *Battle Cry of Freedom* that this "produced the most unforgettable scenes of this unforgettable war."¹⁷² Lincoln entered the city not as a conqueror, but, as expressed in his Second Inaugural Address, "to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and

¹⁶⁹ "History of the Lincoln Statue at Tredegar" in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁷⁰ Ferguson, 25.

¹⁷¹ "History of the Lincoln Statue at Tredegar" in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁷² Ferguson, 26.

lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.”¹⁷³ His attitude of reconciliation was further reflected in his advice to General Weitzel while in Richmond that, “If I were in your place I would let ‘em up easy, let ‘em up easy.”¹⁷⁴ Historians suggest that out of curiosity and concern for the citizens of Richmond, Lincoln risked his safety and that of his son to visit the fallen capital. Lincoln’s secretaries John Nicolay and John Hay explained in their ten volume biography that “never in the history of the world did the head of a mighty nation enter the chief city of the insurgents in such humbleness.”¹⁷⁵

There is little that is known for certain about Lincoln’s visit to Richmond, although the symbolic importance has not gone unnoticed. It is recorded that Lincoln embarked from his ship to walk the city with his son in hand. A large group of African Americans followed Lincoln. He visited the Richmond prison, which housed Union prisoners throughout the war. Lincoln also visited the Confederate White House. It is debated whether he visited the office of Jefferson Davis, but during a visit to Confederate White House this summer, a tour guide remarked that Lincoln would not have entered Davis’ office out of respect for his former acquaintance. There were no pictures of Lincoln taken in Richmond, no magazine sketches, and the most complete eyewitness accounts are from the “embellishing and unreliable pens” of Northern newspapermen, since most Southerners had fled the capital city.¹⁷⁶ Admiral David Porter, who escorted Lincoln through Richmond, recorded the most reliable account of his visit, but it was not published until 20 years later.

¹⁷³ Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address quoted from “History of the Lincoln Statue at Tredegar” in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ Ferguson, 26.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid, 27.

Porter's memoir recounts an extraordinary interaction between Lincoln and a former slave. The blacks of the city rejoiced at the coming of their Great Emancipator. Porter recorded that Lincoln was at once spotted by an "aged Negro," who kneeled before him and exclaimed, "Bress de Lord, dere is the great messiah! He's bin in my heart fo' long years an' he's cum at las' to free his children from bondage! I know dat I am free, for I seen Father Abraham. Glory, Halelujah!"¹⁷⁷ According to Porter, Lincoln responded at length:

Don't kneel to me. That is not right. You must kneel to God only, and thank Him for the liberty you will hereafter enjoy. I am but God's humble instrument; but you may rest assured that as long as I live no one shall put a shackle on your limbs, and you shall have all the rights which God has given to every other citizen of this Republic.¹⁷⁸

Many Northern reporters recorded this conversation, but it still remains uncertain whether it is historical fact or simply an embellishment. Nevertheless, it appears that Lincoln's visit to Richmond was a celebration of emancipation and a gesture towards reconciliation.

Although the majority of accounts reflect that Lincoln came to Richmond to promote healing, currently many Confederate supporters contest the purpose of Lincoln's historic visit. The Sons of Confederate Veterans were instrumental in promoting a view of Lincoln as a conqueror, claiming that Lincoln snubbed the defeated Confederacy. Walter Ring, a white supremacist activist in Richmond, stated, "Lincoln waged war on the unarmed citizens, namely the women and children of the Confederate States of America. For this and other atrocities that Lincoln and the Union army inflicted upon the

¹⁷⁷ Quoted in "When Lincoln Returned to Richmond," *Ibid*, 27.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid*, 27.

South, I am against the placement of the Lincoln statue anywhere in Richmond."¹⁷⁹ In an email to Cynthia MacLeod, Michael Masters, a Sons of Confederate Veterans member, referred to Lincoln as a “war criminal” and alluded to Lincoln’s supposed murder of Southern citizens.¹⁸⁰ Thus, Southern supporters viewed Lincoln as coming to Richmond as a murderous conqueror, not as a benevolent healer.

