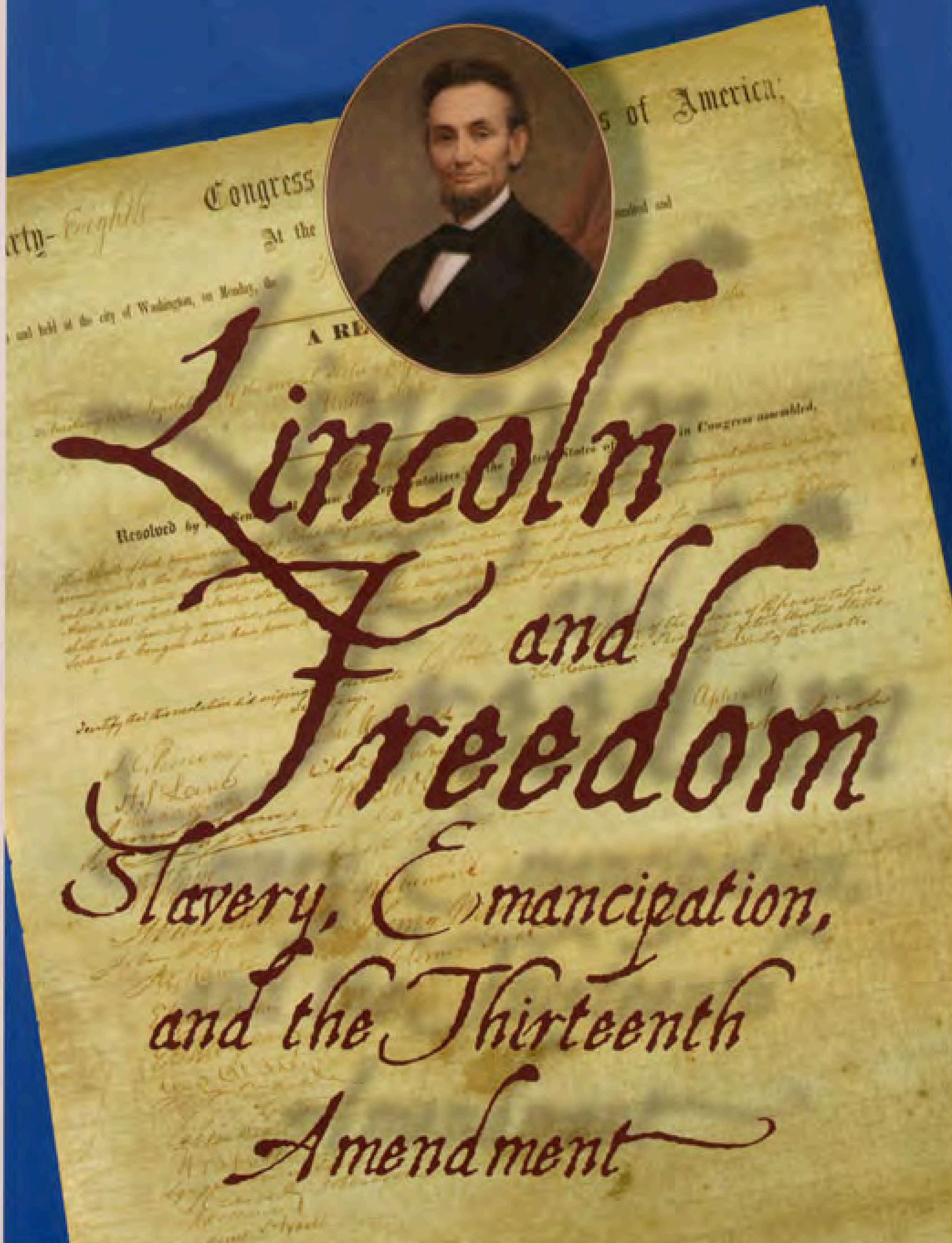
Lincoln Lore

The Bulletin of THE LINCOLN MUSEUM



Number 1890 / Fall 2007

Over 75 Years
Lincoln Lore
Since 1929

Table of Contents

"Keep cool, things is working": Lincoln's Role in his Nomination to the Presidency in 1860
by Alex Gallucci **2**

A Different Destiny: Abraham Lincoln and the Principles of U.S. Foreign Relations
by Robert E. May **10**

Naturally Antislavery: Lincoln, Race, and the Complexity of American Liberty
by James Oliver Horton **17**

Preview: *Lincoln and Freedom: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Thirteenth Amendment*
edited by Harold Holzer and Sara Vaughn Gabbard **28**

Upcoming Events **28**

Chicago Tribune Names *Lincoln Lore* One of Top 50 Magazines......... **28**

Lincoln Lore

is the quarterly bulletin of
THE LINCOLN MUSEUM

The mission of The Lincoln Museum is to interpret and preserve the history and legacy of Abraham Lincoln through research, conservation, exhibitry, and education.

Editor:
Sara Gabbard
Vice President and Director of Development

Contributors:
Joan L. Flinspach, President/CEO
Jane Gastineau, Collections Manager
Cindy VanHorn, Registrar

Thanks to the following scholars who have provided consulting services to The Lincoln Museum for events, exhibits, and publications: Herman Belz, Joseph Fornieri, Harold Holzer, David Long, Myron Marty, and Frank Williams.

For subscription information, contact The Lincoln Museum

200 E. Berry Street, P. O. Box 7838
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801-7838
(260) 455-3864 Fax: (260) 455-6922
email:TheLincolnMuseum@LNC.com
http://www.TheLincolnMuseum.org

© 2007 The Lincoln Museum
Reg. U.S. Pat. and TM Off.
ISSN 0162-8615

"Keep cool, things is working": Lincoln's Role in his Nomination to the Presidency in 1860

by Alex Gallucci

On the first day of the Republican National Convention of 1860, Abraham Lincoln received an important telegram from one of his campaign managers at the Wigwam. "Keep cool [,] things is working," wrote Norman B. Judd.[1] Indeed, "things" were working for Lincoln, who received the nomination two days later. The purpose of this paper is to provide a model for explaining Lincoln's actions toward his nomination and to measure the effectiveness of those actions. In doing so, it will examine Lincoln from after his defeat for Senator in 1858 forward, to his nomination in May of 1860. Lincoln's personal character is particularly critical to this study, as it provides a framework for understanding his conduct in politics. The paper will argue that Lincoln approached the National Convention with a mixture of self-doubt and ambition, which produced a hesitant, yet effective strategy for winning the nomination, when coupled with the work of his managers at the Wigwam.

Historians have attributed Lincoln's success to many factors. Many of Lincoln's first biographers, such as Herndon and Whitney, were the very friends who helped him win at Chicago, and thus accentuated their own role in Lincoln's nomination.[2] "Availability" was the watchword of most contemporaries and historians through the middle of the 20th century. This thesis, supported by Allan Nevins, Reinhard H. Luthin, and William Baringer, states that favorite William H. Seward lost the nomination more than Lincoln won it. These historians employ contextual methodologies in their histories, not focusing simply on Lincoln, but also on his surroundings and competitors.[3] Recent historians have emphasized Lincoln's actions as determinative in his nomination.[4] Other scholars study his personality as a model for his political ambitions.[5] They gaze towards the rich fields of his childhood, his early adult years, and his Presidency for their histories. This has left Lincoln scholarship on the critical years of 1859 and 1860 bereft of a character analysis. This paper seeks to fill the gap by using elements of recent studies on Lincoln's private character as a model for his political behavior.

Any examination of Lincoln's role in his nomination must begin with his defeat in the race for the United States Senate in 1858. His reaction to his loss exhibits a trait that partially guided his thinking over the next year and a half: he suffered an acute bout of depression that reflected his self-doubt. The lack of confidence was a very real factor in his actions in the early part of 1859, leading him to curtly reject suggestions that he could be President in 1860. It was fear and self-doubt, rather than political opportunism, that drove his most important decisions through October of 1859. Yet, a second vein of Lincoln's personality here enters the picture: his ambition. As his speeches and Herndon's comments show, Lincoln desired political accolades. His drive towards the nomination unfolded slowly from the summer of 1859 onwards, moving him hesitantly, but sagaciously, toward the nomination. His efforts show that he understood the requirements for the nomination; namely a balance of conservatism and anti-slavery sentiment that was unobjectionable to all of the Party's many special interest groups. Thus, he produced an attractive package, but

Dust jacket of *Lincoln and Freedom.* (See details on back cover.) The image reflects two objects from the collection of The Lincoln Museum, the signed Senate Resolution for the Thirteenth Amendment and the last portrait from life of Abraham Lincoln (by Matthew Wilson).

did not make the sale. It was up to his managers to convince the delegates to select Lincoln, whose name was not taken seriously before the Convention.

Lincoln's defeat by Douglas in 1858 sparked an episode of his recurring depression that explains much of his conduct in the early part of 1859. Whitney stated, "I never saw any man so radically and thoroughly depressed."[6] Lincoln's sadness stemmed from his lack of self-confidence. Many historians cast Lincoln as a confident figure.[7] His maneuvering, they claim, depicted a "sure-footed" politician with "remarkable self-confidence."[8] Yet, as his depression in the winter of 1859 indicates, whatever self-confidence Lincoln felt coexisted with a large amount of self-doubt. In 1851, Lincoln reflected on his shortcomings, stating to Herndon, "[h]ow hard—Oh how hard it is to die and leave one's Country no better than if one had never lived for it."[9] This sense of failure stayed with Lincoln throughout the decade. In 1856, he wrote a personal note to himself, stating, "With *me*, the race of ambition has been a failure—a flat failure."[10] Even during the campaign of 1858, Lincoln admitted to journalist Henry Villard that he reminded himself constantly that a seat in the Senate was beyond his grasp.[11] His letters after the loss clearly display that this self-doubt was the source of his sadness, for he addresses that very point to console himself. "I have made some marks which will tell for the cause of civil liberty long after I am gone," he wrote to a friend.[12] By comforting his doubts about his legacy, he betrayed the roots of his depression.

The lack of support from Republicans outside of Illinois was particularly troubling to Lincoln during his depression. As Herndon reported, Lincoln believed that Republican Horace Greeley and John J. Crittenden of Kentucky supported Douglas during the campaign. Indeed, Greeley told Herndon that "[t]he Republican standard is too high; we want something practical," meaning he wanted Douglas.[13] Many observers saw Republicans poised to invite Douglas to their side. His fame would add luster and credibility to the new Party. And after having rejected the pro-slavery Lecompton Constitution in Kansas, he seemed just as principled as most Republicans. Lincoln rejected these notions; especially that Douglas had taken a moral stand against Lecompton. Don E. Fehrenbacher argues that such a belief lay behind Lincoln's famous "House-Divided" speech.[14] Lincoln indeed reflected upon this threat during his depression, lamenting, "I expect everyone to desert me."[15]

Lincoln's defeat and self-doubt colored his vision of the course of action which he should undertake. Rather than moving forward with a bold plan for future success, as some have suggested, Lincoln sought preventative measures.[16] In particular, he remained frightened that Republicans would accept Douglas into their party. Thus, he wrote an uncharacteristically blunt letter to Crittenden, one of Douglas's supporters in the campaign. He rebuked Crittenden, stating that "the use of your name contributed largely" to Douglas's victory.[17] In Lincoln's eyes, defeating Douglas was the primary labor to be engaged in by true Republicans. His optimistic letters that scholars look to as the opening salvos of Lincoln's road to recovery, in actuality, laid the foundation for his preventative measures. In these writings, he expressed his belief that Douglas had alienated the South by claiming slavery could be kept out of a territory by local legislation as against the Dred Scott decision, in which the Supreme Court ruled to the contrary. Predicting a future split in the Democratic Party, Lincoln told Illinois Senator Lyman Trumbull that "the struggle in the whole North will be...whether the Republican party can maintain it's identity, or be broken up to form the tail of Douglas' new kite."[18] The task before Lincoln became clear; he must counter Douglas and keep him from co-opting the Republicans to his political purposes. Equally clear is that this mission was forged in the fires of defeat. It represented a reaction to his loss, not necessarily a ploy to win political power.

On March 1, 1859, he gave a speech to Republicans in Chicago. He worried that talk of Republican support for Douglas had "not quite ceased yet."[19] Consequently, he devoted most of the speech, which occurred at a victory celebration, to arguing against Douglas. He posited that no integration with Douglas could be satisfactory for Republicans. Not only would it go against Republicans' principles to accept Douglas's stance on slavery, but also he would ultimately subsume the Party to his own ends.[20] Lincoln kept with this tact in a speech he made in Council Bluffs, Iowa, late in the summer of 1859. A Democratic newspaper reported that he denounced the incorporation of other "opposition" elements into the Republican Party.[21] In doing so, he brought out "the strong points of the Republican position," remembered Grenville M. Dodge, an audience member who was greatly impressed by the speech.[22]

His goal of impeding Douglas remained largely the same as he traveled to Ohio in September to give speeches for the Republican campaign in the state.[23] The Little Giant, as Douglas was called, preceded Lincoln in giving talks to rally Ohio Democrats. The Democratic editor of the *Cincinnati Enquirer* implored Douglas to use caution in his speeches. "Tens of thousands of [Republicans] now stand well affected to you," he wrote optimistically.[24] This is precisely what Lincoln feared. He wrote to his friend in Ohio, Samuel Galloway, about that state's Republican Party: "There is another thing our friends are doing which gives me some uneasiness. It is their leaning towards '*popular sovereignty*,'" Douglas's method to diffuse the crisis over slavery in the territories.[25] For this reason, Lincoln accepted invitations to speak at Columbus and Cincinnati on September 16th and 17th (1859). In the latter address, he referenced Douglas sixty times and committed the bulk of his message to a direct attack upon the principle of popular sovereignty. Clearly then, his overriding purpose through September was to counteract what he perceived as Douglas's threat to the Republicans. Any political gain he accrued was of ancillary importance. Had Lincoln's primary purpose been to increase his political stock for a run at some high office, he probably would have conducted himself in the early part of the year as he did during the winter of 1859 and the spring of 1860, focusing less on Douglas and more on cultivating supporters. Yet, there are also indications in his speeches in the fall that Lincoln began to consider running for the nomination. To comprehend his shift, one must first examine a second aspect of his private character: his ambition.

Lincoln thirsted for public office and the approbation of his peers. His aforementioned complaints at not making an impact on the world were but glimpses of his vast ambition as noted both by himself and his friends. Herndon famously remarked that Lincoln's "ambition was a little engine that knew no rest."[26] Lincoln exhib-

ited the outlines of his ambition in a speech given on January 27, 1838. Fearing that the Founding Fathers had "harvested" the "field of glory," he warned against overly impassioned men seeking fame in a new, destructive field.[27] "OUR WASHINGTON," he asserted, would wield "[r]eason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason."[28] Thus, Lincoln drew the path for the aspiring politician. He undertook this journey himself, studying Euclid's geometric proofs to hone his ability to think logically. During the debates, Lincoln stated that though he had "prayed from the first that this field of ambition might not be opened," he could "claim no insensibility to political honors."[29] Lincoln's prayers went unanswered. His aspirations affected his movement toward the nomination.

The evolution of his responses to suggestions that he run for the Presidency resulted from the interplay between his self-doubt and his ambition. The former gave way to the latter gradually over the course of 1859. During the debates, Lincoln joked about his chances for the Presidency, quipping, "Just think of such a sucker as me as President!"[30] Some historians believed that he used humor to ease himself of inner anguish.[31] After the debates, he stated unequivocally that he would "fight in the ranks" during the campaign of 1860 and asked that no effort be made for his nomination.[32] Lincoln provided the strongest case against his possible candidacy to Jessie Fell. During the winter of 1858, Fell became convinced of Lincoln's national appeal in 1860 and pressed him to write a biography for distribution in Pennsylvania. Had Lincoln planned on pursuing the Presidency, this was a golden opportunity. Pennsylvania, along with Indiana, Illinois, and New Jersey, were the pivotal states in the Republican strategy to capture the Presidency. "I am for the man who can carry Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Indiana, with the reservation…[that] the candidate must be alive," remarked one desperate Republican.[33] Lincoln, who read election results county-by-county, surely grasped the importance of this state for the 1860 election.[34] Had he actively desired the presidency, he would not pass up significant opportunities in the hope that they would be on the table at a much later date. By rejecting this offer, Lincoln displayed that he was not yet in the race. Admitting his desire for the office, he nonetheless stated, "there is no such good luck in store for me as the Presidency."[35] Moreover, it was "a matter of justice" that "such men as Seward, Chase, and others" receive the honors that come with a nomination.[36]

Lincoln's writings during the summer of 1859 evince a shift in thinking from his hitherto unambiguous stance on the nomination. Though still focused on obstructing Douglas, he began to subtly contradict his earlier statements. On July 28, he wrote to a friend in Ohio: "As to Gov. Chase, I have a kind side for him….but still he might not be the most suitable as candidate for the Presidency."[37] Whereas he believed in December that "justice" accorded Chase the nomination, he now questioned the prudence of such a selection. Moreover, he softly moderated his view on his own candidacy. "I do not think myself fit for the Presidency," he claimed.[38] This was by no means a sweeping self-endorsement. However, his statement altered his stance. In April he had requested no movement for the nomination to be made on his behalf. He was now leaving the door open to one who thought Lincoln "fit" for the office and supported his nomination.[39]

Lincoln's reappraisal resulted from a confluence of factors. First of all, his name was increasingly being mentioned for the Presidency. Baringer notes that Illinois felt "rumblings of a Lincoln boom that might develop into importance" during the spring and early summer of 1859.[40] Numerous newspaper editors, vying to become president-makers, placed Lincoln's name atop the Republican ticket for 1860. Additionally, he was receiving adulatory letters from politicians in other states, such as Mark Delahay from Kansas and Galloway from Ohio. As Lincoln later posited, "when not a very great man begins to be mentioned for a very great position, his head is very likely to be a little turned."[41] Lincoln's head was indeed "turned," but the Presidency was still only in his peripheral vision. His main line of sight focused on another issue during the summer that would coincidently help him later in his quest for the White House.

