When Lincoln Borrowed a Book He Didn’t Like

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Somewhere, if this anecdote is true, there exists a book by George Bernard Shaw that he inscribed—twice. First, before sending it to a friend, he wrote, “To —— with esteem, George Bernard Shaw.” Years later, Shaw found the book in a secondhand bookshop, saw the inscription on the flyleaf, promptly bought it, wrapped it up, and posted it to his friend again, this time bearing a second inscription: “With renewed esteem, George Bernard Shaw.” Inscriptions in books always have a context, usually quite obvious, but not always so.

There is a book in the Vespasian Warner Public Library in Clinton, Illinois, that has three of what we shall loosely call “inscriptions.” At the very top of the title page of *Types of Mankind* by Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon (1855) is handwritten Clifton H. Moore, and farther down a rubber stamp suggests this book must be one of many that Moore gave to the library.

The handwriting is that of Clifton Haswell Moore, best known to posterity as a legal colleague and political supporter of Abraham Lincoln. Moore was eight years younger than Lincoln, and they met not long after Moore moved from his native state, Ohio, to Pekin, Illinois, where he taught school and then was admitted to the bar in 1841 at the age of twenty-three. He settled in Clinton and became the first resident lawyer in DeWitt County, where Lincoln already practiced law as a member of the Eighth Judicial Circuit. Moore and Lincoln traveled the circuit together and, like Lincoln, Moore became a lawyer for the Illinois Central Railroad, but he also became a business partner with Lincoln’s friend, Judge David Davis. By pouring money

2. I am grateful to James Cornelius, curator of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, for bringing to my attention the book that is the subject of this article. He knew it would interest me and was also kind enough to read an early draft of this article.
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into land purchases in Illinois, Iowa, Missouri, Kansas, and Nebraska, both Moore and Davis were wealthy men by 1851.3

Part of Moore’s wealth went into the purchase of books, and eventually he possessed the largest private library in Illinois outside Chicago. At the time of his death in 1901, he owned around seven thousand books and many bound volumes of newspapers. Moore left his book collection to the city of Clinton. To house the collection, his son-in-law and legal partner, Vespasian Warner, donated the land and paid for the construction of the Vespasian Warner Public Library, which opened its doors in 1908. Over the next few years Moore’s books were catalogued for general circulation, but in the mid-1990’s the volumes, which had been scattered throughout the library, were pulled together as the C. H. Moore Collection.4

On a flyleaf preceding the title page (shown above) there are two other inscriptions that have recently attracted more serious attention. The uppermost of these reads,


And if the handwriting looks familiar to Lincoln scholars, the inscription below explains why:

The above was written by Pres’t Lincoln
in 1861 — just before he left for
Washington — L. Weldon

Like Moore, Lawrence Weldon had originated in Ohio, moved to Clinton (in 1854) and rode the Eighth Judicial Circuit with Lincoln. Weldon was then twenty-five years old, so twenty years younger than Lincoln. He was hugely impressed by Lincoln; named his son, born in 1857, Lincoln H. Weldon; and in 1861 was appointed U.S. attorney for the southern district of Illinois by the newly elected President Lincoln. Since Lawrence Weldon lived until 1905—outlasting his close friend Moore by four years—it is possible that Moore’s heir, Vespasian Warner, might have asked Weldon if he could confirm
that it was Lincoln who wrote Moore’s name and address on the flyleaf of *Types of Mankind*. Alternatively, Moore himself, at any time between 1861 and his death in 1901, might have asked his friend Weldon to authenticate whether the handwriting was Lincoln’s.

Of course, such confirmation is necessary only because Lincoln did not include his own name in the inscription. It is safe to say that if the book had been presented to Moore by Lincoln as a gift, Lincoln would have ended his inscription with “A. Lincoln,” perhaps begun it with “To,” and maybe even included “esteemed,” but he probably would forbear to remind the recipient where he lived. Even when Lincoln was rushing, early in 1860, to send out presentation copies of his only published book, *Political Debates between Hon. Abraham Lincoln and Hon. Stephen A. Douglas*, he took the trouble to personalize the inscription, as with the copy sent to Stephen J. Logan, “from his friend A. Lincoln.”