The lingering Confederate sentiment in Richmond did not change the opinions of professional historians who supported the project. Lincoln historian Harold Holzer stated, “I applaud the decision to place a statue of Abraham Lincoln in Richmond as an historic symbol of unity and reconciliation.” A proposed column for the Richmond newspaper responded to the claim that Lincoln came to Richmond as a conqueror by saying that, “Indeed most reputable historians, all Lincoln scholars, know that this is false. Indeed even most Americans, even our Southern brethren, regard Lincoln as one of our greatest Presidents.”¹⁸¹ In the correspondence to USHS officials and NPS representative Cynthia MacLeod, a number of professional historians and university professors responded with letters of support for the statue.¹⁸²

Despite the controversy in Richmond over the statue, the primary purpose of creating the statue was to foster reconciliation, peace, and unity in the former Confederate capital. The USHS stated that its original intentions in erecting the statue

¹⁷⁹ “Richmond council endorse Lincoln statue as a symbol of reconciliation.” *Associated Press Newswire*, February 25, 2003.

¹⁸⁰ Proposed newspaper column in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸² Email correspondences in Richmond National Park Service Archives, Richmond, Virginia. The Park Service received hundreds of letters of support, but not nearly as many as the oppositional letters.

were that it would serve as a “symbol of reconciliation and unity in Richmond.”¹⁸³

Furthermore, the letter that the USHS sent out to prospective Richmond sponsors stated:

With his young son beside him, this magnificent statue is truly a symbol of peace and reconciliation. Lincoln did not come to Richmond as a conqueror; he grieved over what he saw. He came as a healer, a unifier, a father, a man for all the people, a quiet, unassuming visitor without fanfare.¹⁸⁴

In addition to the USHS’s intention for the statue, the monument itself promotes reconciliation. Behind the statue of President Lincoln and Tad the words “to bind up the nation’s wounds” are prominently displayed. MacLeod remarked, “That for me, conveys the whole idea. It’s about healing. How could anyone object to healing?”¹⁸⁵

Unfortunately, many Virginians felt differently. Many objected to the statue and claimed that Lincoln deserved no place in Richmond. The lead spokesman for the Sons of Confederate Veterans, Bragg Bowling, led the crusade against the placement of the Lincoln statue in Richmond. Bowling claimed it would be “a slap in the face of brave men and women who went through four years of unbelievable hell fighting an invasion of Virginia by President Lincoln,” and argued that “you don’t build statues to conquerors.”¹⁸⁶ Another member, Henry Kidd, stated that the statue is “not a good idea” because too many Virginians “wouldn’t understand.”¹⁸⁷ Perhaps if Richmond waited another 138 years, then Virginians would welcome a statue of Lincoln in their city. Despite attempts at reconciliation, many Confederate supporters refused to view Lincoln as anything but a conqueror.

¹⁸³ “History of the Lincoln Statue at Tredegar” in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁸⁴ Letter to Richmond sponsor in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁸⁵ Ferguson, 35.

¹⁸⁶ Proposed newspaper column in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid.

Confederate supporters attacked the statue on several fronts. Some objected to the statue based on deeply rooted Confederate sentiment. The *Richmond Times Dispatch* claimed that 71% of Richmond was against the Lincoln statue.¹⁸⁸ Many Confederate supporters claimed that Southern culture was under attack. *The Richmond Magazine* most clearly illustrates the oppositional sentiment in Richmond:

The boorish United States has been shoving it in the South's face for too long, with their 'New York Yankees' and their 'president of the United States' and their 'American Music Awards.' All in your face reminders to the sensitive supporters of the Confederacy of the country they've been forced to inhabit these 130 odd years... We could all live together peacefully as one United States if the North would stop doing its end zone dance at every opportunity.¹⁸⁹