The primary cause of Lincoln's shifting focus during the summer of 1859 rested with the question he asked himself: how can the *Republican Party* achieve success in 1860? His letters to national Party leaders show that Lincoln formulated a potent strategy for a Republican victory. His approach took on two distinct aspects. He announced the first part by way of letters to prominent Republicans in other states. "My main object," he expressed to Indiana Republican Schuyler Colfax, "would be to hedge against divisions in the Republican ranks generally, and particularly for the contest of 1860."[42] To accomplish this, Lincoln recommended that each segment of the Party not stress its peculiar interests to the detriment of the Party as a whole. Thus, for example, he desired that Republicans of Massachusetts refrain from passing nativist legislation that would affect the Party in areas with high populations of foreigners.

Lincoln also hoped Republicans would guard against extremism. This would not only tie together the vast array of subgroups within the Party, but also bring new members into the ranks. Lincoln realized the wisdom of a conservative stance well before the summer of 1859. During his campaign for the Senate in 1858, he tasked Joseph Gillespie with investigating the leanings of the American Party in the Edwardsville Precinct. The American Party of Illinois cast 37,595 votes for their Presidential candidate, ex-President Millard Fillmore, in 1856.[43] Though more conservative than the Republican Party, the Americans housed elements opposed to the extension of slavery. The American Party did not, however, contain extreme views such as abolitionism. To garner those votes in 1860, Lincoln realized that Republicans needed to steer a relatively conservative course. Thus, he wrote to Chase during the month of June, imploring him not to support radical efforts in Ohio to repeal the Fugitive Slave law.[44] Such a move would be odious to moderate voters.

Lincoln's views reflected an accurate assessment of what success demanded not only of the Party as a whole, but also of the Party's Presidential nominee. Contemporaries and historians agree that the candidate's first requirement was to appeal to the cornucopia of special interests within the party. These groups generally represented sectional economic issues, which could prove divisive on the national level. Pennsylvania, as Iowa Governor R.P. Lowe stated, was "exceedingly sensitive upon" the tariff issue.[45] Along with Ohioans, they advocated protective tariffs for their industrial trades. Attempts to "lug high protective tariff doctrines into [the

Republican Party]," as Chicago Mayor John Wentworth put it, rankled the Party's agrarian interests and ex-Democrats.[46] To appease these latter sections, the candidate could not tout the tariff loudly. It had to become a secondary issue, along with provisions for free homesteads, which would placate farmers. Republican leaders worked out many of these compromises in the Party's platform of 1860 by providing something for everyone. Yet, Thomas M. Pitkin maintains that economic issues threatened to split the Party.[47] Thus, as Lincoln predicted, any candidate had to appeal to all regions of the Party.

The main concern for the nominee was not keeping the votes amassed in 1856 and 1858, but adding to them. "[T]he most promising source of additional Republican votes was from the ranks of the American Party," argues William E. Gienapp.[48] Those critical votes rested in Indiana, Pennsylvania, Illinois, and New Jersey. Support for Fillmore in these states played a crucial role in Republican Presidential candidate John C. Frémont's loss in 1856. Republicans in 1858 and 1859 viewed the moderate vote as up for grabs as the American Party slowly dissolved. Kenneth P. Stampp describes how Indiana politicians from 1858 onward wooed Americans through accommodations that entailed mitigating radical stances.[49] To do so, various Indiana Republicans and their colleagues around the country steered clear from any tinge of abolitionism while adopting tepid anti-immigration stances.[50] They exhibited this effort conspicuously after the nomination in Lincoln's campaign newspaper. On the last page of every edition of *The Rail Splitter*, they placed quotations of Democratic leaders degrading the Declaration of Independence next to quotes of Republicans and Revolutionary War heroes upholding the document.[51] Thus, they attempted to bind the venerated and conservative Founding Fathers to the Republican Party. There was no doubt as to Republican strategy.

Courting the conservative Americans forced two problems upon the Republicans. First of all, while the Republican Party could afford to alienate its more radical, abolitionist elements "because they had nowhere else to go,"—no other party came close to their brand of radicalism—there were limits to the conservative path.[52] During the Convention, some delegates such as Chas. Lee Armour expressed disdain for Pennsylvania's use of the title "People's Party," as a means to attract the floating American vote.[53] Armour implied that shying away from the label of Republican represented a weak conviction for the anti-slavery principles at the base of the Party. Additionally, taking on nativists affected the Republican Party's standing with foreigners. Denying special prominence for Republican-voting Germans in 1860, Andreas Dorpalen nonetheless concludes, "Lincoln's victory in the Northwest would have been impossible without German support."[54] Republican strategists realized the importance of foreign support long before the election. Thus, they sought a candidate principled on the slavery issue, yet conservative enough to win the American vote while not repelling foreigners.

Many candidates floundered upon such complex requirements. Seward was viewed as too radical on the slavery issue to attract moderates and too friendly to Catholics, who were targets of the nativists. Like Seward, Chase was too strong an abolitionist to win over the conservatives. Edward Bates from Missouri was, on the other hand, too conservative. Some questioned his commitment to fight slavery, as he had supported Fillmore, not Frémont, in 1856. Others doubted his ability to win the foreign vote. Supreme Court Justice John McClean would have been perfect, if he was only "fifteen, or even ten years younger," Lincoln observed.[55] It is at this point that some scholars explain Lincoln's victory through "availability," beginning with something similar to James M. McPherson's statement: "[t]his left Lincoln."[56] And as the potential candidate assessed the national scene with increasing confidence, he must have noticed that his chances of winning the nomination were not the worst in the field.

Lincoln's speeches in the fall of 1859 show that he gradually implemented a conservative strategy in tandem with his rising confidence. His tour in Ohio was meant to counteract Douglas and keep the Little Giant from twisting the Republican Party into his own, new centrist coalition. To combat Douglas and bolster the Republicans, Lincoln attempted to substantiate his Party's conservative credentials by tying it to the Founding Fathers. "This chief and real purpose of the Republican party is eminently conservative. It proposes nothing save and except to restore this government to its original tone…that which the original framers of the government expected and looked forward to," asserted Lincoln at Columbus.[57] He then looked to the history of the government: "From the adoption of the Constitution down to 1820….a policy had been adopted, and was prevailing, which led all just and right-minded men to suppose that slavery was gradually coming to an end."[58] Positing that the Republicans represented the true heirs of the Founders was a calculated appeal to the moderates.

The success of his efforts in Ohio piqued Lincoln's ambition and his subsequent actions reveal that he quietly began considering himself a candidate. He surely noticed that he was in high demand. The budding candidate received 24 invitations to speak or meet with Party leaders nationwide, from September 1st to the end of November.[59] This included a request from Thurlow Weed, Seward's manager and a powerhouse in politics, to meet in Albany, New York posthaste.[60] During this period he also corresponded with other influential Party members such as Francis P. Blair Jr., who treated Lincoln with respect. But there was one day in particular which moved Lincoln ever closer to full blown candidacy: October 15th. On October 14th, Ohio Republicans celebrated a major victory in the fall elections, a victory Lincoln's campaigning helped to ensure. The next day Lincoln returned to Springfield from a business trip to find waiting an invitation to speak at Reverend Henry Ward Beecher's Plymouth Church in New York.[61] His friend, Ward Hill Lamon, described his reaction: "No event of his life had given him more heartfelt pleasure."[62] Lincoln quickly accepted, inching ever closer to explicitly becoming a candidate.

An invitation to New York represented a chance to see and be seen in the powerful eastern corridors of the Republican Party. Gaining an audience or influence in states other than Illinois was a necessity if Lincoln hoped to win the nomination. Despite the national attention he received during his debates with Douglas, he had nowhere near the reputation of Seward or the other candidates, who had been serving in national positions for many years. Agreeing to speak in New York marked an important transition in Lincoln's determination to win the candidacy.

He was willing to make a considerable effort to gain prominence at the convention.

The effect of the invitation on Lincoln can be seen in his actions of the next two months. He began to speak and move as one desiring the candidacy. On October 17th, Lincoln wrote to a supporter in Kansas that he would not provide an open letter supporting General James H. Lane for the Senate. Lane, a fiery abolitionist, led the Jay-Hawkers, or the free state forces, during the fighting in Kansas. A Republican candidate for the Presidency in 1860 could not risk being associated with Lane's ilk, for fear of losing the conservative vote. Lincoln acknowledged this fact tacitly, stating that as he had never addressed him before "a letter directly from me to him, would run a great hazzard of doing harm to both you and me."[63] Lincoln was thus thinking of his own prospects and keeping to a wise conservative course. During October he also addressed the tariff issue. As with his conservative stance on slavery, Lincoln took the insightful course on the disruptive tariff. He told an inquirer that he had always believed in a "moderate, carefully adjusted, protective tariff" but "the revival of that question, will not advance the cause itself, or the man who revives it."[64] These two letters provide evidence that Lincoln was navigating a careful path. He was doing nothing that could hurt his chances, while positioning himself in the critical center on the divisive issues. He evinced his increased desire and maneuvering in a letter responding to the suggestion he run as vice-president to Simon Cameron. Whereas in 1858 he was committed to working in the "ranks" during the coming campaign, he now conjectured that he may earn a different post: "I shall labor faithfully in the ranks, unless, as I think not probable, the judgment of the party shall assign me a different position."[65] Plainly, Lincoln's ambition had increased.

Opportunities in November of 1859 also stoked Lincoln's ambition and displayed his increased devotion to winning the nomination. Mark Delahay wrote to Lincoln on November 14th, encouraging him to seek the presidency with vigor. "By a timely and determined stand by the Press of Illinois for you, as a Western man, and Representative man of the West...for the next 6 months," Delahay argued that Lincoln could win the nomination.[66] He also suggested that speaking in Kansas would increase Lincoln's image of being a western man and could very likely win him the state's support at the convention. When Lincoln the next day received a formal invitation from Delahay and 53 other Kansas politicians to canvas their state in December, he readily accepted.[67] Thus, by mid-November, Lincoln was clearly acting the part of a candidate. He had agreed to make two major speaking tours in the coming months; one in almost direct response to the urging that it would help make him president. The last critical piece of Lincoln's candidacy—rallying his friends to the cause—would come in December.

Over the past few months, Lincoln had made a silent, but skilful advance toward the nomination. Yet, he had not engaged others to work on his behalf, implying that he himself was not fully committed to running for the nomination. Herndon wrote that until late in December 1859, Lincoln "was most artful in concealing" his ambition for the Presidency.[68] Keeping his political goals from his friends was no little thing in 19th century presidential politics. The standards of the times required candidates to refrain from the nasty business of campaigning. Political allies were necessary if a candidate was to spread his name and have a realistic chance of winning. But friends had to know that one of their lot was in the running in order to help, and until late December of 1859, Lincoln had not let his friends in on his candidacy. Indeed, he wrote to Norman B. Judd on December 9th—who would be among Lincoln's important managers at the Wigwam—"and yet I would rather have a full term in the Senate than in the Presidency."[69]

The timing and implications of this statement paradoxically provide evidence of Lincoln's increased resolve to run for the nomination, even if he had not yet informed his supporters. He was telling a friend with some influence in the national party—Judd was a member of the Republican committee to decide the site for the convention—that the presidency was not his first choice. This ostensibly displays a lack of desire for the nomination. Yet Lincoln was a master politician, and thus not always straightforward. In the lines preceding his statement on the presidency, Lincoln made it clear that he was not running for the Senate. Thus the reference to the presidency takes on a different dimension. It was a new and conspicuous term in the letter; a new possibility that Lincoln mentioned with an affected air of acceptance. From this perspective, the discussion on the Senate sounds like Lincoln's musings on what might have been as he trudged towards the presidency. Events two days prior to Lincoln's letter to Judd add weight to this interpretation. On December 7th, Lincoln's hopes for the nomination were skyrocketed when prominent politicians requested that Lincoln send them a copy of his debates with Douglas for publication. Such "luminous and triumphant expositions of the doctrine of the Republican Party" would be a boon to the upcoming Presidential contest, the letter stated.[70] Lincoln realized that publication would also help his own chances for the nomination. He had attempted to have them published in the spring of 1859, but found little interest. He sent his scrapbook of the debates to his friends on December 19th and set out to win the nomination.

"Ambition running strong and hopes high," as Baringer notes, Lincoln finally enlisted the aid of friends to capture the nomination.[71] He first called in a favor to Judd: "I find some of our friends here, attach more consequence to getting the National convention into our State than I did, or do. Some of them made me promise to say so to you."[72] Of course, Lincoln's chances would be much increased if the Convention occurred in his own backyard. Being on the national committee that was about to determine the Convention's location, Judd was in a perfect position to win the Convention for Chicago. His subsequent success boosted Lincoln's hopes. Lincoln also finally wrote a campaign autobiography for Jessie Fell to distribute in Pennsylvania. He mailed it to Fell on December 20th. Additionally, in the early winter of 1860, Lincoln "authorized [his friends] to consider him and work for him if [they] pleased as a Candidate for the Presidency," remembered Jackson Grimshaw, a friend and supporter.[73] Lincoln confirmed this to Galloway, stating, "[m]y name is new in the field."[74] Thus, after many meager, furtive steps toward the nomination, Lincoln was now an official contender.

Candidate Lincoln made his most important contribution to his nomination with his speaking tour of the Northeast in February and March of 1860. His developing statements on the conser-

vatism of the Republican Party culminated in the most cogent argument of moderation expressed by any Republican candidate. To prove beyond all doubt that the Founders granted the Federal government power to regulate slavery in the territories—a key element of the Republican belief in the non-extension of slavery as against Douglas's local-based popular sovereignty—Lincoln endeavored to discover what the Founders said and did with the issue. Researching "slowly, meticulously, laboriously" through the history of the Founders, Lincoln found the facts for his case.[75] Indeed, to underscore the moderation of his message, Lincoln presented his speech as a carefully argued law brief rather than a fiery political harangue. He argued that the Founders treated slavery as an evil, to be gradually regulated into non-existence. Consequently, "all the Republicans ask" was that the country "speak as [the Founders] spoke, and act as they acted upon" the slavery issue.[76] This was clearly an appeal to the moderate elements that Republicans believed would determine the next election.

Lincoln wisely exuded this temperate sentiment in Seward's state. Many saw the leading candidate for the nomination, Seward, as too radical. His conservative speech two days after Lincoln's, though well received, appeared as a mere concession to political exigencies. Lincoln, on the other hand, was able to come across as conservative in his first address to eastern Republicans. His efforts were effective. A study of original sources shows that the crowd treated him with "frequent and enthusiastic applause," notes historian Frank Williams.[77] Journalist Noah Brooks proclaimed extravagantly, "He's the greatest man since St. Paul."[78] Thus, Lincoln returned to Springfield on March 14, 1860, in a good position to win the nomination. Adhering to the political customs of the day, he made no new pronouncements or major speeches leading up to the Convention.

Lincoln also kept an eye on practical matters affecting his chances. He hedged against divisions in his state party by mediating between disgruntled wings of the Illinois Republican Party.[79] This, along with Richard J. Oglesby's introduction of the "Railsplitter" image, ensured Illinois would present a united front for Lincoln at the Convention. During the spring, Lincoln made contacts with delegates from Indiana and Connecticut, arranging for his managers at the Convention to meet with them.[80] These two states proved critical in Lincoln's nomination. Indiana was one of the four highly sought after states and its first ballot support for Lincoln, along with support from the Northeast, gave Lincoln momentum during the balloting. Thus, Lincoln was an ideal candidate. Principled on the slavery issue, he nonetheless was attractive to conservatives and acceptable to all the Party's many factions.

Despite his strengths, Lincoln retained one weakness that required the work of his managers at the Convention to overcome: his obscurity. Lincoln's name was not the first choice of many delegate lists as they arrived at the Convention. In spite of his performance at Cooper Union, many editors and delegates failed to consider him a strong nominee. In the lead up to the Convention, Greeley's *Weekly Tribune* published articles in support of all other major candidates—except Seward, whom Greeley disliked after a personal dispute ruptured their friendship—and even second tier contenders such as Simon Cameron. Yet, there was no mention of Lincoln.[81] Other publications followed suit. *Harper's Weekly* afforded Lincoln the least coverage of all candidates in its special feature on the Convention. More importantly, delegates and observers on their way to the Wigwam gave Lincoln little thought, as indicated by straw votes taken on the train rides to Chicago. Historian Perley Orman Ray searched through the records of the straw votes on trains and found only one instance where Lincoln outpolled Seward. In most other cases, Ray concluded that the results were "overwhelmingly favorable to Seward's nomination."[82] These editorials and straw polls indicate that Lincoln was an obscure candidate. Many considered him a second level player, when they considered him at all.

Some scholars take his obscurity to be the result of a purposeful decision on Lincoln's part "not to reveal his intentions too early, so as to minimize the possibility of opponents mobilizing against him."[83] "My name is new in the field," Lincoln wrote, concluding that "[o]ur policy, then, is to give no offence to others—leave them in a mood to come to us, if they shall be compelled to give up their first love."[84] Lincoln did not believe that his name as a candidate would rally opposition. He would gain detractors only by giving "offence to others." Other historians have argued that even at the Convention, Lincoln's manager, David Davis, tried to hold back Lincoln's name until the opportune moment.[85] Davis's toilsome effort, however, belies this claim. Indeed, only the tenacious work of Lincoln's managers—who did not keep Lincoln's name back but announced it as loudly as possible—convinced the delegates to take Lincoln's name seriously.

The efforts of Lincoln's supporters during the Convention to broadcast their friend's name sold the delegates on Lincoln's nomination. They did not hope to remain inconspicuous, and thus tailor their efforts for some fictional, advantageous moment, but considered every bit of time important from the start. Upon arrival in Chicago, Davis set everyone to work: Leonard Swett was "to work on the delegates from his home State of Maine," Ward Hill Lamon set out to persuade "those of western Virginia, where he had spent his boyhood," while others argued Lincoln's case to various other state delegations where they had special influence.[86] Jesse Dubois, another friend at Chicago on Lincoln's behalf, wrote of Davis, "[n]ever saw him work so hard." On the whole effort, he argued, "[w]e are quiet but moving heaven & earth."[87] Indeed, Davis began assiduously courting the delegates from the crucial states at the early stages of the proceedings. The nature of Davis's dealings is surrounded in controversy. Many claim he made a pact with Caleb B. Smith of Indiana to obtain votes and another deal with Simon Cameron to win Pennsylvania's support. Yet, as Fehrenbacher argues, deals or no deals, the decision at Chicago was based on "a hardheaded decision that the leading candidate could not win."[88] They came to that conclusion thanks in large part to the labors of Lincoln's managers.

