

Political Leadership, Ethics and Humor

I. Preamble: horizontal and vertical conceptions of Leadership

“Horizontal Leadership”

- The global impulse for individual liberty and human equality is sweeping through all social and political structures;
- There is, understandably, an increasing tendency to democratize our notion of leadership and separate it from established social structures, formal roles and political authority;
- Leadership is now increasingly conceived in horizontal rather than vertical terms;
- Leadership is encouraged and recognized everywhere in the body politic -- wherever there is initiative, knowledge, verve and personal responsibility for the common good;
- Leadership, being horizontal or longitudinal, is thus viewed as co-operative, extensive and inclusive rather than hierarchical, concentrated and exclusive;
- The new Aquarian leader reaches out rather than reaches down, walks beside those he or she leads rather than walks ahead;
- In this egalitarian inspired view, leadership is not to be understood in terms of a static pyramid that funnels energy and initiative from the apex downward toward a passive base;
- true leadership does not delegate from the Olympian stratosphere to those mortals toiling in the biosphere;
- In the compelling imagery of Emerson, the potent lateral motion of the new global leader generates expanding concentric circles that eventually inspire benevolent initiatives in other committed pioneers across hemispheres;

“Vertical Leadership”

- Despite this rich, emerging conception of horizontal leadership, we might still ask the question: “Is there a meaningful place for the vertical dimension of leadership, for the latitudinal that reaches from North to South as it were and not just from East to West?”
- Is political leadership still morally and socially viable and can it accommodate the emerging, freer, more vibrant notion of “egalitarian leadership” -- a non-structured concept of leadership that embraces the immense human potential of *man qua man* to initiate and excel in any and every sphere of life?

- The answer is clearly, “yes”. Hierarchical notions of leadership are still important since they are built into the very logic of civil society; neither families, schools, businesses, military organizations nor political institutions can avoid centralized leadership and stratified responsibilities; (I am using leadership and authority interchangeably.)
- The contemporary search for viable models of political leadership that combine the vertical and the horizontal dimensions is challenging; it is a quest for an anti-entropic, perpetually self-validating modality of leadership that focuses enthusiasm within formal laws and encourages emulation without demanding adulation;
- In scanning the contemporary political world, we might at times feel like aspiring portrait painters without, alas, a worthy, living subject to paint – one whose colors do not continually change like the chameleon, always adapting himself to his surroundings for self-protection;
- Whether we find worthy contemporary political leaders or not, what is eminently clear is that the 16th President of America, Abraham Lincoln, was a political leader who embodied many of the desirable qualities of a true, democratic leader;
- Lincoln brought together the vertical and the horizontal dimensions of leadership in his own unique way – one that is worthy not only our admiration but, much more importantly, of our continued study;
- As Robert Hutchings once remarked, “the classical is that which is always contemporary.” Lincoln is “classical” and thus a political beacon in a stormy, over-politicized age in desperate search of a pole star to guide it to safe harbor.
- Evidence of Lincoln’s stellar qualities will be presented today by drawing extensively from the seminal investigations of two prominent scholars of Lincoln: William Lee Miller and Donald Phillips. Both have given considerable thought to Lincoln as a political leader and the role of his ethics in actualizing his political vision;
- William Lee Miller was a long-time professor at the University of Virginia. He passed away this year at the age of 86 after completing his final work on Lincoln: *President Lincoln: The Duty of a Statesman*. He was a graduate of Yale Divinity School and focused on ethics, religion and politics in 19th Century America. He was also a speech writer for Adlai Stevenson’s presidential bid in 1956. We will draw today from his penultimate study of Lincoln, entitled: *Lincoln’s Virtues: An Ethical Biography*;
- Donald T. Phillips is an author of numerous books on leadership in politics and sports – ranging from the founding Fathers to Phil Michelson, the golfer. He has

presented leadership seminars in almost every governmental department from Homeland Security to the Dept. of Commerce. He is also a former manager-executive for various Internet Technology companies. Lincoln figures prominently in his discussions of the essential qualities of leadership;