Bowling was quoted in the article claiming that the Lincoln statue in Richmond was a “not so subtle reminder of who won the war.”¹⁹⁰ Others falsely accused the USHS of personally profiting from the project. The pro-Confederate sentiment fueled many Southerners to accuse the USHS of a large scam involving the Lincoln statue. Many Sons of Confederate Veterans claimed that Chairman Robert Kline was personally profiting from the statue and that the monument was just an effort to appease the African American controlled Richmond government and the African American community.¹⁹¹ These claims were never substantiated. Lastly, some objected to the statue based on their sheer hatred for Lincoln. Many compared the placement of a Lincoln statue in Richmond as equivalent to placing a statue of Hitler in Paris, or Bin Laden in New York City.

Hundreds of letters of opposition were sent to the NPS expressing that Lincoln was not

¹⁸⁸ “Lincoln’s Place in Richmond,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, September 7, 2008.

¹⁸⁹ Janet Giampietro, “Subtle with a Capital ‘S’: What is it with Richmond and statues?” *Richmond Magazine*, April 2003, 22.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁹¹ Unidentified papers in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

welcome in Richmond, that he was a “war criminal,” a communist, that he violated the Constitution, and that he was an “architect of an illegal war.”¹⁹² Letter writers preferred that the city focus on the erection of more statues to Confederate heroes.

Support for the statue was just as vehement as the opposition. American University professor Edward Smith applauded the first statue of Lincoln in the Deep South. Smith stated, “The only image of Lincoln that is seen in the 11 states that left the Union is on the five dollar bill and the penny. As long as Lincoln is viewed in the South as the invader and conqueror and not the restorer, then I don’t think the war will ever be truly over.”¹⁹³ Chairman Kline denied the accusations of the Sons of Confederate Veterans, claiming that he was actually losing money on the project. Kline reiterated to the people of Richmond, “We are not a red-neck city of the Confederate States of America. We are part of the United States.”¹⁹⁴ A newspaper column in Richmond responded to the opposition as well and re-emphasized the purpose of the statue:

It is unfortunate that installing a statue of Abraham Lincoln in Richmond, Virginia as a symbol of peace and reconciliation has become embroiled in controversy. We believe that a majority of Virginia and America will welcome and admire the statue of a famous father and son near the James River, and in the view of the skyline of Richmond...with the 200th anniversary of Lincoln’s birth coming soon, and for which there is a federally mandated commission, it is also fitting that a statue of Lincoln be placed in Richmond, the capital of one of the fifty states in this great country.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² Michael W. Masters, email to Cynthia MacLeod, January 1, 2003, in Richmond National Park Service Archives, Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁹³ Proposed newspaper column in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁹⁴ *Washington Post*, April 6, 2003.

¹⁹⁵ Proposed newspaper column in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

The *Richmond Free Press* also endorsed the statue claiming that “this public recognition of the 16th President represents a significant change in history related presentations in Richmond, where extreme bias is exhibited in the glorification of the Confederate States of America.”¹⁹⁶ The Richmond based *Opinion* most eloquently rebuked the opposition:

Protestors are hanging onto the outdated separation between the North and South. This statue shouldn't have to stand as a symbol of continued healing as supporters claim. He was our President, the country's President, and that should be reason enough. The statue should be a source of pride for everyone, not a symbol of an imaginary rift.¹⁹⁷

Although the majority of the Sons of Confederate Veterans opposed the statue, a number of members supported the Lincoln statue. Member John Kelley emailed the NPS on December 29, 2002, and stated, “Some of my fellow compatriots in the Sons of Confederate Veterans have forgotten that Abraham Lincoln was the best friend that the South ever had. I think a statue of him in Richmond is most appropriate.”¹⁹⁸ Member Neil Hanlon went as far as informing the NPS of a planned protest by the Sons of Confederate Veterans and commended the statue in an email correspondence on March 31, 2003.¹⁹⁹ Dimitri Watkins, a man of mixed African descent, begged for the statue claiming that he could not wait to see the looks on those “cracker's faces.”²⁰⁰ Watkins' sentiment illustrates that some blacks just supported the statue in efforts to oppose the dominant white history.

