

By Cracky, Abe's Nominated

How Abraham Lincoln Emerged as a Prospective Presidential Candidate to Gain the 1860
Republican Presidential Nomination.

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Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven tar for seg hvordan Abraham Lincoln ble nominert som republikanernes presidentkandidat i 1860. Oppgavens struktur er delt inn i seks kapitler. Kapittel 1 inneholder en historisk og geografisk gjennomgang av Lincolns første nominasjon som president og av litteraturen som beskriver denne hendelsen. Denne diskusjonen munner ut i forskningsspørsmålet:

- *Var Lincoln en avgjørende del i prosessen som ledet til hans nominasjon som republikanernes presidentkandidat i 1860?*

Oppgaven belyser hvilken rolle Abraham Lincoln spilte i hans søken etter presidentnominasjonen i 1860. I Kapittel 2, 3 og 4 rendyrkes en historisk fortelling for å undersøke om fortellingen om Lincolns første nominasjon kan og burde fortelles på en ny måte. Denne fortellingen beskriver hvilke konkrete tiltak Lincoln gjorde for å etablere seg som en appellerende presidentkandidat fra 4. november 1858 til den andre generalforsamlingen i det republikanske partiet åpnet 16. mai 1860. Kapittel 5 diskuterer en grunnleggende oppfatning av Lincoln som gjennomsyrrer mye litteratur som fremstiller hans rolle i prosessen frem mot nominasjonen. Oppgaven argumenterer for at, om ikke direkte misvisende, må dette bilde nyanseres, ettersom det farger fremstillinger av Lincolns rolle i nominasjonsprosessen. Med dette utgangspunktet diskuteres kildegrunnet for to hendelser som belyser forskningsspørsmålet og som er mye omtalt i den historiske litteraturen som tar for seg Lincolns første nominasjon. Til slutt konkluderer oppgaven og forsøker å belyse forskningsspørsmålet i konklusjonskapittelet, kapittel 6.

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*Think where man's glory
Most begins and ends,
And say my glory was
I had such friends.*

- W.B. Yeats

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Foreword

When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.

The start of this poem, written by 13th century Persian poet Rumi, sums up my last year in the two-year Master's program in History at the University of Bergen. In May, 2016, I decided to change the theme of my thesis. This excerpt from Carlos Castaneda's *The Teachings of Don Juan*, and a helping hand from many friends, inspired me to take the plunge:

“A path is only a path, and there is no affront, to oneself or to others, in dropping it if that is what your heart tells you (..) Look at every path closely and deliberately. Try it as many times as you think necessary. Then ask yourself, and yourself alone one question: Does this path have a heart? If it does, the path is good; if it does not, it is of no use.”

I cannot better express the feeling of leaving a path that my heart was never truly in, a path I had chosen to go down in an uninspired place. Working on this thesis, however, has brought me immense joy and satisfaction. In fact, I have had to use Haruki Murakami's four-hour rule to not over-extend my energies while immersing myself in literature about Abraham Lincoln. It has even added a verb to me and my friends' vocabulary: to be “Abing,” which meant that I was busy working on my thesis, while either at home or secluded at my cabin in Eikedalen. There I could make use of Picasso's advice: “Without great solitude, no serious work is possible.”

“What's the deal with Lincoln, anyway?” friends have kept asking me. I think much of my obsession with Lincoln can be traced to the fact that there are no audio evidences of Lincoln's voice. There are, of course numerous photographs, or daguerreotypes as they are called. But people who knew him always tells us how these pictures never could catch the spark in his eyes when he told one of his many stories or as he engaged in a moment of great oratory. Perhaps this is why he has taken on the shape of something of a myth or a legend in literature and folklore. In a way, there is the challenge posed by his assassination, his “martyrdom” which, like the death of John F. Kennedy, unquestionably elevated Lincoln's stature. But in contrast to Kennedy, of whom there are numerous audio and visual recordings, Lincoln's oratory is still clouded in mystery. At what tempo did he speak, which words did he emphasize, how might one describe the sound of his voice, how did this much-emphasized sparkle in his eyes really look whenever he made a point? What did his smile look like? These are all questions that can never be answered and therefore, the more I have read about Lincoln's life, the more mysterious he has become.

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Introduction



The presidential election of 1860 is regarded as one of the most consequential elections of American history. The immediate effect of the election was the secession of seven Southern states, and thus, the election has been considered as the triggering cause of the American Civil War. Elected to the presidency at this crucial point in the history of the United States was Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln's tenure as president during the Civil War has earned him a place in the national pantheon of American presidents.

