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Reading Abraham Lincoln: An Expert/Expert Study in the Interpretation of Historical Texts

SAM WINEBURG
University of Washington

This study explored how historians with different background knowledge read a series of primary source documents. Two university-based historians thought aloud as they read documents about Abraham Lincoln and the question of slavery, with the broad goal of understanding Lincoln's views on race. The first historian brought detailed content knowledge to the documents; the second historian was familiar with some of the themes in the documents but quickly became confused in the details. After much cognitive flailing, the second historian was able to piece together an interpretative structure that brought him by the task's end to where his more knowledgeable colleague began. Data analysis focused on how, lacking detailed content knowledge, this historian was able to regain his intellectual footing, work through confusion, and resist the urge to simplify. Implications of this work for cognitive analyses in history and education are discussed.

I. INTRODUCTION

The origins of chess are claimed by every people on the globe. The Jews trace the game to King Solomon, who reportedly taught it to his son Rehoboam. The Greeks trace it to the philosopher Xerxes, who passed it down to the young Aristotle. The Mandarin Hansing, the Brahman Sissa, the Persian astronomer Shatrenscha: all claim to have invented the game. It is, however, the Arabs whose claim bears linguistic witness: the declaration "check mate" derives from the Arabic *sheik met*, the *sheik*, or king, is dead.

In the more modern history of cognitive science, the ancient game of chess has played a central role. It was to chess that the Dutch psychologist deGroot (1965) turned in his effort to understand complex problem solving. Similarly, Chase and Simon (1973) took up the movement of bishops and rooks to help us understand the nature of planning, means/end analysis, and problem-solving templates—concepts that still find great currency in the cognitive lexicon.

Direct all correspondence to: Sam Wineburg, University of Washington, 312 Miller, Box 353600, Seattle, WA 98195; E-Mail: wineburg@u.washington.edu.

The pioneering studies of chess masters, together with work on expertise in physics problem-solving (Larkin, McDermott, Simon, & Simon, 1980; Chi, Feltovich, & Glaser, 1981) provided striking images of expert performance. The quintessential expert, as Glaser summarized the research literature in 1984, possessed rich networks of highly-elaborated knowledge and myriad problem-solving templates that smoothed the way for the fluid processing of new information. This process went on with lightening speed and, compared to novices, relative ease.

In the decade or so since Glaser's review, a series of studies have complicated the image of the smooth and efficient expert. For example, Scardamalia and Bereiter's (1991) work on written composition revealed that, compared to novices, expert writers took more time executing tasks, detected more problems in their writing, agonized longer over revisions, and spent longer time puzzling about the "rhetorical space" of their compositions. Rather than fluidity and rapidity, the writing process of these experts was characterized by a nagging propensity for finding flaws at every corner. Similarly, Wineburg (1991, 1994), in a study comparing university historians and high school history students, found that it was historians, not students, who echoed pangs of doubt about their interpretations, second-guessing themselves and appending strings of qualifications to their conclusions. Novices, on the other hand, quickly formed interpretations and typically never looked back.

Both domains—literary writing and historical interpretation—provide a counterpoise to the two domains, chess and physics, that lent us our first-generation images of domain-based problem solving. In both literary writing and historical interpretation, solutions to problems are typically not "discovered" but imposed (Resnick, 1987). In the annals of physics or chemistry, a flawed solution is generally of "historical note" but not an essential part of understanding current phenomena (e.g., it's hard to imagine chemists losing their job, or even being chagrined, if they couldn't recount the archaic theory of phlogiston). But in a discipline such as history, a flawed approach to a problem (Beard's 1912 *Economic Interpretation of the Constitution* comes immediately to mind) is still prized and studied by newcomers, not because Beard "got it wrong" (cf. Palmer, 1959), but because his "wrongness" opened up a new way of seeing and asking questions—in short a whole new avenue of "finding problems" (cf. Getzels, 1979). In mathematics, rising stars make their mark by solving long-standing conundrums (cf. Kolata, 1994). In history, they do so by inventing conundrums that never go away.

Different domains may yield qualitatively different images of expertise. But it is also clear from studies across domains that the problems we put to experts shape the images of problem solving we seek to understand (cf. Clement, 1989). So argued Schoenfeld (1985), who presented an expert in number theory with a problem in geometry, a field this expert had not studied in years. The expert's protocol bears a certain resemblance to the protocols of expert writers in Scardamalia and Bereiter's work. Rather than the quick mobilization of knowledge, the expert scratched his head and mumbled, "Hmmm. I don't exactly know where to start" (1985, p. 21). However, as he worked through the problem, the mathematician was able to improvise on what he did know to reach a solution. His success stood in stark contrast to a group of college students who, despite having more knowledge about this particular topic, were unable to solve the problem.

The form of expertise displayed by this mathematician can be thought of as "adaptive" as opposed to "routine" expertise (Hatano & Inagaki, 1986). Adaptive expertise speaks to the ability to apply, adapt, and otherwise stretch knowledge so that it addresses new situations—often situations in which key knowledge is lacking. Viewed from this vantage point, expertise is less the rapid firing and deployment of knowledge than the ability to pick oneself up after a tumble, work through confusion, and reorient oneself to the problem at hand.

These two images of expertise—the nimble and quick problem solver and the resourceful and persistent *bricoléur*—may not be in conflict, but may speak to two different aspects of expertise. Here, the work of Patel and Groen (1991) provides an important distinction. In presenting problems to a group of physicians, with specialties that ranged from radiology to cardiology to psychiatry, Patel and Groen distinguished between "specific" and "generic" expertise—the former would be what a cardiologist brings to a triple bypass surgery, the latter what the radiologist brings. If we needed heart surgery, we would seek the best "specific expert" available. However, if we suffered a heart attack on an airplane we would pray that there was a "generic" expert—an oncologist, an ophthalmologist, somebody with an MD—sitting close by.

The present study set out to explore in close detail the specific and the generic forms of expertise in the domain of history. Both participants in this study were experts given prevailing definitions in the literature but both differed in the level of factual and conceptual knowledge brought to the task. The task they were given centered around Abraham Lincoln and the question of race in the mid-nineteenth century. The overarching goal of the study was to explore how interpretations are formed when experts draw on different kinds of cognitive resources.

II. METHOD

Participants

Two historians were recruited. The first historian (hereafter referred to as H1) has spent a career writing and teaching about Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War. The criteria for recruiting the second historian (H2) were obviously broader: I sought someone in the general field of American history, but not a specialist in the Civil War period, Abraham Lincoln, or Reconstruction.

Both historians were Caucasian males and held the rank of full professor. Each taught in a department that ranked in the top 25 history departments nationally (according to the 1995 rankings of *US News and World Report*), and each earned the doctorate from a department consistently ranked among the top three. Together, these historians had written and edited nearly a dozen books and scores of articles. Both had taught undergraduate survey courses spanning all of American history, with the majority of their upper-level and graduate courses in their respective specializations. During H2's graduate training, his comprehensive examinations covered the Civil War period, but he had not studied this period extensively since then.

Both historians volunteered for the study. Ideally, a crossed-design, in which H1 would have also read documents in H2's specialization, would have been optimal. However, the busy schedules of both men prevented the extension of this task beyond its original confines.

Background

This study builds on previous work in which protocols were collected from 8 historians as they worked through documents about the Battle of Lexington during the Revolutionary War (Wineburg, 1991, 1994). Based on these protocols, a model was formulated to account for historians' cognitive representations of text. Although historians devoted great effort to creating *situation models* (van Dijk & Kintsch, 1983), they also spent considerable time creating a *representation of the subtext,* a model based on implicit textual information that reconstructed authors' assumptions, beliefs, biases, convictions, commitments, hopes, and fears—in sum, the totality of their world views. Texts vary in the degree to which they disclose these elements, but even short texts provide hints of authors' polemical and rhetorical aims, a fact noted by all 8 historians but typically missed by less expert readers (Wineburg, 1992).

As historians moved from document to document, the textual representations they built converged into a cumulative representation of the historical event. This intertextual model, the *Event Model,* incorporated new details and winnowed out less reliable ones. The *Event Model* not only integrated information from the textual evidence historians reviewed, but drew on the cognitive resources they brought to the task—their knowledge, skills, beliefs, and personal experiences.