On the day of the balloting, after a long night of work convincing Pennsylvania and New Jersey to go for Lincoln, Davis and company now publicized their candidate's name in a different manner. With the help of fake tickets and discounted train fares, Davis and Judd were able to usher in a large crowd to cheer for Lincoln during the voting. Halstead described the resulting "uproar" as Lincoln's name was submitted to the Convention as a nominee: "Imagine all the hogs ever slaughtered in Cincinnati giving their

death squeals together, a score of big steam whistles going…and you conceive something of the same nature."[89] Thus, Lincoln's managers worked eagerly and effectively to overcome their candidate's obscurity by tirelessly pronouncing his good name in any manner they could. Without their ability to tap inside connections with numerous delegations and create boisterous momentum for their candidate, it is likely that Lincoln would not have been victorious. Horace Greeley believed so, claiming at the late hour of 11:40 the night before the voting that Seward's prominence would overcome efforts to bring about his defeat, as "the opposition to Gov. Seward cannot concentrate on any candidate."[90] In the early morning hours of the next day, Lincoln's managers persuaded the Seward "opposition" to vote for Lincoln, thus proving their critical contribution to his nomination.

Receiving the news of his nomination, Lincoln proclaimed: "Well Gentleman there is a little woman at our house who is probably more interested in this dispatch than I am."[91] At this point, Lincoln was clearly hiding his excitement. A year and a half earlier, he had considered the nomination beyond his reach. His defeat by Douglas caused him pain and produced self-doubt. His subsequent efforts in politics, up to the fall of 1859, show that his self-doubt formed the basis of his actions. However, during the spring of 1859, the praise of newspapers and friends awakened Lincoln's potent ambition. As his letters to Party leaders across the country in the summer display, he began to ponder what it would take for the Republican Party to win state and national legislatures and even the Presidency in 1860. The answers he found would later provide him with an effective strategy to pursue the nomination: he must not offend any of the numerous, and frequently antagonistic, Party elements while stressing his moderation and conservatism. He applied his tactics slowly throughout the fall, reflecting the fact that he remained hesitant and uncertain. His ambition had not yet eclipsed his self-doubt. After Lincoln accepted the invitation to speak in New York and the request that he publish his debates, there was no doubt that he was a candidate. Following the customs of his day, he did not announce this to the public, but instead mobilized his friends to work for him. His speech in New York established his conservatism in a national spotlight and contrasted favorably with Seward's alleged radicalism. Thus, he had taken the necessary positions to win the candidacy. His name, however, lacked prominence. This was his greatest weakness, which contradicts claims that he was the sole, determinative agent of his nomination. It took the rigorous work of his managers in Chicago to advertise his abilities to the delegates. In the end, Lincoln "kept cool," overcoming his self-doubt to win the nomination and the presidency.

Alex Gallucci graduated from Butler University in 2007. He is serving for a year in Americorps before entering graduate school.

Endnotes

[1] Telegram from Norman B. Judd to Abraham Lincoln, Wednesday, May 16, 1860. *The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress* 1 March 2002. The Library of Congress. 14 March, 2006. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d0268000))>.

[2] Henry C. Whitney, *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln* (1892). 2001 Illinois Historical Digitization Project, The University of Chicago. (accessed 16 April 2006). < http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/getobject_?c.2838:6./lib35/artfl1/databases/sources/IMAGE/>, p. 84. Abram J. Dittenhoefer also focused on the success of Lincoln's friends in his nomination. Abram J. Dittenhoefer, *How We Elected Lincoln: Personal Recollections* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2005, originally published in 1916) pp. 21-35.

[3] Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln: Prologue to Civil War, 1859-1861* Vol. 2 (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), pp. 247-260.; Reinhard H. Luthin, *The Real Abraham Lincoln: A Complete One-Volume History of His Life and Times* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, INC, 1960) pp. 203-219.; Reinhard H. Luthin, *The First Lincoln Campaign* (Gloucester, MA.: Peter Smith, 1964) pp. 136-167.; William E. Baringer, *Lincoln's Rise to Power* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1937) pp. 330-337.

[4] David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) pp. 230-250.; Harold Holzer, *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The Speech that Made Abraham Lincoln President* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2004) pp. 231-237.; Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005) pp. 211-256.

[5] Joshua Wolf Shenk, *Lincoln's Melancholy* (New York: Houghton Miflin, 2005). Michael Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

[6] Henry C. Whitney, quoted in Shenk, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

[7] Richard Striner, *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) pp. 1-4.; Goodwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 211-256.; Richard Carwardine, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (New York: Pearson Education Limited, 2006) pp. 89-90.; William E. Gienapp makes a provision for his humility. Modesty and self-doubt, while similar, are not the same. William E. Gienapp, *Abraham Lincoln and Civil War America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) pp. xi.; David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered: Essays on the Civil War Era* (New York: Vintage Books, 1947-2001) pp. 164-180.

[8] Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered*, p. 180.; Gienapp, *Abraham Lincoln*, p. xi.

[9] Abraham Lincoln, quoted in Burlingame, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

[10] Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953-1955), Vol. 2, p. 383.

[11] Burlingame, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

[12] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 339.

[13] William H. Herndon, *Herndon's Life of Lincoln* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1942), p. 323.

[14] Don E. Fehrenbacher, "The Origins and Purpose of Lincoln's 'House-Divided' Speech", *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, Vol. 46, No. 4 (March, 1960), pp. 615-643.

[15] Whitney, *op. cit.*, p. 467.

[16] For those who believe Lincoln quickly recuperated, see, Shenk, *op. cit.*, pp. 156-160.; Burlingame, *op. cit.*, pp. 248-250.; Carwardine, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power*, pp. 89-90.; Goodwin, *op. cit.*, pp. 209-212.

[17] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 335.

[18] *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 345.

[19] *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 366.

[20] *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 367.

[21] *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 396.

[22] Grenville M. Dodge, *Memories of the Chicago Convention of 1860* (1920) Ed. F.I. Herriot, 2001 Illinois Historical Digitization Project, The University of Chicago. (accessed 16 April 2006). <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/getobject_?c.3106:2./lib35/artfl1/databases/sources/IMAGE/>.

[23] Donald, *Lincoln*, p. 233.

[24] Washington McLean to Douglas, (September 6, 1859), quoted in Harry V. Jaffa, ed., Robert Johannsen, ed., *In the Name of the People: Speeches and Writings of Lincoln and Douglas in the Ohio Campaign of 1859* (Columbus, OH: The Ohio

State University Press, 1959), p. 8.

[25] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 394.

[26] Herndon, *op. cit.*, p. 304.

[27] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 1, p. 113

[28] *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 115.

[29] *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 334.

[30] Abraham Lincoln, (1858), quoted in Burlingame, *op. cit.*, p. 248.

[31] P.M. Zall, Introduction, *Abe Lincoln Laughing: Humorous Anecdotes from Original Sources By and About Abraham Lincoln*, Ed. P.M. Zall (Knoxville, TN.: The University of Tennessee Press, 1995) p. 7.

[32] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 337.; *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 377.

[33] FitzHenry Warren to James Shepherd Pike (February 2, 1860), quoted in Gienapp, "Who Voted For Lincoln?" *Abraham Lincoln and the American Political Tradition* Ed. John L. Thomas (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts, 1986) p. 54.

[34] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 491.

[35] Abraham Lincoln, (1858), quoted in Baringer, *op. cit.*, p. 68.

[36] *Ibid.*, p. 66.

[37] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 395.

[38] *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 395.

[39] Letter from Samuel Galloway to Abraham Lincoln, (July 23, 1859). *The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress* 1 March 2002. The Library of Congress. 14 March, 2006. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d0178500))>.

[40] Baringer, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

[41] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 36.

[42] *Ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 390.

[43] William Gienapp, *The Origins of the Republican Party*, 1852-1856 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987) p. 526.

[44] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 386.

[45] R.P. Lowe, (1859), quoted in, Thomas M. Pitkin, "Western Republicans and the Tariff in 1860", *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 27, No. 3 (December, 1940), p. 405.

[46] *Ibid.*, p. 419.

[47] *Ibid.*, pp. 419-420.

[48] Gienapp, " Who Voted For Lincoln", p. 54.

[49] Kenneth P. Stampp, *Indiana Politics During the Civil War* (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1949) pp. 21-38.

[50] Gienapp, "Nativism and the Creation of a Republican Majority in the North before the Civil War", *The Journal of American History* Vol. 72, No. 3 (December, 1985) pp. 541-551.

[51] *The Rail Splitter*. Vol.1, No. 6-10. Fort Wayne, IN The Lincoln Museum. Chicago, 1860.

[52] Stampp, *op. cit.*, p. 29.; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) p. 217.

[53] Horace Greeley, *Proceedings of the First Three National Republican Conventions of 1856, 1860, and 1864* (Orig. 1893). 2001 Illinois Historical Digitization Project, The University of Chicago. (accessed 16 April 2006). <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/cgi-bin/getobject_?c.2843:4./lib35/artfl1/databases/sources/IMAGE/>. p. 113.

[54] Andreas Dorpalen, "The German Element and the Issues of the Civil War", *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review* Vol. 29, No. 1 (June, 1942), p. 76.

[55] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 36.

[56] Luthin, *The First Lincoln Campaign* p. 167.; Bruce Catton, *The Coming Fury*, (Garden City: Doubleday, 1961) p. 52.; McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom* p. 217.

[57] Abraham Lincoln, "Speech of Abraham Lincoln at Columbus, Ohio, September 16, 1859", Jaffa and Johannsen, eds. (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1959) p. 237.

[58] *Ibid.*, 241.

[59] *The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress* 1 March 2002. The Library of Congress. 22 April, 2006. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/d?mal:40:./temp/~ammem_0TW6::>.

[60] Letter from Thurlow Weed to Norman B. Judd, (October 20, 1859) *The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress* 1 March 2002. The Library of Congress. 22 April, 2006. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d0198100))>.

[61] The venue was later changed to the no less prestigious Cooper Union Hall.

[62] Ward Hill Lamon, (1872), quoted in Holzer, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

[63] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 490.

[64] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 487.

[65] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 491.

[66] Letter from Mark W. Delahay to Abraham Lincoln, (November 14, 1859). *The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress* 1 March 2002. The Library of Congress. 22 April, 2006. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d0206300))>.

[67] Letter from Mark W. Delahay and 53 Others to Abraham Lincoln, (November 15, 1859). *The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress* 1 March 2002. The Library of Congress. 22 April, 2006. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d0206800))>.

[68] Herndon, *op. cit.*, p. 366.

[69] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 505.

[70] Letter from Republican State Central Committee of Ohio to Abraham Lincoln, (December 7, 1859), *The Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress* 1 March 2002. The Library of Congress. 22 April, 2006. <http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?ammem/mal:@field(DOCID+@lit(d0210700))>.

[71] Baringer, *op. cit.*, p. 128.

[72] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 509.

[73] Letter from Jackson Grimshaw to William H. Herndon, (April 28, 1866), *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln*, Eds. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p. 247.

[74] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 34.

[75] Holzer, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

[76] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 3, p. 535.

[77] Frank Williams, "A Candidate Speaks in Rhode Island: Abraham Lincoln Visits Providence and Woonsocket, 1860", *Rhode Island History* Vol. 51, No. 4. (1993), p. 109.

[78] Noah Brooks, (February 28, 1860), quoted in Holzer, *op. cit.*, p. 146.

[79] See endnote 68.

[80] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, pp. 46-47.; *Ibid.*, Vol. 4, p. 44.

[81] Baringer, *op. cit.*, p. 191.

[82] Perley Orman Ray, *The Convention that Nominated Lincoln* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1960) p. 15.

[83] Goodwin, *op. cit.*, p. 212.

[84] Basler, *op. cit.*, Vol. 4, p. 34.

[85] Willard L. King, *Lincoln's Manager, David Davis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960) p. 134.

[86] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

[87] Jessie Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, (May 13, 1860), quoted in King, *op. cit.*, p. 136. David Davis and Jessie Dubois to Abraham Lincoln, (May 15, 1860), quoted in King, *op. cit.*, p. 136.

[88] Fehrenbacher, "The Republican Decision at Chicago", in *Politics and the Crisis of 1860*, Ed. Norman A. Graebner. (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1961) p. 59.

[89] Murat Halstead, *Three Against Lincoln: Murat Halstead Reports the Caucuses of 1860* Ed. William B. Hesseltine (Baton Rouge, Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1960) p. 165.

[90] Horace Greeley, (May 17, 1860), quoted in Baringer, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

[91] Abraham Lincoln, (May 18, 1860), quoted in Donald, *Lincoln*, p. 251.

A Different Destiny: Abraham Lincoln and the Principles of U.S. Foreign Relations

by Robert E. May, Professor of History, Purdue University

Given his negligible military experience before the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln proved to be surprisingly adept as commander-in-chief of the Union's armed forces during the conflict. The nation's sixteenth chief executive for the most part made sound decisions about commanders and military objectives—better judgments, many historians believe, than the battle-hardened, former U.S. Army officer and Mexican War hero Jefferson Davis who directed the Confederate war effort.

Success in wartime, however, often hinges on diplomatic finesse as well as battlefield acumen. The United States might never have gained its independence had not Benjamin Franklin and his fellow commissioners to France during the American Revolution persuaded the French government in 1778 to join a military alliance against England. It is hard to imagine Lord Cornwallis surrendering at Yorktown had not the French navy dominated the surrounding waters at the time. What can we say, in this regard, about Lincoln's oversight of Civil War diplomacy? Did his management of the nation's diplomatic course contribute to or detract from the Union's overall war effort?

At first glance, Lincoln appears to have been even less ready to address the Union's diplomatic challenges when he took office in March 1861 than he was for administering his nation's military affairs. Although he had served as captain of an Illinois militia company in the Black Hawk War, he had no prior diplomatic record at all. James Buchanan, Lincoln's immediate predecessor, had been secretary of state as well as U.S. minister to Russia and Great Britain. Former presidential candidates Daniel Webster and Henry Clay, undoubtedly the two most prominent figures in the Whig Party, with which Lincoln affiliated before joining the Republicans in the mid-1850s, had both, like Buchanan, been secretaries of state.

Lincoln, in contrast, not only lacked service in the Department of State or in U.S. ministries or consulships abroad, but he barely had any national office-holding tenure at all, having merely been a single-term U.S. Congressman in the late 1840s, when he had not, it should be noted, served on the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. Nor could Lincoln draw upon the kind of sustained experience abroad that might compensate for his lack of formal diplomatic experience, though it was hardly uncommon

Charles Francis Adams (TLM #3456)

for national politicians of his day, including his arch-rival Stephen A. Douglas, to take a European "tour" at one time or another. Douglas made his five-month sojourn, which included many hours in observation of England's Parliament and an interview in St. Petersburg with the Russian Czar's private secretary, in 1853 shortly after the deaths of his wife and infant child. Lincoln had never traveled overseas prior to his inauguration.[1]

Given the profundity of much of Lincoln's commentary in his famous debates with Douglas in 1858, it is easy for us today to overlook that at the time he assumed the presidency he was considered as something of a lightweight thinker by many voters and political commentators. The very populist nature of Lincoln's 1860 presidential campaign, with its "Wide Awake" torch-light parades and celebrations of Lincoln's rail-splitting feats, suggested a candidate lacking gravitas. One newspaper dismissed him as a mere "rough-spun disputatious village politician." Quickly-rendered prints and engravings of Lincoln for the campaign, moreover, rarely flattered. They made the candidate seem "sooty," even piratical-looking, at least to some of his critics. In referencing carte-de-visite images of Lincoln and his Confederate peer Jefferson Davis, the British journalist and politician Alexander

J. Beresford-Hope instinctively ruled the latter more "one's idea of what an able administrator and a calm statesman should look like" than Lincoln, whose abilities at maneuvering barges and in the legal sphere hardly, in Beresford-Hope's eyes, qualified him for political leadership.[2]

Given such stereotypical impressions of the new president, many contemporaries naturally doubted that Lincoln possessed the sophistication necessary for the successful management of foreign affairs, a task demanding intrinsic shrewdness, if not knowledge of other countries' cultures and diplomatic policies. Lincoln's own appointee as U.S. minister to Great Britain, Charles Francis Adams, considered Lincoln vulgar and bereft of knowledge about foreign relations, according to Adams's secretary. It can be inferred that Adams measured Lincoln against memories of his own father, John Quincy Adams, the nation's sixth president, who had been secretary of state after filling diplomatic assignments in Russia, England, the Netherlands, and Prussia and had helped to negotiate the Treaty of Ghent ending the War of 1812 as well. John Lothrop Motley, who served as U.S. Minister in Vienna during the Civil War, reported after a discussion with Lincoln in June 1861 that the president did not even attempt to hide his "ignorance" about diplomacy.