In 1856, the newly established Republican party had almost received a majority of the Northern votes. Thus, the Republican nominee for the presidency four years later would likely become the next president of the United States. Additionally, two months after the Republicans had selected Lincoln as its nominee for the presidency, it became clear that the Democratic party could not unite behind a single candidate and thus Lincoln's election seemed inevitable.

Much has been written about Lincoln, the election of 1860, the causes of the Civil War and how the three were connected. Yet only a dozen works devoted to Lincoln's first presidential nomination have emerged. By discussing how these works have depicted Lincoln's nomination and through an investigation of the sources on which these depictions rely, this thesis will try to answer the following question:

- *How did Lincoln become the Republican nominee for the presidency in 1860?*

1.1 Disposition

This thesis will show how Abraham Lincoln was nominated President in 1860. Furthermore, it will address various historiographical discussions related to Lincoln's political resurgence. The thesis is comprised of six chapters. Chapter one will introduce the long history of Lincoln historiography as it relates to the theme. Subsequently it will discuss whether the research question raised: "*How did Lincoln become the Republican nominee for the presidency in 1860*"? provides an adequate scope and focus into understanding how Lincoln was nominated president or if a narrower focus will yield better explanations. Where do scholars differ in the depictions of Lincoln's nomination, and from what source-material do these differences emanate? Chapter one will also discuss the methodological challenges that have arisen while writing on this theme. In chapter two, the thesis takes on the role of a narrator and presents a story of how Lincoln was nominated. Chapter two will briefly recount the relevant American history leading to how Lincoln was in a position to contend for the Republican nomination for President in 1860. Thereafter it presents Lincoln at a time where it seemed he was, if anything, destined to be nothing more than a somewhat successful local politician. Chapters three and four will chronicle crucial periods of Lincoln's life leading to the nomination and explain how he was nominated. In chapter five the thesis returns to analysis by investigating on what basis the story of Lincoln has been constructed, continuing the discussion from chapter one. The thesis discusses sources crucial to how Lincoln was nominated, and investigates if the story told can or even should be told differently, or if there still exists questions or duplicitous depictions of Lincoln's nomination, before concluding in chapter six, where it tries to answer the research question.

1.2 Historiography

1865-1900: ‘O captain! My captain!’

As Abraham Lincoln drew his last breath in the morning of April 15, 1865, the group that had assembled at the Petersen House across the street from where Lincoln had been shot just hours before, grew silent. Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton, broke the silence, allegedly stating: “Now, he belongs to the ages.”¹ The northern part of the nation was left grieving. The entire country had been emotionally ravaged and in many places materially devastated by years of civil war, and for northerners, Lincoln would soon become a political martyr who had sacrificed his life for the Union.² To many, such as early biographer Josiah G. Holland Lincoln was nothing less than the: “Savior of the republic, emancipator of a race, true Christian, true man.”³ But it was not only biographers who contributed to the hero-worshipping. Poet Walt Whitman’s poems and annual memorial lectures on Lincoln is just one example of how Lincoln became lodged in the collective memory of Americans.⁴

Contributing to the hero-worshipping were those who had known Lincoln in his life, who now stood in line to tell stories of his praiseworthy life and, in the process, elevate their own. Many of these early biographers cherry-picked anecdotes about Lincoln’s life to express the now elevated position Lincoln had gained in American society, as if he were a God among men. These biographers had mostly superficial testimonies and sparse biographical accounts on which to base their anecdotes and narratives: the blanks were too often filled with folkloric testimony and legendary accounts. Yet not all of these biographers focused on Lincoln’s divine characteristics as a savior of the nation. Some, who had known Lincoln prior to his presidency, sought to build an image of Lincoln as a great western frontier hero, which, enabled by his physical strength, inflexible will and pure character gained Lincoln prominence and made it seem inevitable that he would one day achieve greatness. These different, even conflicting approaches, have led some commentators on Lincoln biographies to speak of a struggle between “realists” and “romanticists” within the field of Lincoln studies.⁵

¹ From historian Karl Weber’s 2012 *Lincoln, a President for the Ages*, page 1.

² From Lincoln scholar David H. Donald’s 1947 *The Folklore Lincoln*, an article published in *The Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, Vol. 40, no. 4, December 1947, page 377.

³ From Josiah G. Holland’s 1866 *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* in Stephen B. Oates’ 1984 *Abraham Lincoln, The Man Behind the Myths*, page 5.

⁴ Oates 1984, page 9.