II. Lincoln's Leadership qualities

- The quintessential virtues of Lincoln as a political leader were many: i) he was a visionary, one who had a steady vision of what America stood for – more specifically, the sacred principles of individual liberty and human equality, ii) he was a man whose thinking was guided by those principles in realms political and personal, iii) he was adept at relating principles to particulars – marrying universal principles to unique and often volatile social and political circumstances, iv) he was highly intelligent and also possessed a marvelous memory, v) he was morally and politically courageous, vi) he was deeply sympathetic to human injustice and human suffering, vii) he had a rich and powerful moral imagination, viii) he was supremely self-confident but equally humble before the sobering demands of necessity, ix) he was unswervingly resolute once he saw the moral or practical necessity for decisive action, x) he was invariably trustworthy and trusting of friends and subordinates to a fault, xi) he was self-critical in his political as well as in his personal life, xii) he was magnanimous and without malice to his opponents and enemies; xiii) most importantly perhaps, he was so gregarious and inclusive in temperament that his sparkling virtues were contagious – they infused others with the feeling that they could emulate if not surpass him in the exercise of their own responsibilities;
- We might also say that Lincoln had a high intuitive I.Q. He was gifted with penetrating insight into human nature and human circumstance and this made him easy to admire by the many but hard for the few to emulate;
- Now, a caution. The sublime portrait that we have just painted of Lincoln's intellectual, moral and social virtues is like a classical painting: it is beautiful, proportional and pleasant to look at;
- However, no sitting portrait of an individual is complete; as an abstraction that paints a person in a certain fixed pose, it ignores the complexities that make a living human being both interesting, instructive and enigmatic;
- Lincoln had his share of flaws: a touch of political ambition, inherited cultural prejudices, educational limitations and the like;

- But, he is a heroic leader because he was aware of most of his limitations and, instead of ignoring them or, worse, rationalizing them, he eventually mastered and transmuted many of them for the sake of the great cause and vision that he felt he was born to serve; namely, restoring the moral conscience of a nation and ensuring its continued ability to inspire nations seeking to throw off the shackles of tyranny.

III. Lincoln's native culture and his rather unique personal qualities

- Lincoln grew up and lived in the, then, western frontier. He was born in Kentucky, a slave state, lived in Indiana during his teenage years, and spent his adult life in Illinois – technically a “free state” but with the strictest Black Codes imaginable;
- The principal demographic of Illinois was that it was composed principally of immigrants from Southern slaveholding states;
- To many prominent members of the Eastern intellectual establishment, Illinois was culturally crude and educationally backward;
- Despite this cultural matrix, what does William Lee Miller tell us about Lincoln as a young man of twenty one:
 “In a society of hunters, Lincoln did not hunt; where many males shot rifles, Lincoln did not shoot; among fishermen, Lincoln did not fish; among many who were cruel to animals, Lincoln was kind; ...in a frontier village preoccupied with physical tasks, Lincoln avoided manual labor; in a world in which men smoked and chewed tobacco, Lincoln never used tobacco; in a rough, profane world, Lincoln did not swear; in a social world in which fighting was a regular male activity, Lincoln became a peacemaker; in a hard-drinking society, Lincoln did not drink; when a temperance movement condemned all drinking, Lincoln the non-drinker did not join it; in an environment soaked in hostilities to Indians, Lincoln resisted it; ...surrounded by democrats, Lincoln became a Whig; in a political party (Whig) with a strong nativist undercurrent, Lincoln rejected that prejudice; in a Southern flavored setting soft on slavery, Lincoln always opposed it; in a white world with strong racial antipathies, Lincoln was generous to blacks; in an environment indifferent to education, Lincoln cared about it intensely; in a family active in a church, young Lincoln abstained; when evangelical Christianity permeated the western frontier, Lincoln raised questions – and gave different answers than his neighbors.” *Lincoln's Virtues*, pgs. 45 –46;
- Clearly, Lincoln was intellectually and morally individuated to a high degree *vis a vis* his local culture;

