

Lincoln Love

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Lincoln and the Enola Gay

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hen I joined the staff of The Lincoln Museum in the autumn of 1993, planning for the Museum's new permanent exhibit was about to begin. At the same time, the Smithsonian Institution's National Air and Space Museum was preparing to mark the 50th anniversary of the end of World War II with an August 1995 exhibit of the first airplane to drop an atomic bomb, the Enola Gay. For the next year and a half, both historical projects went forward, but to very different ends. The Lincoln Museum's new permanent exhibit, "Abraham Lincoln and the American Experiment," opened on time in October 1995, and has received a gratifying amount of public and scholarly acclaim. The Enola Gay exhibit, titled "The Last Act: The Atomic Bomb and the End of World War II," never opened at all. After excerpts from early drafts of the exhibit script became public, controversy arose over its tone and content, leading to political pressure from Congress that ultimately caused the cancellation of the exhibit in its original form and the resignation of the head of the National Air and Space Museum.

Why did the Enola Gay project fail so disastrously, while the Lincoln Museum's new exhibit succeeded? In part, the result was beyond the control of the two exhibit design teams. Where "Abraham Lincoln and the American Experiment" centers on America's most popular historical figure, the Enola Gay exhibit was unavoidably intertwined with one of the most controversial decisions in American history. Given that the decision to drop the atomic bomb continues to spur emotional debate among historians, veterans, opponents of nuclear weapons,

(On the cover: Hand-colored albumen print of Alexander Hesler's 1857 photograph of Abraham Lincoln.)

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Lincoln Lore

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and others, the Smithsonian could not possibly have presented the story in a fashion that would satisfy all parties.

But museums often address controversial or unpleasant subjects, sometimes with great success, as in the case of the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C. The most important factor in bringing catastrophe down upon the Enola Gay exhibit was that its script, like that of "The West as America" and several other recent Smithsonian exhibits, was characterized by intellectual arrogance and disdain for the visitor. It offended its potential audiences by failing to recognize or respect their historical beliefs, however wrong or outmoded those beliefs may have seemed to the historians at the Smithsonian.

The script was not bad history, by all accounts. Its supporters have argued that it presented a well-researched, balanced, and dispassionate view of the use of the atomic bomb and the end of the war against Japan. The problem was that many Americans were repelled by the idea of taking a balanced and dispassionate view of a war that they had experienced as a moral crusade against the perpetrators of Pearl Harbor and the Bataan Death March. The Smithsonian staff, which clearly worked hard to incorporate the latest scholarship into the exhibit, apparently did not realize that their non-partisan historical presentation might be taken as a revisionist slap in the face to those who remember World War II as a black-and-white struggle of good versus evil, the so-called "good war." Challenging visitors to reexamine their preconcep-

tions is a worthy goal for a museum exhibit, but slapping them in the face is not a good way to do it.

The design of "Abraham Lincoln and the American Experiment" avoids this particular pitfall by paying substantial attention to the cherished historical myths that many visitors bring with them. An entire gallery, "Remembering Lincoln," is devoted to looking at the ways in which the words, deeds and image of Abraham Lincoln have entered popular culture. The exhibit "Did Lincoln Really ...?" gives visitors a chance to discover the validity of popular Lincolnian legends. The museum encourages people to reexamine Lincoln and his era in the light of current scholarship, but it does not try to impose an alien moral framework on their understanding of history.

This is not to say that the Enola Gay debacle was entirely the fault of the National Air and Space Museum staff, or that the Lincoln Museum design team had all the answers. In the current political climate, the lightning of political controversy sometimes strikes its targets purely at random. For every exhibit attacked by the right for being insufficiently patriotic or daring to question traditional interpretations of the past, another is assaulted from the left for failing to meet the demands of "political correctness." Under these conditions, no museum can consider itself secure from the threat of indiscriminate political activism.

There is some good news that can be extracted from the wreckage of the Enola Gay exhibit. The fight over its fate, like the record-breaking attendance at The Lincoln Museum, is evidence that we as Americans still care passionately about our shared past. If we sometimes come to political blows over how to define that past, that is a price that must be paid. The outcome of the Enola Gay story is not a happy one, but the fact that for a few weeks, the struggle to interpret and define a fifty-year-old historical event took some headline space away from the latest murder trial or Hollywood marriage, is cause for hope. — GJP



Dance mistress Cathy Stephens of the Flying Cloud Academy of Vintage Dance, Cincinnati, leads the Grand March at The Lincoln Museum's first annual Union Inaugural Ball. President and Mrs. Lincoln (played by Max and Donna Daniels of Wheaton, Illinois) follow.



(National Park Service)

George L. Painter, Historian at Lincoln Home National Historic Site in Springfield, Illinois, passed away on December 22, 1995. He was 49 years old.

George Painter began his tenure as historian at the Lincoln Home in 1976. He founded the annual Lincoln Colloquium, a scholarly conference that attracts internationally known speakers, and instituted numerous other programs and events, including the Lincoln Heritage Lectures held each year on Lincoln's birthday. He was the founding president of the Lincoln Group of Illinois, and served terms as president of both the Sangamon County Historical Society and the Lincoln Memorial Garden. He wrote numerous articles and co-authored a history of the Lincoln Home, *Seventeen Years at Eighth and Jackson*. In 1993, he received one of the highest honors of the National Park Service, the Appleman-Judd Award, given to one Park Service employee annually in recognition of contributions to the field of history.

The staff of The Lincoln Museum, along with the rest of the Lincoln community, will remember George Painter for his dedicated scholarship as well as the energetic enthusiasm he brought to the cause of furthering the study of Abraham Lincoln. He is survived by his wife, Rose, and their two children, Amanda, 12, and Jeffrey, 5. Donations to The George Painter Memorial Fund for History, to sponsor nationally recognized speakers for the Lincoln Colloquium, can be sent to the Lincoln Home National Historic Site in Springfield, Illinois, 62701.

Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Slavery, 1837-1854

By George L. Painter

Widespread and passionate involvement with public issues characterized the environment in which Abraham Lincoln pursued his political career. In a letter written in 1840, when he was an Illinois state legislator, Lincoln described a demonstration of the intense emotions associated with politics. The incident occurred in Springfield and involved Democratic politician Stephen A. Douglas and editor Simeon Francis, whose *Illinois State Journal* ardently supported Lincoln's Whig party. Lincoln wrote, "Yesterday Douglas, having chosen to consider himself insulted by something in the 'Journal,' undertook to cane Francis in the street. Francis caught him by the hair and jammed him back against a market-cart, where the matter ended by Francis being pulled away from him. The whole affair was so ludicrous that Francis and everybody else (Douglas excepted) have been laughing about it ever since."¹

In the first two decades of Lincoln's political career, political passions were aroused by a number of issues, including slavery. In most of his speeches, letters, and other writings, Lincoln responded to specific situations, rather than attempting to present systematic expositions of an internally consistent philosophy. Nonetheless, certain themes clearly emerge from the corpus of his political utterances. Among the most prominent is disapproval of and opposition to the institution of slavery. Moreover, his statements concerning human bondage, even those made many years apart, often echoed each other in thought and language. Examining some of Lincoln's key statements regarding this issue within the context of his early political career, and noting resonances between them, offers insight into the development of his thought.

Lincoln's opposition to slavery may have been, in part, an outgrowth of early influences. On February 12, 1809, Abraham Lincoln was born in the slave state of Kentucky, within what was then known as Hardin County (now called Larue County).² A large proportion of the county's population was enslaved; by 1811,

slaves numbered 1,007 in comparison with 1,627 white males above sixteen years of age. Although some of Abraham's relatives owned slaves, his parents did not. Moreover, they were members of a Baptist congregation which had withdrawn from the mainstream church because of opposition to involuntary servitude. A number of the ministers of their church went on record opposing the institution; as a boy, Lincoln may have absorbed antislavery sentiments from sermons and other communications with the clergy.³

Decades later, after he had become known as a political opponent of slavery, Lincoln recalled that when his family moved from Kentucky to the free state of Indiana "in his eighth [*sic*] year," the "removal was partly on account of slavery."⁴ The antislavery orientation of his parents, along with other elements of his childhood environment in Kentucky, lends credence to the assertions that Lincoln made in his maturity. In 1858, for example, he declared, "I have always hated slavery, I think as much as any Abolitionist." And at the age of fifty-five, slightly more than a year before his death, he avowed: "I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel."⁵

Early in his political career, Lincoln joined in a protest against slavery on moral grounds. In January 1837, while Lincoln was serving his second term in the Illinois House of Representatives, the legislature passed resolutions condemning abolitionism, and declaring that "the right of property in slaves, is sacred to the slave-holding states by the Federal Constitution...." The resolutions further asserted that the national government "cannot abolish slavery in the District of Columbia." Seventy-seven representatives and every state senator voted in favor of the resolutions; Lincoln was one of only six legislators to vote against them.⁶

On March 3, moreover, Lincoln joined another Whig representative from Sangamon County, Dan Stone, in entering a protest against the resolutions. Stone and Lincoln declared "that the institution of slavery is

founded on both injustice and bad policy." At the same time, they observed "that the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than to abate its evils." In a key statement, they acknowledged their belief that Congress had no constitutional power to interfere with slavery in any state, but they contended that Congress did have authority to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, though this should be done only at the request of the District's citizens.⁷

This 1837 protest represented the most significant expression of Lincoln's position on human bondage during his four terms in the Illinois House of Representatives. Despite his at times intensive discussion of slavery over the next twenty-three years, by 1860 Lincoln still considered his position to be fundamentally the same one that he and Dan Stone had articulated. In connection with the 1860 presidential campaign, Lincoln composed an autobiography in which he pointed out the consistency of his antislavery convictions by referring to the 1837 protest. That early statement, he wrote in the third person, "briefly defined his position on the slavery question; and so far as it goes, it was then the same that it is now."⁸

Lincoln's career as a state legislator ended in 1841. During the next five years, while he practiced law and sought to become a candidate for Congress, Lincoln failed to make any noteworthy public statements concerning slavery. On October 3, 1845, however, Lincoln wrote a private letter that discussed slavery within the context of the question of Texas annexation. In February of that year, Congress had passed a joint resolution providing for annexation, which led to the admission of Texas to the Union in December. Opponents of slavery generally viewed these developments with disapproval, because the institution had already become established in Texas. Although he spoke of "the evil of slavery" in his letter, Lincoln indicated he was somewhat indifferent toward annexation:

I perhaps ought to say that individually I never was much interested in the Texas question ... I never could very clearly see how the annexation would augment the evil of slavery. It always seemed to me that slaves would be taken there in about equal numbers, with or without annexation. And if more *were* taken because of annexation, still there would be just so many the fewer left, where they were taken from. It is possibly true, to some

extent, that with annexation, some slaves may be sent to Texas and continued in slavery, that otherwise might have been liberated. To whatever extent this may be true, I think annexation an evil.⁹

In comparison with Lincoln's later statements, this letter was a relatively mild response to the slavery issue. Even if the annexation of Texas were not to result in a significant increase in the total number of slaves, as Lincoln anticipated, the admission of another slaveholding state would inevitably increase the representation of slavery interests in Congress and affect the formation of national policy. At this juncture, however, Lincoln evidently did not yet see a serious threat to the nation's liberty in such an expansion of the political influence of slavery.¹⁰

In 1846 Lincoln was elected to Congress and served a single term from 1847 to 1849. In Washington, he again took public stands against slavery. For example, Lincoln voted many times in favor of the Wilmot Proviso "or the principle of it," which would have prohibited slavery in any territory acquired as a result of the Mexican War. He also drafted a bill "to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia, by the consent of the free white people of said District, and with compensation to owners"; this action was consistent with one of the positions he had taken in the 1837 protest in the Illinois House of Representatives more than a decade earlier.¹¹ Because of a lack of support from his colleagues, Lincoln abandoned the effort to introduce his measure. He voted instead for another, less comprehensive bill, which would have abolished only the slave trade in the District, rather than the entire institution there.¹²

Although these activities evinced Lincoln's opposition to slavery during this period, he apparently still did not view the institution as the momentous national issue it would become for him in the future. In 1848, he referred to slavery as simply a "distracting question." In general, from the 1830s through the early 1850s, the issue occupied a much less prominent position in Lincoln's public statement than it would in subsequent years.

