

Abraham Lincoln's Leibnizian Second Inaugural Address

by David Shavin

Earlier this month, we celebrated the 150th birthday of Abraham Lincoln's masterpiece of statecraft, his Second Inaugural Address. On March 4, 1865, near the eagerly anticipated end of the most bloody carnage in American history, the poet-statesman Lincoln struck a remarkable note:

... Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh" [Matthew 18:7]. If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine

attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether" [Psalm 19:9]....

Near the end of four years of bloody horror, could he make sense somehow of all the pain, toil, blood, and sacrifice? For Lincoln, there could be no cheering, no mere celebration. But why not just take credit for the great accomplishment and bank it as "political capital"? Why not "strike a deal" with the population—patting all the victors on the back, while tacitly allowing them some sort of "return to normalcy"?

Lincoln knew that the American people, who had risen to take up an historic mission, needed a nation with an equally elevated mission following the war, one which was determined to fulfill the promise of 1776. These larger issues left unaddressed, it were inevitable that a hardened, embittered view of God would set in. And Lincoln was determined that a great moment in



In Lincoln's "masterpiece of statecraft," his Second Inaugural Address, he sought "to bind up the nation's wounds." Just weeks later, on April 14, Lincoln was fatally shot, and died the next day. Here, Lincoln can be seen at the center of the photo, delivering the Inaugural, while his assassin, John Wilkes Booth, appears on the balcony above.

history not find a little people.¹ Rather, Lincoln's bold intention was that humanity change itself *permanently* for the better. He had introduced this theme at Gettysburg in 1863, with his classical inversion: "It is, for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here. . . ." Indeed, there is no proper dialogue with those who "gave their last full measure of devotion," short of allowing their actions to transform oneself into an instrument more powerful than the one no longer here.

With the 150th anniversary of Lincoln's assassination (April 14) and death (April 15) approaching, it were highly appropriate to review and cherish that for which he died.

1. Friedrich Schiller's phrase, epitomizing the tragic shortcoming, after the American Revolution, of the French Revolution. (Interestingly, the White House checked out of the Library of Congress a volume of Schiller's writings, in German, a couple of weeks before Lincoln's Second Inaugural.)

Lincoln's Theodicy

Let's look a little closer at the 1865 Inaugural: "The Almighty has His own purposes." There must be offenses, and, hence, woes; and to be an instrument of those offenses means to be a victim of woes. But why would a just God have allowed the institution of slavery—or, for that matter, have allowed only a partial victory over the British Empire, leaving the new republic "half-slave and half-free"? Is there any sense in which God's love for a creature made in His image, mankind, one capable of willful decisions, would also include the possibility of the horrible mistakes committed by that creature, mistakes that yet, somehow, in the long run, would make mankind better? And in a way that could not have been done otherwise? This is indeed a curious relationship between Creator and created.

So, perhaps the listener would be won over to Lin-

coln's uplifting theological view. Yet Lincoln renounces the "easier triumph" for a result more "fundamental and astounding": "Yet, if God wills" that the present efforts must continue indefinitely into the future, "so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether'" [Matthew 18:7)]

Lincoln pushed forward: Don't agree with me because you are temporarily inspired, while silently you calculate that you've probably paid what you owe your Maker. Instead, we do indeed have an historic mission, one that trumps all other personal calculations. Do not "make book" on the workings of the Almighty. Rather, root out of yourself whatever remnants of your antebellum identity that are still lurking. Then, and only then, will you find the appropriate charity in your heart for what is to come.

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, 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 lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Amongst all the recriminations, the could-have-beens and should-have-beens, the questions as to the fairness and extent of sacrifice, Lincoln is most deeply concerned that the population not internalize a hardened, embittered view of God. Whether it took much less or much greater sacrifice is not the proper calculation. The issue, rather, is whether the Creator has a mission for mankind, and whether we can dedicate our mortal lives to that mission.