IV. Lincoln 's Fundamental philosophic beliefs

- Lincoln's over-riding views on God, the world and human nature are helpful in understanding him. I have culled these views from various writings and, while incomplete, are nonetheless helpful to consider : 1) God exists, is innately just, impartial and benevolent but we cannot claim to know His will, 2) the teachings of Jesus are rooted in truth and are meant to guide us in our decisions; 3) it is left up to each man and woman to apply Jesus' teachings in every sphere of life, 4) there is a continual battle between good and evil, right and wrong taking place in the world at large and it calls upon us to continually choose one or the other; 5) all human beings have an innate sense of justice and a more or less latent fund of human sympathy, 6) all human beings also have a propensity toward selfishness and their own self-interest, 7) our life-philosophy, our local culture and our inherited traits can heavily influence our choice of good and evil, 8) all human action, therefore, is a mixture of good and evil and it is incumbent upon citizens and politicians alike to conscientiously maximize the good in their choices and actions and to reduce the evil;

V. Lincoln's Politics: the ethics of responsibility -- balancing principles, circumstances and consequences

- As Miller points out, Lincoln was a consummate politician – fervently devoted to fundamental party principles, loyal to rightly established policies and adept in dealing with others within and without the party;
- Yet, in critical situations, Lincoln could rise above the feudal nature of political parties and put parapolitical principles above party and self;
- Most of the time -- as Lincoln sagaciously understood -- politics deals with the “art of the compromise” and does not call for strong ideological stands or righteous rhetoric;
- responsible politics is the conscientious effort to determine laws and policies that take into account fundamental principles as well as calculated consequences for the whole;
- Moral and political principles give one the direction of the common good, but the application of accepted principles in creating laws and policies must be viewed within the context of complex dynamic particulars;

- In politics, “particulars” include the views and interests of others without -- as well as within -- the political arena; this often calls for intelligent, conscientious compromise;
- Lincoln’s “moral and political realism” – the recognition of the compelling need to account for and to harmonize particulars -- often brought him into conflict with people who shared his moral convictions and humanitarian principles but not his understanding of either human nature or of the suffering necessary for social growth;
- In this respect, Lincoln had issues with most religious reformers and with many Abolitionist groups and Abolitionist politicians as well;
- As Miller cogently notes, Lincoln felt that social reformers and anti-slavery abolitionists unnecessarily wrapped themselves in moral abstractions and consequently ignored

the concrete moral and political forces that created and sustained painful social maladies;

- For example, the strong tendency among many religious reformers and Abolitionists was to try and “convince” the South to reform itself; this often took the form of harsh public criticism which dramatically pointed out the faults and egregious sins of slave holding states;
- In Lincoln’s view, many sincere moral and political reformers missed the mark in several unfortunate ways;
- Lincoln readily agreed that most religious reformers and abolitionist politicians were “facing Zion” – their moral and political compass was pointing in the right moral and social direction;
- However, Lincoln felt that their arguments and rhetoric were all too often moralistic, simplistic and pervaded by an exaggerated sense of moral superiority;
- For the most part, the anti-slavery spokesmen lectured, chastised and called upon the South to reform itself and to give up its slaves; but, in its appeal, its rhetoric was often peppered with stories and instances of abuse and violence that, while true, only served to demonize all Southerners and to create the false impression that the anti-slavery North was without sin on this matter;
- Many anti-slavery advocates believed that God, law and right were on their side and that the Southern slave holding states were Godless and evil;
- Reformers and critics of slavery ignored the effects of their “sermons” on those they verbally attacked – whether speaking in the pulpit or in the halls of Congress;
- As Miller points out, critics of slavery were eventually speaking only to themselves and preaching to the choir; the South was not listening;