A statement Lincoln made in his 1845 letter regarding the annexation of Texas suggests an explanation for this comparative lack of emphasis. It reveals that Lincoln believed that involuntary servitude would eventually disappear from the nation, and that confining slavery to areas where it

already existed would help guarantee its extinction; that is, as soils became depleted, the institution would cease to be economically viable. Lincoln wrote,

I hold it to be a paramount duty of us in the free states ... to let the slavery of the other states alone; while, on the other hand, I hold it to be equally clear, that we should never knowingly lend ourselves directly or indirectly, to prevent that slavery from dying a natural death—to find new places for it to live in, when it can no longer exist in the old.¹³

Lincoln was to advance a similar explanation in 1858, after he had begun publicly to express much more concern about slavery. In retrospect, Lincoln explained that he had attached less significance to it in earlier years because he had anticipated the institution's eventual demise. "Although I have ever been opposed to slavery," he pointed out in 1858, "so far I rested in the hope and belief that it was in course of ultimate extinction. For that reason, it had been a minor question with me."¹⁴

During this portion of Lincoln's life, while he was relatively quiet in the political forum regarding the question of slavery, private correspondence affords insight into his personal reaction to human bondage. On September 27, 1841, Lincoln wrote to Mary Speed, half sister of his closest friend and confidant Joshua Speed. He described a river journey that he and Joshua had taken from Louisville, Kentucky, to St. Louis, during which he noted a group of slaves aboard the steamboat whose owner

was taking them to a farm in the South. They were chained six and six together ... strung together precisely like so many fish upon a trot-line. 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 where the lash of the master is proverbially more ruthless and unrelenting than any other where ...¹⁵

This first-hand observation of slavery evidently made a profound and lasting impression upon Lincoln, since he referred to it again in a letter written to Joshua Speed in 1855, fourteen years later; by then he had become an outspoken opponent of the

spread of slavery into new territory. "In 1841 you and I had together a ... trip, on a Steam boat," Lincoln wrote. "You may remember, as I well do, that from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio there were, on board, ten or a dozen slaves, shackled together with irons. That sight was a continual torment to me; and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio, or any other slave-border." Lincoln proceeded to describe slavery as "a thing which has, and continually exercises, the power of making me miserable."¹⁶

During the early 1850s, following his term in Congress, Lincoln devoted most of his attention, not to politics, but to his law practice, which was growing into one of the largest and most significant in Illinois.¹⁷ Yet during this interval, he was beginning to experience uneasiness regarding the attitude of other Americans toward human rights and the institution of slavery. Lincoln venerated the Declaration of Independence and its ringing affirmation of human equality; this was linked in his mind with the hope that involuntary servitude would eventually disappear from the nation. As a consequence, he was deeply disturbed that some citizens were coming to question the validity of that portion of the declaration. In the summer of 1852, Lincoln spoke of "a few, but an increasing number of men, who, for the sake of perpetuating slavery, are beginning to assail and to ridicule the white-man's

charter of freedom — the declaration that 'all men are created free and equal.'" With regard to such statements, Lincoln asserted, "This sounds strangely in republican America. The like was not heard in the fresher days of the Republic."¹⁸

When Congress passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act two years later, Lincoln's concern intensified. This legislation, which organized part of the Louisiana Purchase into the territories of Kansas and Nebraska, was introduced and shepherded through Congress by Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas. The Kansas-Nebraska Act was so integral to the development of Lincoln's position on slavery through the 1850s that a discussion of its background, and Douglas's role in its passage, is appropriate.

By early 1854, the territorial organization of the vast region then known simply as Kansas was overdue. The process had been delayed by controversy between North and South over the question of the extension of slavery into the territories. Four previous attempts to organize a single territory for Kansas had been unsuccessful, chiefly due to congressmen from slaveholding states who opposed the Missouri Compromise. That measure, enacted by Congress in 1820 and 1821, allowed Missouri to enter the Union as a slave state, and permitted slavery in territories organized from the Louisiana Purchase south of latitude 36° 30'. Throughout the rest of the Louisiana Purchase, north of that line, slavery was prohibited; this included Kansas. The Missouri Compromise became such a time-sanctioned barrier to the spread of slavery that in 1849 Douglas himself said that it "had become canonized in the hearts of the American people, as a sacred thing, which no ruthless hand would ever be reckless enough to disturb."¹⁹

Five years later Douglas, who had come to regard the territorial organization of Kansas as an urgent matter, was ready to do just that. He was concerned that while the Pacific coast was being settled rapidly in the aftermath of the Californian gold rush, a great unorganized expanse, including Kansas, remained at the heart of the nation.²⁰ He also wished to see a transcontinental railroad constructed along a northern, rather than a southern, route. In hope of quickly settling the territorial organization of Kansas, Douglas (who was chairman of the Senate Committee on Territories) introduced legislation making concessions to the slaveholding states.

The bill his committee reported in January 1854, largely written by Douglas himself, provided that the question of slavery should be left for the territorial settlers themselves to decide. This was the famous principle that Douglas called "popular sovereignty," which had actually been enunciated several years earlier by Democratic politician Lewis Cass. The popular sovereignty provision of the Kansas-Nebraska Act contradicted the provisions of the Missouri Compromise, under which slavery would have been excluded from both territories. In fact, as a result of pressure from other legislators, Douglas added an amendment to the original version of the bill explicitly repealing the Missouri Compromise.²¹

The Kansas-Nebraska Act became the subject of intense congressional debate, in which Douglas played the leading role. He saw the legislation as essential to the national interest, insofar as organization of the Kansas and Nebraska Territories would expedite settlement of the West. In comparison, Douglas viewed slavery as an issue of lesser importance.²² He expressed hope that, under popular sovereignty, Kansas and Nebraska would remain free of slavery because their climate was unsuitable to the establishment of the institution.