Foreign commentators and diplomats expressed similar reservations about Lincoln's capacities. Russia's minister to the United States, Baron Édouard de Stoeckl, considered Lincoln's expression "agreeable and honest," but his face unremarkable, his manners typical of someone from "a small Western town," and his abilities "mediocre." The French novelist George Sand's son Maurice concluded, after an audience with Lincoln in 1861, that "Jove himself" would seem "vulgar" had he Lincoln's oversized mouth, small eyes, beard and "hollow cheeks." French ruler Napoleon III's cousin, who met Lincoln in the summer of 1861, judged him "a poor specimen of a president," the "commonest" Americans had ever elected according to gossip.[3]

A rank amateur in diplomacy, Lincoln would surely, some observers expected, allow his secretary of state, William H. Seward, to chart the Union's foreign policy. A former New York governor and U.S. senator, Seward (who had been Lincoln's chief rival for the 1860 Republican presidential nomination) was far more conversant than the president with overseas affairs and had traveled extensively abroad. He had a comprehensive vision of the policies required for American dominance in world trade, and, while a senator in the 1850s, had advocated U.S. annexation of Hawaii and Russian Alaska. Naturally gossip in Washington early in the Lincoln administration assumed that, as Prince Napoleon put it, Seward had already been granted complete authority over "the President's foreign policy."[4]

William H. Seward (TLM #83)

William Howard Russell, special U.S. correspondent of the *Times* of London when the Civil War erupted, almost joined the chorus of Lincoln detractors. Meeting the Illinoisan during a visit to the State Department a few weeks after the presidential inauguration, Russell was unimpressed by Lincoln's physical appearance. Russell's diary presents the president as a strangely ungainly figure clothed in an ill-fitting, wrinkled black suit. Lincoln's limbs, the correspondent observed, were oversized. He also had "flapping and wide-projecting ears," an "absolutely prodigious" mouth, and a "thatch of wild republican hair." Yet Russell was prescient enough to sense that there was something more to the superficially unsophisticated chief executive. The journalist detected "an expression which almost amounts to tenderness" in Lincoln's dark, deeply-set and "penetrating" eyes and a wittiness in the president's banter. Lincoln, Russell believed, had a commanding presence in his own way. He was a man of impressive "shrewdness, humour, and natural sagacity." The Union was actually fortunate, Russell concluded only months later, to have a leader of such "capacity" running its government in such a crisis, rather than someone who superficially cut a "courtly" figure.[5]

In fact, Lincoln was hardly as ill-prepared for supervising the Union's foreign affairs as his critics assumed. He followed events abroad, held opinions about them, and knew something of the histories of foreign countries. For instance, in 1849 he served on a resolutions committee of a meeting to support Hungary's revolution for independence from Austria and in 1852 spoke at a meeting favoring the same cause. In 1855, venting against the new Know Nothing political party, which called for discriminatory legislation against Catholics and foreign immigrants, Lincoln exclaimed hyperbolically in a private letter that if such policies were ever implemented, he would rather live in "Russia…where despotism can be taken pure" than in the United States with its hypocritical professions of equality. Lincoln alluded to Napoleon's character in his 1854 Peoria address and, in his Cooper Union address on February 27, 1860, presidential candidate Lincoln referenced the 1605 "Gunpowder Plot" of English Catholics to blow up Parliament. When Lincoln met with Mexican minister to the United States Matías Romero in January 1861, during the interval between his election and his inauguration, he showed an awareness of debt peonage below the border, and he queried Romero about the iniquity. Further, although the State Department translator Count Adam Gurowski considered Lincoln's failing to cut the pages of a standard text on international law as evidence of Lincoln's provincialism, Lincoln, according to the historian Jay Monaghan, had a worn copy of that very text in his legal volumes in Springfield.[6]

We should not be completely surprised, therefore, that Lincoln's administration, through deft diplomacy, compiled an excellent record in foreign relations, most especially by averting the potential disaster of British and/or French intervention in the Civil War on the side of the Confederacy, a distinct possibility given the dependence of those nations on Southern cotton exports. Had either or both of the European powers allied formally with the Confederacy, it likely would have provided the South with the margin of victory in the war. True, shipbuilders in England did construct commerce raiders for the Confederacy like the Alabama that wreaked havoc on the Union merchant marine during the

Napoleon III (TLM #2236)

war. True, also, France's emperor Napoleon III capitalized on the Union's wartime vulnerability with imperialistic aggressions in Mexico; not only did French forces overrun much of Mexico, but in 1863-64 they installed in Mexico City a puppet regime under the Austrian prince Ferdinand Maximilian. With the Union's military resources fully committed to the war against the Confederates, Lincoln could only accede for the time being to France's infringement of the Monroe Doctrine. Nonetheless, Lincoln achieved his most important diplomatic goals. Not only did neither Britain nor France intervene militarily in the North American strife, but no foreign state legitimized the Confederate cause by formally recognizing its independence. The Lincoln administration, moreover, convinced European leaders to recognize its blockade of Confederate ports, and by mid-war convinced British and French authorities to intervene against the construction within their territory of warships for the Confederacy.

Lincoln's record in diplomacy was hardly unblemished. He blundered seriously in the "Trent affair" of late 1861, the wartime incident that came closest to bringing British intervention on the Confederate side. This crisis resulted from the miscalculation of an overly aggressive Union naval captain, Charles Wilkes. Wilkes violated international law on November 8 by seizing the Confederate ministers plenipotentiary to Great Britain and France respectively, James Mason and John Slidell, off the neutral British vessel Trent while it was in waters in the Bahama Channel. Wilkes had then conveyed his prisoners to imprisonment at Fort Warren in Boston Harbor, while letting the Trent continue on its way. Wilkes justified the capture on the problematic logic that the men were the equivalent of contraband of war—that is, war matériel that would assist the Confederate cause. Whatever the legitimacy of Wilkes's argument, he had clearly violated the principles of international law, which mandated that captures of contraband at sea (that is vessels and their cargoes) be taken to a legitimate prize court for adjudication as to whether or not they had violated principles of neutrality and were liable for seizure. Britain threatened to break relations with the United States if the Union refused to release the captives and apologize for the insult to the British flag, and made hostile preparations including the dispatching of military reinforcements for Canada, then still a British colonial possession. During this crisis, Lincoln vacillated dangerously on releasing the Confederate ministers. Fortunately for the Union, Seward managed to persuade the president at Cabinet meetings on December 25 and 26 that the government had better give up the captives.[7]

In fact, many scholars emphasize that Seward, just as he ultimately did in the Trent crisis, directed the Union's foreign policy. As David Donald puts it, "in general, the President had little to do with foreign affairs" and "willingly entrusted foreign policy to his Secretary of State." In almost identical language, Phillip Shaw Paludan's masterful analysis of the Lincoln presidency observed that Lincoln was too busy with the war against the South to give much attention to diplomacy, and that he "usually left foreign affairs in Seward's hands." Mark Neely and other scholars have emphasized that Lincoln wisely delayed announcing his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in mid-1862, on Seward's sage advice that it follow a Union military victory and seem the product of Northern strength rather than a desperate measure to offset defeats. By such logic, of course, Seward, not Lincoln, deserves credit for *both* the administration's diplomatic accomplishments and failures. Further, the Lincoln administration would probably never have succeeded in its campaign to ward off European intervention had it not been for complex factors relating to European affairs far beyond its control. Lincoln's genius had nothing to do with France's several military commitments in Europe during the Civil War years, which limited its military capacity for warfare in the Western Hemisphere. Lincoln certainly understood that to some degree Union diplomatic success was dependent on affairs in Europe completely beyond the Union's control. In December 1863, Seward notified Adams in England that the president assumed that a crisis in Europe over the status of the Danish duchies of Schleswig and Holstein diminished the likelihood that Britain would risk war with the Union. Indeed, Lincoln's instincts were sound. Though Britain ultimately refrained from helping Denmark the next year when Austria and Prussia attacked that country, British leaders were seriously considering military intervention at the time that Seward notified Adams of Lincoln's thoughts.[8]

Does this mean, then, that it is absurd to speak of Lincoln's foreign policies? If the president's sole contribution to Union diplomacy had been the Emancipation Proclamation, that alone would make the case for Lincoln's agency in foreign relations. Seward learned of Lincoln's prior intentions to issue such a document during a carriage ride with the president on July 13, 1862.

The final proclamation of January 1, 1863, as John Hope Franklin notes, was partly designed "to defeat as far as possible the efforts of the Confederacy abroad," and was quickly disseminated through diplomatic channels. Although it by no means earned unanimous foreign praise, it inspired a swell of pro-Union feeling among the British working classes and liberal European political leaders and media. Though the Proclamation did not entirely foreclose the possibility of European intermeddling in the Civil War, it ultimately played a significant role in ensuring that the Great Powers would refrain from doing so. As Howard Jones emphasizes, the Emancipation Proclamation put the Union so far in front in "the battle against the peculiar institution" that the Confederates had no success when during the winter of 1864-1865 their diplomatic agents belatedly offered England and France a deal by which the South would end slavery in return for recognition.[9]

Lincoln, however, never intended to fully delegate control over Union foreign relations to Seward, and he remained involved in Union diplomacy throughout the war. Lincoln made it clear to Seward within weeks of his inauguration that foreign relations were to be a shared responsibility. Seward, during the days before fighting erupted at Fort Sumter, wanted desperately to avoid war and was more willing than Lincoln to compromise with Southern leaders to achieve this goal. He suggested to Lincoln in an April 1 memorandum that the Union not only forfeit the fort but implied that it capitalize upon foreign tensions as a diversion from domestic strife. Seward proposed that the administration demand that Spain and France back off from their ongoing interventions in Latin America (Spain was in the process of re-annexing the Dominican Republic, a former colony, and had sent troops there), and go to war if those countries did not respond satisfactorily. Seward likely fantasized that a foreign war might so reignite patriotism in the South that the Confederacy would disappear as Yankees and Rebels joined cause against a foreign power. More noteworthy than Seward's intent is the memorandum's suggestion that if Lincoln lacked the stamina to implement this policy himself, Seward would not "evade" the assignment. Lincoln did not even contemplate being shunted aside in foreign affairs by his secretary. Rather, the president drafted a response dated later that day informing Seward that if the Union were to rattle sabers against France and Spain, "I must do it." Whether or not Seward ever actually received Lincoln's answer in written or verbal form remains unknown. But the draft clearly indicated Lincoln's intent.[10]

Henry Ward Beecher (TLM #2165)

Several historians, most notably Monaghan and, more recently, Dean B. Mahin, have highlighted Lincoln's role as diplomatist. Monaghan emphasized Lincoln's responsibility for sending such Union enthusiasts as the evangelical preacher Henry Ward Beecher, the shipping magnate William H. Aspinwall, and the former U.S. secretary of the treasury Robert J. Walker to England to give lectures and work behind the scenes to discourage loans to the Confederacy and other pro-Southern activities. "Under Lincoln's direction," Monaghan affirmed, "Seward set to work...Every important American he could find was sent to England to talk and lecture." To foment suspicion between Great Britain and France so that the two powers would not cooperate in any bid to mediate the American dispute, Lincoln in April 1862 cleverly gave France's minister to the United States a pass to Richmond, Virginia, the Confederate capital. This favor, according to Monaghan, convinced Britain's minister that France was trying to cut its own commercial treaty with Confederate leaders and leave Britain out. Lincoln had successfully "executed one of those diplomatic movements which his friends called deeply subtle and his enemies pure accident." Later that year, Britain's cabinet voted against a joint mediation proposal from Napoleon.[11]

Mahin notes that Seward's dispatches to Union ministers abroad frequently referenced Lincoln's opinions, that Seward regularly ran dispatches by Lincoln before issuing them, and that they consulted together frequently outside of cabinet meetings. In April 1861 Lincoln wisely modified as unnecessarily provocative a dispatch from Seward to Adams warning Great Britain of war should its foreign secretary meet officially with Confederate diplomats. When in 1863 the British government decided to detain ironclad vessels

intended for the Confederacy—the "Laird rams"—from putting to sea, Seward informed Adams that Lincoln was convinced that the act showed British friendship for the Union cause. Mahin also shows that the president and secretary worked in tandem respecting Mexican policy, being careful not to legitimize the French presence by recognizing Maximilian's government but avoiding close cooperation with national Mexican forces resisting French control. That way, Napoleon III would have no motive to seek an alliance with the Confederacy as a means of preserving his foothold in Mexico. For instance, in September 1863, William Dayton, the Union's minister in France, heard from Seward that Lincoln was growing increasingly concerned that the French intended a permanent tenure in Mexico rather than the temporary stay the French government initially indicated, and that Lincoln wished Dayton to inform French authorities that the United States was deeply committed to the unity and independence of Mexico. When rumors began circulating that the French had designs against Texas as well as Mexico, Lincoln decided that the French had gone too far, and helped plan a number of Union military initiatives in 1863-1864 that were designed to wrest parts of Texas from Confederate hands and ward off French aggression. It was after the failure of most of these initiatives, most spectacularly Union general Nathaniel Banks's disastrous Red River expedition of 1864, that Lincoln and Seward reverted to their policy of postponing action on the French intervention until after the Civil War had ended.[12]

One only need apply simple math to Lincoln's annual messages to Congress to calculate his attention to foreign affairs. His sixty-four-paragraph annual message to Congress in 1863 included twenty-two paragraphs about the Union's foreign relations. The next year, Lincoln's message devoted twenty-three of eighty-one paragraphs to diplomatic affairs.[13]

Certainly Lincoln's message to laborers in Manchester, England, answering an address and resolutions that they had sent to him applauding the Emancipation Proclamation, showed his desire to help mold foreign opinion. In his sensitive response, the president acknowledged the sacrifices that English workers had made during the Civil War (since the Union blockade had so reduced shipments of cotton from the Confederacy that it had put many English mills on reduced schedules and thrown thousands of laborers out of work). Lincoln called the workers' endorsement of emancipation, given their own sufferings, "an instance of sublime Christian heroism" unsurpassed "in any age or in any country"—"an energetic and reinspiring assurance of the inherent power of truth and of the ultimate and universal triumph of justice, humanity, and freedom."[14]

But to say that Lincoln had a hand in Union foreign affairs and that his administration's diplomatic efforts were, for the most part, effective begs further analysis. Did particular principles or theories undergird Lincoln's approach to world affairs? Did Lincoln prioritize idealism or pragmatism in U.S. foreign relations? Is James McPherson right when he argues that Lincoln's words remain as "*relevant*" for U.S. diplomacy today as they were during his own time?[15]

I would argue that one indeed can detect certain themes within the cross-currents of the Union's wartime diplomacy, and that the place to start is by recognizing that Lincoln throughout his public career strongly opposed military intervention in the affairs of other nations. There was nothing hypocritical in his administration's concerted efforts to persuade foreign nations, especially Great Britain and France, to stay out of the American Civil War. Lincoln held the United States to the same standard, believing that his country would have far more influence on other nations as a model of democracy and progress than by imposing its values by force. Lincoln opposed U.S. intervention abroad, even if such interference had praiseworthy goals. In his second annual message to Congress, the president emphasized that his administration had avoided involvement in the internal affairs of European powers.[16]

Lincoln's commitment to such principles anteceded the Civil War. The very resolutions he endorsed supporting Hungary's freedom from Austrian rule also obliged the U.S. government to "announce to the world" its adherence to "non-intervention…as a sacred principle" of international law, which it expected other nations, as well as itself, to respect.[17] Perhaps more revealingly, Lincoln's position about U.S. territorial expansion deviated from mainstream public opinion. Despite the popularity in the United States of the expansionist political philosophy known as Manifest Destiny, which assumed that God favored and would assist the nation's territorial growth, Lincoln had serious reservations about such principles, especially if their implementation required armed force. He sought a different destiny for his country. Lincoln's responses to the U.S.-Mexican War of 1846-1848 and the so-called "filibustering" expeditions of the 1850s illuminate his dislike of military adventurism and aggressive expansionism abroad.

As a U.S. congressman in the late 1840s, Lincoln strongly condemned what he considered U.S. aggression against Mexico before war broke out between the two countries in 1846. Lincoln believed that President James K. Polk had intentionally provoked Mexico into hostilities by sending U.S. troops into land claimed by Mexico in what is today southern Texas and then asking Congress for a war vote on the grounds that Mexico (in Polk's words) had "invaded our territory and shed American blood on American soil." On December 22, 1847, rather boldly for a freshman congressman, Lincoln submitted his so-called "spot resolutions" to the House asking Polk to prove that the locale where fighting began had truly been under U.S. sovereignty at the time. The next month, in a formal speech, Lincoln coldly dismissed the president's justification of the war as the "sheerest deception." Lincoln insinuated, rather, that Polk had started the war to gain Mexican territory. Lincoln asserted to his law partner in Springfield, William H. Herndon, in February 1848 that the disputed soil "was not ours," and that Congress had not even attempted to annex it prior to the war. If Americans condoned their President invading a "neighboring nation" whenever he considered it necessary, Lincoln cautioned, they were negating Congress's war-making power and risking that their leaders, like kings throughout history, would impoverish their people in unwanted wars. Although William Lee Miller's recent study of Lincoln provides evidence that the congressman's position was not as politically self-destructive as some previous historians have suggested, Lincoln's stance certainly exposed his qualms about aggressive territorial expansionism. Lincoln asserted in a speech in Worcester, Massachusetts in 1848 that true Whigs "did not believe in enlarging our field, but in…cultivating our present possession."[18]

Lincoln's reaction to Cuban "filibustering" further illustrated his abhorrence of aggressive interventionism abroad. In the years immediately following the Mexican War, American citizens joined with foreign immigrants to conduct a shocking number of private military expeditions against other nations from U.S. soil that went by the same term—"filibustering"—that we now use for stalling tactics in Congress.[19] Lincoln would not tolerate such affairs, not even filibusters designed to liberate Cuba from Spanish imperial rule. Not only did they lack authorization from the president or Congress, but they violated international law and risked involving the United States in an unwanted foreign war and possibly expanding southern slavery. In 1852, when alluding to fifty filibusters captured in Cuba who had been executed without trial by Spanish authorities, Lincoln emphasized that Cuba's population had not invited these adventurers to revolutionize their island, and that U.S. leaders had responded wisely by not conducting military reprisals for their deaths.[20]

Lincoln continued such policies into his presidency. His March 11, 1861 recommendation to Seward that Ohioan Thomas Corwin be appointed U.S. minister to Mexico is especially illuminating. As U.S. senator in 1847, Corwin had attracted notoriety as a prominent Whig opponent of the Mexican War by not only voting against military supplies for the campaigns in Mexico, but also for exclaiming in what today we would undoubtedly term a "politically incorrect" speech that if he were a Mexican he would want to kill Americans, who had space enough in their own nation. The point is not that Lincoln and Corwin were doctrinaire anti-expansionists. Lincoln had not taken a strong stand against the annexation of Texas in 1845, admitting in an October 1845 letter that he had not personally been "much interested" in the issue one way or the other. Corwin's stand during the Mexican War had derived from his opposition to slavery's extension rather than to territorial gains themselves. As minister to Mexico, Corwin would negotiate a loan to Mexico's government, never ratified by the U.S. Senate, that compelled Mexico to give the U.S. a lien on minerals and land throughout Mexico as security against Mexico's defaulting on payments. Rather, the point is that by selecting Corwin in the first place, Lincoln indicated not only to Mexico but to other nations as well that his administration opposed military adventurism abroad.[21]