⁵ Historian Benjamin Thomas, author of *Portrait for Posterity* from 1947, makes this claim. Donald E. Fehrenbacher’s 1962 *Prelude to Greatness, Lincoln in the 1850s*, page 168. Fehrenbacher himself, a Lincoln scholar, authoring

The “ages” which followed Lincoln’s assassination revealed vastly different approaches to Lincoln’s early life (and his Presidency) and constructed immensely different historical memories of the man, the politician, and the national leader-savior. In a time where writing history had a functional purpose in the United States, Lincoln became a national symbol. American history-writing at the turn of the 18th century was dominated by patriotism, where biographies of revered men, like George Washington, were typical historical works.⁶ As Lincoln grew up, he had read such works, not dreaming that one day, equally apocryphal biographies would be written about him.⁷ American history-writing in the early 19th century was dominated by local history, but in the 1830s records of the constitutional conventions and other nationally significant historical documents were published, which later would be used by Lincoln in his arguments against the expansion of slavery.⁸ By the time the first biographies on Lincoln were published in 1860s and 1870s, his supporters became the dominant spokesmen within the field of biography, while academic historians to a large extent supported their view of Lincoln as an important national figure who could serve as ‘*exemplum virtutis*’ for future generations of Americans.⁹

The Lincoln-supporters were a wide variety of characters, as one group had known Lincoln almost exclusively from his time in Illinois, and the other had come to know Lincoln only in Washington, D.C. during his Presidency. There were, of course, some exceptions. But many interpretive differences emanated from the diverging images established by the various ways in which their spokesmen had known the living Lincoln. For those who had exclusively known Lincoln as president, he appeared as a distinguished and well-dressed father and savior of the nation, dismissing the image of the Illinois figure, an uncouth and backwoods frontier legend as capable of splitting rails as fighting local bullies in primitive communities. Collective images of Lincoln as some type of mixture between rural legend and distinguished statesman as pure as Christ were quickly established. The reading public, however combined elements of both perspectives. Meanwhile, the writing on Lincoln in this period created vastly different pictures of the man - images replete with legendary features and the exaggerations of folklore intertwined with factual accounts and historically accurate detail. In lack of a better word: a mishmash of Lincoln featuring romantic and realistic elements making it hard to de-lineate the historical Lincoln from folklore.

works like *Lincoln in Text and Context* agrees with Thomas’ claims. Donald and Civil War historian David M. Potter, author of, amongst other works, *The Lincoln Theme* agree that works on Lincoln can be divided into these two approaches to Lincoln’s life.

⁶ From Leidulf Melve’s 2010 *History-Writing from Ancient History to Today*, page 137, own translation.

⁷ From David H. Donald’s 1995 *Lincoln*, page 31.

⁸ *Ibid*, page 138.

⁹ *Ibid*, page 138.

Romanticism vs Realism

In this first of five phases of writing on Lincoln, as Lincoln scholar Donald E. Fehrenbacher puts it: “Conventional historians helped create one image of Lincoln...”. But while these typically eastern historians created an image of Lincoln as a towering emancipator and ‘Savior of the Union’, many of his friends, from Illinois created a juxtaposed, contradictory image of Lincoln as a “virile, earthly son of the frontier West.”, as mentioned¹⁰ His friends and supporters relied on their own memory to construct a narrative of Lincoln’s life, even though there are a few examples of serious works emerging in this period which made use of available records. Historians depicting Lincoln in the 1850s and early 1860 before he became a national figure came to acknowledge a challenge in portraying a man in transition. As Lincoln eventually ended up as the Republican candidate for the presidential nomination, historians struggled with reconciling this achieved and eventually beloved figure with the frontier jokester of which many reminiscences remembered.

Even though there certainly is a striking contrast between the Lincoln of the late 1840s and Lincoln the President in the 1860s, the political narrative of this thesis, however realistic in its intentions, will demonstrate some mishmash. Abraham Lincoln in the period was both a frontier circuit-riding lawyer who regaled his colleagues with outlandish stories and ribald jokes and an experienced political operative making backroom deals, persuading colleagues and jousting with rivals. Lincoln of the 1850s came to be regarded as quite a conundrum, not only to his contemporaries but also to historians. The Lincoln of the late 1850s was highly ambitious, yet self-effacing, extremely jovial, yet often depressed, thoroughly convinced of slavery’s injustice, yet pessimistic about its peaceful extinction. As the thesis will demonstrate, it was this multi-faceted, multi-layered figure who gained the Republican nomination in May 1860.

The framework of romanticists versus realists in Lincoln biography (and a characterization of a mishmash) may be too imprecise. Yet, considering that a number of historians have called attention to the problem of dealing with mythology of Lincoln and the paucity of sources for his early life

¹⁰ From Fehrenbacher’s 1987 *Lincoln in Text and Context*, page 183. The phases featured in this thesis is constructed by myself, but is based on Fehrenbacher’s 1987 *Lincoln in Text and Context*. In this book, Fehrenbacher outlines the general content of four distinct positions in Lincoln studies. I have written a history of Lincoln studies, constructed a fifth phase, defined the content of each phase and labelled them and discussed them based on a reading of relevant literature on Lincoln’s first nomination. In addition, see Fehrenbacher’s 1997 *Lincoln in Text and Context*, pages 181 and 286 for a more thorough history of Lincoln studies beyond the theme of Lincoln’s first nomination.