It is clear—that *Types of Mankind* was not a gift from Lincoln but a loan from Moore; that before the loan Moore identified the book as his by writing his own name on the title page; and that Lincoln neatly wrote Moore’s name and address on the flyleaf to make sure the book might
eventually be reclaimed by, or find its way back to, its rightful owner. Perhaps Lincoln had lots of books borrowed from friends and no opportunity to return them before setting off for Washington—or, Lincoln may have thought it wise to indicate the ownership clearly in case his partner, William Herndon—another avid book collector—managed to lose the volume into his own library.

Whatever the scenario for the book’s return to Moore’s collection, the more pertinent questions are, Why did Moore purchase the book himself, and why did he think Lincoln might care to read it? The 738-page tome also bore a hefty title: *Types of Mankind: or, Ethnological Researches, Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races and upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological, and Biblical History: Illustrated by Selections from the Inedited Papers of Samuel George Morton, M.D. (Late President of the Academy of Natural Sciences at Philadelphia), and by Additional Contributions from Prof. L. Agassiz, LL.D.; W. Usher, M.D.; and Prof. H. S. Patterson, M.D.* Nott and Gliddon’s book was first published in 1854 in an expensive edition for seven hundred prepaying subscribers (listed on the final six pages). Before the year was out, a less costly “fourth edition” (actually a reprint) was published for a wider audience, and it was a “seventh edition” of 1855 that Moore owned.

In *Types of Mankind*, Nott and Gliddon promoted the polygenist theory that there was not a single creation (as described in Genesis), but multiple, separate, or “special” creations, which explains why a given continent generally has flora and fauna (including “men”) that differ from those of other continents. The theory had been developing for decades, but in the late 1840s and early 1850s, it was given prominence in books by Samuel G. Morton and lectures and articles by the best-known scientist in America, Harvard professor Louis Agassiz. Josiah C. Nott, of Alabama, publicized the theory at every opportunity, and it gained great favor in America, especially in the South, because it provided a simple “scientific” rejoinder to all those abolitionists who declared that it was evil to enslave our fellow men, since we are all “of one blood.” Well, according to polygenists, Negroes were not our “fellow men” but a very different—and inferior—“type of mankind.” Agassiz’s particular contribution to *Types of Mankind* was an eighteen-page “Sketch of the Natural Provinces of the Animal World and Their Relation to the Different Types of Man,” at the end of which he put the polygenist case succinctly:

Either mankind originated from a common stock and all the different races with their peculiarities, in their present distribution,
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are to be ascribed to subsequent changes—an assumption for which there is no evidence whatever . . . or, we must acknowledge that the diversity among animals is a fact determined by the will of the Creator . . . [and] what are called human races, down to their specialization as nations, are distinct primordial forms of the type of man.

The “Sketch” was accompanied by a “colored lithographic Tableau” compiled by Gliddon to compare species from different continents, with the human from Africa looking particularly apelike in comparison with the human from Europe, represented by an engraving of the great botanist Georges Cuvier.5

Lincoln was interested in science and technology, but his law partner, Herndon, could talk for hours about natural history. According to Herndon’s biographer, David Herbert Donald, he took his children for carriage rides into the countryside every Sunday “to teach them botany, geology, and ornithology.” One nephew never “saw a botany book that knew more about plants.”6 Herndon was far more likely than Lincoln to purchase Types of Mankind, but if Herndon possessed a copy, then no one else would need to lend one to Lincoln.7 And if neither man bought the book, the reason could be that they knew what was likely to be in it.

For several years, by his own account, Herndon “subscribed for and kept on our office table the Westminster and Edinburgh Review and a number of other English periodicals,” and he was clearly influenced by the book reviews he read in these publications. Herndon added that he “purchased the works of Spencer, Darwin, and the utterances of other English scientists, all of which I devoured with great relish. I endeavored, but had little success in inducing Lincoln


to read them.”8 “I kept many of my books in my office, especially the
new ones, and read them. Mr. Lincoln had access to all such books
as I had and frequently read parts of the volumes, such as struck his
fancy.”9 “Occasionally [Lincoln] would snatch one up and peruse it
for a little while, but he soon threw it down with the suggestion that
it was entirely too heavy for an ordinary mind to digest.”10 Thomas
Huxley (later known as “Darwin’s Bulldog”) wrote a scathing review
of the first edition of Types of Mankind for the Westminster Review in
July 1854.11 Lincoln could also have read reviews of Types of Mankind
in American journals to which we know the law office subscribed.12