In an expansion and elaboration of this model, Leinhardt and Young (1996) focused on the role played by historians' theoretical commitments, such as feminism or Marxism, or their particular disciplinary focus, such as economic or social history. Such prior commitments led historians to construct what Leinhardt and Young called a "historical read," an interpretation in which source material was filtered by and subsumed into larger theoretical frameworks. The historical read was most evident when historians read a familiar document of their own choosing. However, when asked to step out of their specialization and read a document they had never seen, historians relied on more general problem solving strategies, such as those identified in the study by Wineburg (1991).

In that study, three disciplinary-specific heuristics were identified: *sourcing*, or the act of considering the source of the document when determining its evidentiary value; *corroboration,* in which the details of one document are compared with those of another before accepting such details as fact; and *contextualization*, the act of creating a spatial and temporal context for a historical event.

In particular, the theoretical conceptualization of this last heuristic, *contextualization*, was closely tied to—indeed limited by—the aim of the task: the reconstruction of a specific battle on the eve of the American Revolution. But it is one thing to contextualize a discrete event like a battle, that has a fixed beginning, an unfolding, and a clear end. It's quite another to contextualize a shift in zeitgeist or popular consciousness. This latter aim, central to understanding changing attitudes toward race in the mid-eighteenth century, requires

the building of an abstract model that acknowledges competing ideas, broad shifts in opinion, and new ways of conceptualizing social phenomena. A desire to understand something about this broader range of contexts led to the formation of this task.

Task Design

The overriding goal in task design was to construct a task that would, in the words of Ericsson and Smith (1991, p. 18), "capture superior performance under controlled conditions." To do so, more than three hundred documents were reviewed. The goal in selecting documents was to combine canonical texts (such as excerpts from the Lincoln/Douglas debates) with lesser-known documents that shed a different light on Lincoln's views. Key documents from Lincoln's contemporaries were also sought so that the final set of documents would sample from the range of opinion on slavery and race in the mid-1800s.

The seven documents included three from Abraham Lincoln, one from Stephen A. Douglas, and three from historical contemporaries (see Appendix). The three documents from Lincoln spanned 21 years of his life. The earliest was composed when he was a 32-year-old lawyer traveling up the Mississippi and writing a letter to a close friend; the second was his rebuttal to Douglas in the first debate at Ottawa, Illinois; the third, written when Lincoln was already president, came from a meeting with a group of free Blacks about establishing a colony in Central America. The other documents included Douglas's opening statement at Ottawa; statements from two religious racists, John Bell Robinson and John Van Evrie; and a statement from the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison.

Procedure

The two historians were taught the think-aloud procedure (Ericsson & Simon, 1984) using an article on bees ("Busy as a Bee?") from the science section of the *New York Times* (July 30, 1991). They were asked to read this passage out loud and to verbalize everything that they "heard themselves thinking." For guidance, they were shown a list of six guidelines for eliciting verbal protocols taken from Perkins (1981), such as "say whatever's on your mind," "don't overexplain or justify," "don't worry about complete sentences," and so on.

Historians were instructed to read the historical documents with the broad goal of "understanding the light they shed on Lincoln's views on race." Each of the 7 documents was printed on a separate sheet, with the source of the document appearing at the top. Historians read the documents in the same order but were allowed to go back to earlier documents at any time. During historians' "concurrent reporting" (cf. Ericsson & Simon, 1984; Pressley & Afflerbach, 1995) my own comments were minimal, only reminding historians to verbalize their thoughts when they fell silent. After each document, historians were asked to give a "retrospective report" on anything else they remembered themselves thinking. Such retrospective reports are particularly susceptible to the criticisms of the think-aloud method (Nisbett & Wilson, 1977; but see also Ericsson & Simon, 1984). However, such reports offer insights into cognitive processes that are not provided by concurrent reports alone (Robertson & Ericsson, 1988; Wineburg, 1991). During data analysis, a sep-

aration was maintained between data elicited during the concurrent and retrospective phases of the think-aloud method.

Data Analysis

Data analysis sought to describe and draw relationships among the different kinds of cognitive processes engaged in by historians. Protocols were transcribed verbatim and analysis was systematic. Analysis occurred in four stages.

Stage 1. Protocols were prepared by parsing them into "conceptual units." A conceptual unit was defined as a unit of speech that focused on a single idea. A unit could be as short as a few words (if a single thought was discernible) and as long as eight lines of the protocol. If an utterance exceeded eight lines, it was split into two units. Transcripts were prepared using an Apple Laser printer with a 12-point typeface and a 55-character carriage return. This precision, which might be overwrought elsewhere, was necessary for insuring consistency in applying decision rules for comparing the two protocols.

Stage 2. Protocols were systematically reviewed in order to create a coding scheme. Rather than applying a pre-existing scheme, the goal here was the categorization of cognitive phenomena and a careful description of their features. Initially, protocols were reviewed inductively. Working hypotheses were developed, checked, refined, and rechecked in subsequent reviews. In this type of analysis, rigor is achieved by the refinement, addition and elimination of codes, so that the surviving codes bear theoretical significance but never stray far from the empirical data at hand.

Stage 3. Three broad codes were used to characterize each conceptual unit. When a single unit straddled more than one code, only the dominant code, following Waern (1980), was assigned.

Self

These comments were self-referential statements that addressed aspects of the historians' beliefs, personal views, or opinions. These included metacognitive comments that pointed to aspects of confusion, emerging understanding, or the formulation of plans. Also coming under this category were comments addressing affective responses evoked by the texts.

Text

This code embraced comments that made reference to the explicit and implicit meanings of the text. These included comments about literal meaning (e.g., the establishment of basic causal connections, the decoding of anaphoric references, etc.) as well as comments at an interpretative level (e.g., a narrowing the range of textual meanings or speculating about what historical actors meant or intended).

Context

Comments coded as *context* were devoted to the establishment of a textual "world" to make the text intelligible. Six sub-codes were generated to capture the distinct aspects of this category (a full coding scheme, along with decision rules, is available from the author):

Spatio-temporal comments focused on the physical location of events and of human beings set against concrete geographical settings. Such comments related to the temporal sequence or chronology of events linked in time. Comments about a "mental picture" of events or seeing something in the "mind's eye" also came under this code.

Social-rhetorical comments related to the social demands of situations in which actors sought to persuade others of their points of view. Under this category came comments that fleshed out an intellectual and ideological landscape in which people in the past wrote and spoke.

Biographic comments focused on the life histories of individuals, the events that shaped their personal thinking and behavior, their characteristic modes of response, and the kinds of beliefs that framed their conceptual universe.

Historiographic comments made reference to the body of historical writing (the "secondary literature") about the past.

Linguistic comments addressed the historical meanings of words, terms, and phrases, including speculations about the range of meanings that differ from contemporary connotation and denotation.

Analogical comments sought to explain past events or behavior by drawing explicit comparisons to other historical periods.

A second rater blind to the identity and backgrounds of the historians coded the protocols using the three general codes, yielding an acceptable reliability, Cohen's K = .86. Another rater coded *contextual* comments applying the six sub-codes, Cohen's K = .84.

Stage 4. During this final stage, protocols were coded for other cognitive behaviors. These codes were independent from the codes specified under Stage 3. Two phenomena were identified for coding: (1) *intertextual linkages*, in which historians made explicit reference to previous documents read in the set; and (2) the *specification of ignorance*. This construct referred to instances when historians explicitly acknowledged confusion, expressed puzzlement or wonder, asked questions, or specified gaps in knowledge. Unlike the coding scheme from *Stage 3* (which was applied only to concurrent reporting data), the application of these codes included data from both concurrent and retrospective phases. Interrater agreement was tested with a second rater: a 100% agreement was reached for *intertextual linkages*; 96% for the *specification of ignorance.*

III. RESULTS

Length

The two protocols differed in length. H1 spent approximately 2 hours and 45 minutes reading the documents in comparison to H2's 1 hour and 50 minutes. The difference in number of words uttered was also considerable: 5073 words for H1 versus 2992 for H2.

