



3-4-2016

Historicizing the Free Speech Debate: Harold Holzer on Lincoln and Censorship

Anika N. Jensen
Gettysburg College

Follow this and additional works at: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler>



Part of the [Military History Commons](#), and the [United States History Commons](#)

Share feedback about the accessibility of this item.

Jensen, Anika N., "Historicizing the Free Speech Debate: Harold Holzer on Lincoln and Censorship" (2016). *The Gettysburg Compiler: On the Front Lines of History*. 118.

<https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler/118>

This is the author's version of the work. This publication appears in Gettysburg College's institutional repository by permission of the copyright owner for personal use, not for redistribution. Cupola permanent link: <https://cupola.gettysburg.edu/compiler/118>

This open access blog post is brought to you by The Cupola: Scholarship at Gettysburg College. It has been accepted for inclusion by an authorized administrator of The Cupola. For more information, please contact cupola@gettysburg.edu.

Historicizing the Free Speech Debate: Harold Holzer on Lincoln and Censorship

Abstract

Before attending Harold Holzer's Lincoln Lyceum lecture entitled "Lincoln and the Press: Master or Monster?" I really believed that today's media presence was the craziest this nation had ever seen. Mr. Holzer insisted otherwise. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

The Gettysburg Compiler, Civil War, 150th Anniversary, Gettysburg, Civil War Memory, Sesquicentennial, Lincoln Lyceum lecture, Harold Holzer, "Lincoln and the Press: Master or Monster?"

Disciplines

History | Military History | United States History

Comments

This blog post originally appeared in [The Gettysburg Compiler](#) and was created by students at Gettysburg College.

THE GETTYSBURG COMPILER

ON THE FRONT LINES OF HISTORY

Lincoln Scholar Harold Holzer Teases His Upcoming Lecture at Gettysburg College

February 19, 2016

By Alex Andrioli '17



2016 Lincoln Lyceum speaker Harold Holzer. [Photograph courtesy of the Mid-Atlantic Center for the Arts & Humanities.](#)

[Harold Holzer](#), winner of the 2015 Gilder Lehrman Lincoln Prize, will be delivering the 2016 Lincoln Lyceum lecture entitled **Lincoln and the Press: Master or Monster?**

Harold Holzer is one of the country's leading authorities on Abraham Lincoln and the political culture of the Civil War era. A prolific writer and lecturer, and frequent guest on television and radio, Holzer has authored, co-authored, and edited more than 45 previous books on Lincoln

and the Civil War. He recently retired from the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York where he was senior vice president for public affairs. He joined Roosevelt House in September 2015, where he directs academic programs for Hunter College undergraduates in public policy and human rights, and hosts public programs on history and current events.

*The lecture, which is free and open to the public, will be held on **February 23, 2016 at 7:30 p.m. in CUB 260 at Gettysburg College.** We hope to see you there!*

ANDRIOLI: As you discuss in your prize-winning *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion*, Lincoln was not the beloved president that he is today. Many Northerners despised him as much as Southerners did. Based on your research for *Lincoln and the Power of the Press*, do you think Lincoln really earned the reputation of “Honest Abe”?

HOLZER: Here is one Lincoln legend that I think is true. Impressed by stories of George Washington’s unassailable honesty from his own boyhood on, Lincoln really did try to live up to the example so dramatically retold by Parson Weems in his early life of Washington. Moreover, Lincoln worked off the debt he incurred when that book was damaged while in his possession! And we do have testimony from Lincoln’s early friends, relatives, and neighbors that he too was meticulously, almost obsessively honest—his wife said honesty was almost a “mania” with him (she should know!). So the young man who always got asked to be the judge at tugs-of-war or wrestling matches, earned his way to the sobriquet that followed him through the 1860 presidential campaign—and while many of his unique traits were criticized during his White House years (including his love of humor and the theater), I don’t think anyone seriously questioned his honesty. It was a virtue he wore proudly and a mantle he deserved.

ANDRIOLI: Your book is not exclusively about Lincoln. You spend a lot of time depicting the lives and careers of the three biggest editors of the 1860’s: Horace Greeley, Henry J. Raymond, and James Gordon Bennett. Did you always have the intention of including these men when you first thought to write this book? Is it even possible to tell the story of Lincoln’s relationship with the press without them?

HOLZER: I hate to sound like a typical born-and-bred New Yorker, but this town was the media center of the country then, as now. As the song says, if you made it here, you made it everywhere (I realize I’m only clumsily paraphrasing Kander and Ebb). But observers of the day did marvel, perhaps less musically, that news seemed always to flow out of New York, but seldom in—that is, the flow of newspapers was so immense that news itself became a great New York export. So, yes, it was indeed impossible to write about Lincoln and the press without honing in on the “Big Three” of New York: Bennett, who could be so viciously critical, but who Lincoln tried hard to mollify before the 1864 election—going so far as to offer him the coveted post of Minister to France if he toned down his assaults; Greeley, who was unpredictable, mercurial, unfulfilled, and jealous—but who Lincoln effectively tamed whenever he went “off message,” whether on emancipation timing or peace terms—and on one occasion, Greeley even approached giving aid and comfort to the enemy; and Raymond, the Republican Party stalwart (and RNC Chairman in 1864), devoted to Lincoln and almost a press *secretary* during the campaign for a second term (during which he also ran for Congress and put out a book of Lincoln’s speeches—all while simultaneously editing his newspaper. That’s why the New York

Big 3 dominate the book. And it's interesting: I set about to write a book about the press and Lincoln, and really worked hard to keep it so focused, but Lincoln is just too dominant—as he was then—not only as the *subject* of press coverage, but as a master wire-puller who really made news his way. So it unavoidably, inevitably flipped—to Lincoln and the Press.

ANDRIOLI: What do you personally want people to take away from *Lincoln and the Power of the Press: The War for Public Opinion*?

HOLZER: I aspire to different reader takeaways at different moments. Right now, amidst the unrelentingly angry tone of the 2016 presidential race—certainly so on the Republican side—I would love to remind people that media hysteria and cozying up to, or denouncing, the press is NOT a new in American political history, nor should it be a particularly troubling phenomenon. Things were far more partisan 155 years ago than now, but readers and voters then *enjoyed* the drama, instead of fretting endlessly about the eroding “tone” of politics. I wish people could simply participate with relish instead of worrying that they’re being too demonstrative.

<http://gettysburgcompiler.com/2016/02/19/3721/>