Herndon ended up owning—and in 1873 putting up for auction—
two copies of a separate and particularly influential book: one copy
had been given (or lent) to Lincoln by James W. Keyes, a Springfield
tailor, and a later edition Herndon had bought himself. Vestiges of the
Natural History of Creation, first published anonymously in London
in 1844 by the Edinburgh writer and publisher Robert Chambers,
was a book to which Types of Mankind was a kind of antidote, espe-
cially as administered in Louis Agassiz’s “Sketch,” where he wrote
that Vestiges’s “premises are generally adopted by those who would
shrink from the conclusions to which they necessarily lead.”13 Obvi-
ously influenced by geologist Charles Lyell and many other scientific
writers, Chambers rejected “special creations” and instead argued
for a progressive “development” that involved not only plants and
animals but also geology (cutting across Lyell’s view) and, indeed,
the entire cosmos. No area escaped Chambers’s analysis, from astron-
omy to zoology, and he included human beings, described as
developing according to “natural laws” originally laid down by the
Creator. Chambers was a good writer whose cheerful and elegant
explanations of the latest arcane research made Vestiges a publishing

8. William Herndon and Jesse Weik, Herndon’s Life of Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle
(Cleveland: World, 1942), 353.
249–53.
12. “Progress of Infidelity,” Richmond Enquirer, April 29, 1854; Living Age 49 (June
14, 1856): 688; “Is Man One or Many?” Putnam’s Monthly Magazine 4 (July 1854): 1–14;
Scientific American 9 (July 1, 1854): 333; “The Human Family,” Southern Quarterly Review
13. Nott and Gliddon, Types of Mankind, lxxvi.
phenomenon. Herndon recalled more than thirty years later his own surprise that *Vestiges* actually interested Lincoln “so much that he read it through.” The book’s “doctrine of development or evolution . . . interested [Lincoln] greatly, and he was deeply impressed with the notion of the so-called ‘universal law’—evolution.” (The term “evolution” was probably not yet in common usage whenever Herndon and Lincoln discussed “development.”) According to Herndon, after reading the book, Lincoln “did not extend greatly his researches,” although he “subsequently read the sixth edition of this work, which I loaned him.” Herndon believed that “by continued thinking in a single channel [Lincoln] seemed to grow into a warm advocate of the new doctrine.” In Herndon’s view this was Lincoln’s only “investigation into the realm of philosophy. . . . ‘There are no accidents,’ he said one day, ‘in my philosophy.’”

Lincoln and Herndon also shared a deep interest in slavery and the related issue of racial theories. In his biography of Lincoln, Herndon wrote,

I was in correspondence with Sumner, Greeley, Phillips, and Garrison, and was thus thoroughly imbued with all the rancor drawn from such strong anti-slavery sources. . . . Every time a good speech on the great issue was made I sent for it. . . . Lincoln and I took such papers as the *Chicago Tribune*, *New York Tribune*, *Anti-Slavery Standard*, *Emancipator*, and *National Era*. On the other side of the question we took the *Charleston Mercury* and the *Richmond Enquirer*. . . . I purchased all the leading histories of the slavery movement, and other works which treated on that subject.

Herndon’s Auction List included many books “on the other side of the question,” such as George Fitzhugh’s *Sociology for the South*, which, according to Herndon, “defended and justified slavery in ev-

15. Herndon to Remsburg, ibid.
very conceivable way” and “aroused the ire of Lincoln more than most pro-slavery books.” When Fitzhugh published that work in 1854, he had not yet converted (but did eventually) to the polygenist view—
“scientific racism”—declaring that blacks were inferior because their race was a “separate creation,” which meant they were practically a different species. “Scientific racism” became part of the political discourse of the time and can be seen—without employing much technical terminology—in the speeches of Alexander H. Stephens and, more notably, Stephen A. Douglas. In his debates with Douglas, Lincoln parried these arguments by clinging to the concept that “all men are created equal.”

One can see why Lincoln and Herndon might have found *Types of Mankind* interesting despite believing its basic premise to be obnoxious, a feeling perhaps making them reluctant to support the authors by actually buying the book. Moore, it seems, was not averse to buying the book and lending it to Lincoln. As Moore was a great collector of books, that may be explanation enough for the purchase. Although Moore never sought political office himself, he became a staunch Republican and was a great supporter of Lincoln during his contests with Douglas in 1858 and 1860. However, Moore was also close enough to Douglas personally to be involved in co-ownership of several blocks of land in the north end of Clinton, and late in life he once reminisced, “I shall always remember with regret one thing [Lincoln] said about Douglas, which was this: ‘Douglas will tell a lie to ten thousand people one day, even though he may have to deny it to five thousand the next.’” It is possible that Moore either sympathized with, or was at least intrigued by, Douglas’s undoubted interest in “scientific racism” and may have purchased *Types of Mankind* to learn more about it.