Types of Contexts

Protocols were coded according to the three categories of *Self, Text*, and *Context.* A Chi-square analysis yielded significant differences between the two protocols, χ^2 (2) = 16.03,

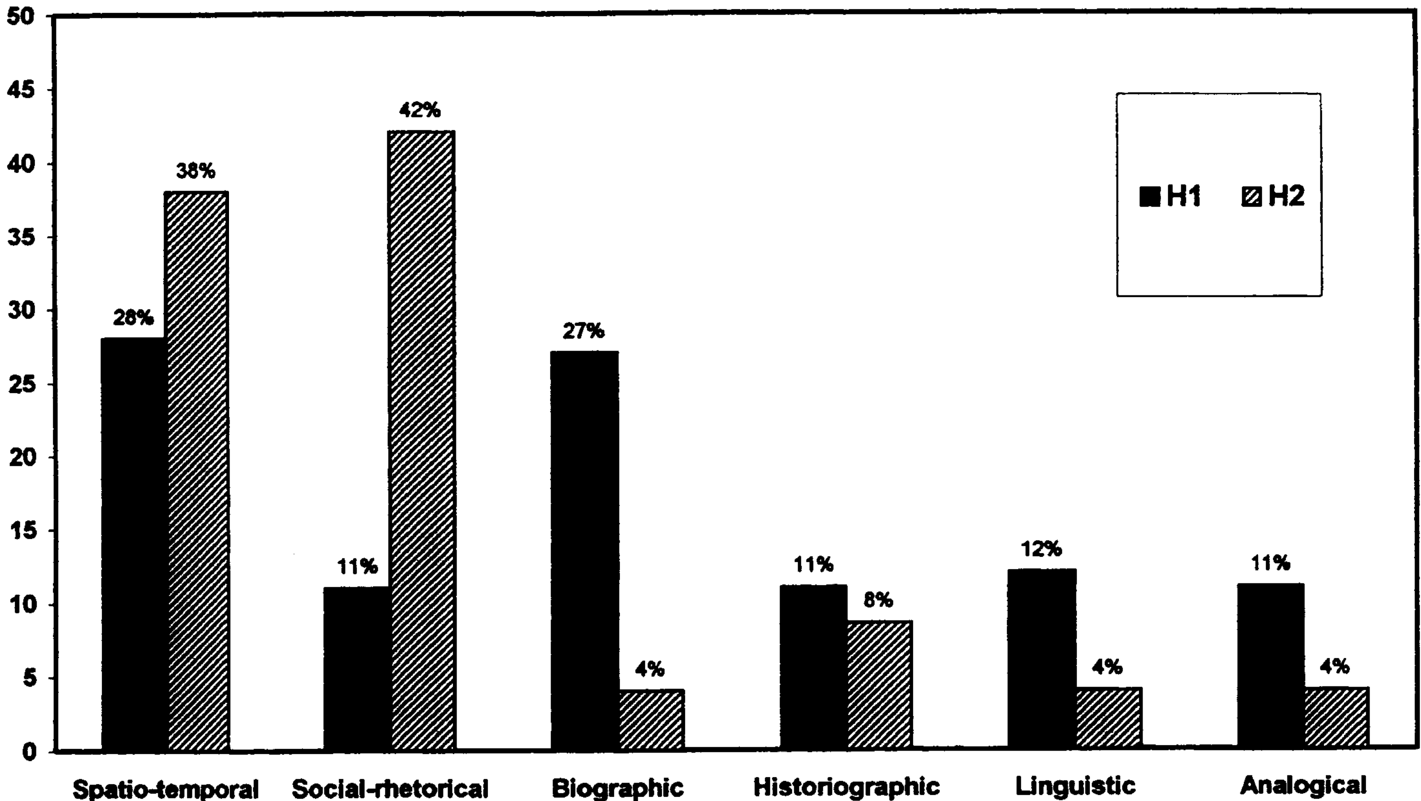

Figure 1. Proportion of contextual comments by category.

$p < .01$. For H1, there were 105 conceptual units. *Self* accounted for 9% (9) of conceptual units, *Text* 30% (32 units), and *Context* 61% (or 64 units). For H2, there were 77 total conceptual units. H2's respective percentages were 18% (14 units) *Self*, 51% (39) *Text*, and 31% (24 units) *Context*. These differences reflected several expected results: H2 more often than H1 raised questions about his knowledge and monitored his own confusion (Self); H1 brought more background knowledge to the task, which provided him with more resources for building a context.

This pattern carries over to the distribution of comments categorized as *Context:* 61% of H1's comments fall under *context*, while only 31% of H2's do. *Contextual* comments were further coded using the six sub-codes. Figure 1 shows the relative frequency of the different types of contextual comments.

The greatest differences occurred in the categories of *Social-Rhetorical* and *Biographic* context. These findings reflect an essential difference in the kinds of intellectual resources historians brought to this task. H2 lacked the key ingredient, factual knowledge about Lincoln, that would allow him to build a biographic context. On the other hand, the task provided him with raw materials for creating a social-rhetorical context. The document set itself included an array of social and rhetorical genres—a campaign debate, a personal letter, a newspaper editorial, a public address, and so on—that allowed H2 to draw on related knowledge about these discourse forms in public and private life.

Although Figure 1 shows the relative frequency of contextual comments, it does not address differences in kind. Table 1 addresses this by juxtaposing examples from each of the two protocols.

In the example from the category of *Spatio-temporal* context, H2 draws on knowledge of other periods in the history of the Americas (and the role of climate on Europeans' New World ventures) to bring texture to Lincoln's plan for a Central American colony. On the other hand, H1's comments zero in on his extensive knowledge of *this* event, which he places in a micro-chronological sequence that takes into account the desolation of the Union Army after Bull Run, the deliberations by Lincoln and his advisors about the timing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the effects on Lincoln of the bloodiest day of the war, the Battle of Antietam, which left 22,000 dead and wounded in its wake.

A similar pattern in the specificity of comments is evident in *Biographic* context. H2's comments indicate some knowledge about Lincoln's concerns about emancipation, but even here his knowledge is overshadowed by what he doesn't know. On the other hand, H1's comments, in this instance a comment about abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison's struggles with his son, show intimate familiarity with key figures of this time. H1's other comments in this category often spoke to issues of character—people's idiosyncrasies and mannerisms, their ways of navigating the social world. For example, when reading Document C, H1 commented on Lincoln's description of slaves bound together "like so many fish upon a trot-line" (C.5). The image provoked H1's comment about Lincoln's characteristic use of words:

> It has always interested me about this passage how precise Lincoln is in describing a small iron clevis. He doesn't even say they were chained or anything . . . . People who rode the circuit with [Lincoln] as judges . . . the judges and lawyers would ride from one

TABLE 1
Examples of Historians' Contextual Comments

Spatio-Temporal

Lincoln's address on Colonization delivered to a group of freed Black men at the White House on August 14, 1862. (D.4) It is interesting, that Lincoln is, although he has decided on Emancipation, and, as you know, his Cabinet persuaded him to wait until you win a victory. The North was losing battles. Lee and Stonewall Jackson, the second battle of Bull Run and all the rest of it were really the biggest victories the South ever won, I suppose right there, before the middle of August, 1862. And it was Seward I think who was Secretary of State who said, lookie, if you issue an Emancipation Proclamation now it's going to seem a last gasp, death-bed repentance and all of that, you're about out. Wait until you've won a victory. And so the Battle of Antietam which was militarily sort of a draw, it was enough of a victory. . . and it did stop the invasion of the North for the moment. [H1]

The country is a very excellent one for any people (D.10) 'Any people' except Europeans who died there in great numbers. Europeans were much more successful thriving in the more moderate climates, North American, above Mexico, South America away from the tropical zones. So it amuses me when he says this country is "a very excellent one for any people." [H2]

Social-Rhetorical

Then support Mr. Lincoln and the Black Republican party. Who are in favor of the citizenship of the Negro. (A.5) OK. My reaction so far is that this probably expresses Douglas's view. That's his real views, and that he is appealing to his audience. Many of his audience probably share this view. So I don't think Douglas had to distort his view—I think his views fit in with the views of a lot of people in his audience. [H1]

Lincoln's address on Colonization delivered to a group of freed Black men at the White House on August 14, 1862. (D.4) It's important that the audience is a group of free Black men. One would assume that he would say things differently to them than to others. Although, maybe not. [H2]