Fehrenbacher passed away in 1997, but after reaching out to Lincoln scholars Douglas Wilson and Michael Burlingame, it became clear that an adequate work on Lincoln studies simply did not exist. Where I refer to correspondence or unpublished works by Wilson and Burlingame, it is clear in the notes.

and many aspects of his personal life, it is worth noting as the thesis proceeds.¹¹ In this context, the thesis will briefly treat some of the important historical literature of Lincoln's professional career as lawyer and politician and note how the romantic-realist issue has shaped some of this commentary, for many have seen this struggle between romantic and realistic assessment as a recurring theme for Lincoln historians. The origin for the variations between the romanticists and realists may be traced back to two seminal biographies that emerged after Lincoln's death. These volumes were written by men who had had intimate contact with Lincoln either in the 1860s exclusively, when he was President, or solely in the 1830-1850 period where Lincoln lived an ordinary life in Illinois. The two publications were published around the same time, but their similarities end there. Their depictions of Lincoln are, as one scholar puts it: "strikingly dissimilar."¹²

Herndon's Lincoln

The first publication, *Herndon's Lincoln*, was written by Lincoln's law partner and confidant for sixteen years, his nine-year younger partner, William H. Herndon. Herndon became Lincoln's apprentice in 1844, and until 1860 he served as a mixture of friend, trustee and professional partner to Lincoln. During these years, they formed a close professional relationship. The information collected by Herndon has made his work the most seminal biography ever published. This is, quite simply because Herndon's compilation remains the most influential collection of information in existence. Vowing to complete a biography on his deceased friend after his assassination in 1865, Herndon set out to rescue Lincoln from those who were turning him, Herndon believed, into an unbelievable divine figure. Herndon's co-author, Jesse W. Weik, assisted him as the work prolonged, and Herndon kept his promise to publish a biography in 1888, three years before his own death. For much of the period, Herndon struggled with alcoholism, aging and a deteriorating personal economy, but still made trips to places Lincoln had lived, interviewing witnesses and retrieving character accounts about his old friend. He based his inquiry on long interviews with two dozen people who had known Lincoln in New Salem, including for instance Jack Armstrong, who was defended by Lincoln in a celebrated murder-case. Critical of the romantic biographies that were

¹¹ Some examples are Donald Fehrenbacher in his 1962 *Prelude to Greatness*, David Donald in his 1956 *Lincoln Reconsidered*, Stephen Oates in his 1984 *Abraham Lincoln, The Man Behind The Myths* and Lloyd Lewis' 1957 *Myths After Lincoln*.

¹² Fehrenbacher 1897, page 183.

emerging, Herndon was of the opinion that: “The stories we hear floating around are more or less untrue in part or as a whole.”¹³

John G. Nicolay & John Hay’s *The Life of Abraham Lincoln*

Two of these romantic storytellers, in the eyes of Herndon, were John G. Nicolay and John Hay, President Lincoln’s private secretaries in the White House. Being young men during Lincoln’s Presidency, the two were to spend the rest of their lives finishing a 10-volume work on their hero, setting the story in a Victorian literary romantic style. Hay and Nicolay treated Lincoln’s life in its various stages, and although their account is detailed and voluminous, their *The Life of Abraham Lincoln* has had an impact, but not so much because of new information or the keen or nuanced observations on Lincoln provided by the authors. The sheer amount of material is what is most noteworthy. Perhaps the bulk itself is what has led Fehrenbacher to point out that Nicolay and Hay’s work has been “more minded than read.”¹⁴ This despite the authors’ unique contemporary access to Lincoln’s private writings and correspondence, which after Lincoln’s death had fallen into the hands of his oldest son, Robert Todd Lincoln.¹⁵

Neither Herndon’s ‘realistic’ nor Nicolay and Hay’s ‘romantic’ portraits of Lincoln may be construed as “essentially false” as Fehrenbacher claims. At the same time, neither depiction can be established as “historically factual.” In the case of Lincoln’s first nomination, the lack of source material was left open to theories and efforts to create coherent narratives with limited primary data. In this context, his nomination was virtually neglected by historians until later generations of historians. For biographers, there were other, more interesting aspects of his life on which to focus, for example, the period after the nomination up to his first presidential election, or his activity after his first presidential inauguration which took place only months before the firing on Fort Sumter, considered to be the official start of the American Civil War.