18. Lander, *Lincoln and Darwin*, 92–99, 137–42. In *Darwin’s Sacred Cause*, Desmond and Moore suggest that it was reading *Types of Mankind* that tipped the scale for Darwin, who, after twenty years of research, finally began writing what eventually became *Origin of Species* shortly after plowing through Agassiz’s “Sketch”—in the margin of which Darwin scribbled “O proh pudor Agassiz!” (O for shame!) (264–66). In *Lincoln and Darwin*, I was unable to conclude “whether Lincoln ever read [*Types of Mankind*] or merely read about it” (86), but having seen the volume from the C. H. Moore Collection, it is now easier to believe that he did read at least some portion of it.


Looking for occasions when Lincoln might have wished to borrow *Types of Mankind* from Moore, I found one possibility in the brief period between Lincoln’s celebrated debates with Douglas during the 1858 senatorial election and the series of important speeches (often aimed at Douglas) that Lincoln made in the run-up to his successful bid for the Republican Party’s nomination for president. It was during this hiatus that Lincoln on several occasions delivered his only “lecture” (as he called it), variously titled “Inventions,” “Inventions and Discoveries,” and “Discoveries and Inventions.” Lincoln had had this subject in mind since at least 1855 when, while riding the Eighth Judicial Circuit together, Leonard Swett, Henry C. Whitney, and he took turns reading aloud a lecture titled “The Necessity, the Reality, and the Promise of the Progress of the Human Race,” which George Bancroft had delivered to the New-York Historical Society a year earlier. Whitney later reported that Lincoln said “that he had for some time been contemplating the writing of a lecture on man . . . from his earliest primeval state to his present high development, and he detailed at length the views and opinions he designed to incorporate in his lecture.” Lincoln had already—before hearing Bancroft’s lecture read aloud—been contemplating the subject of man, but his lawyer friends had not heard of it before then.

While Lincoln could admire many points in Bancroft’s lecture (especially its stress on the unity of mankind), Bancroft’s examples of human progress were rather parochial—mainly celebrating inventions of the past half-century by New-York Historical Society members, such as Robert Fulton. Lincoln was less interested in Fulton’s steamboat than in the earliest use of steam power, and his main concern was the very concept of invention and what it says about man. Unlike Bancroft, who depicted God as aiding man in his progress, Lincoln


24. For other speculations by contemporaries about what prompted Lincoln to write his lecture, see Lander, *Lincoln and Darwin*, 9.
subtly argued that God had little to do with it. After making jokes at the expense of Adam and Eve, Lincoln argued that all the advances since Adam’s time were the “result of Discoveries, Inventions, and Improvements. These in turn, are the result of observation, reflection, and experiment,” by which man built on “all he has learned from others.”

To support this point Lincoln argued that learning from others was greatly facilitated by the invention of “phonetic writing” (and later printing)—which was not a gift from God to mankind; otherwise its development would not have been so uneven among men. “That it was difficult of conception and execution, is apparent . . . [since] so many tribes of men have come down from Adam’s time to ours without ever having possessed it.”

This is when Lincoln first refers to the differences between some “tribes of men.”

In his lecture Lincoln used the word “race” only three times, always referring to the entire “human race.” He spoke of different “tribes of men,” some characterized as “savages.” But while he agreed with Bancroft’s view that “every man is in substance equal to his fellow man,” Lincoln accepted that men have developed differently: not because God made them different or bestowed “inventions” on some but not others, but exactly because inventions and discoveries were made by men themselves, giving some advantages over others. So Lincoln argued that it is to the invention of writing that “we owe everything which distinguishes us from savages.”

While discussing other discoveries and inventions, Lincoln highlighted the discovery of America and the creation of patent laws, but before actually discussing each, he inserted—“though not strictly apposite to my present purpose . . . two other important events—the Lutheran Reformation in 1517 and, still earlier, the invention of negroes, or, of the present mode of using them, in 1434.” His Protestant audience probably admired the reference to the Reformation (unless the churchgoers pondered why he implied that their religion was an “invention”) and was probably mystified by the phrase “the invention of negroes,” especially since Lincoln offered no further explanation.