Biographic

Garrison . . . worked for a short time as the assistant editor of the Genius *before beginning his own anti-slavery periodical in 1831.* (F.2) What I was thinking about was an incident . . . [about] Garrison and his son, in about 1870 or 71. Garrison's son, who had fought in the Civil War, was an editor of *The Nation* magazine. *The Nation* was started in 1865, the magazine that is still going now, started in 1865 . . . . Garrison's son and *The Nation* had taken the position that there was so much corruption in the Reconstruction governments that they should be given up, and Garrison and his son had debated this between themselves for some time . . . . [The son] said [to the father] there is no need for us to talk about this anymore, we are on exactly opposite sides. He said, we modern people realize, he says, you keep harping back to this old issue, we modern people realize that corruption is the big issue. [H1]

He belongs to an inferior race and must always occupy an inferior position. (A.13) I don't know as much about Lincoln's views as I think I do. As I read it and see Douglas, perhaps putting words in Lincoln's mouth, I'm not quite sure about what I do and don't know about Lincoln. . . . I know that [Lincoln was] very practically aware of the concerns of bringing them together as if they were equal in the same society. But I don't know enough about Lincoln's views to, maybe, make some other judgments I've been making. [H2]

Historiographic

In the right to eat the bread which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man. (B.9) A staunch critic of Lincoln has cited this passage as example of Lincoln's sort of two-facedness. . . . And that's what Richard Hofstadter did in his book *The American Political Tradition* published in 1948. Hofstadter, I think, later changed his views about that. [H1]

continued

TABLE 1
Contiued

Between these extremes of humanity are the intermediate races (G.2) I'm reminded here about Winthrop Jordan's (1968) book *White over Black*, and how the colors came to be important for English-speaking people. The color of black, the color of white, and what those entailed psychologically apart from race and people, but [what] the colors themselves had meant. [H2]

Linguistic

If we deal with those Negroes. . .whose intellects are clouded by slavery, we have very poor materials to start with. (D.6) I think, it'd be interesting, one way is to criticize from today's standpoint, the really sort of historical way, would be to see whether there were any abolitionists at the time, you see . . . [who] say it differently. And I think what we've found out in recent studies of abolitionists is that many of them thought of it the very same way. [H1]

I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position. (B.5) I'm going back and rereading the sentence. These 19th-century orators spoke in more complicated sentences. They weren't used to sound bites. I'm wondering what he means by physical difference--if it's simply the color or there are mental traits that he's thinking about, that he also has in mind when he refers to "physical differences"? [H2]

Analogical

If we deal with those Negroes who are not free at the beginning, and whose intellects are clouded by slavery, we have very poor materials to start with. (D.6) Again, one might picture that from the present day standpoint as, kind of racist kind of statement. . . . One might make the same kind of statement today, I mean when one observes in the countries of Eastern Europe trying to adapt to a sort of a free market, and a free political processes. . . . People who've not had experience . . . in doing this, one can't expect that right off they're going to be able to do this right away. [H1]

How true it is that God renders the worst of human conditions tolerable. (C.8) His point that "God renders the worst of human conditions tolerable" makes sense in that context. It's an insight into human nature that's been confirmed by a lot of others. One example that comes to mind is Alexander Solshenietzen writing about Siberia and how, like the camps in Siberia for Soviet prisoners, you get to find out what is structured and defined rewards in that misery. And that's what I'm reminded of. [H2]

> place to another, and Lincoln would be riding on in a buggy, so there's plenty of time to talk and they'd see a tree and they'd all agree that that's a beautiful tree, but then it would always be Lincoln, "Well now what does its beauty consist in? Does its beauty consist in its form? Does it consist in its color? Does it consist in the location of the tree, or what? And this comes up several times. People comment on that Lincoln always seemed to be trying to get to the heart of the matter . . . . Not only when he's president, but even before he's president. Frequently when Lincoln has said something it's really not possible—at least I've never found it possible—to say what he said in fewer words than he said it. He had boiled it down right to the essence.

H2's characterization of Lincoln here is consistent with other historians' descriptions. Wills (1992) notes that Lincoln frequently discussed philology with his personal secretary (and later Secretary of State under McKinley) John Hay. Lincoln's speeches have long been studied by students of oratory for their balanced rhythm and elegant structure. And, perhaps hyperbolically, Lincoln scholar McPherson (1991) titled one of his essays about the 16th president, "How Lincoln Won the War With Metaphors."

Overview of the Two Readings

H1's Reading

Although H1 asked several questions in the course of his reading, his protocol is an extended elaboration of views he first laid out during Document A, Douglas's speech at Ottawa. Here Douglas imputes to Lincoln the belief of God-given equality between the races, the notion that the slave "was endowed with equality by the Almighty and that no human law can deprive him of these rights" (@ Document A, line 9, or A.9). At this early stage in the reading, H1 gave an overview of issues upon which the whole task pivoted:

> Lincoln accepted that slavery was the law of the land and was on record that he wasn't going to use force to try to change that law of the land, and so long as slavery existed by the Constitution, Lincoln would support it. So it depends a good bit on what "no human law can deprive him of these rights"—precisely what that means . . . Lincoln certainly over and over stated [the centrality] of the Declaration of Independence, just as Douglas said, and he stated [it] frequently. . . . That in the "view of God" Blacks were equal—Lincoln right off—it doesn't sound like Lincoln would put it that way.

Here, then, is a telegraphic look at the nexus of issues that influenced Lincoln's views about slavery: H1 focuses on the relationship between the language of the Declaration of Independence, the constraints of the Constitution, the concept of natural rights (or what "no human law can deprive him of these rights" means), and whether or not God figures into Lincoln's public position on slavery and emancipation.

It is easy to get lost in this swirl of issues. To modern ears, it would seem that if one subscribed to the proposition that "all men are created equal" (a common but overly-simplified distillation of the Declaration of Independence) the abrogation of slavery would automatically follow. However, in the 1850s these issues were more complicated than they might seem now. Although some commentators have viewed Document B as contradictory to Lincoln's other public statements (hence H1's reference to historian Richard Hoftstader under *Historiographic Context* in Table 1), H1 sees it instead as "reflective of the complexity of Lincoln's position" (@B.9).

A close examination of Lincoln's response shows aspects that are easily overshadowed by its charged language. Indeed, as H1 pointed out, the only thing Lincoln is willing to concede *unequivocally* to Douglas is that there is a "physical difference between the two races." From then on, Lincoln equivocates. Regarding moral or intellectual endowment, there is "perhaps" a difference, Lincoln says. This "perhaps," a qualification typically missed by contemporary readers, is crucial, for even to raise the possibility that the races were morally and intellectually equivalent must be viewed against the backdrop of mid-nineteenth century racism (Fredrickson, 1971, 1975). As Wills notes (1992, p. 96), the agnosticism signaled by "perhaps" constituted the "liberal" position of the day. What might appear to modern readers as a bit of preciosity was to Lincoln and his contemporaries a distinction full of implication. Because it is difficult to imagine a world in such agnosticism would be viewed as "progressive," modern readers tend to view Lincoln's statements as contradictory and inconsistent, or worse—hypocritical and self-serving.

After this point in the task, H1's reading was largely an amplification of earlier themes. The most complete statement of his views, a place where his think-aloud took on the cadence and rhythm of a university lecture, came at Document E, the religious justification of slavery offered by John Bell Robinson. In his retrospective report, H1 compared Lincoln's position to Robinson's:

> Lincoln never connects religion and slavery. In fact, in his Second Inaugural that is the big contrast that he draws, where he says that, in this contest, it's now nearing its end, it's March, 1865. Both sides read the same Bible, both sides pray to the same God. He says it may seem strange that any people should pray to God to justify an institution like slavery. Clearly, I think, to Lincoln, it seems strange, but then, characteristically, in Lincoln's way, he says "let us not judge so that we be not judged." It seems to me that's the one time that I can think of where Lincoln mentions God in relation to slavery, and the assumption is that it is absurd for people to pray to God to justify human slavery. That is the characteristic Lincoln view, and he even goes further when he suggests in the following sentence or so that it may very well be that God is not on either side. Seems to me that's the real insight of Lincoln which I'm not sure I've seen equaled anywhere. It would be beautiful if we could incorporate that in our foreign policy.... When two people are quarreling one may sympathize with one side but that's not to say that it's totally right versus total wrong there, and that we shouldn't say that God is on our side. That's not for us to say. And it may very well be that there are a lot of conflicts that God is not on either side. Now that seems to be a degree of detachment, that's the characteristic about Lincoln that I'm so struck by: the detachment. In the midst of fighting a hard war, I mean people can be detached if they didn't care who won the war, and there were people like that, and certainly they were detached, but to fight a hard fight, as hard as anybody, and then be able to be detached at the end and say we must not assume that God is on our side. I don't think [God] is on their side, because I don't think that God would support slavery, but that's not to say that God is on our side. And that seems to me to be such a great degree of detachment that I'm not sure anybody can go beyond it.

