POLITICS & GOVERNMENT

Mum's the Word

"The Strange Silence of Political Theory" by Jeffrey C. Isaac, in *Political Theory* (Nov. 1995), SAGE Publications, 2455 Teller Road, Thousand Oaks, Calif. 91320.

You might think that certain events of the recent past—the revolutions of 1989 in Eastern Europe, the end of the Cold War, the collapse of the Soviet Union, the triumph of Western liberalism—would catch the attention of professional political theorists. Apparently not. Their response, complains Isaac, a political scientist at Indiana University, has been "a deafening silence."

Between 1989 and '93, *Political Theory*, "the premier journal of American political theory," published 108 full-length articles. Only one had anything to do with the events of 1989. *Polity*, "the most important American political science journal regularly publishing political theory," ran 61 articles in the field, with only one lonely review-essay about 1989. The *American Political Science Review*, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, and *Ethics* did not muster a single article among them. In all, Isaac says, political theorists wrote 384 articles during the four years, and only two dealt with these world-transforming events.

What accounts for this "shocking" failure? he asks. "How can a form of inquiry that claims to be the heir of Plato, Machiavelli, Tocqueville, and Marx, thinkers profoundly caught up in the events of their day, be so oblivious to what is going on around it?"

Too many political theorists, Isaac believes, are lost in an insular world, using esoteric jargon, speaking only to one another, and preoccupied with the writings of other, earlier or fashionable, thinkers. Instead of dealing directly with a subject such as constitutionalism, they prefer to think and write about "Locke on Constitutional Government" or "Constitutionalism in Habermas." Unlike the eminent political thinkers of the past, Isaac laments, today's theorists seem content to be mere "puzzle solvers of the problems of others, focusing on approved topics, following academic conventions."

The Other Lincoln

"Lincoln's First Love" by Mark E. Neely, Jr., in *Civil War Times* (Nov.–Dec. 1995), P.O. Box 8200, Harrisburg, Pa. 17105-8200.

If there is one president whose political career marks him as ever calculating, overly ambitious, suspicious, and willing at times to resort to "dirty tricks," it is, of course, Richard M. Nixon. And seeming to stand in saintly contrast is the first Republican president, Abraham Lincoln. Historians don't like to admit it, contends Neely, a Pulitzer Prize-winning historian at St. Louis University, but there was more than a little Nixon in Honest Abe.

Politics was Lincoln's "first love," Neely asserts. His ambition, as his law partner once said, was "a little engine that knew no rest." He served one term (1847–49) in the U.S. House of Representatives, ran unsuccessfully for the U.S. Senate in 1855, and tried again three years later.

His famous debates with Democratic senator Stephen A. Douglas, the last of them on October 15, 1858, are often cited among the great moments in American political history. But they were only part of his hard-fought campaign as the Republican candidate for the Senate. He spent most of the next two weeks giving speeches, greeting voters, and writing letters. In those days when state legislatures, not the voting populace, chose U.S. senators, Lincoln was trying to help enough

Lincoln, pictured in 1857, "lived the life of a professional politician."