Yet the date 1434 signals what Lincoln was thinking about. In Francis Lieber’s *Encyclopedia Americana* (which Lincoln either owned or

consulted from the state library and cited elsewhere in the lecture) he could have read in the article on slavery that Africans’ bondage to Europeans began in 1434, when a Portuguese captain kidnapped some Africans and sold them to some Moorish families in southern Spain. Unlike slaves in antiquity, these Africans were not debtors, war captives, or even time-indentured laborers. Lieber wrote that this “atrocity at which nature revolts . . . could never have reached the height it did, if the color of the slave had not given rise to the idea of his being by nature a degraded being.” In Lincoln’s view, this “idea” of black inferiority was, therefore, an invention, not ordained by God or nature. To be sure, Lieber touched on more than mere color, declaring in the article titled “Negro” that the shape of the cranium allowed “less space for the brain than in some other varieties” of man; however, Lieber also asserted, “The opinion formerly maintained, that they were of an inferior variety of animals, would not now find an advocate, or even a convert, even in the ignorance or the worst passions of the whites.”

Lincoln knew that last assertion was out of date. In the twenty-seven years since Lieber wrote it—in fact quite recently—there had indeed arisen serious advocates of the idea that black people were, if not “of an inferior variety of animals,” then at best an inferior variety of humans, one created separately from Adam and on an inferior model. This was the doctrine of “special creations,” or polygenism, against which Lincoln, in his own way, had been arguing ever since 1854, when the Kansas-Nebraska Act—a bill drafted by Douglas, who had no doubts about the inferiority of blacks—opened new territories for the expansion of slavery. Lincoln’s one and only lecture was first delivered in April 1858. The second delivery was ten months later—three months after he had lost his 1858 bid for Douglas’s senatorial seat. The lecture was apparently revised considerably between the first and second delivery.

Lincoln had become disturbed by the development of the theory of special creations and chatted with fellow lawyers in 1855 about preparing a lecture on the nature of man. He was writing, or rewriting, that lecture while engaged in political debates with a man who believed God had ordained that black persons were inferior. Knowing


31. For a view that Lincoln was arguing against polygenism as early as 1852 in his eulogy for Henry Clay, see Lander, *Lincoln and Darwin*, 94–95. On Stephen A. Douglas’s embrace of polygenism, particularly the work of John Van Evrie, see ibid., 93–105.
all that, Lincoln’s friend and ally, Clifton H. Moore, might well have suggested that Lincoln learn more about what he was attacking by borrowing and reading *Types of Mankind*.

* * *

There is, however, another more proximate scenario that might explain why Moore lent *Types of Mankind* to Lincoln—and even why Moore bought it himself. This relates to a legal case that involved all three of the men who inscribed Moore’s copy of the book. The case was *Dungey v. Spencer*, and it took place in 1855, the year Moore’s “seventh edition” of *Types of Mankind* was published.32

In 1851 William Dungey married the sister of Joseph Spencer. In January 1855, when a family quarrel turned bitter, Spencer claimed publicly that his brother-in-law, whose Portuguese ancestry had given him a dark complexion, was actually a Negro who had been widely known as “Black Bill” when he previously lived in Tennessee. Spencer called Dungey “a nigger married to a white woman.”33 This was worse than a personal insult, for Illinois’s “Black Law” as modified only two years earlier had restricted the immigration into Illinois of any free black person (or anyone having “one-fourth negro blood” and therefore “deemed a mulatto”). If Spencer’s allegation went unchallenged, Dungey’s very marriage was at risk, as well as his property and right to remain in Illinois.

Dungey came to Lincoln for legal help, explaining that he had no Negro ancestry, only Portuguese. Knowing what was at stake for Dungey—and knowing also that there was no value for his client or himself in challenging the validity of the “Black Law”—in the April term Lincoln filed a charge of slander against Spencer and sought $1,000 in damages. He probably expected Spencer to back down and withdraw the accusation, avoiding the costs of litigation. But Spencer promptly instructed two attorneys, Clifton H. Moore and his recently arrived partner, Lawrence Weldon. When Moore managed to find a technical fault in Lincoln’s declaration, Judge David Davis, a good friend to all three lawyers and a business partner with Moore, agreed but allowed Lincoln to amend the charges. Still, the case had to be held over till the


October term. According to Weldon, at the moment when Judge Davis agreed that Lincoln had made a professional error, Lincoln looked “across the trial table at Moore and [Weldon] and shaking his long, bony finger, he said, ‘Now, by Jing, I will beat you boys!’” Moore and Weldon knew that, for Lincoln, “by Jing” was strong language, and that Lincoln also had a strong case, especially since Moore and Weldon believed that their own client, Spencer, was a fool. Now Lincoln would push the case just “to redeem himself from the implication arising from the fact that he had been, as the lawyers say, ‘demurred out of court.’”