- Lincoln felt that it is clearly heroic to stand up for a principle but foolish to believe that you can chastise the South into self-reform by telling them how sinful and evil they are;
- In a word, the anti-slavery people that Lincoln admired -- but nonetheless distanced himself from -- embraced a separatist morality and were therefore rarely self-critical; they were rather unwilling to seek out and cultivate the good in their opponents -- even if the latter led to no immediate, desirable result;
- Lincoln believed that the whole self-righteous approach was unrealistic, naively simplistic and a misreading of human nature;
- Because of this, there was a tragic misapprehension of the depth of the evil of slavery;
- Slavery was a deeply rooted, historically insulated institution that was the result of the coalescence of selfishness, economics and a cultural way of life;
- How could the Southern people not be attached to slavery?
- Lincoln's perspective and analysis of slavery were decidedly different from many sincere thinkers and reformers;
- At the philosophical lever, Lincoln argued what we might now call a "unitary morality"; that is, Lincoln believed that true moral discourse should attempt to unite and harmonize us in our differences, not to divide and further separate us;
- We show our humanity not just by virtue of the moral principles we espouse, but by virtue of our humane application of them in our variegated relationships;
- The humane integration on principle and practice, of policy and community needs, calls for courage, moral imagination and wisdom – the ability to fearlessly visualize a just solution to tense and destructive human situations – a solution that is not the captive of time and thus is liable to be more concerned with being timely and suitable to the occasion;
- According to Lincoln, we are true leaders when we marry principles to people in such a way that everyone is potentially elevated and healed, chastised and renewed;
- How did Lincoln apply his "unitary moral philosophy" to the actual presence in the South? What did he say to the Abolitionists and the social reformers? What cautions did he raise?:1) The Southern people are as we would be had we been born in the South and they would be as we are had they been born in the North, 2) the Southern people have just as much a sense of justice and human sympathy as we have: the South joined with the North in ending international slave trade before its constitutional deadline, the South joined with the North in making slave trading a treasonous offense punishable by hanging, the South voluntarily freed up to 400, 000 slaves from 1787 to 1854, 3) the South did not originate slavery as slavery also existed in the North for a short period of time; 4) slavery is a national problem – not just a Southern one -- and we are all responsible in some way for contributing to its existence, e.g., Boston and New York City built most slave ships; 5) all moral and social reform must ultimately be voluntary

and the South cannot be bullied into giving up an entire culture over-night, 6) to excessively criticize the South is to increase their sense of self-justification and is guaranteed to isolate them further, 7) we must not be impatient or cynical since slavery, a monstrous evil, must either be voluntarily renounced or will eventually collapse out of its own dead weight, 8) the central obstacle in any meaningful dialogue with the South over the issue of slavery thus lies on two fronts: first, the obstacle in the North is our false belief that we are morally superior and this leads to self-righteousness and impatience; secondly, the obstacle in the South is equally serious in that it is the peculiar, moral-psychological defect of giving moral justification for an evil act, i.e., that slavery is right and can be rationally and morally justified, 9) the latter obstacle in the mind and will of the South is all the more difficult to overcome because any moral justification for evident evil perverts the intellectual principle and thus makes it extremely difficult for others to convince evil doers that their way of life is wrong;

- (Lincoln recognized the need for positive alternatives, and while he proposed them, they were doomed to failure for the very reasons he cited – a rooted evil cannot be overcome easily, without pain and suffering and without voluntary commitment;)
- According to Miller, Lincoln made the above argument repeatedly in various forms over a number of years;
- Lincoln became a polished speaker on the slavery issue and eventually debated the most powerful politician in Washington, Stephen Douglas, Illinois's eminent senator;
- Douglas was a fearless orator who bullied and terrorized many an Abolitionist politician in the Senate; he was also the chairman of the powerful Senate committee that determined Congressional policy over new territories and those seeking statehood;
- Lincoln, challenged Douglas when the latter was up for re-election to the Senate in 1858; as we know, Lincoln was defeated in the Illinois legislature by a slim margin (the state legislatures chose senators in Lincoln's time);
- After his debates with Douglas in 1858, Lincoln saw to the publication of the debates and was subsequently invited to speak before the "educated elite" of New York in 1860 – several months before he was unexpectedly nominated for the presidency of the Republican Party;
- Lincoln's ability to think through political issues in terms of their core principles, to draw out the implications for theory and for practice, his conscientiousness and truthfulness in presenting facts were a marvel. Furthermore, his very presence seemed to elevate the whole occasion and affect his audience in unusual ways. None more so than on this occasion when he spoke before the "mental culture" of New York in 1860. To quote Miller again:

"One who was there described his own initial transformed response (to Lincoln) as follows: "When Lincoln rose to speak, I was greatly disappointed. He was tall, tall – oh,

how tall! and so angular and awkward that I had, for an instant, a feeling of pity for so ungainly a man.” But then as Lincoln developed his speech, this member of the audience ... said of him: “His face lighted up as with an inward fire; the whole man was transfigured. I forgot his clothes, his personal appearance, and his individual peculiarities. Presently, forgetting myself, I was on my feet like the rest, yelling like a wild Indian, cheering this wonderful man.” *Lincoln’s Virtues*, pg. 10.

VI. The Lincoln – Douglas Debates: Restoring the American Promise and Awakening America’s Conscience

- Let us, with Miller, look at the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858 for a moment;
- Lincoln knew that the debates were being recorded by major state and national newspapers – due to Douglas’s presence and the slavery issue, not because of Lincoln;
- Lincoln’s speeches were flavored with the Socratic in that they raised pertinent questions, made telling distinctions, pointed to underlying principles, followed out their implications and were peppered with wry humor;
- Furthermore, unlike Douglas who excelled in *ad hominem* arguments, appealed to racial prejudices and stirred up irrational fears, Lincoln was respectful, refused to make personal criticisms, avoided pandering to the standing prejudices of his audience and conscientiously sought to elevate each occasion as much as possible into the plateau of foundational principles as they related to the issue at hand;
- Lincoln was “Socratic” in the further sense that he was concerned with peeling off layers of misconceptions and misperceptions that were deeply rooted in the public mind over the slavery issue and its extension;
- Through the prism of the nationally-followed debates, Lincoln wished to clean the occluded mental lens of the American mind and restore its fecund principles of individual liberty and human equality expressed most transparently in the Declaration of Independence;
- Lincoln believed that to articulate such principles lucidly, relevantly and imaginatively would help to influence public sentiment and restore the forgotten Revolutionary conscience of the Republic;
- Lincoln sought to ignite a mental chemistry that would alchemize the public psyche and help to reverse the accelerating momentum of pro-slavery forces;
- Politically speaking, if the Kansas-Nebraska bill of 1854 (that allowed new states to choose slavery by popular election) was allowed to go into effect it would lead in time to more slave states and that occurrence would, in turn, inevitably increase the strength of the Southern vote in Congress;

- The potential proliferation of slave states would then go against universal morality, the essential principles of the Declaration of Independence and the expressed intent of the primary framers of the Constitution;
- Ethically speaking, Lincoln believed that the spread of “popular sovereignty” *vis a vis* the extension of slavery was not morally compatible with the principle of “every man being created equal”;
- America ultimately stands for equality as well as for individual liberty and to not see their reciprocal relationship is to ignore both justice and what America represents before the world;
- Lincoln argued that while slavery was a necessary constitutional compromise, it should not be allowed to expand;
- In this sense, Lincoln believed that the collective good can at times be embodied in a negative act; that is, the repeal of the Kansas-Nebraska bill would prevent moral retrogression – a further decline into slavery;
- Put another way, Lincoln was saying that we need to be uncompromisingly clear about the principles at stake (liberty and equality) even if our application of them is very narrow and limited for the time being, i.e., preventing the extension of slavery in newly created states;
- Finally, Lincoln saw the slavery issue in global terms; he saw it in terms of the democratic aspirations of peoples everywhere and believed that it was imperative that America not appear to support slavery even if it inherited it due to complex historical circumstances;