The so-called St. Albans raid of 1864 tested Lincoln's non-interventionist principles, but in the end he remained true to them. On October 19, Confederate agents who had been using Canadian territory as their base robbed banks in St. Albans in northern Vermont and tried unsuccessfully to set the town on fire before being fleeing back into Canadian territory. Not only did Union general John A. Dix, commanding the Military District of the East, authorize Union troops in Burlington to follow the raiders "into Canada if necessary and destroy them" in the raid's immediate aftermath, but he issued a second inflammatory order after a Canadian magistrate freed from custody thirteen raiders who had been apprehended by Canadian authorities. Now Dix authorized federal forces not only to hunt the raiders anew in Canada but also to bring them back to the U.S. for trial, denying Canadian authorities control over their disposition. Dix's order had the potential to involve the United States in war with Great Britain; however Lincoln, taking Seward's advice, on December 17 ended the immediate crisis by canceling Dix's orders. Lincoln's restraint paid dividends when Canadian authorities subsequently rearrested a majority of the raiders.[22]

One can argue, of course, that non-interventionism slides easily into isolationism. But I would contend, rather, that Lincoln brought an internationalist perspective to the White House, and that this is the second legacy of his diplomatic record. Lincoln would never have allowed for British and/or French mediation or arbitration of the Union/Confederacy dispute. Lincoln considered the Confederacy an illegitimate entity and he consistently regarded its war effort as a rebellion against the nation's legally constituted authorities. For foreign nations to demand the right to mediate the North's dispute with the South, therefore, amounted to foreign meddling in America's domestic affairs. As Howard Jones points out, British leaders especially came to realize that even making mediation proposals to the Union, a strategy that the French favored for part of the war years, risked provoking the Union into declaring war upon the European powers. But historians have given insufficient attention to how much Lincoln actually favored arbitration by third powers in disputes between legitimate states.[23]

Lincoln either advocated or resorted to arbitration on several occasions during his presidency. During the Trent affair, he responded positively when the abolitionist senator Charles Sumner intimated that an English contact of his in Parliament, John Bright, recommended that the argument be adjudicated by the King of Prussia or other parties. Encouraged that arbitration might provide a face-saving exit from the crisis, Lincoln started crafting an arbitration proposal, before being dissuaded from that option by information from many sources that the crisis needed more immediate resolution than arbitration procedures would permit. Earlier that year, Lincoln had considered arbitration regarding a territorial dispute with Great Britain inherited from the Buchanan administration. The argument concerned whether the San Juan Islands (near Vancouver Island) in Puget Sound came under U.S. or British sovereignty. In 1859, a U.S. military detachment under none other than George E. Pickett, later of Gettysburg fame, had defied British naval demands that U.S. soldiers and settlers leave San Juan Island in the archipelago. Although the dispute was not resolved until 1872, years after Lincoln's death, Lincoln and Seward on several occasions floated arbitration proposals regarding the islands. As early as March 16, 1861, for instance, a mere twelve days after taking office, Lincoln noted in a message to the Senate that his predecessor had asked the Senate the previous month to consider a British proposal to submit the dispute to arbitration by the Swedish and Norwegian king, the Dutch king, or the Swiss Confederation. Lincoln told the Senate that he approved of Buchanan's course and was prepared "cheerfully" to receive the Senate's recommendation on the issue. In his December 1863 annual message, Lincoln advised that the Senate approve a forthcoming convention to resolve by "the arbitrament of a friendly power" an ongoing maritime dispute regarding Spain's jurisdiction in Cuban waters. The same message reported that arbitration by the king of Belgium had successfully resolved U.S. claims against Chile regarding the seizure by Chilean officers of U.S. private property.[24]

Third, Lincoln's administration pursued a foreign policy defined by principle but tempered by pragmatism. From the very begin-

ning of his presidency, Lincoln realized that there was no way to divorce diplomacy entirely from politics. When he was deciding on his initial diplomatic appointments, Lincoln suggested to Seward that it might be wise for the administration to assign overseas the German native and prominent Wisconsin Republican Carl Schurz, not because of Schurz's abilities but rather to appease the administration's "german friends" (i.e. German voters). Similarly, Lincoln knew full well that he could not expect foreign nations simply to do what was morally right in their diplomatic conduct. He observed in his first annual message, nations "are not always able to resist the counsels of seeming expediency, and ungenerous ambition" in their foreign relations. Lincoln hoped to win the cooperation of foreign states, he explained in the same speech, by showing them that preserving the Union was in their own national interest. In this sense, one might say that Lincoln was at heart a realist.[25]

The Emancipation Proclamation originated more as a war measure than because of Lincoln's abhorrence of slavery. What John Hope Franklin calls the "pressure of war" and what Howard Jones labels Lincoln's "pragmatic approach to events" led Lincoln into reconsidering his prior position that the North was waging the war to restore the Union and had no designs against slavery in states where it already existed. By freeing slaves in areas still under rebellion, the Proclamation would deny essential labor to Confederate farms and factories, assist the enrollment of escaped slaves into Union military ranks, and hopefully give foreign countries, most especially Great Britain (the leading antislavery power in the world), pause should they consider active intervention in the war. Similarly, pragmatic concerns framed Lincoln's reactions to France's intervention in Mexico. So long as the Union cause was in the balance, Lincoln's administration dared not take a threatening stance against France's infringement of the Monroe Doctrine. Although Seward made the administration's displeasure with France's intervention known, the administration took an essentially neutral position regarding the efforts of the liberal Mexican president Benito Juárez to expel the invaders, denying Mexican requests for munitions and arms to assist their resistance while refusing to recognize formally the Maximilian regime. By deferring action on Mexico, Lincoln and Seward showed a shrewd understanding that priorities had to trump principle when the stakes got too high. They simply could not afford to wage war against France while the Confederacy remained viable.[26]

But it is striking to what degree Lincoln's democratic egalitarianism became embedded within his diplomacy. Convinced that the Union's longstanding traditions of political and religious liberty dating from the Declaration of Independence gave it special moral authority on the world scene, he did not shrink from affirming ethnocentrically in his second annual message one month before his Emancipation Proclamation was to go into effect that his nation was "the last best, hope of earth" and that "God must forever bless" the North for taking its dramatic step. Throughout the war, Lincoln disseminated democratic tenets within his correspondence to foreign diplomats, sometimes lecturing foreigners didactically about his nation's exemplary democratic traditions, as when he observed to the son of a former officeholder in France's government that in the Union, "every soldier is a man of character and must be treated with more consideration than is customary in Europe." Lincoln emphasized in a letter welcoming Sweden's minister that since the U.S. championed "the rights of human nature and the capacity of man for self-government," it would naturally enjoy "fraternal" relations with Sweden, whose rulers and people shared the same "faith." Lincoln similarly preached to Peru's minister that although the U.S. sought friendship with all nations, his administration could not conceal its "especial sentiments of friendship for...those who, like themselves, have founded their institutions on the principle of the equal rights of men." In yet another diplomatic missive, Lincoln argued that systems of republican government were "better adapted" to the maintenance of prosperity, order and peace than other governmental forms.[27]

By today's standards, Lincoln's foreign policies sometimes failed to match the high ideals that he pronounced, most notably in his administration's negotiations with foreign governments for colonies where he could settle free African Americans. Lord Richard Lyons, Britain's minister in the U.S., reported on January 27, 1863, that Lincoln had sent for him the day before and proposed that British island possessions welcome as laborers blacks wishing to emigrate from the United States, specifying that these emigrants would be persons "either born free" or who "had become so with the consent of their former owners." During the war, Lincoln's administration actually took steps, ultimately unsuccessful, to establish such colonies on the Central American coast and on an island off Haiti's coast.[28] To Lincoln, colonization abroad represented a rational solution to racial hatred in America and a means to possibly win over Southern states to emancipation. But such policies obviously contradicted his vision of the Union as a fountainhead for human equality.

Still, it would be wrong to dwell on Lincoln's consideration of colonization without noting that his administration also took unusually strong action against the African slave trade, signing a treaty with Britain allowing that nation to search suspected vessels flying the American flag, despite historic American resistance to such boardings dating back to impressment controversies before the War of 1812. To Lincoln, this treaty held especial significance, and he exulted in his 1863 annual message to Congress that the agreement had ended forever American involvement in that "inhuman and odious traffic." Perhaps even more telling, Lincoln endorsed and gained congressional enactment of U.S. recognition of the black republic of Haiti as an independent polity, reversing over a half century of U.S. foreign policy dating back to Haiti's successful, bloody revolution for independence from France at the turn of the century. Further, Lincoln's administration negotiated a commercial treaty with Haiti that was ratified in 1864.[29]

It would be an exaggeration, of course, to reduce Lincoln's foreign policy to his endorsements of non-interventionism, international arbitration, and democratic idealism. For the sake of argument, one could construct a case that he and Seward, for instance, just as consistently pursued America's commercial expansion, particularly its access to foreign markets for American goods. Consider, in this light, Lincoln's second annual message, which fully endorsed a scheme by which the construction of an intercontinental telegraph line across the Bering Strait would allow U.S. business interests to dominate eastern Asia's commerce. Lincoln announced regarding this scheme, which was the brainchild of the Union's commercial agent in the Amur river region of eastern Russia, "I have favored

the project…to connect by a Pacific telegraph with the line which is being extended across the Russian empire."[30]

Nonetheless, the anti-interventionist, multilateral, and democratic strands in Lincoln's diplomacy, I think, speak to us today, as we grapple anew with challenges in international affairs that may, ultimately, threaten this nation's survival as much as did Southern secession from the Union in 1860-1861. No one initiative by either the Union or Confederate state departments during the Civil War matched the diplomatic clout abroad, we now realize, of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation. At a time when the United States has lost much of its international prestige and power as a result of armed interventionism abroad and rejection of global initiatives on environmental issues, it might be useful to recall how much Lincoln achieved by military restraint, international arbitrations, and effective communications of his nation's most revered political values.

Endnotes

[1] David Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 121; Robin W. Winks, *Canada and the United States: The Civil War Years* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1960), 23; Robert W. Johannsen, *Stephen A. Douglas* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 381-86.

[2] Allan Nevins, *The Emergence of Lincoln: Prologue to Civil War*, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), 2: 305; Robert W. Johannsen, *Lincoln, the South, and Slavery: The Political Dimension* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 106-107, 112; excerpt from Alexander J. Beresford-Hope 1861 lecture quoted in *Europe Looks at the Civil War: An Anthology*, ed. Belle Becker and Lillian Friedman (New York: Orion Press, 1960), 31-33. Cartes-de-visites were small, inexpensive albumen photographs mounted on 2 _" x 4" cards.

[3] Adams and Motley quoted in Dean B. Mahin, *One War at a Time: The International Dimensions of the American Civil War* (Washington, D.C.: Brassey's, 1999), 2; Baron Édouard de Stoeckl (lecture comment), Maurice Sand (to his mother), and Prince Napoleon (diary, Aug. 3, 1861), all quoted in Becker and Friedman, ed., *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, 42, 57, 76-77.

[4] Ernest J. Paolino, *The Foundations of the American Empire: William Henry Seward and U.S. Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973); Howard I. Kushner, "Visions of the Northwest Coast: Gwin and Seward in the 1850s," Western Historical Quarterly 4 (July 1973): 295-306; Prince Napoleon Diary, Aug. 3, 1861, in Becker and Friedman, ed., *Europe Looks at the Civil War*, 76.

[5] William Howard Russell Diary, Mar. 27, Oct. 9,1861, in *My Diary North and South*, ed. Eugene H. Berwanger (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1988), 43-47, 317-18.

[6] "Resolutions in Behalf of Hungarian Freedom," "Call for Kossuth Meeting," Lincoln to Joshua F. Speed, Aug. 24, 1855, Speech at Peoria, Illinois, Oct. 16, 1854, "Address at Cooper Institute, New York City," Feb. 27, 1860, Roy P. Bassler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 8 vols. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 2: 115-116, 116n, 118, 118n, 281, 323, 540-41; Jay Monaghan, *Diplomat in Carpet Slippers: Abraham Lincoln Deals With Foreign Affairs* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1945), 121.

[7] Howard Jones, *Union in Peril: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 80-93; D. P. Crook, *Diplomacy During the American Civil War* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1975), 43-47; Donald, *Lincoln*, 322-23.

[8] Donald, *Lincoln*, 320-21; Phillip Shaw Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1994), 88-89; Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 107-108; Seward to Adams, Dec. 17, 1863, quoted in Mahin, *One War*, 196; W. E. Mosse, "Queen Victoria and Her Ministers in the Schleswig-Holstein Crisis 1863-1864," English Historical Review, 78 (Apr. 1963): 263-83.

[9] John Hope Franklin, *The Emancipation Proclamation* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), 34, 84, 106-11; Howard Jones, *Abraham Lincoln and a New Birth of Freedom: The Union & Slavery in the Diplomacy of the Civil War* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 146; Charles S. Hubbard, *The Burden of Confederate Diplomacy* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1988), 169-71.

[10] William H. Seward, "Some thoughts for the President's consideration" (dated Apr. 1, 1861), Lincoln to William H. Seward, Apr. 1, 1861, and Roy Basler's commentary in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 4: 317n-18n, 316-17.

[11] Monaghan, *Diplomat*, 155, 159, 197-204, 222, 279-320 (quotations on pp. 287 and 223 respectively).

[12] Mahin, *One War*, 3, 9, 46-47, 53, 194-95, 222-27.

[13] Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 7: 36-56, 8: 136-52.

[14] Excerpt from the address of the workers of Manchester, Eng., Jan. 1, 1863, Lincoln to the Workingmen of Manchester, Eng., Jan. 19, 1863, in Basler, *Collected Works*, 6: 65n, 63-65.

[15] James M. McPherson, "'The Whole Family of Man': Lincoln and the Last Best Hope Abroad," in Robert E. May, *The Union, the Confederacy, and the Atlantic Rim* (West Lafayette, IN: Purdue University Press, 1995), 155 (italics are McPherson's).

[16] "Annual Message to Congress," December 1, 1862, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 5: 518-19.

[17] "Resolutions in Behalf of Hungarian Freedom," in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 2: 115.

[18] James K. Polk, Message to Congress, May 11, 1846, in James D. Richardson, comp., A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents, 20 vols. (New York, 1897-1911), 4: 437-43 (quotation on 442); Lincoln's resolutions, Dec. 22, 1847, Lincoln's speech (Jan. 12, 1848), Lincoln to Herndon, Feb. 15, 1848, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 1: 420-22, 431-42 (quotations on 433 and 440), 451-52; William Lee Miller, *Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography* (New York: Random House, 2002), 164-91 (Speech in Worcester, Massachusetts, reported in Boston Advertiser quoted on p. 190).

[19] Robert E. May, *Manifest Destiny's Underworld: Filibustering in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 2002).

[20] Lincoln speech to the Springfield Scott Club, Aug. 14, 26, 1852, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 2: 135-157.

[21] Lincoln to Williamson Durley, Oct. 3, 1845, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 1: 347; Michael F. Holt, *The Rise and Fall of the American Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 249, 265-67; Thomas David Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion: The Triumph of Liberalism in Mexican-United States Relations, 1861-1867* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 16-20, 56-64.

[22] Winks, *Canada and the United States*, 295-321.

[23] Mahin, *One War*, 10; Howard Jones, "History and Mythology: The Crisis over British Intervention in the Civil War," in May, ed., *Union, the Confederacy, and the Atlantic Rim*, 36-51.

[24] Donald, *Lincoln*, 322-23; Durwood Ball, *Army Regulars on the Western Frontier*, 1848-1861 (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 139-49; Winks, *Canada and the United States*, 35, 158-59; Lincoln, "Annual Message to Congress," Dec. 8, 1863, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 37.

[25] Lincoln to Seward, Mar. 18, 1861, Lincoln, "Annual Message to Congress," Dec. 3, 1861, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 4:292-93, 5: 36.

[26] Franklin, *Emancipation Proclamation*, 12 (quotation)-19; Jones, *New Birth of Freedom*, 87; Schoonover, *Dollars over Dominion*, 108, 169; Crook, *Diplomacy*, 159.

[27] "Annual Message to Congress," Dec. 1, 1862, Lincoln to Agénor-Etienne de Gasparin, Aug. 4, 1862, Lincoln to Edward Count Piper, Nov. 8, 1861, Lincoln to Federico Barreda, Mar. 4, 1862, Lincoln to Don Marcelino Hurtado, June 4, 1861, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 5: 537, 355, 18, 142-43, 4: 393; Serge Gavronsky, *The French Liberal Opposition and the American Civil War* (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 59.

[28] Lord Richard Lyons to Lord John Russell, Jan. 27, 1863, in James J. Barnes and Patience P. Barnes, *The American Civil War through British Eyes: Dispatches from British Diplomats*, 3 vols. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2003-2005), 2: 306-308. Lincoln's colonization projects are summarized in Benjamin P. Thomas, *Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952), 362-63.

[29] Lincoln's Annual Messages to Congress, Dec. 3, 1861, Dec. 1, 1862, Dec. 8, 1863, in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 5: 39, 521, 7: 36; Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State University Press, 1988), 186-87.

[30] Lincoln, "Annual Message to Congress," in Basler, ed., *Collected Works*, 5:521; Paolino, *Foundations of the American Empire*, 41-50.

Naturally Antislavery: Lincoln, Race, and the Complexity of American Liberty

by James Oliver Horton

In this age, when some charge any revision of political position as a "flip flop" and consider thoughtless consistency a praiseworthy political attribute, we would do well to remember one of the most important political figures in American history, President Abraham Lincoln, a man who learned from personal experience and changed his mind. In a letter written in 1864, one year before his assassination, Lincoln expressed a view of himself as firmly opposed to the institution of slavery. "I am naturally anti-slavery," he wrote. "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." Then he added an intriguing autobiographical note, "I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel."[1]

William Lloyd Garrison (TLM #2241)

Although Lincoln did not have much direct contact with slavery during his early life, he did observe the general inhumanity of the institution. He saw slaves at labor, being sold, and being punished. He was generally appalled but he was constrained by his acceptance of the legitimacy of law. Significantly, he believed that the United States Constitution protected slaveholders' human property, placing it beyond the reach of his personal morality. No matter how he felt about slavery, under the law, slaves were personal property and the source of great wealth throughout the South. This was the personal dilemma that Lincoln, the lawyer and politician, faced all of his professional life. His antislavery sentiments were substantial from the early years of his life, but they were moderate, and moderation restrained his actions until the circumstances of his life and the life of the nation changed dramatically in 1861.[2]

With the presidential election in the fall of 1860, Lincoln became the sixteenth president of the United States, but before he actually took office in March of 1861, seven of the largest slaveholding states from the Deep South—South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana and Texas—seceded from the United States, seized much federal property, and declared themselves an independent nation. By that spring the bloodiest war in American history was underway. It was only under these circumstances, through his constitutional powers as a war-time president, that Lincoln could finally bring himself to put his antislavery convictions into action. In doing so he moved from his position as moderate antislavery advocate to full-fledged abolitionist.