¹³ From David Donald’s 1948 *Lincoln’s Herndon*, page 112.

¹⁴ Fehrenbacher 1987, page 184.

¹⁵ The Robert T. Lincoln papers were sealed by Congress for twenty-five years after his death, by Robert Lincoln’s order, and in 1947 they were released to the public. This made Nicolay and Hay’s work on Lincoln’s presidential years prior to 1947 singular. After 1947, several biographies of Lincoln appeared, and from 1953-1955 Roy P. Basler and the Abraham Lincoln Association in Springfield published Lincoln’s monumental *Collected Works*, and the Library of Congress published *the Abraham Lincoln Papers*, Oates 1984, page 7.

1900-1920: Plumbing the depths of Lincoln's character

By 1909, American history-writing in had become heavily influenced by positivistic elements. Some American historians went so far as to say that history was only meant to "determine, as accurately as possible, and to document minutely exactly what has happened".¹⁶ In the case of history-writing on Lincoln's first nomination, "what had actually happened", however, was relatively unclear. Yet a tendency to worship Lincoln and focus on anecdotal documents continued. As Lincoln's contemporaries were vanishing, another generation of amateur historians emerged. In this period, it was not so much the battle between the two mythical constructions which came to dominate the field. While previously, these approaches, "one portraying Lincoln as a frontier hero, the other as a martyr saint" had dominated the field, the turn of the century saw a new tendency. In the 20th century, Lincoln was becoming a mixture of "strikingly dissimilar" ahistorical portrayals, representing and embodying American ideals rather than being depicted as a product of his environment.¹⁷ Accordingly, one of the most notable works of the period is that of Lord Charnwood or Godfrey Rathbone Benson. His celebrated *Abraham Lincoln* from 1916 is considered a classic. This is not necessarily because of his addition of new source materials, but rather because of its analysis of Lincoln the President. Historian and Lincoln scholar, Donald M. Potter, has called Lord Charnwood's work the first "genuinely contemplative biography". The next forty years however, would see many a "contemplative biography".¹⁸

1920-1960 'The Golden Age'

Most the contributions in the next forty years came from professional historians with higher critical standards than most of the earlier works. Their addition of newly available primary source material re-invigorated the study of Lincoln's nomination. The authors of these generations were removed from personal familiarity with the subject and even further removed in time from the Civil War. These professional historians tried to maintain - where some of Lincoln's supporters in the wake of his assassination sometimes failed - a critical distance from their object of study. Perhaps this is

¹⁶ Melve 2010, page 139.

¹⁷ Stephen Oates in his 1984 *Abraham Lincoln: The Man Behind the Myths*, page 7.

¹⁸ From David Potter's 1948 lecture *The Lincoln Theme and American National Historiography*, page 17.

why Fehrenbacher in the 1980s called this period, from the 1920s to the 1950s, a ‘golden age’ of Lincoln biographies.¹⁹

William Baringer’s ‘Lincoln’s Rise to Power’

The golden age represented a new interest in Lincoln himself and also in his first nomination. Of the major contributions, William Baringer’s *Lincoln’s Rise to Power* from 1937 remains an important work to this day, not only because of its new information on the nomination effort and its nuanced personal portrayals of the team surrounding Lincoln, but also because it continues to be cited in many works from this era. Despite the many new publications, it could be claimed that the mundane quality of Lincoln’s pursuit of the nomination could be seen in its relative neglect by generations of historians: until Baringer publication in 1937, there was not much focus on his nomination or the subsequent campaign.²⁰ Baringer claimed in 1937 that this was because the romanticized aspects of Lincoln biographies typically did not include the somewhat tedious depiction of Lincoln’s rise to power because it was far removed from the tale of “Lincoln the God”, which Baringer felt was the figure whom many of his peers were chronicling. Dismissing this approach, Baringer asserted that: “Lincoln was made President by the vicissitudes of politics, by events quite mundane, in no way divine, by contacts and agreements which observers who do not understand the hard necessities of political life might well deem corrupt.”²¹

The golden age’s approach to Lincoln’s first nomination

Consequently, most biographies that were published in the golden age continued to focus on Lincoln’s presidential years. When they did address how Lincoln was nominated, the story tended to take the form of a grandiose narrative, emphasizing Lincoln’s skillful diplomacy, which fit into an image of Lincoln as a respectable statesman. In these accounts, the darker sides of Lincoln’s nomination, suggesting that Lincoln promised future cabinet office or power within the administration in exchange for support at the national convention, were often edited away. Such an approach was slowly modified. In 1950, Allan Nevins asked, in *The Emergence of Lincoln*, one of his eight works on the coming of the Civil War, about what had been Lincoln’s part in the coming of the war. As the

¹⁹ Fehrenbacher 1987, page 182.