H2's Reading

H2 confronted his lack of knowledge almost immediately. At the third sentence of the first document, he made this admission:

> As I read this and see Douglas perhaps putting words in Lincoln's mouth, I'm not quite sure about what I do and don't know about Lincoln. Douglas makes it sound as if Lincoln believes they're equal, Blacks and Whites, on virtually every level, but I don't know to what extent Lincoln did or did not believe that. I know that he was very practically aware of the concerns of bringing [the races] together as if they were equal in the same society at this point, but I don't know enough about Lincoln's views to make some other judgments I've been making. (@A.3)

In the next document, Lincoln's rebuttal of Douglas, Lincoln states that he has "no purpose to introduce political and social equality" between the races. At this point (@B.4) H2 paused: "Just rereading the sentence again. Again trying to think about how Douglas's statement about Lincoln thinking the two were equal could have some truth if it falls outside the realm of what Lincoln identifies as political and social equality." A sentence later (@B.5), H2 stopped again:

> I'm going back and rereading the sentence. These nineteenth-century orators spoke in more complicated sentences. They weren't used to sound bites. I'm wondering what he means by "physical difference." If it's simply the color or are there mental traits that he's thinking about, that he also has in mind when he refers to "physical differences"?

At the end of the document, H2 focused on the question of natural rights and what they might mean with reference to slavery:

> If Blacks have the "natural rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" one would assume that liberty and pursuit of happiness would indicate that they cannot be slaves at the same time. Similarly, if Blacks have the "right to eat the bread which his own hand earns," that they have the right to the product of their labor, that is the pursuit of happiness or liberty, one form or the other, then if that is a natural right then slavery goes against those natural rights. (@B.8)

H2 called attention to this apparent contradiction but did not try to dissolve it. Over the next five documents his reading can be thought of as a prolonged exercise in the *specification of ignorance,* in which he made a careful accounting of the knowledge he would need before he could reach judgment. His stance here bears uncanny similarity to the protocols of historians collected by Leinhardt and Young (1996, esp. p. 465). Across Documents C-H, H2 asked, on average, 4.2 questions per document, underscoring what he did not know with markers such as "I don't have enough to go on" or "This makes no sense to me."

H2's process of asking questions came to a head at Document E, the statement from John Bell Robinson. Robinson's religious racism posed a contrast to Lincoln's views, but the precise nature of this contrast was not immediately apparent. The differences only came into focus, slowly and painstakingly, as H2 backtracked to earlier documents. By the end of Document E, H2's questions started to take shape. His comments at this point, with notations that indicate links to previous documents, appear in Figure 2.

H2's point of departure as he backtracked to earlier documents was John Bell Robinson's claim that God ordained Africans to their status as slaves. The first link backward was to Lincoln's response to Douglas (Document A), in which Lincoln focused on physical differences between the races and issue of natural rights. H2 finds no mention, however, of God in Lincoln's response. From here, in link 2, the historian searched for Lincoln's connection between slavery and God. This search brought him back again to Document A (@A.8), a statement in which Douglas imputes to Lincoln the belief that "Negro equality is guaranteed by the laws of God, and that it is asserted in the Declaration of Independence."

From Douglas's claims, H2 moved to Lincoln's response (link 3), which connects the Declaration of Independence to issues of emancipation but makes no explicit reference to God. In link 4, H2 pinpointed a place in Lincoln's letter to Mary Speed in which slaves and God are explicitly linked, a linkage which gave him a basis for comparing Lincoln's views to John Bell Robinson's. It is at the next link, the fifth, that we see a conscious act of refinement in H2's understanding. He returned for the third time to Document B, raising questions about the nature of natural rights and where these rights might come from according to Lincoln.

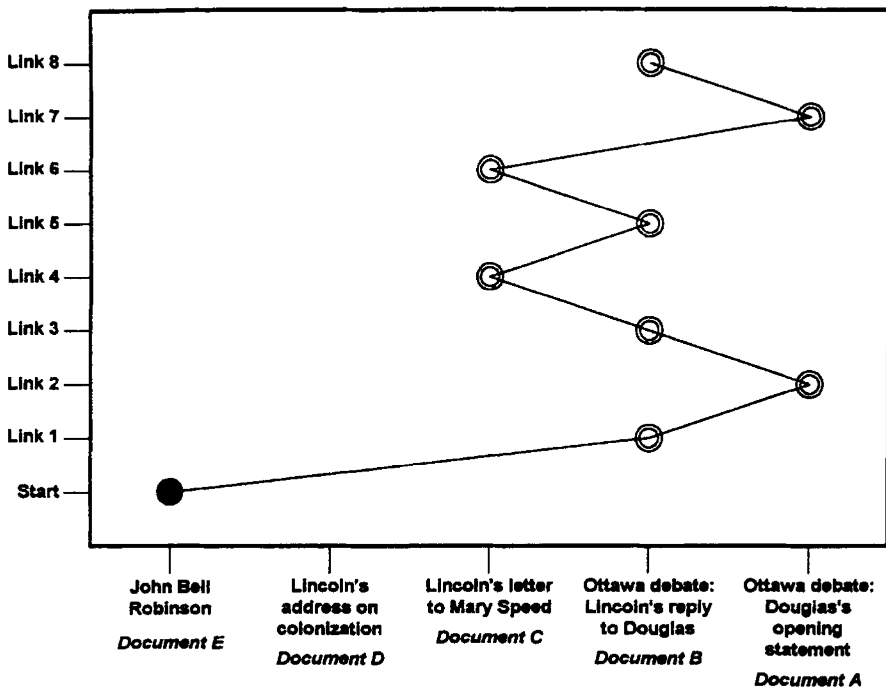

Figure 2. Retrospective report for H2 after reading Document E

Lincoln also talks about Blacks being endowed with certain things from God, but "usefulness as slaves"[†]or a status of slaves isn't one of the things that he mentions. [I'm going to] look at some of the earlier [documents]. What I'm looking for is his discussion [of] the physical difference between the two and his discussion of natural rights [to] see if he links those at all to God.[1.B§] It was Douglas[2.A] who linked Lincoln to believe about the Negro to God and the Declaration of Independence. But in this,[3.B] in Lincoln's reply, he refers—I'm looking here for reference to God—I'm not finding it but I haven't finished yet, he refers to the Declaration of Independence. But in the letter to Mary Speed[4.C] he did say "how true it is that God renders the worst of human conditions tolerable." But God didn't render slavery a condition that Blacks ought to find themselves in, according to Lincoln. Lincoln keeps going out of it in these things, he talks about the Declaration of Independence,[5.B] he talks about natural rights—I'm not sure where these come from in his mind—and he talks about natural differences. But he does not bring God into it other than to say that God makes, God allows people to make the worst of human conditions tolerable.[6.C] And that's a form of mercy, not of any kind of restriction on their status or behavior. What I thought, Douglas[7.A] has accused Lincoln of saying that Blacks had equal rights from the Declaration of Independence and God. Lincoln didn't say that in these things. [He didn't say] anything about God, just the Declaration of Independence[8.B] and natural rights, wherever those come from.

Note. [†]Denotes the starting place for the reading. The words in quotation marks are from the current document being read. [§] Numbers refer to the order of links to other documents; letters refer to the document being referenced.

In returning to Document D in link 6, H2 came to view the letter to Mary Speed as a counter to John Bell Robinson. Lincoln connects God and slavery in the Speed letter in order to stress the common humanity of all peoples, not to restrict slaves' status or behavior. When H2 returned to Stephen Douglas's claims in link 7, he was now in a position to dispute them. H2's final link, his eighth, brought him back for the third time to Lincoln's speech at Ottawa. H2 sees that even in justifying his position against slavery, Lincoln leaves God out of the equation, appealing instead to the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence.

