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# Personal Loyalty, Thick-Thin Morality, and the Crisis of Conscience: The Case of Lincoln at Gettysburg-Abstract

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TO: Associate Dean Wendy Kellogg  
FROM: Vera Vogelsang-Coombs, Associate Professor  
RE: Presentation to Levin College Research Conference  
DATE: June 29, 2014

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I am submitting this proposal to present the following research paper at the second annual 2014 Levin College Research Conference.

Vera Vogelsang-Coombs, "Personal Loyalty, Thick-Thin Morality, and the Crisis of Conscience: The Case of Lincoln at Gettysburg."

Abstract

This paper analyzes the interplay of personal loyalty, the thick-thin morality of American society, and the private conscience of public servants in shaping their moral understanding and political judgment. It conceives of private conscience as a process of self-appraisal public servants may use to strengthen their capacity to exercise tough moral and political leadership. To illustrate the interplay of loyalty, morality, and conscience, I examine the case of Lincoln's Address at Gettysburg. My analysis shows how Lincoln used the thick-thin morality of American society in the Gettysburg Address to unify his divided conscience and the divided nation around his moral and constitutional duty to preserve the nation during the Civil War. The thick-thin morality of Lincoln's Address was not only rich in meaning for his immediate audience of 20,000 but is a lasting message of unification for Americans far from Gettysburg in space and time.

The Gettysburg Address is significant because it provides the moral foundation that enables American society to correct its ethical mistakes. Thus, ethical progress in twenty-first century America depends, in part, on morally and politically tough public servants who, similar to Lincoln, are unafraid to defend and nurture the American constitutional system. By using private conscience to balance their personal loyalty, thick-thin morality, and constitutional politics, public servants help sustain the timeless Gettysburg legacy that the nation and "government by the people, and for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

This paper builds on Chapter Two of my current book project, *Political Ethics of Public Service*, which is under an initial review by a major academic publisher. Furthermore, this paper fits within the newly emerging constitutional school of thought in public administration. Finally, this paper complements the scholarship of leading public administration scholars based at the LCUA, Professor Michael Spicer and Professor Emerita Camilla Stivers.