It is this that determines all other calculations. For example, it determines whether the population was prepared to have the Republic's transcontinental land-bridge project free the world from imperialism. It determines whether there would be genuine and shared joy over the progress of the newly freed slaves, a vast section of the American population that had previously been kept in deplorably inhuman conditions. It determines whether the sacrifice to rid the world of a great offense was wasted, or not—so "that these dead shall not have died in vain."

Lincoln and Leibniz, 150 Years Prior

The Second Inaugural is unmistakably infused with the theology of Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716). Now, Lincoln's particular genius could have fashioned his own theodicy, his justification of the ways of God toward mankind, without having worked through Leibniz's particular version of his *Theodicy*. Certainly, Lincoln's capacity to fashion his Second Inaugural could be accounted for, otherwise. Simply consider: Lincoln's readings of Shakespeare and of the King James Bible, along with a deep-seated optimism—reflected in his excitement for the power of discovery, and expressed through his humor. Further, he had just led his country's historic battle against the British Empire. Lincoln was well-situated to lead a nation with poetic statecraft, regardless of any "smoking gun" evidence regarding his relationship with Leibniz. However, it is appropriate to investigate the role of the ghost of Leibniz in this matter.

Leibniz's Prophecy and Lincoln

In 1715, exactly 150 years before Lincoln's speech, Leibniz initiated a particular intervention into the English-speaking world, with the first of what are titled the "Leibniz-Clarke Letters." He wrote to his former student, and now political collaborator, Princess Caroline of Ansbach. Leibniz was particularly concerned about what he termed the "very mean Notion of the Wisdom and Power of God" infecting the government, from the writings of Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), John Locke (1632-1704), and Isaac Newton (1643-1727). Caroline had fought against the ostracism of Leibniz, the man who, in arranging the succession of the House of Hanover to the English throne, would have been the natural choice as a prime minister.² However, when, in 1714, King George I, Caroline's uncle, moved his court from Hanover, Germany, to England, he deliberately excluded Leibniz.

Caroline proceeded to challenge the imperial ide-

2. Between 1711 and 1713, Leibniz had enraged Montagu's "Venetian" Party in London, with his appointments as Imperial Privy Counsellor both for Russia and for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and his mission for centering those governments upon national scientific academies. If England had fallen under Leibniz's counsel at this point, the empire game might have completely toppled.

ology built up around Newton, with a project to publish an English translation of Leibniz's 1710 *Theodicy*. In the fight to extirpate the Leibniz "virus" from the new English ruling family, the Venetian Antonio Conti, along with Isaac Newton, spent many hours be-

sieging Caroline to let "this Leibniz matter" go.

Earlier, around 1704-05, Leibniz had taken on the task of uprooting the destructive axioms embedded in John Locke's ideological tract, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, which tied man's mind itself as

Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

March 4, 1865

Fellow-Countrymen:

At this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself, and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without warring to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has al-

ready attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding.

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a slave to his senses. (Since each man had his own senses, this was, supposedly, a more liberal ideology than Hobbes' "king of the jungle" approach in his *Leviathan*.) Leibniz had taken up this project, as it was the only responsible role for a statesman who had intervened to put his patroness, Princess Sophie of Hanover, into the line of succession. There was an "elephant in the room," and Leibniz had to address the cultural shortcomings.



Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, the philosophical Founding Father of America, is shown here with his patroness, Princess Sophie, who sets a laurel wreath on his head.

Leibniz's *New Essays on Human Understanding* benevolently, but systematically, exposed Locke's destructive axioms. One particular passage from this work came to be featured for American republicans of the 1840s by a political colleague of Lincoln (of whom, more below), with an ending echoed in Lincoln's Second Inaugural. This was Leibniz on the danger of the cynical philosophies of Hobbes and Locke: "*I find that opinions bordering close upon license, which take possession of the governing minds of the great world and creep into works of polite literature, are preparing the way for the universal revolution with which Europe is threatened.*"

The spiritual disease spreading amongst rulers is displayed when actual patriotism is scoffed at; when those who dare to champion universal aims are subject to ridicule; and when a proper love for future generations has turned into a cold disdain. Leibniz concludes that, while such cynical, "end-of-an-era" ideologies will take themselves down, more importantly, in the process, they will forge a deeper determination among their opponents never to again sink into such a downward spiral.