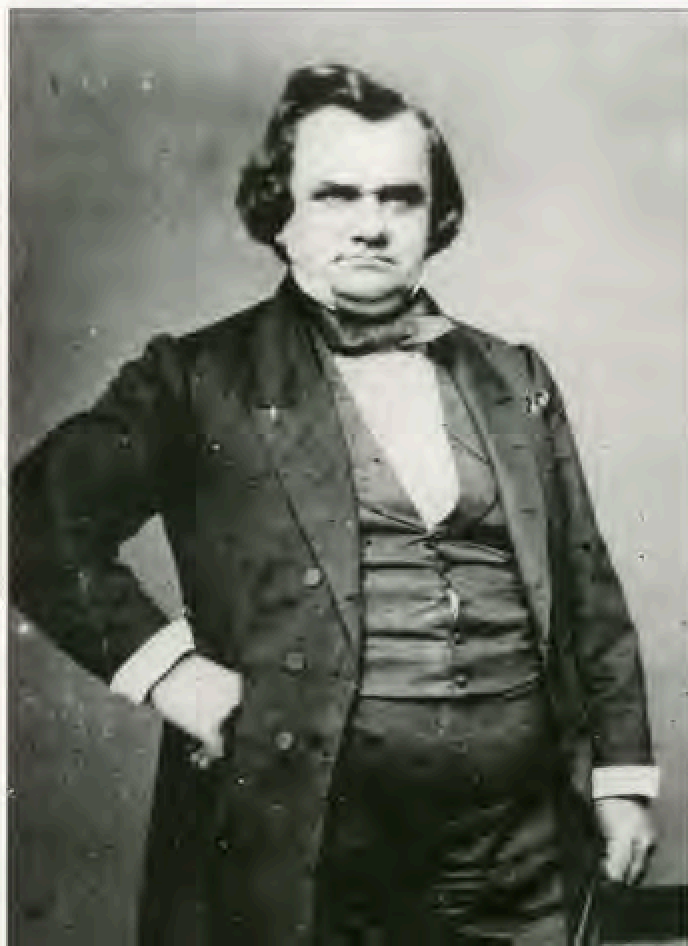
Historian Aileen Kraditor laid out the distinction between antislavery and abolition in her classic study, Means and Ends in American Abolitionism. Those who considered themselves antislavery opposed the institution but generally moderated their criticisms of slaveholders and sought compromise that might contain the spread of slavery and encourage voluntary emancipation. Many, like Supreme Court Chief Justice John Marshall or antislavery Whig political leader Henry Clay, favored the African or West Indian colonization of all blacks freed from bondage. For them, the removal of emancipated African Americans was the only practical solution to the problem of American slavery. Lincoln favored colonization also, but his was a moderate colonization stance supporting voluntary emigration only.[3]

Abolitionists, on the other hand, as Kraditor explained, were uncompromising in their attack on slavery. They demanded immediate emancipation without consideration of colonization or expatriation. They attacked slaveholders as immoral, inhumane, sinful exploiters of human beings who cared only for their own elevation and financial gain. In the years before the Civil War, they regarded Lincoln with great suspicion and saw his antislavery position as hypocritical. "He is Southern by birth, Southern in his associations and southern, if I mistake not, in his sympathies," charged one Illinois newspaper editor. "His wife, you know, is a Todd," the editor continued, "of a proslavery family, and so are all his kin."[4]

American's radical abolitionists attacked Lincoln for most of his political life, but most agreed with his constitutional analysis. They too believed that the national constitution protected slavery. Boston abolitionist editor William Lloyd Garrison condemned it as

a slaveholder's document. On the 4th of July in 1854, reacting to the passage of the new more harsh Fugitive Slave Law four years earlier, he burned a copy of the Constitution, calling it, "a covenant with death and an agreement with Hell." He then asked the crowd for an "Amen," as he proclaimed, "so perish all compromises with tyranny." Garrison represented the most radical abolitionists. There were many levels of antislavery between his stand and that of antislavery Whigs who were far more conservative on the issue. Lincoln may have been in some sense antislavery, but he was not an abolitionist in the Garrisonian sense of the term.[5]

Historian Allen Guelzo has pointed out that there is no evidence that Lincoln strongly opposed slavery on humanitarian grounds before the late 1840s. Although he was born in the slave state of Kentucky, Lincoln's father Thomas moved the family to free Indiana while Abraham was still a child. The presence of slavery was apparently one reason for the family's move, although it may have been that Thomas was offended as much by the economic competition he faced from slave labor as by the inhumanity of the institution itself. In any case, young Abraham grew to maturity in a free state. Lincoln lore has it that as a young man, while on a flatboat trip to New Orleans, he was appalled by the sight of slaves at auction, "Negroes chained, maltreated, whipped and scourged." John Hanks, Lincoln's cousin, who claimed to have been with him on the trip, recalled the impact of this encounter: "Lincoln saw it, his heart bled, said nothing much, was silent from feeling, was sad, looked bad, felt bad, was thoughtful and abstracted." Hanks was confident, as he said, "that it was on this trip that [Lincoln] formed his opinions of slavery; it ran its iron in him then and there."[6]



Stephen A. Douglas (TLM #65)

There is some doubt, however, that Hanks actually completed the trip to New Orleans. Further, Guelzo argues that, while Lincoln lived there, the free state of Illinois allowed slaves to be transported through and to be confined temporarily within its borders. At the time that Lincoln moved to Springfield in April of 1837, six of the 115 African Americans in the town were slaves. Although while serving in the Illinois General Assembly, in March of 1837, he had condemned a resolution criticizing antislavery protest, there is no evidence that Lincoln ever raised a word of protest about slaves held in his city of residence.[7] A decade later, he provided his legal services to slaveholder Robert Matson, who was attempting to use the Illinois courts to retain ownership of his human property. Matson was being sued by one of his slaves, Jane Bryant, who claimed that she and her family had been held in Illinois beyond the state's limit on the temporary residence of a slave. Despite Lincoln's court appearance on Matson's behalf, Bryant won her case.[8]

These events cast serious doubt on the extent to which Lincoln was "naturally anti-slavery," in his early life. Nor is there evidence that his antislavery sentiment engendered feelings of racial equality. Garrison and other abolitionists who organized the American Antislavery Society in 1833 pledged themselves to work for an end of slavery and to create a society in which African Americans could "share an equality with the whites, of civil and religious privileges." During the same period, however, Lincoln expressed doubts that all slaves necessarily suffered under slavery.[9] In the summer of 1841, he reacted to the sight of slaves chained together on a boat on the Ohio River with the observation that those so bound did not seem to mind their plight. "Amid all these distressing circumstances, as we would think them," he told a friend, "they were the most cheerful and apparently happy creatures on board." Lincoln's conclusion was clear: "They are not like us." Later, however, when Lincoln recalled the same incident, he did so with much more empathy for the captive slaves. "That sight was a continual torment to me," he wrote to a friend in 1855. By then Lincoln was apparently affected by slavery in ways not apparent earlier. Although he had not taken a strong stand against the harsh Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, within a few years of its passage he wrote, "I confess I hate to see the poor creatures hunted down, and caught, and carried back to the stripes, and unrewarded toils." Obviously, Lincoln was changing and growing during these years, a trait he would display for the rest of his life.[10]

Although he had not become an abolitionist by the mid 1850s, Lincoln had certainly grown more antislavery in his public positions. He increasingly opposed slavery as a moral evil but, under ordinary circumstances, he saw no legal way to remove it from states that sanctioned it. Yet he felt strongly that the institution should not be allowed to spread into territories that might be added to the nation in the future. Lincoln made this clear in his assessment of the Kansas Nebraska Act supported by Stephen A. Douglas, the U.S. senator from Illinois, who would become his chief political rival in the decade before the Civil War.

The act repealed a measure passed in 1820 that had admitted Maine to the union as a free state, balancing the admission of Missouri as a slave state. Except in Missouri, slavery was excluded from all the Louisiana Purchase lands north of the 36°30 parallel, Missouri's southern boundary. This Missouri Compromise closed the territories of Kansas and Nebraska to slavery, a proposition that ignited heated regional debate in the early 1850s. In an effort to walk a line between antislavery and proslavery opinion, Douglas proposed that the status of slavery in the territories, and any states carved from them, be determined by the popular vote of area residents. He and his supporters in the Senate argued that this was the most democratic solution to the question of slavery's expansion. Lincoln, however, stood staunchly opposed. In a speech delivered in Peoria, Illinois in the fall of 1854 he set out his opposition to the act, especially those parts of it that allowed for the spread of slavery beyond the slaveholding South. Speaking of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, he argued that it was "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."[11]

Lincoln opposed the expansion of slavery because of the great inhumanity of the institution, because of its generally debilitating effect on the society, and because, as he said, "it deprives our republican example of its justice in the world." Thus, he disliked slavery for a complex set of reasons, not the least of which was the stain it created on the nation's democratic experiment in the eyes of the world. It "causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and…forces so many really good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil Liberty—criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self-interest."[12]

Yet, even by the 1850s, Lincoln remained relatively moderate in his antislavery stance. True to his roots in the Whig Party, he stopped short of publicly condemning slaveholders. "I have no prejudice against the Southern people," Lincoln told his Peoria audience. "They are just what we would be in their situation." It was the existence of slavery in the South, he believed, that made southern slave supporters what they were. He argued that they would not now create the institution if it did not already exist. Then he admitted that had he the power, he could not bring himself to "free [the slaves] and make them politically and socially, our equals." Lincoln saw any program for immediate emancipation as an impractical solution to the problem of slavery, although he suggested Americans consider some measure of unspecified gradual emancipation.[13]

As the decade of the 1850s wore on and sectional tensions increased, Lincoln shifted his partisan alliances to suit his peculiar antislavery stance. In a eulogy for Henry Clay in 1852, he expressed great admiration for this Whig Party leader, the author of important compromises with slavery, including the Compromise of 1850. That measure included not only the abolition of the slave trade in the District of Columbia but also the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850. That law provided greater protection for slaveholder property; and it guaranteed no legal rights to anyone accused of being a fugitive slave, a provision that increased the danger that free blacks might be kidnapped into slavery. Lincoln also praised Clay's commitment to the American Colonization Society which sought to encourage the end of slavery by removing all blacks from the United States and resettling them in the West African colony of Liberia, founded by the Society in the early 1820s. Despite the condemnation heaped on this idea by free African Americans and abolitionists, black and white alike, Lincoln heartily endorsed the plan. Using Clay's words, Lincoln argued: "There is a moral fitness in the idea of returning to Africa her children, whose ancestors have been torn from her by the ruthless hand of fraud and violence. Transplanted in a foreign land, they will carry back to their native soil the rich fruits of religion, civilization, law and liberty. May it not be one of the great designs of the Ruler of the universe, (whose ways are often inscrutable by short-sighted mortals,) thus to transform an original crime, into a signal blessing to that most unfortunate portion of the globe?"[14]

Lincoln completely ignored African American arguments that, by having served in the ranks of Revolutionary soldiers who brought the nation into existence and among those who in the War of 1812 had defended that nation's independence, their ancestors had won the right of citizenship for succeeding generations. In the decade before the Civil War, Lincoln saw this plan for black American removal as a practical means to emancipation, allowing freedom for African Americans without subjecting white Americans to fears of interracial tensions with their former slaves.[15]

Although his support of colonization was based on an assumption that a multi-racial America was not practical, this was one form of antislavery that Lincoln could claim. It was an antislavery that contributed to his move from the fracturing Whig Party towards the newly forming Republican Party during the mid-1850s. He was not among the first to join the Republicans formed in 1854, but within two years Lincoln helped to organize the new party in Illinois. Although most Republicans were not truly abolitionist, many held antislavery principles. Like Lincoln, many who joined the new party had come from the antislavery wing of the Whig Party.

The political tensions of the early 1850s that had torn the Whigs asunder and given birth to the Republican Party continued to grow, making compromise on the slavery question all but impossible. They also moved Lincoln farther along the road of antislavery. He had made a reputation for himself as a congressman from Illinois by opposing America's entry into the war with Mexico. He worried about the impact that such a war might have on slavery. At the end of his congressional term in 1849, however, it was not clear that Lincoln was interested in continuing a political career. He returned to the profession of law and was admitted to practice before the U.S. Supreme Court. It was the struggle over Kansas that brought him back to politics and to the subsequent slavery-related struggles of the 1850s.[16]

In 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court under Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, a Maryland slaveholder and staunch supporter of slavery, handed down a stunning rebuff to Dred Scott, a Missouri slave who had sued for his freedom on the grounds that his master, a military officer, had quartered him in free territory for an extended period. The eighty-year-old Taney wrote the Court's opinion and read it aloud to a shocked and silent courtroom. He argued that

the national founders never intended African Americans to be citizens. Thus, neither Scott nor any other black person had standing before the Court and therefore could not bring suit. Further, the Court ruled that Congress did not have the power to prohibit the expansion of slavery into any American territory. The Republican Party, that had based much of its platform on a firm stand against the expansion of slavery, strongly objected.

Lincoln stood with his party, and his political positions seemed to appeal to a wide range of Republican views. His brand of antislavery steadfastly opposed slavery's expansion, but his respect for the Constitutional protection of the institution reassured moderates and conservatives that he was no radical abolitionist. When his party selected him to run in 1858 for the Illinois U.S. Senate seat, he was careful to distinguish his position on slavery from those of Stephen A. Douglas, his Democratic opponent. By the late 1850s, Lincoln was ready to strongly state his views on the immorality of slavery and the danger it posed to the nation. In his "House Divided" speech given in Springfield, Illinois, in the early summer of 1858, Lincoln told his audience, "I believe that this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free." He believed that the founders had assumed that over time slavery would fade from the nation. Yet, the events of the 1850s, especially what he termed "the Nebraska doctrine" and the Dred Scott decision, had opened all the territories to slavery and even made possible its reintroduction into many of the currently free states. Lincoln warned of dire consequences. "We shall lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri are on the verge of making their state free; and we shall awake to the reality, instead, that the Supreme Court has made Illinois a slave State."[17]

Clearly, Lincoln was growing more concerned about the ability of the nation to survive the slavery debate. Neutrality on the issue had become impossible for one committed to the preservation of the Union. During the series of campaign debates with Douglas, Lincoln spoke in antislavery terms. "What has ever threatened our liberty and property save and except this institution of Slavery," he asked those who had gathered in Alton. He argued that one cannot cure a cancer by allowing it to spread over the entire body. Restricting its spread was what Lincoln called "the old fashioned way, the way in which the [founding] fathers themselves set us the example."[18]

Yet Lincoln also understood that in the volatile world of mid-nineteenth century politics too strong an antislavery stance was dangerous. To hold the support of his party and that of all but a small minority of Republican constituents, he must continually distinguish himself from Garrison and the true abolitionists. Realizing Lincoln's vulnerability on this point, Douglas attempted to paint him as "radical" on the issue of race. Douglas strongly suggested that Lincoln favored not only an end to slavery, but also a reorganization of society that would bring about a political and social equality of the races. In his defense, Lincoln stated what was obvious to African Americans. To be antislavery was not necessarily to believe in racial equality. Employing his most effective wit, Lincoln accused Douglas of rearranging his words so as to "prove a horse chestnut to be a chestnut horse."[19]

Leaving no doubt that he favored a system of white supremacy, Lincoln claimed that black people were inferior people, not the equals of whites in many things, "certainly not in color, perhaps not in moral or intellectual endowments." Still he believed that they were entitled to some rights. He argued that "there is no reason in the world why the [N]egro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence, the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness."[20]

As the debates continued that summer, again and again Lincoln was forced to defend himself against the charge of seeking a social and political system of racial equality. In Charleston, Illinois, he drew cheers when he unequivocally laid out his stand on the racial issue. "I will say then that I am not nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races." He then turned to the specifics of his beliefs saying, "I am not nor ever have been in favor of making voters or jurors of [N]egroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people." Douglas had suggested that intermarriage was one of the intended consequences of Lincoln's position. To this charge Lincoln replied, "I do not understand that because I do not want a [N]egro woman as a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife."[21]

Even though he was pushed to proclaim his dedication to white supremacy, Lincoln would not completely surrender his antislavery stand. He drew a line between racial equality and his commitment to humanity at its most basic level in the American context. In Ottawa, Illinois, he told a crowd that there were some areas in which racial differences did not justify white supremacy. "In the right to eat the bread, without leave of anybody else, which his own hand earns," Lincoln argued, "[the black man] is my equal and the equal of Judge Douglas and the equal of every living man." Here was the crux of his antislavery position.[22]