¹⁹⁶ *Richmond Free Press*, January 2-4, 2003.

¹⁹⁷ Jason Gaddis, *Opinion*, April 7, 2003.

¹⁹⁸ John Kelley, email to Cynthia MacLeod, December 29, 2002, in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

¹⁹⁹ Neil Hanlon, email to Cynthia MacLeod, March 31, 2003, in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

²⁰⁰ Dimitri Watkins, email to Cynthia MacLeod, January 1, 2003, in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

The morning of the dedication of the Lincoln statue, the Virginia Historical Society hosted their Lincoln symposium. Many prominent historians, government officials, and members of the USHS attended. The goal of the symposium was to counter the “Lincoln Reconsidered” conference hosted by the Sons of Confederate Veterans a few months prior. The SCV attempted to discredit Lincoln’s accomplishments by calling upon author Thomas DiLorenzo and his book, *The Real Lincoln*. DiLorenzo was the only Lincoln “scholar” recruited for the conference and his book is considered “a bit of a hatchet job” where details are “meticulously extracted from its context and then positioned to reflect as poorly on Lincoln as possible.”²⁰¹ The Lincoln symposium on the day of the dedication strongly opposed the “Lincoln Reconsidered” conference and assembled a group of prestigious Lincoln scholars, such as Harold Holzer, William Lee Miller, and Ronald C. White.

The dedication of the statue was held on April 5, 2003. Approximately 850 invited guests attended, including three former Virginia governors. The principle speaker was Robert Stanton, national head of the Park Service. Remarks were also made by then Lt. Governor Tim Kaine and by Richmond Mayor Rudy McCollum. The African American mayor expressed the need for Richmond to diversify their monuments and pull away from simply glorifying the Confederacy. McCollum concluded that the money donated by the city of Richmond was “the best \$45,000 the city has spent.”²⁰² Other speakers included park supervisor Cynthia MacLeod, Chairman Robert Kline, Ronald C. White, Harold Holzer, USHS President Martin Moran, and Alice Harris, whose grandmother was a slave, African American historian John Hope Franklin, several

²⁰¹ Ferguson, 31.

²⁰² *Washington Post*, April 6, 2003 in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

congressman, and a small number of state legislators. The theme of the day was celebrating “the second coming of Abraham Lincoln.”²⁰³

The speeches on the dedication day focused on Lincoln’s great accomplishments and his historic visit to Richmond, and reemphasized reconciliation. Former Governor A. Linwood Holton alluded to Lincoln’s Second Inaugural and asserted that Lincoln was the driving force behind preserving the Union. Holton stated that Lincoln’s preservation of the Union allowed Virginians to remain part of the “great American democracy” and that “preserved it stands as a monument to the creation and endurance of a democracy unique in history.”²⁰⁴ Moran proudly proclaimed that the statue is “already being acclaimed as one of most important and significant statues of Lincoln in the world.”²⁰⁵ Moran also noted, “We wanted Lincoln down here among the people, something more human, more approachable, something everyone could relate to.”²⁰⁶ The historians in the speaking group expanded upon Lincoln’s visit to Richmond, most notably Ronald C. White, who explained the significance of the visit in American history. Furthermore, White compared the Richmond statue with the brooding Lincoln as displayed in the Lincoln Memorial. He explained the “thoughtful, gentle Lincoln who came to Richmond”

Not as a divisive force, but as a healing presence. Lincoln has a remarkable staying power...Lincoln still speaks to us because he is strangely contemporary. Critics argue that the statue will open old wounds. Space has been left deliberately on either side of Abraham and Tad so that you and I may sit down and talk together about those wounds. Lincoln is coming to Richmond again. As you and I come,

²⁰³ Ferguson, 38.

²⁰⁴ Dedication speech manuscripts in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia.

²⁰⁵ Ibid.