But it may happen that such persons will themselves experience the evils they suppose to be reserved for others. If they cure themselves of the spiritual epidemic whose pernicious effects begin to show themselves, they will perhaps escape these calamities; but if not, then will Providence heal society, even the revolution which this disease must naturally end in. For happen what may, all things will finally work together for the best;

although this result cannot take place without the chastisement of those who, even by their evil acts, have brought about a general good.

This passage held a special place in the first English-language biography of Leibniz, written in 1845 by John Milton Mackie (1813-94). He introduced the above passage with: "His prophetic views on this point [of Leibniz's newly assigned role for England—ed.] were expressed in his *New Essays on the Human Understanding*, as follows. . . ." Leibniz's prophetic view, put bluntly: The Venetian Party may succeed temporarily in their takeover of England. However, in so doing, they were only making the American Republic necessary.³ Mackie's emphasis on this prophecy, along with the language of it, was not likely to have been missed by Lincoln.

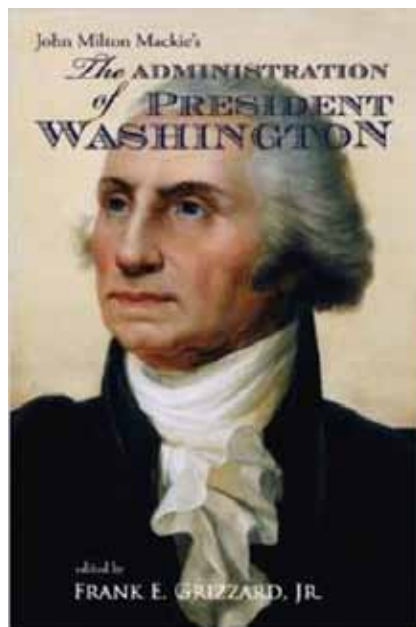
3. Leibniz's *New Essays* were under "lock and key," on orders of the British Crown, until 1765. Their publication at that point directly resulted in Benjamin Franklin making a special trip to Hanover and Goettingen in 1766 to consult with Munchhausen, Raspe, and Kästner—the revivers of Leibniz's work. Franklin's deliberations over those documents led to the triadic formulation in 1776 of "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." (In brief, happiness is a matter of the world being constructed such that liberty, or man's capacity for discovery and invention—actual human freedom—is necessary for the conditions of life. Any other constructed world, e.g., where a lack of inventiveness required Malthusian genocide; or where life's necessities were met, as in the "Garden of Eden," automatically—fell short of the definition of Leibniz's "happiness," or felicity.) This author recounts this story in "From Leibniz to Franklin on 'Happiness,'" *Fidelio*, Spring 2003.

Lincoln and John Milton Mackie

Mackie and Lincoln had shared a political intervention in 1848-49, in their attempt to shape Zachary Taylor's campaign and Presidency along the lines of a revival of the Washington/Hamilton alliance. In 1848, Lincoln campaigned for the Whig, Taylor, in Illinois, Delaware, and Massachusetts, speaking for a government budget for internal improvements. The scholar, Mackie, published his *The Administration of President Washington* in the *American Whig Review*, as a model for the new Taylor Administration, based on a return to the non-partisan leadership of an Alexander Hamilton-inspired Washington administration. While Lincoln undoubtedly knew of Mackie's (1849) work on Hamilton and Washington, it is not known for certain what Lincoln knew of Mackie's earlier (1845) work on Leibniz.⁴

Between 1845 and 1848, Mackie followed his work on Leibniz, by collaborating with Jared Sparks' efforts to educate Americans about the Founding Fathers, who had by then passed from the scene. Americans would learn from Sparks that, before the debased populism of Andrew Jackson, there was a level of statecraft worth studying and emulating. Mackie went further, in his 1849 study of Washington's administration, to identify "Jacksonian democracy" as descended directly from the Jacobinism of the French Revolution—and, most importantly, that this disease originated in the refusal by Jefferson and others to think through Hamilton's statecraft, as expressed in his sovereign credit-generating methods.