In his concluding argument in the Senate debates concerning the bill, Douglas defended its potential benefits. Self-government for the territories, in the form of popular sovereignty, would "destroy all sectional parties and sectional agitations." By removing the slavery question from the purview of Congress and leaving it "to the arbitrament of those who are immediately interested in and alone responsible for its consequences, there is nothing left out of which sectional parties can be organized."²³

The Kansas-Nebraska Act was signed into law on May 30, 1854. Douglas later asserted, "I passed the Kansas-Nebraska Act myself. I had the authority and power of a dictator throughout the whole controversy in both houses."²⁴ When he returned to Illinois in August, however, Douglas found that sponsorship of the act and the repeal of the Missouri Compromise had embroiled him in a storm of protest. During the course of Douglas's westward journey, it became obvious that instead of bringing national agitation over the slavery issue to a close, the act was provoking shock and outrage among many citizens. "I could travel from Boston to Chicago by the light of my own effigy,"

COMMISSIONER'S SALE
OF
VALUABLE NEGROES.

AN abolitionist in favor of the African Church, in the Equity court of Robert T. Vanmeter, Martha Carl, and William Brown, against John Carl and others, pronounced at July term, 1859, I will, at the

31st day of December, 1859,

At the late residence of John Carl, deceased, and in the company of Robert T. Vanmeter, of the State of Ohio, sell to the highest bidder, for 15 miles from Elizabethtown to, and to the highest bidder, at public auction,

THREE
LIKELY NEGROES,

Consisting of two valuable women and one boy.

RECY, ANN AND PETER,
the latter under 10 years of age.

TERMS OF SALE.

The sale will be on a credit of eight months, the purchaser to give bond with approved security, to bear interest from the day of sale to have the same and effect of a regular bond as aforesaid, and to be made payable to the undersigned.

WASELL HANCOCK, Comr.

October 10th, 1859.
Also, on the same day, a very valuable young negro man, of whose name and of the same place.

In 1859 slaves were still being sold in Kentucky's Hardin County, where Lincoln had been born fifty years earlier. (TLM #3063)

Douglas lamented. "All along the Western Reserve of Ohio I could find my effigy upon every tree we passed."²⁰

Once back in Illinois, Douglas embarked upon a speaking tour throughout the state to support Democratic candidates for the Illinois and federal legislatures. In his speeches, he also defended the controversial legislation with which he had now become identified.²¹ Among the people with whom Douglas was to debate the issues surrounding the Kansas-Nebraska Act was Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln did not take a public stand on the Kansas-Nebraska Act until nearly three months after it had been signed into law; he hesitated through the summer of 1854. From the time the bill was introduced in Congress, however, Lincoln must have devoted considerable thought to its implications. The results of Lincoln's ruminations became manifest when he began to deliver speeches upon the subject at the end of the summer. His first address was presented on August 26, at the Scott County Whig convention in Winchester, Illinois. A letter published by the *Illinois Journal* provided a brief description:

After the transaction of the regular business of the convention ... the Hon. A. Lincoln ..., was loudly called for to address the meeting. He responded to the call ably and eloquently ... His subject was the one which is uppermost in the minds of the people — The Nebraska-Kansas bill; and the ingenious, logical and at the same time fair and candid manner, in which he exhibited the great wrong and injustice of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and the extension of slavery into free territory, deserves and has received the warmest commendation of every friend of freedom who listened to him.²²

Lincoln's speeches in 1854 made it obvious that he took a very different view of the Kansas-Nebraska Act than did Douglas. As Lincoln later wrote of himself, during that year the practice of law "had almost superseded the thought of politics in his mind, when the repeal of the Missouri compromise aroused him as he had never been before." The Kansas-Nebraska Act alarmed him because it allowed the introduction of slavery into territory where the Missouri Compromise had prohibited it for more than thirty years. The act transformed Lincoln's view of the status of slavery, insofar as it shattered his confidence

that the institution was, as he put it, "in course of ultimate extinction."²³

In the autumn of 1854, Lincoln summarized the impact of the Kansas-Nebraska Act upon its opponents, including himself. Douglas, Lincoln said, "took us by surprise — astounded us — by this measure. We were thunderstruck and stunned; and we reeled and fell in utter confusion. But we rose each fighting...."²⁴ From this point onward, slavery became a focus of Lincoln's public statements on political issues. He later explained, "I have always hated it [slavery], but I have always been quiet about it until this new era of the introduction of the Nebraska Bill began."²⁵

Galvanized by his opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, Lincoln again became a candidate for the Illinois House of Representatives. The *Illinois Journal* carried an announcement of his candidacy on September 4, slightly more than a week after he began to deliver speeches concerning Douglas's legislation.²⁶ This was the first time Lincoln had sought elective office since his nomination for Congress in 1846, eight years earlier.

Although Lincoln did not run directly against Douglas in 1854, the Kansas-Nebraska Act was the major point of contention in the canvass. In a sense, Lincoln and all the other candidates opposed to that act were campaigning against its author.²⁷ This was highlighted by an agreement between Lincoln and Douglas to a debate format for some of their speeches. In comparison with the Lincoln-Douglas debates that formed so prominent a feature of the Illinois senatorial contest in 1858, the 1854 debates were fewer and smaller. Unlike the later debates, when Lincoln and Douglas appeared simultaneously on the same platform, in 1854 they generally spoke at different times, although usually at the same location and on the same or consecutive days. The 1854 debates were to receive much less attention, both from the public and press at the time and subsequently from historians; they were also unquestionably less significant in the development of Lincoln's political career.²⁸

Nonetheless, the debates of 1854, along with other speeches he delivered that year, represented a watershed in the articulation of Lincoln's position on slavery. The 1854 debates may be regarded as a dress rehearsal for the discussions four years later. This interpretation of the earlier debates is compatible with approaches to



(TLM #2386)

"We were thunderstruck and stunned ... But we rose each fighting..." Senator Stephen A. Douglas's Kansas-Nebraska Act rekindled Lincoln's interest in politics.