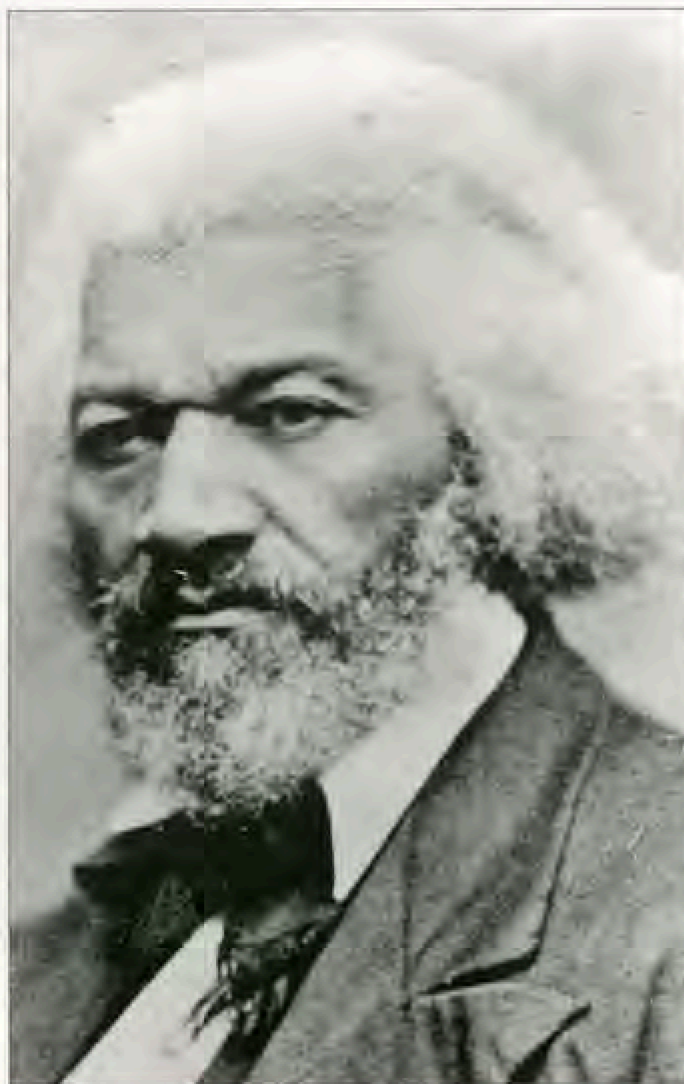
Although on the eve of the Civil War Lincoln was no abolitionist, he did see African Americans as human beings with basic human rights. Slavery troubled him largely because it deprived human beings of those natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence. It was in large part his moderation on this central question of the era that made Lincoln attractive to Republicans who nominated him as their party's candidate for the presidency in 1860. During his campaign and even after his election, Lincoln struggled against those who, as he said, labeled him a fanatical "Black Republican" whose goal was to incite "insurrection, blood and thunder among the slaves." In defense of himself and his party, Lincoln charged that slaves did not need Republican prodding to rise in revolt. He cited as evidence the Nat Turner rebellion in 1831, more than two decades before the founding of the Republican Party. To those who argued that Republicans had encouraged and supported John Brown's 1859 raid on Harpers Ferry as the first step towards slave insurrection, Lincoln pointed out that Nat Turner's band, with no Republican support, had killed more then three times as many as had died at Harpers Ferry. After condemning Brown's efforts and assuring his critics that Brown was not a Republican, Lincoln argued that due to the lack of rapid communication between slaves no extensive slave rebellion was possible at that time. As he put it, "The indispensable concert of action cannot be attained."[23]

Southern slaveholders never believed that Lincoln or any other Republican could be trusted to respect their property rights in slaves. Despite Lincoln's personal and professional history and his protestations to the contrary, they continued to see him as an abolitionist. The debate on this issue and on how the South should respond to an election of a Republican president split the Democratic Party, as southern Democrats peeled away from the national organization to form their own party. Moreover, a fourth party split off from the southern faction, calling itself the Union Party and insuring a hopelessly fractured opposition to the Republican candidate. As a result, Lincoln won the presidency with a majority of the electoral votes but less than 40% of the popular vote. He carried not a single southern or border state.

Southern claims that Lincoln was a front for abolitionist power carried a ring of irony for most abolitionists, especially in northern black communities that formed the backbone of abolitionism. African Americans generally supported the Republicans with great reluctance, viewing them as only the least offensive of the unsatisfactory alternatives available to them. During the summer before the 1860 election, black leaders who toured the North speaking to white abolitionists and free blacks bemoaned their limited political choices. H. Ford Douglass, a former Virginia slave who had become leader among Chicago blacks, addressed an abolitionist 4th of July picnic in Framingham, Massachusetts. He drew a great response when he labeled the political parties "barren and unfruitful," explaining that none "seeks to lift the [N]egro out of his fetters, and rescue this day from odium and disgrace." He singled out Lincoln, classing him with an outdated form of conservative antislavery. He challenged his audience to explain the difference "between the anti-slavery Abraham Lincoln, and the anti-slavery of the old Whig party, or the anti-slavery of Henry Clay." He then answered his own challenge. "There is no difference between them." Finally, with a polemical flourish that stirred his listeners, he claimed the antislavery of Clay and Lincoln to be "just as odious to the antislavery cause and antislavery men as ever was John C. Calhoun," the notorious South Carolina defender of slavery.[24]

Thus, most black leaders greeted the Lincoln victory with ambivalence and skepticism. Their fears were not allayed by his inaugural address in which the new president pledged not to interfere with slavery in the states where it was sanctioned by law. This gesture, meant to reassure the slaveholding South, infuriated African Americans and illustrated for many the futility of looking to the federal government to fulfill the promises of the American commitment to freedom. With sadness and anger they noted that the first act of the new "antislavery president" was to declare his unwillingness to move against slavery. Lincoln's words seemed to confirm in the minds of many blacks and their white abolitionist allies that the new chief executive was, as one claimed, but "the fag end of a series of proslavery administrations."[25]

Frederick Douglass, the powerful abolitionist speaker, newspaper editor, and former slave, disagreed with this depiction of Lincoln and the Republican Party. He understood that a Lincoln presidency would be no abolitionist administration, but he hoped that a Republican victory "over the wickedly aggressive pro-slavery sentiment of the country" might help to move the nation toward an antislavery position. Events in the wake of Lincoln's presidential victory in the fall of 1860 were not encouraging, however. In early December, Douglass and other abolitionists were attending a meeting in Boston in memory of John Brown when the gathering was overrun by those determined not to allow the abolitionists to speak. Things quickly degenerated, as abolitionists on the platform came under intense attack. Douglass was among those assaulted by the mob and finally expelled from the hall by the police. That this violent confrontation with obvious racial overtones could occur in the nation's most abolitionist city suggested that Douglass may have underestimated the depth of racist anti-abolitionist feeling in the North.[26]



Frederick Douglass (TLM #1380)

Obviously, Lincoln was right in his analysis of the national mood on the issues of slavery and race. It is most probable that the conciliatory tone of his inaugural address was meant not only for the southern states in secession and for those border states considering the possibility but for much of the rest of the nation as well. By the time he took office, Lincoln may have been committed to antislavery, but he also remained an astute politician. He understood that the country would not welcome a bold antislavery stand from its new chief executive. Thus, he bided his time.

Ironically, it was the South that created the conditions under which Lincoln could justify a move against slavery. By seceding from the Union, Southerners removed slavery from the protections provided under the U.S. Constitution, and by engaging in a war against the United States, they allowed the president, under his wartime constitutional powers, to authorize the confiscation of their slave property. Although abolitionists, black and white, bristled when Lincoln argued that his major purpose in pursuing the war was to save the Union, in fact he may have been structuring a politically viable position from which to ultimately play out an antislavery strategy. By defeating the southern effort at unconstitutional secession and restoring order in the South, Lincoln saw himself as engaged in the most sacred responsibility of the presidency. Thus, he could mollify the mass of anti-abolitionist critics to his political right by arguing that slavery was a side issue compared with the major goal of preserving the constitutional Union.

On a visit to New York City just before taking office, President-elect Lincoln encountered William E. Dodge, a wealthy industrialist who urged him to compromise with the South, then in the early stages of secession. To do otherwise, Dodge argued, was to risk the financial ruin of many northern cities, including New York City where without southern business the economy would grind to a halt and grass would grow in the street. Lincoln's answer displayed his characteristic humor but also his total commitment to the Constitution which he argued must be "respected, obeyed, enforced, and defended, let the grass grow where it may."[27] His actions, he said, were directed at traitors who placed their human property above the nation itself. "I could not feel that, to the best of my ability, I had even tried to preserve the constitution, if, to save slavery, or any minor matter, I should permit the wreck of the government, country, and Constitution all together."[28]

His reasoning was sound in several ways. So long as the South remained under the shelter of the U.S. Constitution, it had little to fear from abolitionists, no matter how determined they might be to end slavery. This institution was fully protected by law and the authority of the commander in chief under his constitutional responsibilities. When, in 1859, John Brown and his small army had attempted to move against slavery, they were confronted not simply by the local militia, but by the U.S. Marines led by Colonel Robert E. Lee with the assistance of Lieutenant "Jeb" Stuart. Many abolitionists hailed the news of southern secession, believing that it would ultimately ensure the destruction of slavery. Speaking to an excited abolitionist crowd that had just heard the news of southern threats of secession, one black leader quoted Shakespeare in proposing a message to the South. "Stand not upon the order of your going," he bid the South, "but go at once… there is no union of ideas and interests in the country, and there can be no union between freedom and slavery." He was not the first. For more than a decade before the Civil War, Garrisonians had demanded "No Union with Slavery." Now the South seemed to be acting to facilitate the conditions under which abolitionists might mount an effective assault on what they called the Slave Power. One asked rhetorically, "Do you suppose that Old John Brown will be the last?"[29]

The southern secessionists saw withdrawal from the United States as an important step to ensure the protection of slavery against abolitionist attack. South Carolina seceded just before Christmas in 1860, to be followed in short order by six additional states. The Confederate States of America, with West Point graduate, former Secretary of War, and U.S. Senator from Mississippi Jefferson Davis as provisional president, was established in early February of 1861, just as Lincoln was preparing to take office. Lincoln's inaugural message, conciliatory as it was, did little to abate the southern momentum, and after the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, four additional states from the Upper South left the United States to join the Confederacy. No American president had ever faced such a crisis, and Lincoln required all of his considerable political skills to hold the rest of the nation together, including the four slave states—Maryland, Delaware, Kentucky and Missouri—that did not secede. The presence of these slaveholding states complicated any antislavery approach Lincoln might take, especially in the early years of the war.

The war disrupted the routine of slavery not only in the slave states that had seceded but in those that had remained in the Union as well. Fearing that any widespread slave uprising might drive the loyal slave states towards the Confederacy, Lincoln cautioned Union commanders to prevent slave insurrections, even as they waged war on the enemy. Thus, military units operated in accordance with the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, returning fugitive slaves who escaped to Union lines. In August of 1861 John C. Frémont, commander in charge of the Western Department of the Army, declared martial law in Missouri to control the intense Confederate guerilla action there. He then issued an order freeing the slaves of all disloyal Missouri slaveholders. Lincoln, fearing border state reaction, revoked Frémont's order and removed him from command.[30]

Yet, the pressure to move against slavery, at least in the rebellious states, was growing. Also in August, Congress sought to strike a blow at the enemy by passing the First Confiscation Act which authorized Union commanders to seize rebel property. It also declared freedom for all slaves who labored for the Confederate military. Still Lincoln did not encourage his commanders to free slaves of Confederate masters. The next spring, arguing that no commander could move without specific authority of the president, he overruled an emancipation order issued by General David Hunter, U.S. commander in eastern South Carolina and Georgia. Despite complaints from the ranks that his policy of returning fugitive slaves to their masters turned the U.S. military into a force of slave catchers, Lincoln held fast to his position. Frederick Douglass, angered by the president's refusal to move in an antislavery direction, declared Lincoln "the most dangerous advocate of slave-hunting and slave-catching in the land."[31]

Meanwhile, slaves in the border states and those in Confederate areas who could reach Union lines were escaping in significant numbers. Lincoln's proposals for gradual compensated emancipation for slaveholders in states loyal to the Union, which were designed to calm border state fears, met with resistance. Only in the District of Columbia, where the federal government had direct control, was the plan put into effect. On April 16, 1862, Lincoln signed an act abolishing slavery in the capital and compensating masters with approximately $300 for each freed slave. Still, during the summer of 1862, a rising crescendo of voices calling for Lincoln to authorize

a general emancipation of slaves in the rebellious states would not allow his antislavery conscience to rest. Delegations of abolitionist and Quaker groups brought their message to the White House. In August, Douglass chastised Lincoln for not enforcing Congress's Second Confiscation Act, passed in mid-July, that declared freedom for the slaves of disloyal masters. This new congressional action, Confederate victories on the battlefield, and the increasing difficulty of recruiting soldiers brought additional pressure for presidential action. By that time, Lincoln had already drafted a preliminary emancipation order, and in late July he shared a draft of his Emancipation Proclamation with his Cabinet.[32]

Such a proclamation was fraught with danger. With so much of the fighting going against the Union, many might consider it an act of desperation, a judgment which might weaken its impact. There was also the question of the status of former slaves after emancipation. As an answer to this second issue, Lincoln fell back on that decades-old solution, colonization. In an effort to address black resistance to his plan, Lincoln made history. The president of the United States invited a delegation of African Americans to meet with him at the White House. On the afternoon of August 14, 1862, five black leaders—H. Ford Douglass, Henry Highland Garnet, William Wells Brown, A.P. Smith, and Edward M. Thomas—arrived to meet with the president. Thomas, assuming leadership of the delegation, asked the president to address the group, which he did. What followed was a sobering example of Lincoln's racial assumptions, a disappointment to the delegation and to African Americans who later became aware of his words, published in the next day's edition of the New York Tribune and in September's edition of Frederick Douglass's newspaper, Douglass' Monthly.

Calling slavery the "greatest wrong inflicted on any people," Lincoln made clear his determination to bring the institution to an end. Once ended, however, he told the delegation, black people would never be able to enjoy true freedom or equality in the United States among whites. "I do not propose to discuss this," he said, "but to present it as a fact with which we have to deal." Then he made his racial assumptions clear. "You and we are different. We have between us broader difference than exists between almost any other two races." Since he believed that these differences could never be altered, Lincoln suggested what he saw as the only practical solution. He argued that slavery had been an evil influence on whites as well as blacks and that the races could never live together except under the influence of that evil. He concluded that "it is better for us both, therefore, to be separated." He then presented his plan of voluntary African American emigration to Africa, the Caribbean, or South America. The black men listened to the president politely but found his words discouraging and offensive.[33]

In reaction, Frederick Douglass wrote a scathing editorial in Douglass' Monthly, calling Lincoln an "itinerant colonization lecturer" and a "genuine representative of American prejudice and Negro hatred."[34] A.P. Smith wrote to the president saying what almost all black people felt and asking the questions that most would have asked, if given the chance. "[M]ust I crush out my cherished hopes and aspirations, abandon my home, and become a pander to the means and selfish spirit that oppresses me? Pray tell us, is our right to a home in this country less then your own, Mr. Lincoln?" he asked rhetorically. He went on to proclaim his patriotism, comparing it to Lincoln's, and declared his strong resistance to African American colonization. Clearly, African opposition to colonization was overwhelming.[35]

Within a few months Lincoln announced his intention to issue an Emancipation Proclamation at the turn of the New Year. On the grand day, African Americans waited hopefully for the official word. When it came, blacks were relieved to find that it contained no contingency for colonization. Henry Highland Garnet, who had been part of the black delegation that Lincoln had addressed at the White House, led a gathering at Cooper Institute in New York City. He pronounced the president "an advancing and progressive man…the man of our choice and hope."[36]

The Proclamation also altered Douglass's appraisal of Lincoln, for much had changed. For many African American and white abolitionists in the United States and Europe, the war now became a holy crusade against slavery. Black troops were serving the Union cause, their actions impressing even the most skeptical. Despite the disadvantages they faced in service to their nation, they had responded to the call that Lincoln had built into the Emancipation Proclamation.

Douglass met Lincoln for the first time in August of 1863. As a recruiter of African American troops, Douglass had come to Washington to talk to federal officials about the inequities in pay and treatment imposed on blacks. After meeting with members of Congress and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, he visited the White House where he was received by the president. As Douglass set out the case for action needed to redress the disadvantages black soldiers confronted, he was struck by Lincoln's directness. He said that he "saw at a glance the justice of the popular estimate of his qualities expressed in the prefix Honest to the name Abraham Lincoln."[37] The men discussed the plight of black soldiers, and Lincoln defended himself from the charge of being slow and vacillating on the question of emancipation and human rights for African Americans.

Douglass was impressed. "Mr. Lincoln listened with patience and silence to all I had to say." On the question of equal pay for black soldiers, Lincoln set out the politics of the situation. African Americans were paid roughly half the amount allotted to whites, but the president argued that, "the employment of colored troops at all was a great gain to the colored people . . . that they ought to be willing to enter the service upon any condition." He went on to say that the inferior pay provided to black soldiers "seemed a necessary concession to smooth the way to their employment at all as soldiers ." Yet, in the end, Lincoln seemed to agree to work to redress the pay inequities. As Douglass recalled, the president told him, "…ultimately they would receive the same."[38]

Although Douglass did not receive all he had hoped, the former slave came away from this meeting feeling that the president of the United States had treated him as an equal and that he had encountered a sincere man. Lincoln's assessment of public opinion on the issue of African Americans in uniform was accurate. The general white public opposed equal pay for black troops because of what it symbolized. One New Yorker expressed the prevailing sentiment saying, "it is unjust in every way to the white soldier to put him on a level with the black."[39]

The struggle for equal pay would continue for more than two years, but finally, as the war neared its end in March of 1865, Congress authorized equal pay for all black soldiers, retroactive to their actual dates of enlistment. Progress had been slow, as Lincoln acknowledged, but pay equity had finally been achieved. Through it all, Douglass maintained a realistic understanding of Lincoln, the politician, and was nevertheless impressed with "the solid gravity of his character."[40]

As the war continued, Lincoln's views on racial issues changed. He came to appreciate the contributions that African Americans were making to the cause and became more outspoken on the subject. His Emancipation Proclamation provided an antislavery focus to U.S. military efforts that persuaded several European nations to withhold recognition and aid from the Confederacy. In the United States, it raised the hopes of those committed to freedom, but others, especially in the loyal slave states, were uneasy about the concept of emancipation. It promised freedom to the slaves held by those still in rebellion; and although it did not apply to slaves in loyal states, slaveholders in the loyal states complained that many of their slaves embraced the spirit of the proclamation and walked off the plantation.