In the course of this zigzagged comment, H2 came to understand that while Robinson appeals to God to justify slavery as a lower form of manhood, Lincoln appeals to God to connect the races in common humanity. Through this intertextual weave, he learned that Lincoln justifies the equality of the races, not by appealing to God, but by appealing to the natural rights in the Declaration of Independence, a reinterpretation so sweeping that Wills (1992) called it the "Second American Revolution." Although H2 started off the task confused and full of questions, he ended up with a sophisticated understanding of Lincoln's position that brought him by the task's end to an interpretation similar to where his more knowledgeable counterpart, H1, began.

Specification of Ignorance

The protocols of the two historians were coded for instances of the *specification of ignorance*. There were 21 instances for H2 versus 7 for H1, $Z = -2.02$, $p < .05$, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test.

The nature of each historians' specification of ignorance reflected similar patterns from other parts of the protocol. H1's questions demonstrated the specificity and depth of someone who has spent a career studying this time period; each query responded to a particular detail in the documents with no conceptual linkage among the 7 instances. On the other hand, H2's questions echoed one other until the point when they came together in an interpretive outline (see Figure 2). The difference in how these historians specified what they did not know is illustrated in Table 2, a point in the task when both responded to the same phrase.

For H2, Lincoln's use of the phrase "capable of thinking like White men" is "baffling," one which he has to "think about" twice within this short comment. Even then, H2 expressed doubt about whether he had enough to go on. In contrast, H1 immediately characterized the phrase as an unfortunate choice of words by Lincoln, who used the term "White men" here as a synonym for "free men." H1 then laid out different criteria for judging Lincoln, "present day standards" and the "historical way." By "present day standards," Lincoln lays himself "open to criticism." But a different problem faces the historian who wants to contextualize Lincoln. If, in Lincoln's world, the word "white" was synonymous with "free," then Lincoln can hardly be blamed for using a phrase whose meaning was apparent to him and his contemporaries. But how would we know if this interpretation was correct? H1's comment shows us in small compass how historians both formulate hypotheses and propose ways of verifying them. H1 proposed a search of the literature of abolitionists to see if they, too, used this phrase, a fact that would "weaken the historical

TABLE 2.
Comparison of Historians' Comments at "Capable of Thinking like White Men"

H1	H2
Clearly I think, from the present day standards he's open to criticism by bringing color into it, "capable of thinking as free men," see that's what we want, it's not whether they're White or not. . . I think he meant free men. Not those who have been systematically oppressed, and I think in his view, he just automatically--he's never seen White men enslaved. Now White men have been enslaved in various parts of the world, but he had never seen it. So he equated White with free, Black with slaves. It would be interesting--one way would be to criticize him from today's standpoint. But the really sort of historical way, would be to see whether there were any abolitionists at the time, you see . . . [who] say it differently. And I think what we've found out in recent studies of abolitionists is that many of them thought of it the very same way. That is, there were abolitionists who were "racists," who thought in terms of Whites free, Blacks slaves. So that would dull--if that's the case--that would dull, unless we had people at Lincoln's time who didn't make the same error as I would call it that Lincoln made--it would weaken the historical criticism of Lincoln. You can certainly criticize Lincoln from today's standpoint. From today's standpoint he should have known better.	"Capable of thinking like White men." This is a baffling statement. I have to think about it. I want to read it over again. Clearly the condition of slavery in his mind has clouded their thinking. It's give him, given the nation's poor materials with which to work. Poor materials for what? For the nation to work with? I'm not quite sure. . . . "Capable of thinking like White men"? Does that mean that they have never been enslaved or that they are so far from slavery that they don't think as if they have ever been slaves? I've got to read it again. I think too much has been taken out of it for me to appreciate exactly what's going on in that paragraph. I don't quite understand the context; I'm a little confused. But clearly, the idea that if we can start with Blacks who haven't been enslaved, we're starting with better materials. People who perhaps haven't had ideas of self-government and self-support beaten out of them by slavery. But I'm not sure if the idea is to take these better materials to some other place, Africa or Central America, or if he wants to send the defective materials overseas to these colonies. I'm not quite sure what's going on. Obviously making an appeal to the free Black audience that they're the ones who ought to be leading the way. Which makes the most sense? I'm not sure.

criticism of Lincoln." In this example, H1 not only specifies his ignorance but lays out an action plan for remedying it.

Intertextual Links

The two historians differed in the number of times they referred back to previous documents. H1 made 3 intertextual links versus 20 links for H2, $Z = -1.8$, $p = .06$, Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test. During the initial part of the task, neither historian looked back frequently to earlier documents. Across Documents B-D, H1 had 1 link, H2 had 2. However, at Document E, H2 made 9 links (8 that appear in Figure 2). H2 made another 9 links over the final two documents, an indication of his attempt to create a context within the task itself.

IV. DISCUSSION

This study offers different images of historical expertise (see Table 3). In many respects, H1 resembled the sure-footed experts from other domains. For him, these documents acti-

vated broad associations and extensive declarative knowledge that let him situate documents in an web of chronologically ordered events—sometimes down to the sequence of days within a specific month of the Lincoln presidency. At other times the documents provoked seemingly ready-made interpretations, points when the think-aloud took on the quality of a "profess-aloud."

H1's protocol exemplifies the range of ways that historians create historical contexts—ways that go beyond simple notions of situating events in time and space. From H1's protocol, we learn how an understanding of the Lincoln-Douglas debates is enriched by knowledge of the life history of Abraham Lincoln and his own development as a thinker. Further, we see the pivotal role played by the establishment of a linguistic context, the recognition that words themselves have histories that must be considered before rushing to judgment or condemnation (cf. Olson, 1994). We see also how the reading of history takes place against the backdrop of its own interpretative history. When H1 invoked the historian

TABLE 3
Features of Expertise as Displayed by Two Historians

Aspect	H1	H2
Reading Time	165 minutes	110 minutes
Definition of Key Issues	4 minutes into task	43 minutes into task
	Lincoln's views re: slavery revolve around conflicts between enacted law (Constitution), natural law (as set down in Dec. of Independence), and Divine Law.	Major difference in stance between Lincoln and religious racists—while each appeals to God, they do so for opposite reasons. Lincoln's argument for emancipation springs from his interpretation of natural rights.
Specification of Ignorance	7 instances	21 instances
	Each in response to specific textual details with minimal conceptual linkage between questions; explicit strategy of hypothesis testing for resolving textual questions.	Pattern of linked questions that led to search strategy within document set. Question asking as key to formation of new interpretation.
Context Creation	Knowledge brought to task afforded creation of biographic context; seamless interweaving of knowledge brought to task and associations spurred by specific documents.	General forms of context (e.g., social-rhetorical) less dependent on specific topical information; creation of intertextual context within task.
Nature of Expertise	Encyclopedic knowledge of topic and its chronology, down to the sequence of days within a specific month of the Lincoln presidency. Extensive knowledge of familial texts as well as positions of competing interpretive schools.	Ability to work through confusion, resist the urge to simplify, and regain intellectual footing despite major gaps in knowledge: in short, the ability to develop new knowledge even when lacking many of the requisite tools to do so.

Richard Hofstadter (see Table 1) he shows how his own position results from an on-going dialogue with a historiographic tradition. Finally, H1's protocol allows us to see how historians, when generating self-explanations (cf. Chi & Bassok, 1989), draw analogies with and comparisons to other historical periods.

In fact, over the course of his reading, H1 drew twice as many analogies (4) as H2. This may be one way that historical expertise differs from expertise in other domains. In science, for example, there is some indication that the tendency to create analogies varies inversely with knowledge about the target phenomena (Dunbar, in press). Here, at least, the trend went the other way: it was the more knowledgeable historian who made more frequent comparisons to other time periods.

The protocol of the second historian, H2, shines a different light on the reading of history. Here, the historian was thrown into unfamiliar territory and, at least initially, responded with confusion. Yet, as he worked through the task, H2's questions began to cluster around a set of constructs and relationships that proved crucial to his understanding. Despite early stumbling, H2's adaptive expertise was evident by the task's end, when an interpretative structure that made sense of these issues came into view. Even with major gaps in background knowledge, H2 succeeded in creating a context to explain this diverse collection of texts.