4. Lincoln might well have read of Mackie's biography of Leibniz in the favorable review in Silliman's 1845 *American Journal of Science and Arts*. (The same issue had extensive coverage of Charles Wilkes' 1838-42 Exploring Expedition—part of the geomagnetic measurement project that Leibniz had proposed to Russia's Peter the Great.) Edgar Allan Poe read Silliman's journal, and also took notice of the biography of Leibniz (in *Grahams' Magazine*, Vol. 27, 1845).



John Milton Mackie, author of "*The Administration of President Washington*," which proposed to revive Washington-Hamilton principles, also produced the first English-language translation of Leibniz's 1710 "*Theodicy*," echoes of which can be found in Lincoln's thought and speeches.

Mackie argued that Jackson's Democratic Party had been born of "those Democratic Societies, which, fathered by Citizen Genet, approved of the excesses of the [French 1794-95] Reign of Terror, and which Washington characterized as 'a most diabolical attempt to destroy the best fabric of human government and happiness that has ever been presented for the acceptance of mankind.' They boast of their popular name [Democrat—ed.]; let them remember that, when first adopted in this country, the name of 'Democrat' was synonymous with that of 'Jacobin.'"

Further, that the key to Washington's administration was "the turning of all citizens from the corrupting speculations, and dissolute courses, which prevailed after the war, to the patient cultivation of the virgin soil, and to the prosecution of all those trades and arts." Hence, "the sterling integrity and transcendent abilities of Alexander Hamilton"

were called upon to head the Department of Treasury.

Could there be any doubt that Lincoln, the foremost advocate of Hamilton's internal improvements at the time, and Mackie, the leading Leibnizian in the United States, were collaborators?

Leibniz's 'Harmony of Interests'

If Lincoln had also studied Mackie's 1845 *Life of Godfrey William Von Leibnitz*,⁵ what would he have im-

5. The full title was *Life of Godfrey William von Leibnitz, on the Basis of the German Work of Dr. G.E. Guhrauer*. Gottschalk Eduard Guhrauer was a Jewish scholar from Breslau, who studied philology and philosophy at Berlin's Humboldt University at about the same time, 1833-34, that Mackie studied there. As a young man, Guhrauer was selected as the editor of Leibniz's German writings. His 1840 *Leibnitz's Deutsche Schriften* was dedicated to Wilhelm von Humboldt. Guhrauer followed that with the 1842 (G.W.v. Leibnitz, *eine Biographie*, the work that Mackie translated and somewhat re-wrote. Guhrauer died at the age of 44, shortly after completing the second volume of his *Leben und Werke* of Gotthold Ephraim Lessing. (Of note: Guhrauer had succeeded the editor of the first Lessing volume, Th.W. Danzel, who had died at age 32. And Danzel was a close friend and political associate of Otto Jahn,

bibed? First, of no little significance, Mackie includes the first-ever competent English-language account, after more than a century, of the so-called “Leibniz-Newton controversy.” However, for our purposes, the key is Mackie’s account of Leibniz’s 1714 design for England.

Mackie relates how, after Leibniz had negotiated the accession to the English throne of his patroness, Sophie of Hanover, her death a couple of months before that accession “annihilated his [Leibniz’s] prospects of one day rending himself useful as the friend and counselor of a queen of England.” Mackie relates that Sophie had written, two or three weeks before her death:

... a long letter on the affairs of England, [Mackie quoting Leibniz] “*as full of correct judgments as if written by the prime minister*”—Leibniz favored, moreover, the views of the deceased Electoress respecting English affairs too much, to be a favorite with [her son] George Lewis [King George I]. . . . She, also, was not inclined to follow so much the counsels of the Whigs in England, as were the Elector and his minister, Bernstorff; but, in accordance with the views of Leibniz, she preferred to endeavor to unite the more moderate members of both the great political parties of the country.