Despite the new moral focus that the Proclamation added to the struggle, the early years of the war were less than promising for the Union cause. Setbacks on the battlefield for Northern forces and the unprecedented loss of life contributed to a pessimism that plagued much of the United States. Although General Ulysses S. Grant won a victory over Confederate forces during the spring of 1862 at Shiloh, Tennessee, 13,000 of his 63,000 men were killed in the process. Later that year, U.S. forces suffered another 14,000 losses at the second Battle of Manassas and yet another 12,000 casualties at the battle of Fredericksburg, also in Virginia. During the summer of 1863, the Union suffered over 20,000 casualties and then in the spring of 1864, General Grant's forces lost over 7,000 men in a little over an hour, as they attacked entrenched rebels at Cold Harbor, Virginia. All told, during one month of fighting in the late spring of 1864 the United States lost some 50,000 of its soldiers.[41]

In light of these shocking casualties, Lincoln felt strong pressure to sue for peace at almost any cost. Democrats had gained control of the legislature in his home state of Illinois in 1862 and called for negotiations to end the war. Only the efforts of Richard Yates, the state's Republican governor, had prevented it from withdrawing support for the war.[42] Fearing that such reactions might lead to demands for a reversal of emancipation as a peace offering to the Confederacy, Lincoln called Douglass to the White Hose for another consultation. This time explaining the situation and his fears that an immediate peace might leave tens of thousands of slaves in southern bondage, he asked for Douglass's help. "I want you to set about devising some means of making [the slaves] acquainted with [The Emancipation Proclamation], and for bringing them to our lines." Douglass was again impressed. Recalling this meeting, he said of Lincoln, "He spoke with great earnestness."[43]

The president had every reason for concern. As the presidential election of 1864 approached, his analysis of the political situation seemed disturbingly accurate. He faced a stiff challenge from the Democratic candidate, General George B. McClellan, the former commander of the Army of the Potomac whom Lincoln had relieved from military duty because of differences over the general's handling of the war in Virginia. If McClellan and the Democrats should take control of the White House, emancipation would be in grave danger. This was a significant concern since some Republicans were convinced that Lincoln could not win a second term. The situation was made more alarming when in mid-July of 1864, barely four months before the election, Confederate forces moved into Maryland, within five miles of Washington, D.C.

Although the party was not united in its decision, Lincoln secured the Republican nomination for the presidency. The Republicans also endorsed a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery. Lincoln was reelected with 55% of the popular vote, and in January of 1865, with his support, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution to bring an end to slavery. Finally, Lincoln was politically free to state his antislavery views and to connect them more directly to the war. In his Second Inaugural Address, he told his audience that the presence of slave property, one-eighth of the nation's population, had constituted a "peculiar and powerful interest" for slaveholders. He told his listeners what almost all understood clearly, that this interest was "somehow, the cause of the war." He then suggested that slavery was an offense in the sight of God and that the Almighty may very well have punished the nation through the ordeal of war. Perhaps, he speculated, America's punishment would be continued "until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword."[44]

The war had changed Lincoln. He was impressed and even touched by the service of black troops. He was certain that they had played a major role in saving the Union and bringing an end to slavery. Meetings with Frederick Douglass had also gone a great distance towards changing Lincoln's racial views. Whereas before the war he had spoken of African Americans as inferiors, his respect for Douglass was obvious, made public by Lincoln's own words. He had invited Douglass to the White House reception after the inaugural address, an unprecedented gesture of respect. Then after Douglass had talked his way into the gathering, past officials who could hardly believe that a black man was to be the special guest of the president at such an affair, Lincoln shocked many in the room, by not only acknowledging Douglass's presence, but also his friendship. As Douglass remembered it, he walked into the East Room "amid a scene of elegance such as...I had never before witnessed." Lincoln, in the midst of conversation, saw him and immediately acknowledged his presence. "Here comes my friend Douglass," he announced. Then, taking Douglass's hand he said, "I am glad to see you. I saw you in the crowd today, listening to my inaugural address; how did you like it?" Finally, as if to expel any doubt, Lincoln added, "there is no man in the country whose opinion I value more than yours." When Douglass complimented the speech, Lincoln thanked him, as White House guests looked on with considerable interest. This was a great distance from Lincoln's position during his debates with Stephen A. Douglas in the late 1850s, when he had doubted the intelligence of African Americans and denied advocating their basic citizenship rights.[45]

Lincoln had indeed become publicly antislavery, having gone on record in support of the Thirteenth Amendment. He also seemed to drop his earlier plans for the colonization of African Americans outside of America. A decade before, in Peoria, Illinois, Lincoln had suggested colonization as a solution to the problem of slavery. While he admitted the impracticality of such a plan, he told his audience, "My first impulse would be to free all the slaves and send them to Liberia—to their native land."[46] However, after his Emancipation Proclamation of 1863 and the enlistment of black troops thereafter, he fell publicly silent on the issue. Historian Richard Carwardine sees Lincoln's failure to mention colonization as an important signal of his major philosophical shift. "One intimation of the new direction in policy," Carwardine suggests, "was the dog that did not bark." It indicated what Stephen B. Oates has called "an eloquent silence, indicating that he [Lincoln] had concluded that Dixie's whites and liberated Negroes must somehow learn to live together."[47] He may have been convinced by the argument put forward by a variety of black leaders that African Americans were as much American as white Americans and more so than recent white immigrants. He was surely swayed by the gallant military service of the tens of thousands of black troops fighting to save the nation. Regardless of where he stood at the start of the war, by his second term as president Lincoln had moved closer to the position staked out more than three decades earlier by black revolutionary David Walker who asserted, "America is more our country, than it is the whites—we have enriched it with our blood and tears."[48]

None other than William Lloyd Garrison acknowledged the antislavery progress Lincoln had made. The abolitionist leader met with Lincoln shortly before the 1864 election. The two men talked privately for an hour, discussing the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's drive towards the total abolition of slavery. Lincoln told Garrison that he favored a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery to be added to the Republican platform. This should be done immediately and with strong party support, Lincoln argued, so that it would not be thought contingent upon Union victory on the battlefield or upon his fate at the ballot box. Garrison, always suspicious of American politics and politicians, was impressed by the president's commitment to the complete removal of slavery. He emerged from the meeting firmly believing that Lincoln would "do all that he can see it right and possible for him to do to uproot slavery and give fair-play to the emancipated."[49] In a speech to a cheering crowd of the abolitionist faithful, Garrison expressed gratitude "to the humble rail-splitter of Illinois— to the Presidential chain-breaker of millions—to Abraham Lincoln."[50] Abolitionist doubts about Lincoln's antislavery views faded rapidly as the president became more publicly open on the subject. In a speech to an Indiana army regiment in mid-March, just a few days after his inauguration, Lincoln employed his well known wit to make the point. "Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery," he told the troops, "I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally."[51]

Although downplayed as a cause of the war in the winter and spring of 1861, by the spring of 1865 slavery was clearly at the war's center. Within three weeks of his message to the troops in Indiana, all had changed. On April 9, Lee surrendered his forces to Grant at Appomattox Court House. Two days later in Washington, Lincoln addressed the question of reconstructing the conquered states. Abolitionists were urging that now that African Americans were about to be free, they should have the vote. Lincoln seemed willing to seriously consider this proposition. He even showed signs of being open to that social equality among the races that he had denied during his debates with Stephen A. Douglas in the senate race of 1858. Speaking specifically about the conditions for the readmission of Louisiana to the United States, Lincoln acknowledged approvingly that the new state constitution had opened public schools to blacks and had empowered the legislature to give them the right to vote. He then expressed support for conveying the franchise on selected groups of African Americans. "I would myself prefer that it were now conferred on the very intelligent, and on those who serve our cause as soldiers." He seemed excited by what he saw as a new spirit that freedom had brought to African Americans. "The colored man too," he said, "in seeing all united for him, is inspired with vigilance, and energy, and daring."[52] The president seemed to be moving toward advocating a complete overturning of the ruling in the Dred Scott decision.

Lincoln's transformation was apparent to many in his audience that evening, including an actor named John Wilkes Booth. Booth was a southern sympathizer who had yet to fully accept the Confederate surrender. He hated Lincoln for humbling the South and was infuriated by the president's endorsement of citizenship rights for African Americans. He was so enraged by Lincoln's words that he vowed to kill the president. On April 14, 1865, Booth made good on his threats, assassinating Lincoln as the president sat watching a play with his wife in a private box at Ford's Theatre in Washington.

By the end of his life, Lincoln had grown to be what he said himself to be—antislavery. But he was still growing and showed definite signs of becoming much more. He was moving beyond his earlier views of white supremacy. His relationship with Frederick Douglass and the experience of the war in which he called on the service of African Americans were among the most influential factors in his personal growth. Although he did not live to see the states ratify the Thirteenth Amendment that finally abolished slavery across the nation, his actions had helped make it possible. African Americans generally understood his growth, and most loved him for it. In New York they gathered at Cooper Institute to protest the decision of the city council to exclude blacks from Lincoln's funeral procession as it passed through the city. Douglass addressed the crowd, denouncing the council's action and praising their fallen hero. In support of the city's African Americans, the New York Evening Post observed, "Our late President was venerated by the whole colored population with a peculiar degree of feeling…and [they] looked upon him as the liberator of their race. We have accepted the services of colored citizens in the war and it is disgraceful ingratitude to shut them out of our civil demonstration." The newspaper also published a letter by black minister John Sella Martin, who argued that Lincoln had formed a special relationship with African Americans whom "he had lifted by the most solemn official acts to the dignity of citizens and defenders of the union." Lincoln, he argued, would have wanted African Americans to be "allowed the honor of following his remains to the grave." It finally took a telegram from Charles Dana, Assistant Secretary of War, to persuade the council

to reverse itself. Finally some two thousand blacks took up positions at the rear of Lincoln's funeral procession in the city.[53]

Elsewhere, African Americans stood by the thousands along the tracks that bore the train carrying Lincoln's body back to Illinois. By and large, blacks were realistic about Lincoln. Most understood the conservative antislavery man he had been and were devoted to the memory of the abolitionist he had become. However slowly, and with whatever complications, Lincoln had presided over the end of slavery. It was Lincoln's personal growth that ultimately led to his premature death. John Wilkes Booth assassinated him for destroying the slaveholding South and for his support of citizenship rights for black people. It was also his personal growth that led African Americans across the country to remember Abraham Lincoln as the Great Emancipator.[54]

James O. Horton is the Benjamin Banneker Professor of American Civilization and History at The George Washington University. *He presented this paper as the 2006 McMurtry Lecture at The Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana. The Lincoln Museum thanks the family of R. Gerald McMurtry for sponsoring the publication of this article.*

Endnotes

[1] "A. Lincoln to Albert G. Hodges, April 4, 1864," Michael P. Johnson, ed., *Abraham Lincoln, Slavery, and the Civil War: Selected Writings and Speeches*, (Boston: St Martin's Bedford Books, 2000), 285.

[2] Roy P. Basler, ed., *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 2:320.

[3] Aileen Kraditor, *Means and Ends in American Abolitionism: Garrison and His Critics on Strategy and Tactics*, 1834-1850 (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

[4] David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 181.

[5] Henry Mayer, All on Fire: *William Lloyd Garrison and the Abolition of Slavery* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1998), 445.

[6] Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds. *Herndon's Informants : Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana : University of Illinois Press, 1997), 457. See also Allen C. Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln: Redeemer President* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1999), 128.

[7] Abraham Lincoln, "Protest in Illinois Legislature on Slavery," *Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 1:75.

[8] Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 126-127.

[9] "Article Three," *The Constitution of the American Anti-Slavery Society: with the Declaration of the National Anti-Slavery Convention at Philadelphia*, December, 1833 (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838).

[10] Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*, 127-128.

[11] "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois," Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 45.

[12] "Speech on the Kansas-Nebraska Act at Peoria, Illinois," Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 45.

[13] Paul Finkelman, *Defending Slavery: Proslavery Thought in the Old South* (Boston: Bedford/St Martin's Press, 2003); "Speech to One Hundred Fortieth Indiana Regiment" (March 17, 1865) Basler, *Collected Works*, 8:361; Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 45-46.

[14] Basler, *Collected Works*, 2:132.

[15] For African American reactions to plans for African colonization see, James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Free Black Culture and Community in the North, 1700-1865*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 177-202.

[16] The U.S. defeat of Mexico in 1848 extended the nation by more than 500,000 square miles through the Southwest and on to California and the Pacific Ocean, enabling the possible extension of territory that might be open to slavery.

[17] "A House Divided, Speech at Springfield, Illinois, June 16 1858," Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 63, 68.

[18] Seventh Lincoln-Douglas Debate, October 13, 1858, Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 79.

[19] First Lincoln-Douglas Debate, August 21, 1858, Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 72.

[20] First Lincoln-Douglas Debate, August 21, 1858, Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 72.

[21] Fourth Lincoln-Douglas Debate, September 18, 1858, Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 73.

[22] First Lincoln-Douglas Debate, August 21, 1858, Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 72.

[23] "Address at Cooper Institute, February 27, 1860," Maureen Harrison and Steve Gilbert, eds., *Abraham Lincoln: Word for Word* (San Diego, CA: Excellent Books, 1994), 249-274, 266-267.

[24] James M. McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted during the War for the Union* (New York: Vintage Books, 1965), 5-6.

[25] Donald Yacovone, ed., *Freedom's Journey: African American Voices of the Civil War* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 2004), 299.

[26] See William S. McFeely, *Frederick Douglass* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1991), 208-211.

[27] Ron Soodalter, *Hanging Captain Gordon: The Life and Trial of an American Slave Trader* (New York: Atria Books, 2006), 98.

[28] Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 285.

[29] *Chicago Daily Times and Herald*, November 20, 1860.

[30] W.M. Brewer, "Lincoln and The Border States," *Journal of Negro History*, vol. 34 no. 1,(January, 1949), pp. 46-72

[31] David W. Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield: Race, Memory and the American Civil War* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 80.

[32] Harold Holzer, Edna Greene Medford and Frank J. Williams eds., *The Emancipation Proclamation* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 2006).

[33] *New York Tribune*, August 15, 1862.

[34] *Douglass Monthly*, September, 1862, quoted in Blight, *Beyond the Battlefield*, 80.

[35] Holzer, Medford and Williams, eds., *The Emancipation Proclamation*, 19.

[36] Holzer, Medford and Williams, eds., *The Emancipation Proclamation*, 22.

[37] McFeely, *Frederick Douglass*, 229.

[38] Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (London: Collier Books, [1892] 1969), 348.

[39] James McPherson, *The Negro's Civil War: How American Negroes Felt and Acted during the War for the Union*, 199.

[40] Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 348.

[41] Harry S. Stout, *Upon the Alter of the Nation: A Moral History of the Civil War* (New York: Viking, 2006), 338-349; James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988).

[42] Arthur Charles Cole, *Centennial History of Illinois: The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870* (Springfield, IL: Illinois Centennial Commission, 1919).

[43] Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 358.

[44] "Second Inaugural Address, Washington, DC, March 4, 1865," Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 320-321.

[45] Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*, 366.

[46] "Slavery and the Repeal of the Missouri Compromise," Peoria, Illinois, October 16, 1854, " Harrison and Gilbert, eds., *Abraham Lincoln: Word for Word*, 105-144, 116.

[47] Richard Carwardine, *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006), 220; Stephen B. Oates, *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1984), 113-114.

[48] *David Walker's Appeal*, edited with an introduction by Charles M. Wiltse, 3rd edition (June, 1830; New York: Hill and Wang, 1965), 76.

[49] Mayer, *All On Fire*, 568.

[50] *Liberator*, February, 10, 1865.

[51] Basler, *Collected Works*, 8:361.

[52] Johnson, *Abraham Lincoln*, 332.

[53] Victor Searcher, *The Farewell to Lincoln*, (New York: Abingdon Press, 1965), 139; Philip S. Foner, *History of Black Americans: From the Compromise of 1850 to the End of the Civil War* (Westport, CN: Greenwood Press, 1983), 449-450.

[54] Michael Kauffman, *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies* (New York: Random House, 2004).

From The Lincoln Museum and Southern Illinois University Press

Lincoln and Freedom: Slavery, Emancipation, and the Thirteenth Amendment

Edited by Harold Holzer and Sara Vaughn Gabbard
Foreword by Joan L. Flinspach
Introduction by Harold Holzer

Chapter 1: Slavery during Lincoln's Lifetime
James Oliver Horton

Chapter 2: Lincoln's Critique of Dred Scott as a Vindication of the Founding
Joseph R. Fornieri

Chapter 3: Lincoln and the Limits of Constitutional Authority
Phillip Shaw Paludan

Chapter 4: Lincoln, God, and Freedom: A Promise Fulfilled
Lucas E. Morel

Chapter 5: "Sublime in Its Magnitude": The Emancipation Proclamation
Allen C. Guelzo

Chapter 6: Lincoln's Summer of Emancipation
Matthew Pinsker

Chapter 7: The Role of the Press
Hans L. Trefousse

Chapter 8: Marching to Freedom: The U. S. Colored Troops
John F. Marszalek

Chapter 9: Lincoln and the Rhetoric of Freedom
Ronald C. White Jr.

Chapter 10: Ballots over Bullets: Freedom and the 1864 Election
David E. Long

Chapter 11: The Constitution, the Amendment Process, and the Abolition of Slavery
Herman Belz

Chapter 12: The Thirteenth Amendment Enacted
Michael Vorenberg

Chapter 13: "That Which Congress So Nobly Began": The Men Who Passed the Thirteenth Amendment Resolution
Ron J. Keller

Photo by Jim Gabbard

Editors Harold Holzer and Sara Vaughn Gabbard

Chapter 14: The End of the Beginning: Abraham Lincoln and the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Amendments
Frank J. Williams

Chapter 15: Picturing Freedom: The Thirteenth Amendment in the Graphic Arts
Harold Holzer

To order *Lincoln and Freedom* from The Lincoln Museum Store, please visit www.TheLincolnMuseum.org or call (260) 455-3864.

Chicago Tribune Names *Lincoln Lore* One of Top 50 Magazines in the United States for the Third Consecutive Year

We would like to thank the members of Friends of The Lincoln Museum for providing financial support for *Lincoln Lore*. Also, we thank the scholars who have provided articles in the last year:

John Beatty
Herman Belz
Joseph Fornieri
Alex Gallucci
E. Phelps Gay
Allen Guelzo
Harold Holzer
James Horton
Martin Johnson
David Long
Myron Marty
John Marszalek
Robert May
Lucas Morel
William Pederson
John David Smith
Richard Striner
Hans Trefousse
Frank Williams
Douglas Wilson

Upcoming Events

Lincoln Forum

Lincoln Forum: "Lincoln, Law, and Justice" November 16–18, 2007, Gettysburg, PA (www.TheLincolnForum.org).