The creation of context lies at the heart of historical expertise, forming the foundation upon which sound historical readings must rest. In examining the protocols of these experts, we are able to surface the very elements that are often hidden in historical monographs: the fits and starts that precede the emergence of an interpretation, the seams that hold together discrete and seemingly contradictory pieces of text. On encountering such an eclectic group of texts, the easiest thing a reader can do is to leave each text as is: each an island unto itself, distanced from its neighboring texts by more than two decades, and separated from our own condition by gaps in time, geography, language, custom, manner, and habit of mind. Creating coherence from this textual mélange is a major cognitive achievement.

An important question in any study of expertise is how experts get to be that way. In this regard, the present study offers little new, for, like other snapshot studies of expertise, it cannot address what is at base a developmental question. But the study of expertise must also address a second key question: How is it that experts keep learning? Why do they continue to get smarter from encounters with materials and situations that leave other problem solvers unfazed (cf. Holyoak, 1991; Perkins & Saloman, 1989)?

Here, H2's protocol offers intriguing clues. His zigzagged comments open a window to interpretative processes typically eliminated from historians' book-length manuscripts. By following H2's interpretative tracks, we see how his understanding emerges as a result of a dialectical process between the questions he asks and the textual materials he encountered. Expert problem-solving has sometimes been depicted as a unidirectional process in which the knowledge-base of the expert is brought to bear on a particular problem. Here, however, the arrow goes in the other direction: Aspects of the textual case provoked, challenged, and altered the knowledge base of the expert (cf. Scardamalia & Bereiter, 1991).

Novice readers encounter the past in primary documents and judge it. H2 encountered the past in this task and learned from it.

Indeed, the dialectical process of reading exemplified by H2 contrasts with how other adult readers performed on this same task. In a previous study (Wineburg & Fournier, 1994), 14 college history majors and non-majors, all enrolled in a program to become school teachers, read these same documents. Although there was great variety in their responses, two trends stood out. One group took Lincoln's words at face value, as offering direct access into Lincoln's mind unmediated by issues of context or the passage of time. They saw the documents written by others, e.g., those by John Bell Robinson or William Lloyd Garrison, as contributing little to the conversation about Lincoln, since neither document mentioned the president directly. Other, more careful, readers recognized that they needed a context for Lincoln's words. But rather than fashioning a context from the raw materials provided by these documents, they *selected* a context from their contemporary social world.

In other words, faced with seeming incongruities in Lincoln's position, these readers appealed to an array of present social forms and institutions—speech writers, press conferences, spin doctors—which allowed them to harmonize discrepant information. In one sense, they possessed sufficient background knowledge to form situation models from low coherence text (cf. McNamara & Kintsch, 1996), but such models, while adequate for quick, everyday readings, fell far short of mature disciplinary understanding (cf. Wineburg, 1992; 1997). In such readings, Lincoln and Douglas become contemporaries in top hats, much like characters from a James Michener novel who happen to dress funny but whose behavior and mannerisms are those of our next-door neighbors.

The phenomenon of "presentism," the act of viewing the past through the lens of the present, is not some bad habit we've fallen into, but is instead our psychological condition at rest. If Lincoln seems to be saying two different things, it is because he is speaking to two different audiences for, in our world, we know exactly why Bob Dole says one thing to Kansas wheat farmers and another to New York City stock brokers. We resolve contradictions in Lincoln's words by turning him into one of us.

H2 responded differently to these textual contradictions. He assumed, at least as a working hypothesis, that the contradictions he detected in Lincoln may be rooted less in the 16th president's duplicity than in his own ignorance of the 19th-century. H2's distrust in his own sense-making abilities may be thought of as a domain-specific form of metacognition, an imperative to read history differently from how we read ordinary expository or narrative text. None of us can stop the spread of activation that occurs when we read certain words—in this case, charged words about race. H2 reacted to these words with heightened affect just as the college students referred to above. But what distinguished his reading was the ability to step back from the first interpretation that came into view. His was a reading that was disciplined in both senses of the word: first, by showing restraint and self-awareness in the face of the first ideas that popped into mind, and, second, in the academic sense of word, by drawing skillfully on professional training that enjoins historians to identify and resist anachronism.

H2 brought to this task an awareness that words give rise to multiple interpretations, and that the first one we think of may disclose more about ourselves than the people we are trying to understand. When H2 says in Document B that he does not know "what Lincoln's saying," he does not mean that he can't figure out the words in the text, but something broader and more encompassing: that he does not understand a world into which a whole segment of the population was born into slavery, a world in which a trip to the market could result in the purchase of human beings. Oppression exists in as many varieties as ever, but the institution of slavery and its accompanying commercial arrangements are difficult to fathom today. In that sense, a chasm separates us from Abraham Lincoln, and before we can understand his views, we must enter into what Lowenthal (1985; 1989) has called a "foreign country." It is an approach to reading history that underscores its strangeness, rather than its continuity, with today (Wineburg, 1997).

But what about H1? Is he not a virtual resident of the 1860s, so steeped in these events that he can array them with a precision that few of us can equal with events in our own present? Indeed, for much of his protocol this seemed the case. But his comments on the phrase "think like a White man" (see Table 2) demonstrated that he is a resident of the 20th, not the 19th, century.

H1 responded to this phrase by outlining a strategy of consulting the documentary record to see if abolitionists also used the phrase "White men" as synonymous for "free men." Essentially, he recommended a textual strategy that first gained currency in the field of biblical hermeneutics: the notion that we can understand a word by examining all of its textual occurrences, a method of reading that spurred the creation of the biblical concordance. Concordances are useful tools when one is separated from language as a living, breathing entity. Native speakers, however, don't need them: they speak the language in its own natural context. H1 remains an interloper in the world of the 1860s. Every now and then, a nuance escapes him that signals that he is not a "native speaker." He speaks the language of the 1860s but does so with a slight and sometimes undetectable accent.

The protocols of both historians shed light on the active processes of creating historical contexts, of piecing together into stories the bits of life that present themselves as artifacts from another world. The word "creating" is used here deliberately. The process of establishing a historical context is misrepresented by notions of "placing" or "putting" Lincoln into context, verb forms that conjure up images of jigsaw puzzles in which pieces are slotted into pre-existing frames. Context, from the Latin *contexere*, means to weave together, to connect strings in a pattern. The zigzagged weave of H2 or the problem-finding and solving of H1 exemplify the active and creative processes that go into the formation of historical interpretations.

Radical constructivists might see license here for an approach of anything goes, a kind of Bacchanalian revelry of context creation run amok. But such an interpretation would be misguided. While words may not "fix" or "determine" meaning they sure do constrain it. If one reads Lincoln's racial views as harsher than John Bell Robinson's, closer to a van Evrie than a Lloyd Garrison, it is a reading that is wrong, no matter what verbal somersaults or linguistic contortions that are offered. In this sense, an analogy can be drawn between the act of cooking and the processes of historical interpretation. Elements of the

documentary record can be likened to ingredients in a kitchen. The culinary variations one can produce with, say, flour, tomatoes, eggs, cheese, and salt—from pizza to pasta, to quiche and soufflé—are endless. But if a group of cooks claimed they could produce ice cream, meat loaf, or aspic from these same ingredients we would send them back to cooking school—or worse, recommend a psychiatric evaluation.

V. CONCLUSION

In contrasting someone who has written books about the Civil War with someone who has not, it is easy to lose track of just how much knowledge this second historian brought to the task: H2 knew the general chronology and sequence of events, he could decipher major figures, he understood the antecedents and aftermath of the Civil War, and so on. However, H2's factual knowledge is not what stood out. Once he became immersed in these documents, it was what he didn't know that came to the fore: his way of asking questions, of reserving judgment, of monitoring affective responses and revisiting earlier assessments, his ability to stick with confusion long enough to let an interpretation emerge. It was how he responded in the face of what he didn't know that allowed him, in short, to learn something new.

What might we learn from such a reading that might help us become more thoughtful about the teaching of history in schools? This question is more pertinent than it might first seem. Although this study bears on the thought processes of historians, it is not the task *faced* by historians. Historians do not go into the archive to find carefully excerpted documents, serially presented, each with an explanatory sentence at the top. If anything, this task resembles a format that many students face in a testing situation, such as the Document-Based Question of the Advanced Placement examination (cf. Young & Leinhardt, 1998), in which students have 55 minutes to decipher how 7-9 documents speak to a significant historical question. Emerging research on students' ability to deal with such complexity (e.g., Carretero & Voss, 1994; Leinhardt, 1993; Paxton, 1997; Perfetti, Britt, & Georgi, 1996; Rouet, Britt, Mason, & Perfetti, 1996; Spoehr & Spoehr, 1994; Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish, & Bosquet, 1996; Voss, Wiley, & Kennet, in press; Wineburg & Fournier, 1994; see Wineburg, 1996, for review) shows how challenging this task can be.