When eventually the trial commenced before a jury in the circuit court of DeWitt County (in Moore and Weldon’s hometown, Clinton), Lincoln laid out his case with skill and simple eloquence that Weldon could easily recall forty years later. Lincoln started by denying that “the best way to build up and maintain a good reputation is to go to law about it,” but that his client had no choice when Spencer “went from house to house gabbling—yes, gabbling” that Dungey was a “nigger.” Lincoln managed to emphasize “gabbling” in some dramatic way, and his pronunciation of “nigger . . . had a curious touch of the ludicrous, . . . which instead of detracting seemed to add to the effect.” Lincoln then declared, “[M]y client is not a Negro, though it is no crime to be a Negro, no crime to be born with a black skin. But my client is not a Negro. His skin may not be as white as ours, but I say he is not a Negro, though he may be a Moor.” Weldon does not say so, but one imagines that Lincoln, after repeating “is not a Negro” three times, paused before delivering the last clause—his punch line. It was wonderful wordplay: for many in the jury would at first think “Moor” was a synonym for “Negro,” making Lincoln’s statement absurd; but then their next thought—probably before they worked out that “Moor” had connotations about Muslims moving from Morocco to the Iberian peninsula, and that this description might then be accurate for Dungey—might be that Lincoln had somehow referred to Spencer’s attorney, Clifton H. Moore. Weldon himself said that Judge Davis was “scarcely able to restrain a smile” as he interrupted: “Mr. Lincoln, . . . you mean a M-o-o-r, not M-o-o-r-e.” “Well, your Honor, Moor, not C. H. Moore,” Lincoln replied, sweeping his arm toward the table at which the defendant’s attorneys sat.

35. Weldon’s is the only eyewitness account, uncorroborated, and written down not by him but by the journalist interviewing him forty years after the events. And yet Weldon’s references to Lincoln’s pronunciation and gestures suggest that many of Lincoln’s phrases must have etched themselves deeply in his memory.
36. Ibid., 146.
This, no doubt, caused some laughter, but was Lincoln simply unable to resist a pun, or did he enable the jurors to consider the difference between a Negro and a Moor? When did Lincoln learn the difference? Perhaps the lover of Shakespeare ran to his Encyclopedia Americana after beginning Othello and read the article “Moors”: “inhabitants of . . . Morocco; . . . of Arabian origin . . . they call themselves Moslems. . . . The Romans called [them] Moors . . .; [invaded] Spanish kingdom of the Visigoths. . . . The dominion of the Moors in Spain . . . lasted nearly 800 years.”37

When Spencer first came to Moore and Weldon after being charged with slander, the two lawyers had advised the defendant to plead justification (that is, that he had spoken what he believed to be the truth) and obtain depositions from residents in Tennessee who considered the Dungey family to be of mixed blood. During the trial, Lincoln pointed out that none of the deponents lived within thirty miles of Dungey’s former home in Tennessee, so their information was mere hearsay.

Lincoln closed his case with what his opposing counsel, Weldon, called a “powerful and remarkable speech, abounding in wit, logic, and eloquence of the highest order . . . [yet] clothed in the simplest garb of expression, and in words understood by every juror in the box.”38 After Judge Davis instructed the jury, they retired and “in a few moments returned” with a judgment against Spencer, ordered to pay Dungey $600 in damages and $142.90 in court costs. Spencer amazed his lawyers by talking of carrying the case to the Supreme Court, but Lincoln settled matters by saying his client did not want to make money out of the suit, and the lawyers persuaded their clients to agree that Dungey would remit $400 in return for a “release of errors from the record,” meaning that Spencer would have no grounds for an appeal.