²⁰⁶ Ferguson, 39.

the spirit of Lincoln depicted in the statue is encouraging us in our day to help bind up the nation's wounds.²⁰⁷

Harris also commented that the statue was a “unifying symbol in an overwhelmingly black city.”²⁰⁸ Chairman Kline simply summed up the meaning of the statue by implying “that we should love each other.”²⁰⁹

The Sons of Confederate Veterans loudly protested the statue before and during the dedication. Months prior to the dedication a commander from the SCV requested usage of a city park directly across the street from the Lincoln statue for a “picnic.” Conveniently, these 500-700 Confederate re-enactors planned to gather on the day of the dedication of the Lincoln statue. The morning of the dedication about eighty people, mostly Sons of Confederate Veterans, held a protest at the grave of Jefferson Davis in nearby Hollywood Cemetery, the site of the graves of thousands of Confederate dead.²¹⁰ Several people marched to the dedication site to chant derogatory comments. Many protestors carried signs stating pro-Confederate sentiments such as “No Honor for War Criminals,” and “Jefferson Davis was Our President,” and “Your Hero Killed Five of My Ancestors.”²¹¹ A few protestors sang “Dixie” and one man tried to enter the ceremony wearing a shirt displaying the Stars and Bars, but was prohibited from entering. As one final protest, during the dedication speeches, a plane loudly flew over the site with a banner that read “Sic Semper Tyrannis,” the words that John Wilkes Booth cried out after assassinating Lincoln.

²⁰⁷ Dedication speech manuscripts in Richmond National Park Service Archives. Richmond, Virginia

²⁰⁸ Ibid.

²⁰⁹ Ferguson, 39.

²¹⁰ Tyler-McGraw, 165.

²¹¹ Ferguson, 38.

The ceremony concluded with the unveiling of the Lincoln statue by Kline, Moran, and MacLeod. Moran made a comment about finally bringing Lincoln back to Richmond, and then unveiled the statue while a crowd erupted in cheers. The crowd engulfed the statue, each person hoping to sit down beside Lincoln and Tad for a photo. The USHS members looked on proudly. On the same day of the dedication, the Richmond City Council formally declared April 5 as “Lincoln in Richmond Day.”²¹²

Currently in Richmond, healing and reconciliation remain attractive themes for Civil War commemoration. The contrast between Richmond as a prominently African American city and as the former Confederate capital forced the city to establish cautious strategies for commemorations of the Civil War in the city. While the city of Richmond asserts a new focus on reconciliation and healing, the question remains: reconciliation for whom? Is this reconciliation aimed at making amends between North and South or between blacks and whites? The city slowly struggled to incorporate African American history into the landscape of the city, despite neo-Confederates’ emphasis on states’ rights and the superiority of the Confederacy. At the dedication of the Lincoln statue, African American history and emancipation were largely excluded, with the exception of a few selected African American speakers whose speeches were not as widely recognized.

This raises an interesting paradox: why, in an overwhelmingly African American city, is emancipation ignored? The statue of Lincoln in Richmond is certainly a great symbol of reconciliation, but Richmond does not attest to one of Lincoln’s greatest accomplishments, which is the emancipation of millions of slaves. In 2008, historian

²¹² Ferguson, 38.

Roice Luke argued that the statue should not only remind us of the war's last days, but also of "the first day of true emancipation for more than 4 million African American enslaved people" and that "the destruction of slavery and the beginning of freedom for those millions of Americans must therefore be remembered when we view that statue at Tredegar."²¹³ African American support for the statue was recorded, but specific African American responses to the Lincoln statue were conspicuously absent in any literature pertaining to the statue. Although blacks reside within the city limits of Richmond and, therefore, have come to occupy a number of city positions, it is still the wealthy, white citizens of the outskirts of Richmond who dominate the historical memory of the city. In the struggle to promote the history of the Civil War in Richmond, it is evident that the power, status, and money of the white citizens overwhelmed the efforts of the black majority.