²⁰ Baringer 1937, page 1.

²¹ Baringer 1937, page 4.

1960s approached, this tendency to criticize Lincoln and notice his political activity and acumen became more typical. Yet several works on Lincoln's nomination which emerged in this period to shed light on actors besides Lincoln downplayed and almost neglected Lincoln's own political activity. Willard E. King's 1960 *Lincoln's Manager, David Davis*, is such a work. Investigating Lincoln's close friend and unofficial campaign manager, David Davis, Willard highlight Davis' role in Lincoln's nomination. According to King, Davis was an integral part of Lincoln's political resurgence and especially in the nomination process. Lincoln allegedly once stated that he kept: "no secrets from him."²² In 1962, Fehrenbacher, shed much light on the transitional Lincoln of the 1850s in his seminal *Prelude to Greatness, Lincoln in the 1850's*. This work explained for the first time in some depth how Lincoln was in a position to establish himself in the field of presidential hopefuls as the 1860 presidential canvass approached. Historian Reinhard Luthin, who took a more focused and concrete approach in *The First Lincoln Campaign* from 1964 also followed this path, yet more similar to Nevins' approach than to Fehrenbacher's. Luthin, like Nevins, focused minutely on what transpired in the Republican National Convention in 1860, where the underdog Lincoln won the Republican nomination, as the favorite William Seward was pushed aside.

Whatever methodological deficiencies historians in the golden-age demonstrated, the era nonetheless represents a significant contribution to literature on Lincoln's nomination. One might, however, dispute the characterization as a "golden" age, as historians in this era tended to lend continued support to the image of Lincoln as something closer to a divine figure than to a figure produced by his times. Yet, there are many reasons to term this period as a indeed a gilded age for Lincoln biographies, particularly as it relates to the numerous texts emerging which treated Lincoln's nomination. The period represented a new focus on Lincoln, and works from this period were subjected to stricter academic scrutiny than previous works, as professional historians to an increasingly degree dominated the field of Lincoln studies. These historians often had roots to academic communities, doing their research in conjunction with the consolidation of academic history, now institutionalized in colleges and universities throughout the United States. Supported by the academy and a vibrant scholarly discourse, these works from the golden age have contributed more to illuminate how Lincoln was nominated than any previous period in Lincoln scholarship. This assessment remains valid, despite the challenges associated with some unanswered questions about Lincoln's effort to gain the presidency. Even so: as with many other works on Lincoln's pre-presidential life, the works in the golden age rely heavily on information published by Herndon and several other collections of reminiscences of Lincoln by his peers and colleagues.

²² From David Donald's 1995 *Lincoln*, page 242.

Other important full-length biographical works written in the so-called golden age includes the influential *Lincoln the President* from 1945 by the pre-eminent Lincoln scholar of the era, James G. Randall. In 1948, Randall's protégé, the oft-praised Lincoln biographer David H. Donald, published his first major work on Lincoln, but in his study chose to focus on the neglected life-story of William Herndon, appropriately termed *Lincoln's Herndon*. In 1960, poet Carl Sandburg published the first of two works on Lincoln entitled *Abraham Lincoln, The Prairie Years*. This work with its highly romanticized depictions of Lincoln's early life story had a significant impact on how Lincoln was perceived both by historians and the public at large and is probably the most popular biography on Lincoln ever written.²³ Of the acclaimed works in this period, Sandburg's *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, along the much earlier work by politician and historian Albert J. Beveridge's *Abraham Lincoln 1809-1858*, deserves mention. Sandburg's work became influential mainly because of its popularity, while Beveridge's was influential because the publication relied on his own scholarly research into sources other than reminiscences, including newspapers and legislative journals.²⁴

1960-1990 Revisionism

Herndon had once asked rhetorically of Lincoln's surge towards the Presidency: "Was he not the right man in the right time at the right place?"²⁵ The revisionism in the 1960s countered the implied tone of Herndon's question. Historians in the 1960s, 70s and 80s put Lincoln's historical reputation under revision in an ever-expanding field of research.²⁶ Some questioned Lincoln's zeal against slavery, others accused the President of racism, while most asked if the Civil War could have been avoided. Lincoln's racist sentiments were underlined primarily by pointing to Lincoln's remarks during the 1858 senatorial campaign against Senator Stephen A. Douglas. In one of the seven debates held at Charleston, Illinois, Lincoln stressed his opposition to Negro suffrage, blacks holding office, jury service and interracial marriage, which led later generations of historians to speculate into Lincoln's sentiments on the black population.²⁷

²³ Oates 1984, page 7.