As Leibniz put it at the time, in a letter to John Ker, an advisor to the Court:

The king must by all means leave to his nation the free choice of the members of parliament; and oppose, also, the hateful intrigues and corruption which have existed under former reigns. Such a course of conduct will surround him with men of honor and ability, who will act from disinterested principles, and will have regard for the general welfare of the nation.

So far, so good.

But, how to accomplish this harmony? Mackie identifies Leibniz as the author of a 1714 pamphlet, “Anti-

the Mozart scholar—yet another of the 1830s Humboldt University students.) Mackie’s Leibniz project in the United States might usefully be viewed as an offshoot of the Humboldt-Mendelssohn operations of the 1830s Berlin.



Today, 150 years after Lincoln’s Second Inaugural, writes Shavin, there need be “a flowering of Lincoln-esque statecraft—one that not only ends all empire systems, but one that conquers new frontiers with the proportionally increased powers of human culture.” Here is the last known photo of Lincoln, Feb. 5, 1865, by Alexander Gardner.

Jacobite,” and characterizes Leibniz’s strategy for England in that pamphlet: The writing style and the

... liberal spirit with which it advocated the reconciliation of the two political parties of Great Britain, leave no doubt of its having emanated from the pen of the great philosopher. The writer maintained with great clearness and force of argument, the importance of rendering such protection to agriculture, the basis of national prosperity, on the one side, and to manufactures and commerce, on the other, as to secure a harmonious development of these two conflicting interests. He also insisted on the importance of remedying the disorders which were then tending to diminish the influence of piety and morality upon the national character.

As early as 1845, but no later than 1849, Lincoln would have fully identified with Leibniz’s strategy for an English-speaking republic, as presented by Mackie.

In Summary: Lincoln's Poet-Statesman

Lincoln did right by Leibniz 150 years ago, on March 4, 1865.

Lurking in the crowd that day were members of the assassination team, including John Wilkes Booth. "*Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh.*" If we shall suppose that the British Empire system is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both BRICS nations and non-BRICS nations this terrible showdown as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him?

Today, 150 years later, there is no justice in the targeting and execution of President Lincoln, short of a

flowering of Lincoln-esque statecraft—one that not only ends all empire systems, but one that conquers new frontiers with the proportionally increased powers of human culture. Unless one chooses to fashion his or her identity around such basic truths, it is all a pathetic soap opera.

On that day in the not-distant future when imperial dinosaurs are extinct; when Lincoln's republic recognizes today's outbreak of classical "American" methods, expressed in Chinese, in Russian, in Hindi, and such; and when that republic decides, joyfully, to renew itself and join in—on that day, civilization may well breathe a big sigh of relief. But will a poet-statesman be able to strike a note that, in identifying and capturing for ourselves the insanity of what mankind has gone through, makes us permanently better? And so much better, that the reality of mankind at the helm, driving our Solar System through the galaxy, will seem as child's-play to those who come after us? If so, Lincoln will smile, as we will have done "all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

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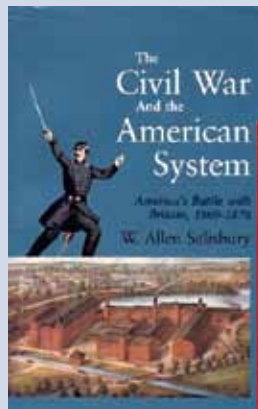
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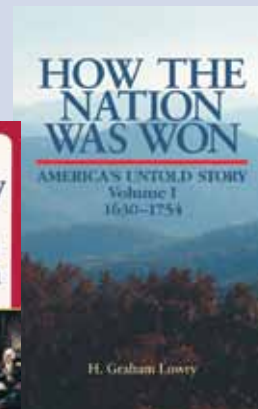
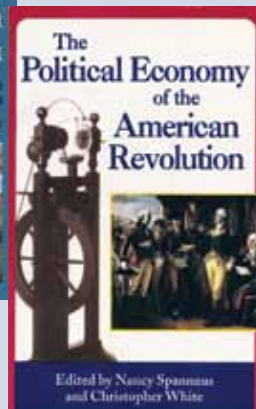
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