Only a fraction of the school children who study history ever go on to become professional historians. In that sense, our focus in history instruction has always been liberal rather than vocational. Particularly in high school and college, the history curriculum possesses the potential, often unrealized, to teach students how to sort through contradictory information and come to reasoned conclusions (Gagnon, 1989; Boix Mansilla & Gardner, 1997; Wineburg & Wilson, 1988). Tests such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, which ask "What do our 17-year-olds know" (Ravitch & Finn, 1987), serve an important function to be sure. But it may be students' response in the face of complexity—what they do when they *don't* know—which holds the key to their continued learning from the world we call the past.

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APPENDIX: SET OF DOCUMENTS USED IN STUDY

Document A

In 1858, Abraham Lincoln ran against Stephen A. Douglas for a seat in the U.S. Senate.[1] *The two engaged in a series of seven public debates which attracted national attention.*[2] *Although Lincoln lost the election, he became widely known for his views on slavery.*[3] *The following is an excerpt from Douglas' address to Lincoln in their first debate at Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858.*[4†]

If you desire Negro citizenship, if you desire to allow them to come into the State and settle with the White man, if you desire them to vote on an equality with yourselves, and to make them eligible to office, to serve on juries, and to ajudge your rights, then support Mr. Lincoln and the Black Republican party, who are in favor of the citizenship of the Negro.[5] For one, I am opposed to Negro citizenship in any and every form. I believe this government was made...by White men, for the benefit of White men and their posterity forever, and I am in favor of confining citizenship to White men, men of European birth and descent, instead of conferring it upon Negroes, Indians and other inferior races.[6]

Mr. Lincoln, following the example and lead of all the little abolition orators, who go around and lecture in the basements of schools and churches, reads from the Declaration of Independence, that all men were created equal, and then asks how can you deprive a Negro of that equality which God and the Declaration of Independence awards to him.[7] He and they maintain that Negro equality is guaranteed by the laws of God, and that it is asserted in the Declaration of Independence.[8] . . . I do not question Mr. Lincoln's conscientious belief that the Negro was made his equal, and hence his brother, but for my own part, I do not regard the Negro as my equal, and positively deny that he is my brother[9].... [Lincoln] holds that the Negro was born his equal and yours, and that he was endowed with equality by the Almighty, and that no human law can deprive him of these rights[10]...Now, I do not believe that the Almighty ever intended the Negro to be the equal of the White man[11].... For thousands of years the Negro has been a race upon the earth, and during all that time, in all latitudes and climates, wherever he has wandered or been taken, he has been inferior to the race which he has there met.[12] He belongs to an inferior race, and must always occupy an inferior position.[13] (from Lincoln, 1989, pp. 504–505).

Document B

From Abraham Lincoln's reply to Stephen A. Douglas at Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858.[1]

I will say here . . . that I have no purpose directly or indirectly to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists.[2] I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.[3] I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the White and Black races.[4] There is a physical difference between the two, which in my judgment will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality, and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as

well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong, having the superior position.[5] I have never said anything to the contrary, but I hold that notwithstanding all this, there is no reason in the world why the Negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.[6] I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the White man.[7] I agree with Judge Douglas [that the Negro] is not my equal in many respects—certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment.[8] But in the right to eat the bread...which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man.[9] (from Lincoln, 1989, p. 512)

Document C

Abraham Lincoln, writing in a letter to Mary Speed, a personal friend, September 27, 1841.[1]

By the way, a fine example was presented on board the boat for contemplating the effect of condition upon human happiness.[2] A gentleman had purchased twelve Negroes in different parts of Kentucky and was taking them to a farm in the South.[3] They were chained six and six together.[4] A small iron clevis was around the left wrist of each so that the Negroes were strung together precisely like so many fish upon a trot-line.[5] In this condition they were being separated forever from the scenes of their childhood, their friends, their fathers and mothers, and brothers and sisters, and many of them, from their wives and children, and going into perpetual slavery . . . yet amid all these distressing circumstances . . . they were the most cheerful and apparently happy creatures on board.[6] One, whose offense for which he had been sold was an over-fondness for his wife, played the fiddle almost continually; and the others danced, sung, cracked jokes, and played various games with cards from day to day.[7] How true it is that "God renders the worst of human conditions tolerable . . ."[8] (document cited in Lincoln, 1989, p. 74).

Document D

Colonization of freed Blacks was an idea proposed early in the nineteenth century.[1] *Many Whites who opposed slavery actively advocated colonization, maintaining that true freedom and equality could be realized only by relocating the Black population.*[2] *Abraham Lincoln had long favored the idea, and, in 1862, a sum of money was appropriated by Congress to aid in a colonization program.*[3] *The following is from Lincoln's "Address on Colonization" delivered to a group of free Black men at the White House on August 14, 1862.*[4]

Why . . . should the people of your race be colonized, and where?[5] If we deal with those who are not free at the beginning, and whose intellects are clouded by slavery, we have very poor materials to start with.[6] If intelligent colored men . . . would move in this matter, much might be accomplished.[7] It is exceedingly important that we have men at the beginning capable of thinking as White men, and not those who have been systematically oppressed. . . .[8] The place I am thinking about having for a colony is in Central America.[9] . . . The country is a very

excellent one for any people, and with great natural resources and advantages, and especially because of the similarity of climate with your native land—thus being suited to your physical condition.[10] (from Lincoln, 1989, p. 368).

Document E

From *Pictures of Slavery and Anti-Slavery: Advantages of Negro Slavery & the Benefits of Negro Freedom Morally, Socially, and Politically Considered* by John Bell Robinson, a White pro-slavery spokesperson, Pennsylvania, 1863.[1]

God himself has made them for usefulness as slaves, and requires us to employ them as such, and if we betray our trust, and throw them off on their own resources, we reconvert them into barbarians.[2] Our Heavenly Father has made us to rule, and the Negroes to serve, and if we . . . set aside his holy arrangements for the good of mankind and his own glory, and tamper with his laws, we shall be overthrown and eternally degraded, and perhaps made subjects of some other civilized nation[3] . . . . Colonization in their native land of all the Negroes would be so nearly impracticable, that it will never be done, and no other spot on this green earth will do for them.[4] It would be the height of cruelty and barbarism to send them anywhere else.[5] If they could all be colonized on the coast of Africa, they would fall back into heathenism and barbarism in less than fifty years.[6] (from Robinson, 1863, p. 42)

Document F

From an editorial by William Lloyd Garrison appearing in the Genius of Universal Emancipation, *February 12, 1830.*[1] *Garrison (1805–1879) was a leading White abolitionist and worked for a short time as the assistant editor of the* Genius *before beginning his own anti-slavery periodical in 1831.*[2]

I deny the postulate, that God has made . . . one portion of the human race superior to another.[3] No matter how many breeds are amalgamated—no matter how many shades of color intervene between tribes or nations—give them the same chances to improve, and a fair start at the same time, and the result will be equally brilliant, equally productive, equally grand.[4]

Document G

From *Negroes and Negro "Slavery:" the First an Inferior Race, the Latter its Normal Condition* by John H. Van Evrie, M. D., Van Evrie, Horton & Co., New York, 1863.[1]

The Caucasian is white, the Negro is black; the first is the most superior, the latter the most inferior—and between these extremes of humanity are the intermediate races . . . .[2]

As color is the standard and the test of the specific character, revealing the inner nature and actual capabilities of the race, so, too, is it the test and standard of the normal physical condition of the individual.[3] The highest health of the White man is distinguished by a pure

and transparent skin, and exactly as he departs from this, his color is clouded and sallow; while that of the Negro is marked by perfect blackness, and the departure from this is to dirty brown, almost ash-color . . .[4] Every one who practically understands the Negro, knows that the strongest affection his nature is capable of feeling is love for his master—that affection for wife, parents, or offspring, all sink into insignificance in comparison with the strong and devoted love he gives to the superior being who guides, cares, and provides for all his wants.[5]

†*Note.* Material in italics was added at the beginning of the document for introductory purposes and to provide bibliographic information.