²⁴ I have not read these works. This argument is taken from Fehrenbacher's 1987 work on Lincoln historiography, *Lincoln in Text and Context*.

²⁵ Taken from Emmanuel Hertz' 1938 *Hidden Lincoln*, page 121.

²⁶ Historian Stephen B. Oates labelled in his 1984 book *Abraham Lincoln, The Man Behind the Myths*, the period in the preceding decades as a "veritable renaissance", page 3.

²⁷ From the fourth debate between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas at Charleston, Illinois, September 16, 1858, Basler *CW*, Vol. III, page 146.

Critics contended that Lincoln was a reluctant emancipator, and his attitudes towards the Negro population have remained a matter of dispute among historians of the revisionist era. Many have even questioned Lincoln's role in the actual abolition of slavery, a focus prompted by the civil rights movement of the 1960s. While some historians of this period have portrayed Lincoln as a great wartime strategist, others find him responsible for the outbreak of the war itself and deemed the bloody conflict to be unnecessary; thus Lincoln was branded the villain, with his position on slavery and his Northern-centered election victory as the catalyst of an unnecessary national tragedy. In another perspective, some historians in this third, and in what we may call a later fourth period of Lincoln biography, began to see Lincoln's sudden and unlikely political success as nothing more than the work of a political opportunist. These historians did certainly not find any expression of a divine providence or a fortuitous twist of fate in Lincoln's rise to prominence and electoral victory, as Herndon and many others suggested. Although biographies in the golden age continued to lend support to an image of Lincoln as a national saint, a more critical approach also became discernible.²⁸ As historians in the 1950s and 1960s put renewed emphasis on Lincoln during the Civil War, his role in this crucial period also came under revision. This revisionism called into question the inevitability of the Civil War even as many minimized Lincoln's role in the outbreak of that war. This was prompted by new explanations and frameworks for understanding the causes of the war. These new models for interpreting history dominated the works by historians in this era.²⁹ All the while, Lincoln's nomination effort was largely neglected in this period, the most important work appearing was David H. Potter's 1976 *Impending Crisis, 1848-1860*, which launched a theory that Lincoln was essentially a so-called "dark horse" as he tried to seize the Republican nomination for President. However, the emphasis upon Lincoln's deficiencies as a military leader and as a reluctant emancipator, as critics argued, continued in the 1970s and 1980s. Stephen B. Oates' judgement of Herndon's work was typical of this period in Lincoln scholarship, as Oates deemed Herndon's work to be brimming with: "gossip, hearsay and legend."³⁰ In 1987, Fehrenbacher published *Lincoln in Text and Context*, trying to recount the historiography of Lincoln studies at the tail end of this revisionism movement. Revisionism was certainly coming to an end, Fehrenbacher asserted, and it should be noted that although critical works dominated the field in this period, some works depicting more positive images of Lincoln continued to emerge during the 1960s and after.

²⁸ Richard Hofstadter, Donald Riddle and Reinhard H. Luthin are among the historians who, at various points, have argued that Lincoln was a shrewd and devious man who used the slavery issue conveniently for his own benefit. See Fehrenbacher 1987, pages 189 and 193.

²⁹ Melve 2010, page 141.

³⁰ From Oates' 1984 *Lincoln The Man Behind the Legend*, page 6.

1990-2017: Re-investigating the gold-mine in the second golden age

Since the start of the 1990s, the field of Lincoln studies has flourished by putting new emphasis on Herndon's source-material. The emerging availability of these digitalized first-hand sources which also include Lincoln's own papers have made the last 25 years of research into a new golden-age. Paradoxically, this has taken place as new developments within the general field of academic history have moved scholars in quite different directions. For example, rather than focusing on powerful white men, the new impetus on social history during the cultural turn which started in the 70s, has focused more on cultural and social history, in addition to other previously neglected fields of history, like women's studies and ethnic minority histories. Yet, contrary to this focus, works on Abraham Lincoln have in the last twenty years thrived, with new and significant works appearing annually. Given Oates' judgement in 1984 of the revisionist era as a "renaissance" in Lincoln studies, perhaps it is fitting that leading Lincoln scholar Michael Burlingame has called the recent development "a virtual avalanche." Perhaps this phase therefore fittingly can be labelled "The Second Golden Age" of Lincoln studies.³¹