VII. Lincoln as President: Lord Acton’s Principle in Reverse

- Lincoln as president assumed never-before-used war time powers, and, by the time he was assassinated he had redefined and expanded the office of the Presidency as well as reorganized the U.S. military and made it into a more cohesive instrument of the federal government;
- Prior to Lincoln, the Congress was the primary political power; but after Lincoln, political focus shifted to the office of the President;
- Despite Lincoln’s self-assumed, war-time powers, he exercised them all with utmost solicitousness; he also sought and received Congressional approval for all Presidential initiatives that exceeded previous interpretations of presidential powers;
- Miller makes the brilliant observation that Lincoln was the embodiment of Lord Acton’s principle in reverse: According to Lord Acton, “Power corrupts. Absolute power corrupts absolutely.”

- The more power and authority that was vested in Lincoln -- or that he deliberately assumed to deal with the insurrection -- the more circumspect, resolute and responsible he became;
- Lincoln, it seems, was all but immune to the intoxications of political power and he repeatedly set aside his own personal views, feelings and opportunities for the sake of the greater good of preserving the Union and – after the Emancipation Proclamation -- of abolishing slavery;
- We see his ability to handle power and authority in the way he exercised his leadership.
- Lincoln’s Presidential leadership was characterized by his ability to skillfully relate to all his subordinates in creative ways;
- In his book, *Lincoln Stories for Leaders*, Donald Phillips sets out in simple but helpful language many of Lincoln’s effective leadership modalities. For example, Phillips notes the following practices: i) the White House was an open door to all visitors; ii) cabinet ministers were invited to take the initiative and they learned that Lincoln would never chastise them if they made honest mistakes but would certainly step in if they refused to admit errors and to correct them, iii) authority was continually delegated to various subordinates, but always with discretion and with an eye to the deserving, iv) cabinet meetings were “free wheeling” and usually conducted with Lincoln as simply “the first among equals”, v) Lincoln continually mixed and mingled with his staff, his generals and the troops; vi) Lincoln, was resolute, firm and wholeheartedly committed to staying true to his oath of office and exceedingly adept at helping others to share that responsibility with him;

VIII. Lincoln’s gregariousness, the importance of story-telling and the therapeutics of humor

- Lincoln’s effect on people – strangers, friends, allies and foes alike was remarkable -
- to quote Donald Phillips:
“Carl Shurz, a Republican contemporary of Lincoln, and later a Union general, recounted his first meeting with the future president. ‘All at once, after the train had left a way station, I observed a great commotion among my fellow passengers, many of whom jumped from their seats and pressed eagerly around a tall man who had just entered the car. They addressed him in the most familiar style: “Hello, Abe! How are you?” and so on. And he responded in the same manner: “Good evening Ben! How are you, Joe?” ...And there was much laughter at some things he said, which in the confusion of voices I could not understand. “Why,” exclaimed my companion,

the committee man, “there’s Lincoln, himself!” He pressed through the crowd and introduced me to Abraham Lincoln, whom I then saw for the first time...He (Lincoln) received me with an offhand cordiality, like an old acquaintance...and we sat down together. In a somewhat high pitched but pleasant voice...he talked in so simple and familiar a strain, and his manner and homely phrases were so absolutely free from any semblance of self-consciousness or pretension of superiority that I soon felt as if I had known him all my life, and we had very long been close friends. He interspersed our conversation with all sorts of quaint stories, each of which had a witty point applicable to the subject in hand and not seldom concluded an argument in such a manner that nothing more was to be said.” *Lincoln Stories for Leaders*, Donald Phillips, pg. xiii;