The black city council attempted to incorporate African American history into Richmond's history, but the African American legacy of emancipation was completely ignored in the construction and dedication of the Lincoln statue. Perhaps the white elites believed that simply erecting a statue to Lincoln would promote African American history, but the location of the statue does not support the notion that white government officials desired to prominently display African American history. The statue is completely hidden from public view at Tredegar, and the Tredegar site itself is on the edge of town. The statue sits alone behind one of the larger buildings and is not easily accessible. Considering the loud protest the statue evoked, it would be expected that the

²¹³Roice D. Luke, "Lincoln's Place in Richmond should Move Out From the Shadows," *Richmond Times Dispatch*, September 7, 2008.

statue would be largely visible to the citizens of Richmond, but instead the statue remains tucked away as if the majority of citizens hope to forget that it even exists.

The location of the statue illuminates a larger controversy in Richmond. The debate over the Lincoln statue illustrates the deep bitterness that some white Southerners foster towards the loss of the Confederacy in the Civil War. Many Southerners have had difficulty coming to terms with the dissolution of the Confederacy and the role that slavery played in the Civil War. Many Confederacy supporters attempt to focus on states' rights and the valor of the Confederate army instead of accepting the legitimacy of the Union victory. A statue to the Union President Lincoln is just another reminder of defeat. The hatred towards Lincoln is not based solely on the person that he was, but rather the painful event he represents for many Southerners. This is especially true in the former Confederate capital. While the white elite population is willing to promote a certain kind of reconciliation on some level by allowing a statue to Lincoln, he still remains hidden in Richmond.

Many Civil War sites have steadily moved towards promoting an emancipationist memory of the war, yet Richmond still clings to traditional Lost Cause versions of the Civil War. In the early-to mid-twentieth century, many Civil War sites and Lincoln sites promoted solely reconciliation, but over time sites like the Lincoln Memorial and Gettysburg battlefield have incorporated an emancipationist memory of the war. While the majority of the nation focused on reconciliation decades ago, Richmond is only recently coming to terms with it, but it is clear that this reconciliation is only for whites, despite feeble attempts to incorporate the African American narrative. In 2003 Richmond finally took steps toward accepting the loss of Confederacy and focused on

reconciliation, yet emancipation remains an unexplored topic in public memory.

Pertaining to Civil War memory, Richmond has progressed in the right direction, but has a long way to go to catch up with the rest of the nation.

CONCLUSION

The way that the nation remembers the Civil War is essential to its understanding of the history of the war. Different groups have interpreted the Civil War in various ways. The white public has generally focused on the reconciliation of the North and South during most of the twentieth century. African Americans opposed the dominant narrative by promoting an emancipationist memory of the war that focused on slavery and emancipation. While both narratives are essential for understanding the history of the Civil War, these two memories appear oppositional. As David Blight has explained in *Race and Reunion*, in the struggle of Civil War memory, Americans were so concerned with reconciling the divided nation that race relations were ignored.

A study of the memory of Abraham Lincoln proves that reconciliationist and emancipationist memories can coexist. Lincoln was a central figure in the Civil War, yet Civil War memory studies have shied away from examining Lincoln. The reason for this is that historical sites have promoted strictly either the reconciliationist memory or the emancipationist memory of the Civil War. Since the memory of Lincoln illustrates that Lincoln symbolizes both reconciliation and emancipation, Lincoln proves to be an anomaly in Civil War memory. In Lincoln sites, reconciliationist memories collide with emancipationist memories and often form a more cohesive and inclusive memory of the Civil War.

Ford's Theatre, initially viewed as a place of sorrow, transformed into a sacred memorial as the memory of the theater shifted. Directly after the assassination of Lincoln, much of the American public viewed Ford's Theatre as a place of Southern betrayal. The painful memory associated with Ford's Theatre forced the American public to grieve the many sufferings of the war and come to terms with Confederate involvement in the assassination. Therefore, the public initially shunned this building, turning it into an anonymous office building. As the North and South reconciled, the attitudes of the public towards Ford's Theatre shifted. As North and South both came to appreciate Lincoln, there was a movement to restore theater to its former glory.

