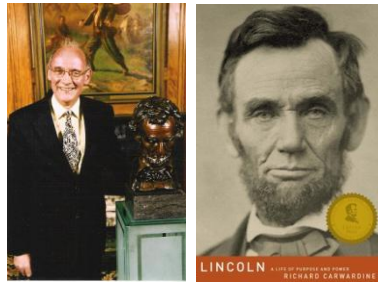


2004 LINCOLN PRIZE WINNER RICHARD CARWARDINE FOR *LINCOLN: A LIFE*
OF PURPOSE & POWER



LINCOLN PRIZE ACCEPTANCE SPEECH

In the fall of 1923 David Lloyd George, twelve months after the general election that had ended his six-year term as British Prime Minister, made a short tour of North America. Accompanied by his wife, daughters, and secretaries, he was welcomed as no British visitor before him. Ferry boats, launches and a squadron of circling aircraft saluted him as his liner, the *Mauretania*, docked in New York. A choir of Welsh-American women, dressed in the traditional costume of his homeland, sang welcoming choruses. Then, in a blizzard of ticker-tape, he was driven to City Hall to receive the Freedom of New York. As a wartime leader of “almost superhuman” character (so the *New York Times* put it), and one of the most engaging and eloquent leaders of the day, he drew huge crowds to hear him speak in over twenty cities during a month-long visit. He had lunch with President Coolidge, met the Cabinet and the Chief Justice, and had what would be his final meeting with the now-paralysed Woodrow Wilson.

Lloyd George basked in this adulation, but nothing thrilled him more than his opportunity to pay homage to the man he admired above all others: his life-long hero, Abraham Lincoln. In Kentucky he visited Lincoln’s birthplace, walked thoughtfully around the log-cabin several times, keenly examined its interior, and knelt to drink with cupped hands at the nearby stream: it was, he said, ‘a glorious day’, one of the most memorable of his life. At Oak Ridge cemetery in Springfield he paid his respects at Lincoln’s tomb. He visited

the Gettysburg battlefield. And, at a small railroad station in Vermont, he had a joyful meeting with Lincoln's son Robert, and delayed the train while they talked.

Born in the year of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, Lloyd George had grown up in Wales, in a culture shaped by radical politics and the Nonconformist religion of its myriad plain chapels. His parents' generation, and then his own, were inspired by the events of the American Civil War, Lincoln's defence of democratic republicanism, and the freeing of the slaves. The more than thirty thousand Welsh people in the United States in 1861 had been overwhelmingly loyal to the Union. They flocked to its armies: to the 23rd Wisconsin, the 14th Vermont, the 56th Ohio, the 146th New York, and other regiments.

Reports of their exploits quickly found their way by letter and newspaper back to Wales itself – to country where the nonconformist conscience saw God at work in the Union cause; where the Welsh translations of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* enjoyed astonishing success; and where even Jefferson Davis's Welsh roots did little to change the low esteem in which the Confederate President was held.

Lloyd George's world of Liberal politics and vigorous nonconformist chapels was in retreat when I was a boy growing up in the South Wales coal-mining valleys in the 1950s and 1960s, but it was certainly not forgotten. You could still hear the boast, not entirely in jest, that 'Lloyd George knew my father'. (That was certainly the truthful claim of my grandmother, whose own father, a local Liberal Party luminary, played host to 'LG'.) Preachers, Sunday school teachers, and the book prizes they distributed to children for steady attendance, aimed to keep the Protestant conscience in good working order. America remained an influential point of reference, connected to Wales by continuing, if weakening, ties of blood and family.

All this helps suggest how an Oxford undergraduate from the Welsh valleys came to take an interest in America and her past. But it does not explain how I discovered a particular interest in the Civil War era and in Lincoln. After all, in Oxford that name is more commonly associated with a college founded by an early fifteenth-century bishop than with the sixteenth president of the United States. But there were a couple of courses in American history on

offer to students, one of them on the coming of the Civil War, ‘Slavery and Secession’. This was brilliantly taught by a handful of gifted amateurs each year reinforced by a visiting specialist from the United States, the Harmsworth Professor. And at that particular time, when I was sizing up ‘slavery and secession’, the visiting Harmsworth was none other than Don Fehrenbacher. You will not be surprised that I found *Prelude to Greatness*, his book on Lincoln’s political career before the presidency, both a revelation and an inspiration.

Thus began my career-long love of American history, and especially of the scholarship on the Civil War era. After teaching the subject for thirty happy years at the University of Sheffield, I now find myself introducing it to new generations of students back in Oxford. Yet I certainly did not set out on this career expecting to become a biographer of Abraham Lincoln, or even a specialist on the Civil War. In fact, when Don Fehrenbacher interviewed me for the graduate scholarship that would take me for a year to the University of California at Berkeley in 1969, he proposed the antebellum theatre as a promising field of study: this was a kind and imaginative suggestion, since he knew I had led a double life as a stage-struck student, one which included an appearance with Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor in a movie that makes a plausible claim to topping the list of the ten worst films ever made. In the event, I focussed my graduate study on nineteenth-century antislavery reformers and their transatlantic networks. But it did not take long, under the gentle prodding of my supervisor (a wise, generous and saintly scholar of evangelicalism, John Walsh), to see that there could be no real comprehending of the world of these reformers – their beliefs, their institutions, their followers, and their political efforts – without understanding their religion.