Lincoln biography that emphasize continuity among the various phases of Lincoln's life.²⁹

As part of the debates, on October 4, 1854, Lincoln delivered a major three-hour address in Springfield. Although a self-contained statement, it was intended to answer a speech given the previous day by Douglas, who stayed to hear Lincoln's reply and to offer a rebuttal. The *Illinois Journal* published only a summary of Lincoln's address. Twelve days later, on the evening of October 16, the candidate presented substantially the same oration at Peoria, in response to a speech given by Douglas in the afternoon. The full text of this address appeared in serialized form in seven issues of the *Journal* only after its delivery in Peoria; as a result, it has come to be known as the Peoria speech, a name Lincoln himself applied to it.³⁰ In the 1920s, historian Albert J. Beveridge described it as Lincoln's "first great speech." In a recent biography, Mark E. Neely, Jr., added that the Peoria speech was "better than any he would give in the famous Lincoln-Douglas debates four years later."³¹

The Peoria speech was the most forthright and forceful statement against the immorality of slavery that Lincoln had yet articulated. As an overture sounds the motifs of a large musical composition, so the address established a framework for much of Lincoln's later discussion of the slavery question. Themes he developed in the speech were to echo through his future anti-slavery declarations.³²



Slaves awaiting an auction in New Orleans; during Lincoln's term in Congress, a slave market operated within sight of the Capitol. Illustration from *Harper's Weekly*, January 24, 1863. (TLM #4432)

Lincoln began the Peoria speech by examining the historical background to the controversy over the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the extension of slavery. He reviewed the valuable role the Missouri Compromise had played in American history and defended its special status. Lincoln then denounced Douglas's repeal of the compromise, for opening to slavery territory where it had prohibited for decades. "I think, and shall try to show, that it is wrong," Lincoln declared; "wrong in its direct effect, letting slavery into Kansas and Nebraska — and wrong in its prospective principle, allowing it to spread to every other part of the wide world, where men can be found inclined to take it."³⁹

Lincoln rejected Douglas's argument that environmental factors such as climate would prevent slavery from becoming established in Kansas and Nebraska, calling this contention "a palliation — a lullaby." In rebuttal, he pointed out that the institution was flourishing north of the Missouri Compromise line in five states and the District of Columbia. Conversely, Lincoln cited the example of Illinois as evidence that legal prohibition of slavery could prevent the institution from gaining a foothold in an area.⁴⁰

An emphasis upon the evil of human bondage was to remain a salient feature of Lincoln's later pronouncements upon the issue, including those in the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. In the Peoria speech Lincoln elaborated on the thought that he and Dan Stone had expressed in their 1837 protest; "the institution of slavery is founded on both injustice and bad policy." Now, seventeen years later, Lincoln contended:

Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man's nature — opposition to it, is

[in?] his love of justice. These principles are an eternal antagonism; and when brought into collision so fiercely, as slavery extension brings them, shocks, and throes, and convulsions must ceaselessly follow. Repeal the Missouri compromise — repeal all compromises — repeal the declaration of independence — repeal all past history, you still cannot repeal human nature. It still will be the abundance of man's heart, that slavery extension is wrong; and out of the abundance of his heart, his mouth will continue to speak."⁴¹

At the center of Douglas's arguments, Lincoln discerned an attempt to deny the slave's humanity. Lincoln characterized the view of proponents of the Kansas-Nebraska Act as follows: "Inasmuch as you do not object to my taking my hog to Nebraska, therefore I must not object to you taking your slave. Now, I admit this is perfectly logical, if there is no difference between hogs and negroes." In Lincoln's view, such notions represented a dangerous departure from the ideal of universal equality embodied in the Declaration of Independence. He declared, "If the negro is a *man*, why then my ancient faith teaches me that 'all men are created equal;' and that there can be no moral right in connection with one man's making a slave of another." This was a contention he would reiterate in the Lincoln-Douglas debates four years later.⁴²

Yet, the Peoria speech expressed ambiguity regarding the prospective status of black people in American society, if slavery could be immediately abolished. As Lincoln acknowledged, his views reflected, to some degree, the prevailing attitudes and prejudices of the era:

If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia, — to their own native land. But a moment's reflection would convince me, that ... in the long run, its sudden execution is impossible ... What then? Free them all, and keep them among us as underlings? Is it quite certain that this betters their condition? ... What next? Free them, and make them politically and socially, our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not.⁴³

There seems to be an inconsistency within these passages. On the one hand, Lincoln included black Americans in the Declaration of Independence's promise of equality; on the other, he was unwilling to grant social and political equality to freed slaves. A resolution of this apparent contradiction is provided by a statement Lincoln made at Ottawa, Illinois, in the first Lincoln-Douglas debate of 1858. After indicating that he believed black people could not live upon an equal basis with white people because of what he termed "a physical difference" between the races, Lincoln asserted:

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. [Loud cheers.] I hold that he is as much entitled to these as the white man. I agree with Judge Douglas he is not my equal in many respects — certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowment. But in the right to eat the bread, without leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns, he is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas, and the equal of every living man. [Great applause.]⁴⁴

In addition to numerous references to the Declaration of Independence, the Peoria speech invoked the values of the nation's founders in other ways. "I love the sentiments of those old-time men," Lincoln declared, calling their principles "our" or "my ancient faith." As Lincoln depicted it, his opposition to the extension of slavery was firmly grounded in the ideals of the founders, whereas

Douglas's doctrine of popular sovereignty represented a dangerous innovation.⁴¹

In this connection, Lincoln discussed the Ordinance of 1787 (often called the Northwest Ordinance); based upon an earlier document by Thomas Jefferson, it had barred slavery from the Northwest Territory, which included the area that would later become the state of Illinois. Lincoln observed that "with the author of the Declaration of Independence, the policy of prohibiting slavery in new territory originated."⁴²

Lincoln attributed this policy to the other founders as well. He asserted, "This same generation of men, and mostly the same individuals of the generation, ... who declared independence — who fought the war of the revolution through — who afterwards made the constitution under which we still live — these same men passed the ordinance of '87, declaring that slavery should never go to the north-west territory." By representing the people who adopted the Declaration of Independence, achieved victory in the Revolution, framed the Constitution, and enacted the Ordinance of 1787 as one group, Lincoln was departing from strict historical accuracy to create a mythic view of the past.⁴³

Lincoln argued that this interpretation of the nation's formative years established a weighty precedent for the exclusion of slavery from Kansas and Nebraska under the Missouri Compromise. "The spirit of seventy-six and the spirit of Nebraska, are utter antagonisms," he insisted.⁴⁴ Such buttressing of arguments with appeals to the ideals of the founders was to resound through Lincoln's future antislavery pronouncements.