In the early-to mid-twentieth century, while the nation was focused on reconciliation, Ford's Theatre was reopened as an operating theater. The theater was restored to the exact appearance of the night of April 14, 1865. Both Northerners and Southerners joined in the celebration of the new theater. More importantly, the grand re-opening coincided with the Civil Rights Era. When Ford's Theatre operated during the Civil War Era, African Americans enjoyed very few rights. By the time the theater reopened, the NAACP had secured racial integration at Ford's Theatre and its doors were thrown open to blacks. African Americans joined in the racially unified celebration. Vice President Hubert Humphrey emphasized the price of freedom and the need for the nation to continue to strive for the principles Lincoln represented. In addition, the Ford's Theatre museum, through their displays and artifacts, presents a more emancipationist legacy of the Civil War. As Americans moved towards first reconciliation and then emancipationist memories, Ford's Theatre represented both competing memories of the Civil War.

The Lincoln Memorial underwent a similar transformation from a site of reconciliation to a site that represented emancipation. The government proposed the memorial to promote reconciliation and Lincoln's role as Savior of the Union. On the day of the dedication in 1922, speeches focused narrowly on sectional reconciliation and ignored Lincoln's role as the Great Emancipator. There was only one African American speaker at the dedication and his speech was ignored by the newspapers. African Americans proclaimed that the Lincoln Memorial was merely opened, but far from being properly dedicated.

During the 1939 controversy over the Marian Anderson concert, African Americans realized the potential that the Lincoln Memorial had for promoting the memory of emancipation. African Americans strategically utilized the Lincoln Memorial to hold prayer rallies and marches, which subtly promoted an emancipationist memory of Lincoln. By 1963 and King's speech in front of the Lincoln Memorial, the memory of emancipation was forever intertwined with the memory of Lincoln. Therefore, the Lincoln Memorial, while still reflecting the reconciliation of North and South, also promotes an emancipationist memory of the Civil War.

Perhaps the most controversial statue to Lincoln appeared in the former capital of the Confederacy in 2003. Richmond proposed a statue to Lincoln to promote reconciliation and healing. The Sons of Confederate Veterans protested against Lincoln's second coming to Richmond. Ironically, in an overwhelmingly African American city, emancipation was largely ignored in the dedication of the statue, proving that the local white elites of Richmond still controlled the memory of the city.

While Richmond has taken noble steps towards reconciliation by allowing Lincoln in the city, it has a ways to go to catch up with the rest of the nation. Reconciliation has been exemplified in Civil War memory. Therefore, many Civil War sites have begun to incorporate an emancipationist memory of the war in efforts to achieve a more balanced presentation. Richmond has not reached this point yet in their commemoration of the war, although in 2008 historian Roice Luke explained in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* that the Lincoln statue in Richmond should remind the public of one of Lincoln's greatest accomplishments, which was the emancipation of millions of slaves. Hopefully, in the coming years the Lincoln statue in Richmond will stand for both reconciliation and emancipation.

As we approach the sesquicentennial years of the Civil War, debates over the Civil War are once again ignited, and the ways that Americans have remembered the war are being discussed. Abraham Lincoln, as one of the key figures in the war, provides the nation with a controversial topic of debate. Perhaps the sesquicentennial of the Civil War will be a useful lesson to the nation that emancipationist legacies of the Civil War are equally as important as a strictly reconciliationist version of the war. Hopefully, the nation will be inspired by the memory of Lincoln to pursue both important legacies of the war. Currently, the debate rages over whether Civil War sites promote reconciliation and emancipation. While the former tended to dominate in the early years, the trend is shifting towards a more inclusive memory of the Civil War that recognizes the centrality of emancipation. Since memories of Abraham Lincoln can encompass both emancipationist and reconciliationist memories of the Civil War, greater emphasis on his

role in the conflict could facilitate the movement towards a more inclusive view of the past.

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