Part of the agreement was that Spencer would pay Lincoln’s legal fee. When Lincoln proposed to let Moore and Weldon determine the size of his fee, they protested that he must fix the amount of his own fee. “After a few moments’ thought,” according to Weldon, “he said, ‘Well, gentlemen, don’t you think I have honestly earned twenty-five dollars?’” They were astonished that the figure was not at least a hundred. Ultimately, when Moore transferred Spencer’s payments, he saw to it that Lincoln received at least $50.00.39

37. “Moor” occurs sixty times in Shakespeare’s play, although the title in the First Folio is actually The Tragedie of Othello, the Moore of Venice [!].
Since *Dunsey v. Spencer* hinged on the identification of a man’s race, perhaps Moore decided to purchase the recently published seventh edition of *Types of Mankind*, in case it might shed some light on the subject. Or maybe he already owned it but decided to lend it to Lincoln after the latter made his little joke about Moore’s name. Or maybe it was safer to lend it to Lincoln after the case was over, for the book’s several references to the inhabitants of Morocco stressed that they were quite distinct from sub-Saharan Negroes. Even Louis Agassiz’s “Sketch” said, “[W]e have Semitic nations covering the north African and south-west Asiatic faunae.”

Whether *Types of Mankind* was lent to Lincoln with some intention of educating him or merely as a joke, the evidence that Lincoln read at least some portions of *Types of Mankind* is extremely slender and leans on one anecdote. In January 1865, after surviving the most racist presidential election campaign in American history and with the end of the Civil War in sight, Lincoln invited America’s best-known scientist, Agassiz, to the White House for a chat. By this time Agassiz was engaged in a war of his own, retreating under fire as he battled against the advance of Darwin’s theory of natural selection, the antithesis of special creation. By the time *Origin of Species* was published in 1859, Lincoln was too busy—getting elected president and then conducting a war—to read it, though back in Springfield William Herndon added a copy to his library. But Lincoln still read newspapers and journals that would have mentioned Agassiz’s very public opposition to Darwin’s idea that species evolve and therefore, by implication, all the races of man have a common ancestry. Lincoln may have shared the negative opinion of Agassiz that Herndon revealed when discussing geology with a visiting journalist in 1867: “We had no need of Agassiz out here to tell us what things meant.” And although one has to assume—and Agassiz probably did—that the Great Emancipator was more on Darwin’s side than on Agassiz’s, the president proved himself a polite host during the Harvard professor’s brief visit. Lincoln’s friend, the journalist Noah Brooks, was present throughout, and left three slightly different accounts.

40. Nott and Gliddon, *Types of Mankind*, e.g., 207: “The Moors are generally a fine-looking race of men”; and lxviii, for Agassiz’s opinion.
“The conversation, however, was not very learned,” wrote the puzzled journalist. “The President and the savant seemed like two boys who wanted to ask questions which appeared commonplace, but were not quite sure of each other. Each man was simplicity itself.”42 Early in the conversation, Lincoln asked Agassiz about the pronunciation of his name, which led to a discussion of different languages, with Lincoln showing a surprising bit of philological knowledge as he spoke words in foreign languages that had the same root as similar words in English. Gradually Brooks recognized that Lincoln was somehow engaged in a “gentle cross-examination of Agassiz, . . . how the Professor studied, how he composed, and how he delivered his lectures; how he found different tastes in his audiences in different portions of the country”: and Lincoln certainly knew how popular Agassiz had become with southern audiences before the war, especially after contributing his “Sketch” to *Types of Mankind*. While on the subject of lecturing, Lincoln mentioned “in passing” that many years ago “he was induced to try his hand at composing a literary lecture—something which he thought was entirely out of his line.” According to Brooks, Lincoln said “his purpose was to analyze inventions and discoveries—to get to the bottom of things.”43 In one account, Brooks wrote that “Agassiz begged that Lincoln would finish the lecture, sometime. Lincoln replied that he had the manuscript somewhere in his papers, ‘and,’ said he, ‘when I get out of this place, I’ll finish it up, perhaps, and get my friend B— to print it somewhere.’”44

As the conversation between the president and the professor continued, Brooks was left wondering why “no questions were asked about the Old Silurian, the Glacial Theory, or the Great Snow-storm”—good geological stuff that interested Lincoln and on which Agassiz was an authority. After Agassiz left, Brooks asked Lincoln why he questioned “his learned visitor” in the way he did. “Why,” said Lincoln, “what we got from him isn’t printed in the books; the other things are.”45 And one of those books in which Agassiz’s views were printed—one which Lincoln once borrowed and which contained a compact “Sketch” written by Agassiz—was *Types of Mankind*.

42. Brooks, “Personal Reminiscences,” 678.
43. Ibid., 224.
44. Ibid., 678.
45. Ibid., 223–24.