In Lincoln's judgment, an especially disturbing departure from the values of the founders was the notion that slavery constituted a "sacred right of self-government." He explained, "I particularly object to the NEW position which the avowed principle of this Nebraska law gives to slavery in the body politic. I object to it because it assumes that there CAN be MORAL RIGHT in the enslaving of one man by another ... I object to it because the fathers of the republic eschewed, and rejected it."⁴⁵

Although he depicted the founders as being united in their opposition to slavery, Lincoln, in common with other politicians of his era, recognized that the Constitution protected involuntary servitude within the

states. For example, Lincoln and Dan Stone had acknowledged in 1837 "that the Congress of the United States has no power, under the constitution, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different States."⁴⁶ This admission must have represented something of an embarrassment for Lincoln, insofar as it appeared to be inconsistent with his portrayal of the founders' intentions regarding slavery.

In the Peoria speech, Lincoln dealt with this difficulty by emphasizing antislavery trends he discerned within the language of the Constitution. Lincoln argued that the founders had been reluctant to protect slavery by the document, but had done so under the pressure of "necessity":

The argument of "Necessity" was the only argument they ever admitted in favor of slavery ... At the framing and adoption of the constitution, they forbore to so much as mention the word "slave" or "slavery" in the whole instrument ... Thus, the thing is hid away, in the constitution, just as an afflicted man hides away a wen or a cancer, which he dares not cut out at once, lest he bleed to death; with the promise, nevertheless, that the cutting may begin at the end of a given time ... Necessity drove them so far, and farther, they would not go.⁴⁷

Lincoln was to present this interpretation again in the future, and develop it at greater length in his Cooper Institute address of February 1860.

An additional motif of the Peoria speech that would continue to be a significant element in Lincoln's political discourse concerned the preservation of the Union. He saw agitation over slavery as a divisive influence that threatened this goal. As a means of restoring the spirit of compromise and thereby quelling controversy and reducing the danger of disunion, he called for restoration of the Missouri Compromise.⁴⁸

Despite his strongly expressed disapproval of slavery, at one point in the address Lincoln indicated he gave higher priority to preserving the Union than to halting the spread of human bondage. "Much as I hate slavery," he affirmed, "I would consent to the extension of it rather than see the Union dissolved, just as I would consent to any GREAT evil, to avoid a GREATER one." Lincoln was to echo a similar point of view during his presidency, notably in the August

1862 open letter to *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley regarding his Civil War aims.⁴⁹

In the final paragraph of the main portion of the Peoria speech, Lincoln advocated a different, more positive approach to preservation of the Union, one uniting it with his opposition to slavery and his appeals to principles of the nation's founders:

Our republican robe is soiled, and trailed in the dust. Let us repurify it. Let us turn and wash it white, in the spirit, if not the blood, of the Revolution. Let us turn slavery from its claims of "moral right," back upon its existing legal rights, and its arguments of "necessity." Let us return it to the position our fathers gave it; and there let it rest in peace. Let us re-adopt the Declaration of Independence, and with it, the practices, and policy, which harmonize with it. Let north and south — let all Americans — let all lovers of liberty everywhere — join in the great and good work. If we do this, we shall not only have saved the Union; but we shall have so saved it, as to make, and to keep it, forever worthy of the saving. We shall have so saved it, that the succeeding millions of free happy people, the world over, shall rise up, and call us blessed, to the latest generations.⁵⁰

After this seminal speech, Lincoln continued to campaign, delivering addresses in Chicago and other communities. In spite of the antislavery fervor he displayed in these orations, Lincoln declined to join a new political group whose foremost mission was to oppose the institution. When he spoke in Springfield on October 4, the audience included a group of radical opponents of slavery who called themselves "fusionists" or Republicans, and were seeking to organize a new political party in Illinois. The Republicans were in Springfield to hold a meeting the following day, which Lincoln did not attend. Evidently impressed with Lincoln's address, they encouraged him to join their group and even went so far, without consulting him, as to add his name to the Republican state central committee.⁵¹

In a letter to Ichabod Coddling, an abolitionist, temperance lecturer, and active leader of the new group in Illinois, Lincoln protested the inclusion of his name on the committee. He indicated that his differences with the Republicans chiefly concerned methods. "I suppose my opposition to the

principle of slavery is as strong as that of any member of the Republican party," Lincoln wrote, "but I had also supposed that the extent to which I feel authorized to carry that opposition, practically, was not at all satisfactory to that party."⁵⁰

Lincoln's long-standing commitment to the Whig party was doubtless a major factor in his unwillingness to join the Republicans in 1854. At that time, moreover, the Republicans were not sufficiently numerous or organized to constitute a full-fledged political party. In addition, the number of abolitionists among its organizers must have given him pause; identification with abolitionists would have been a severe political liability, since they were generally regarded as dangerous extremists. In October 1854, for example, the *Illinois Journal* observed, "Abolition is an odious epithet among us; and we do not believe that there are a dozen men to be found in Sangamon county to whom it can properly be applied." Lincoln and Dan Stone's 1837 protest had likewise expressed strong reservations about abolitionism, stating "that the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than to abate its [slavery's] evils."⁵¹ Nonetheless, in the Peoria speech Lincoln sanctioned concurrence with abolitionists on specific issues. He observed:

Some men, mostly whigs, who oppose the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, nevertheless hesitate to go for its restoration, lest they be thrown in company with the abolitionist. Will they allow me as an old whig to tell them good humoredly, that I think this is very silly? Stand with anybody that stands RIGHT ... and PART with him when he goes wrong. Stand WITH the abolitionist in restoring the Missouri Compromise; and stand AGAINST him when he attempts to repeal the fugitive slave law.⁵²

Lincoln's 1854 canvass came to a successful conclusion on November 7, when he was elected to the Illinois legislature for the fifth time. Only three days after his election, however, Lincoln reported in a letter, "Some partial friends here are for me for the U.S. Senate; and it would be very foolish, and very false, for me to deny that I would be pleased with an election to that Honorable body." The next day, he asserted in another missive, "I really have some chance." Because a state representative would be ineligible for the Senate, on November 25 he declined the office to

which he had been elected before beginning to serve his term.⁵³

On February 8, 1855, voting for senator took place in the state legislature. Although Lincoln received the largest number of votes on the first ballot, he failed to win because five of the Democrats who opposed the Kansas-Nebraska refused to vote for a Whig. As balloting proceeded, it appeared that Joel Matteson, a Democrat who had not taken a stand on the act but was presumed to be an ally of Douglas, was likely to gain the election. In order to prevent this, Lincoln threw his support to an Anti-Nebraska Democrat, Lyman Trumbull, who won on the tenth ballot.⁵⁴

Despite his disappointment at not becoming a senator, Lincoln felt some satisfaction in having helped to insure that a candidate opposed to the Kansas-Nebraska Act was elected. "I regret my defeat moderately, but I am not nervous about it," he wrote the day after the election. "Matteson's ... defeat now gives me more pleasure than my own gives me pain. On the whole, it is perhaps just as well for our general cause that Trumbull is elected. The Neb. men confess that they hate it worse than any thing that could have happened. It is a great consolation to see them whipped worse than I am." He later declared, "I could not ... let the whole political result go to ruin, on a point merely personal to myself." His setback may have led Lincoln to the recognition that the Whig party could not encompass all of the widespread opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, and that the traditional alignment of Whigs versus Democrats was becoming blurred under the great stress engendered by this issue.⁵⁵

By February 16, 1855, Lincoln had recovered from his disappointment sufficiently to write, "I have now been beaten one day over a week; and I am very happy to find myself quite convalescent." During the preceding months, Lincoln's campaign activities had severely restricted the attention he could devote to his law practice. On March 10, 1855, he penned an apology to a New York law firm for his failure to attend to a pending matter. "I was dabbling in politics; and, of course, neglecting business," he confessed. "Having since been beaten out, I have gone to work again."⁵⁶ Although Lincoln now found himself out of public office, the events of the previous year would prove to be precursors of later developments in his political career.

In most cases, historians have given much more attention to the Lincoln-Douglas

debates and other events of 1858 than to those of 1854. For example, one acclaimed study of Lincoln and the politics of the 1850s devotes four chapters to 1858 but only twelve pages to the 1854 canvass; even so, the work provides more thorough coverage than is found in most treatments.⁵⁷ This disproportionate emphasis is partly a result of the greater abundance of documentary material from the later year, as well its closer connection to Lincoln's nomination for the presidency.

Nonetheless, the events of 1854 unquestionably represented a turning point in Lincoln's life. During that year, he came to regard slavery as an urgent national issue. As a consequence, he spoke more forthrightly upon the slavery question than ever before, and he continued to do so in the future. The themes Lincoln articulated in the Peoria speech and other addresses of 1854 were to resound through his future statements, including the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858. In fact, Lincoln quoted heavily from the Peoria speech in the first of the 1858 debates as well as in several other addresses of that campaign.⁵⁸

Lincoln's 1854 speeches, moreover, elicited more favorable notice than his earlier addresses had received. The *Whig* of Quincy, Illinois, called a Lincoln oration in the 1854 campaign "one of the clearest, most logical, argumentative and convincing discourse on the Nebraska question to which we have listened." In retrospect, Lincoln thought his "speeches at once attracted a more marked attention than they had ever before done."⁵⁹

The 1854 canvass marked not only Lincoln's deepened and more vocal commitment to the antislavery cause, but also his reemergence as a candidate for public office, after an eight-year absence. The debates with Douglas prefigured the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858, which were to bring him national repute. In a sense, the notoriety he gained from the 1858 debates was a prerequisite to his nomination and election to the presidency in 1860. Thus, Lincoln's political activities in 1854 represented the beginning of a chain of events that led to his assumption of national leadership. As passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act influenced Lincoln in 1854, so in the future Lincoln himself would exercise a profound influence upon the course of history through his actions as president.