- Because of his remarkable memory, Lincoln was a virtual encyclopedia of stories, poems, anecdotes and jokes; (he once said that he had a mind like iron, difficult to scratch, but once scratched could not be easily removed);
- He was not only gifted at telling stories but as the above quote shows, deliberately used stories as a substitute for reasoned discussion or tedious argument;
- Even his fierce political opponent, Senator Steven Douglas, admitted this during their debates of 1858 when he said: “Every one of his (Lincoln’s) stories seems like a whack upon my back....Nothing else, not any of his arguments or any of his replies to my questions, disturbs me. But when he begins to tell a story, I feel that I am to be over-matched.” *Ibid*, pg xvi;
- To illustrate Douglas’ lament, there is the story of Lincoln’s meeting with a group of concerned politicians from out West when he was President. No sooner had these Western politicians entered the president’s office than they began to criticize his administration’s policies in every direction – and that for several minutes. Finally, Lincoln held up his hand and signaled for silence. He then commented: “Gentlemen, suppose all the property you were worth was in gold, and this you had placed in the hands of a man to carry across the Niagara River on a rope. Would you shake the cable and keep shouting at him: ‘Stand up a little straighter, stoop a little more, go a little faster, go a little slower, lean a little more to the south?’ No, you would hold your breath as well as your tongue and keep your hands off until he got safely over.
The government is carrying an enormous weight. Untold treasure is in our hands. Don’t badger us. Keep silent and we will get you safely across.” (*Ibid*, pgs. 8-9)
Needless to say, the politicians nodded politely and left his office in silence.
- Wit as well as illustrative stories was also used to good effect by Lincoln. On one occasion, during one the senate debates with Senator Douglas in a heavily pro-slavery district of Illinois, Douglas accused Lincoln of being “two-faced”. Most of the crowd

booed and shouted colorful epithets at Lincoln. When Lincoln rose to speak he referred to Douglas's remark about his being "two-faced". He then said that he would leave it up to the audience to decide whether he was "two-faced" or not. Lincoln paused, looked directly at the audience and said: "Do you really believe, my fellow citizens, that if I had two faces that I would be wearing this one?" The audience roared with laughter and shouted that "that was a good one Abe". It eased the tension, dispelled animosity and created a better atmosphere for Lincoln to make his case.

- Lincoln also told jokes against himself. For example, he delighted in telling the following conversation between two Quaker women overheard while traveling on a train. The brief conversation went as follows:

"I think Jefferson Davis (Confederate President) will succeed", said the first Quaker woman.

"Why does thee think so?" asked the second.

"Because Jefferson Davis is a praying man." replied the first.

"And so is Abraham a praying man." rejoined the second.

"Yes, but the Lord will think that Abraham is joking."

- Clearly, wit and wisdom were naturally fused in Lincoln's mind and he used it to great effect in the exercise of his leadership responsibilities and in coping with the terrible decisions he faced.

IX. Lincoln as Wise Statesman:

- Lincoln was really a statesman: a wise manager of men and women as Plato would say;
- To the thoughtful student of political leadership, the qualities of statesmanship seem to consist of incompatible psychological mixtures. A true leader embodies opposites and yet synthesizes them. Perhaps, this is because, as Plato notes, a statesman has high powers of discretion. That is, a real leader is capable of being firm as well as flexible, merciful as well as just, active as well as patient, courageous as well as long-suffering. However, it is his power of discrimination that "activates" which quality, state of mind and action is best suited to the particulars of the occasion.
- As Plato said in his dialogue *The Statesman*, we lesser mortals can only follow the rules the true statesman lays down. The true statesman, himself, is really inimitable; he is, paradoxically, the only one who can break his own rules since the wisdom of a statesman is ever-fresh and evolving as the situation demands. Thus, no general rules – even of the wise --can be made to cover all possible circumstances;

- In closing, I will simply quote William Lee Miller in his latest -- and last -- marvelous book on Lincoln entitled, *President Lincoln: the Duty of a Statesman*:
“The eminent scholar of international relations Hans Morgenthau, after a career in Europe and the United States that spanned most of the twentieth century, may have startled some of his students with his choice toward the end of his life of an exemplary statesman: not Bismarck or any other European possibility, and not Thucydides or any other classical figure, but Abraham Lincoln.”
- Why? Because Lincoln artfully wove together the vertical and the horizontal threads of leadership with consummate skill and compassion.
- In this sense, Lincoln is indeed a study “for the ages”.

James Tepfer

Institute of World Culture