Over many years, both as a student and as university teacher, I count myself fortunate to have shared the intellectual company of some outstanding European historians who have taken religion seriously. They have seen the power of religious ideas to mobilise men and women – whether Medieval Cathars, or Elizabethan Puritans, or Victorian Nonconformists – into individual and collective action. My own work on Protestant evangelicals in the early and mid-nineteenth century shares this understanding: my obese book, *Evangelicals and*

Politics in Antebellum America, showed how evangelicals played an important role in bringing the nation to the verge of war.

The route from studying evangelical Protestants to writing a biography of Lincoln, who wasn't one, may not seem obvious, but there is a logic to it. One of the aims of my book is to explore Lincoln's ethical thought, and to show the tenacity with which he stuck to his convictions: his meritocratic faith; his belief that no one's opportunities for self-improvement should be limited by their class, religious beliefs or ethnicity; his repugnance for slavery as a system that denied men their chance of moral and economic self-fashioning; his unwavering commitment to a Union freighted with moral value, as a democratic-republican model for the world; and his dutiful determination that the Union should not be lost on his watch. Lincoln's moral understanding of the uses and burdens of power was not founded on a conventional Christian faith. But the evolution of his religious thought, and its deepening during the war, his Calvinistic frame of reference, and the ease with which he rooted his arguments in scripture, make it essential to take his religion more seriously than he himself took the frontier revivalists whose over-exuberant stump sermons he mocked as a young man.

A second purpose is to show how Lincoln derived much of his power from his relationship with evangelical Protestantism. Mainstream evangelicals did much to shape the mass politics that reached their maturity at about the same time that Lincoln arrived at his. In pre-war Illinois, as elsewhere, the lines of party political division commonly coincided with religious and ethnic ones. Alert to the influence of religious opinion, Lincoln's appeal offered a blend of Protestant conscience and Enlightenment rationalism. The orthodox Protestantism which sustained the Republican party and much of the wartime Union coalition, and which flourished in New England and its diaspora, was not Lincoln's religion. But he shrewdly harnessed its power, first to win the presidency and then to rally support behind the war's purposes.

The pre-war Lincoln who was adept at political management and who brilliantly positioned himself for the Republican nomination in 1860, and the wartime president who strove to sustain patriotism and mobilise it through his party, the army, and the religious-

humanitarian agencies, does not easily square with the picture of a president passively controlled by events. The Lincoln I recognise is an active and, in important strategic respects, a decisive figure, one able to see the bigger picture, and wise enough to know how far to bow to larger forces, without losing all room for manoeuvre. He was ambitious, enterprising, and determined. Even those who made much of his fatalistic trait denied that this meant a blind belief in destiny. Moreover, as Joseph Gillespie observed, Lincoln yoked to his faith in predestined *ends* a belief in foreordained *instrumentality*, 'and therefore he was extremely diligent in the use of means.'

This was the Lincoln who told a law student seeking advice: 'Work, work, work, is the main thing.' Historians know that in this respect what is true for lawyers is no less true for themselves. But if studying Abraham Lincoln has involved hard work, it has brought profound rewards, too. I venture that there is no historical figure of any time or place in whose company an historian can take greater pleasure. Equally, there can be no richer collection of scholarly writings than those available to the Lincoln biographer, many of them the work of the historians here tonight, including previous Lincoln prize winners: mostly historians write as individuals, but our work is impossible without the assembled scholarship of others. To you I offer my thanks. I regret only, but deeply, that two people whose work I have found a continuing inspiration, have not lived to be here to share my pleasure: Bill Gienapp, friend of over thirty years, and Peter Parish, Britain's finest historian of the Civil War.

Above all, I am conscious of the extraordinary honour of the Lincoln Prize. I remain in a state of some disbelief that I should be standing here in receipt of this most distinguished of awards, the foremost prize in nineteenth-century American history. I hope you will understand my pride in receiving an award that this year reflects on the maturity of American historical scholarship in Britain. Most of all, however, I feel a deep sense of gratitude to the founders of the prize, Richard Gilder and Lewis Lehrman, to the Board of Trustees and its Chairman, Gabor Boritt, to the Prize Jury, and to the Lincoln and Soldiers Institute at

Gettysburg College. I offer my heartfelt thanks for this Prize and for this occasion. This seems the appropriate moment to repeat those words of Lloyd George, that other son of Wales: this is 'a glorious day', one of the most memorable of my life.