Notes

1. Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-1955), 1:206 (hereinafter cited as *CW*).
2. Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1982), 173.
3. Louis A. Warren, *The Slavery Atmosphere of Lincoln's Youth* (Fort Wayne, Ind.: Lincolniana Publishers, 1933), [10], [4], [8].
4. Neely, *Encyclopedia*, 173; *CW*, 4:61.
5. *CW*, 2:492, 7:281.
6. *CW*, 1:75 n. 2; Paul Simon, *Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness* (Norman, Okla.: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 133.
7. *CW*, 1:75.
8. *CW*, 4:65.
9. *CW*, 1:347-48.
10. Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 24.
11. *CW*, 2:252, 20 n. 3; 1:75.
12. *CW*, 2:22 n. 4; Neely, *Last Best Hope of Earth*, 39.
13. *CW*, 1: 348; Neely, *Encyclopedia*, 279.
14. *CW*, 2:514.
15. *CW*, 1:260.
16. *CW*, 2:320.
17. *CW*, 4:67; Cullom Davis, "Abraham Lincoln, Esq.: The Symbiosis of Law and Politics," in *Abraham Lincoln and the Political Process: Papers from the Seventh Annual Lincoln Colloquium*, ed. George L. Painter (Springfield, Ill.: Lincoln Home National Historic Site, 1994).
18. *CW*, 2:130-131.
19. Neely, *Last Best Hope of Earth*, 35.
20. Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 255. Lincoln quoted this statement in his Peoria speech; see *CW*, 2:252.
21. Neely, *Encyclopedia*, 170.
22. Johannsen, *Douglas*, 408, 445-46.
23. Johannsen, *Douglas*, 431.
24. Johannsen, *Douglas*, 434.
25. Johannsen, *Douglas*, 450-51.
26. Johannsen, *Douglas*, 455.
27. Earl Schenk Miers et al, eds., *Lincoln Day by Day* (Dayton, Ohio: Morningside House, Inc., 1991), 2:126; *CW*, 2:226-27.
28. *CW*, 4:67; 2:492, 514.
29. *CW*, 2:282.
30. *CW*, 2:492.
31. Miers, *Day by Day*, 2:126; *Illinois Journal*, September 4, 1854, p. 3, col. 1.
32. Neely, *Encyclopedia*, 234-35.
33. Neely, *Encyclopedia*, 235; Don E. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (Stanford, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 1962), 34.
34. William E. Gienapp, "Abraham Lincoln and American Political Culture," in *Papers from the Fifth Annual Lincoln Colloquium*, ed. George L. Painter (Springfield, Ill.: Lincoln Home National Historic Site, 1990), 39.
35. *CW*, 2:240 n. 1, 247-48, 276; 4:77; *Illinois Journal*, October 21, 23-28, 1854.
36. Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1928), 2:218, 244; Neely, *Last Best Hope of Earth*, 39.
37. Mario M. Cuomo and Harold Holzer, eds., *Lincoln on Democracy* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1990), 65; Neely, *Last Best Hope of Earth*, 40.
38. *CW*, 2:255.
39. *CW*, 2:262-63.
40. *CW*, 1:75, 2:271.
41. *CW*, 2:264, 266.
42. *CW*, 2:255-56.
43. *CW*, 3:16.
44. *CW*, 2:267, 266; Neely, *Encyclopedia*, 235.
45. *CW*, 2:249.
46. *CW*, 2:267; Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 216.
47. *CW*, 2:275.
48. *CW*, 2:275, 274.
49. Neely, *The Fate of Liberty*, 216; *CW*, 1:75.
50. Neely, *The Fate of Liberty*, 216; *CW*, 2:274.
51. *CW*, 2:270-72.
52. *CW*, 2:270, 5:388.
53. *CW*, 2:276.
54. Miers, *Day by Day*, 2:130-31; Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, 35-36; William E. Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 123; *CW*, 2:288 nn. 1, 2.
55. *CW*, 2:288.
56. *CW*, 2:288 n. 1; Gienapp, *Origins of the Republican Party*, 124; "The Cry of Abolition!" *Illinois Journal*, October 19, 1854, p.2, col. 1; *CW*, 1:75.
57. *CW*, 2:273; Neely, *Encyclopedia*, 120-121. Lincoln considered opposition to the Fugitive Slave Acts of 1793 and 1850 inappropriate because the Constitution guaranteed the right of owners to repossess escaped slaves.
58. Miers, *Day by Day*, 131; Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Supplement 1832-1865* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1974), 25; *CW*, 2:286, 287-88.
59. Miers, *Day by Day*, 2:138; Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, 38-39; Neely, *Encyclopedia*, 262; Benjamin P. Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1968), 154.
60. *CW*, 2:306, 307; Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, 39-40; Neely, *Encyclopedia*, 262.
61. Roy P. Basler and Christian O. Basler, eds., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Second Supplement 1848-1865* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 9; *CW*, 2:308.
62. Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness*, chaps. 3-6, pp. 20-25, 33-38.
63. Neely, *Last Best Hope of Earth*, 40; *CW*, 3:14-15, 79, 83, 88.
64. Neely, *Last Best Hope of Earth*, 43; *CW*, 4:67.

At The Lincoln Museum Special Event:



Harold Holzer

The Seventeenth R. Gerald McMurtry Lecture Saturday, September 21

This year's speaker will be Harold Holzer, Chief Communications Officer of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City. Mr. Holzer is the author of *Dear Mr. Lincoln*, *The Lincoln Image* (with Mark E. Neely, Jr. and Gabor Boritt), *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: The Civil War in Art* (with Mark E. Neely, Jr.) and numerous articles on the iconography of Lincoln and his contemporaries. The cost of the lecture and reception is \$20 for members, \$25 for non-members.

The Spirit of Lincoln Award

The winner of the 1996 Spirit of Lincoln Award, presented on February 12, was Peggy Charren, founder of Action for Children's Television. The award is given annually by The Lincoln Museum and the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company to a public figure who uses the power of language for the public good, in the tradition of Abraham Lincoln. *Lincoln Lore* readers are invited to submit nominations for next year's award.

Correction:

The previous issue's article on the "Emancipation inkwell" should have noted that while former White House tutor Alexander Williamson remained close to the Lincoln family after the war, it was his son William who corresponded with Robert Todd Lincoln and died in 1926, within two days of Robert's death. Alexander Williamson died in 1903 at the age of 90. (Thanks to reader Roy Licari.)

Upcoming Exhibits:



American Greek Revival Architecture

May 15 — June 23

The Greek Revival (c. 1826-1860) reflected a young nation's optimism, pride, and faith in the power of reason. The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History has organized this exhibit of the characteristic architectural style of Abraham Lincoln's America. Museum members are invited to a preview opening May 14; please call (219) 455-7494.



The Grand Picnic

July 12 — September 2

The Lincoln Museum is inviting local merchants and community organizations to celebrate summer by creating imaginative picnic-themed displays in the Temporary Exhibit Gallery. A prize for the best display, as chosen by visitors, will be awarded on Labor Day.



Making Their Mark: Signatures of the Presidents

Opening October 1

The Museum's collection of presidential signatures will be the focus of this look at how American presidents from Washington to Clinton have made their mark on history, both literally and figuratively.

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