Although critical approaches to Lincoln continued into the late 1980s, the 1990s marked a new and significant wave of writing on Lincoln. Scholars were increasingly questioning the reasoning behind the first golden age's reluctance to acknowledge and implement certain first hand-sources in their academic works. There were also remnants of "old-school" approaches to Lincoln biography, including the work of the distinguished Lincoln scholar David Donald, who published his acclaimed biography *Lincoln* in 1995. Donald and his mentor, the aforementioned James G. Randall, had collectively devalued the source material of Herndon and questioned its historical authenticity. Earlier critics had noted specific examples of Herndon's exaggerations and myth-spreading, particularly tied to his negative portrayal of Mary Todd Lincoln. But Randall, Donald, and several other golden age historians expressed other doubts about stories of the early Lincoln, for example, those concerning the authenticity of Lincoln's alleged affair to Ann Rutledge. While the first generation of golden age historians deemed the story to be a myth because of the lack of primary source evidence, second golden age historians have re-visited this love story and deemed it highly likely to have taken place. Some have suggested that reassessments of some events related to limiting and criticizing personalized accounts may reflect the fact that historians have found significant evidence about Lin-

³¹ From Michael Burlingame's unpublished talk given at Knox College, September, 2016. Re-iterated with Burlingame's permission.

coln which stands in contrast to the glorified images conjured up by earlier stages of biographical construction.³²

The approach of historians in this fifth phase, if it can be so labelled, actually stands in contrast and opposition to the evidence-based assessments and conclusions drawn by first golden age historians. Those earlier scholars emphasized critical standards so much that this led to demoting reminiscences as a source-material almost completely. Instead, they focused on the facts confirmed by “hard-facts“. This approach meant rejecting, for instance, many of the sources published in William Herndon’s work. These sources had now, according to first golden age historians, become suspect, given the close nature of Herndon and Lincoln’s relationship. In the 1990s, however, scholars like Douglas Wilson, Rodney Davis, Michael Burlingame and Allen Guelzo addressed the vast material of oral sources on Lincoln quite differently. Burlingame, another prominent historian of the era and a leading Lincoln-scholar, is of the opinion that the digitalization of Herndon’s collection is the most important contribution to understanding the pre-presidential Lincoln since Basler’s publication of *Lincoln’s Collected Works* in 1953. He and others give more credence to the published accounts of interview recollections than did the first golden age biographers. Although the field of Lincoln biographies may seem immensely vast, the three most important contributors of the last seventy years were mentors and protégés of each other. Randall mentored David H. Donald, and Donald mentored Burlingame. But unlike Randall and Donald, who often discarded Herndon’s information, Burlingame has applied Herndon’s information vigorously in his extensive biography on Lincoln that appeared in 2008, *Abraham Lincoln: a Life*. This book, and many others in the period, did not treat Herndon’s vast source material of recollection and interview records “like nuclear waste,” at all. Rather, they chose to look at it as the “gold mine” it actually constituted, to use Davis’ and Burlingame’s terms.³³ The period coincided with the digital availability and subsequent study of primary sources which mentioned Lincoln - and includes materials relevant to his earlier life. Among other contributions, Donald and Virginia Fehrenbacher’s primary source database *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln* from 1996 contained hundreds of statements which Lincoln allegedly made. Like most sources on Lincoln, these documents contained reminiscences, but also contemporary first-hand sources including diaries, letters and newspapers. In addition, Douglas Wilson’s publication of *Herndon’s Informants* in 1998 stands as a turning point in the field of studies into Lincoln’s pre-presidential life, and into how Herndon’s collection was treated. Prior to Wilson’s efforts, Herndon’s collection had been preserved in the Library of Congress, but it

³² From Joshua Wolf Schenck’s 2005 *Lincoln’s melancholy*.

³³ “Like nuclear waste” is Schenck’s re-iteration of Rodney Davis’ terming of how the oral reminiscences were viewed, while the “gold mine” analogy is from a talk Michael Burlingame, given at Knox College. I have quoted Burlingame’s statements with his permission.

took a digitalization of Herndon's difficult handwriting to make his collection accessible to Lincoln scholars. Rodney Davis and Douglas' Wilson's digitalization of this archive has made available the sources on Lincoln's youth in Kentucky and Indiana and also his early time in New Salem, Illinois.

Some of the other contributions in this fifth period, which is still ongoing, have come from Doris Kearns Goodwin, Harold Holzer, and Eric Foner. Foner's works on Lincoln might be seen to represent a microcosm of the history of the last fifty years of writing on Lincoln. Initially, Foner had almost nothing positive to say about Lincoln, portraying him as less worthy of respect and admiration than had been granted at the beginning of the fourth critical/revisionist period in Lincoln scholarship. But Foner's later work presents a far more positive image of Lincoln, acknowledging Lincoln's role and views on slavery, both on a level of principles and, more precisely, as a significant contribution to the fight against its expansion, an issue under much debate among contemporary historians into the 21st century. Today, a new version of Lincoln's collected works is being compiled; this collection which will eventually be available online will feature the letters Lincoln received, and also the occasional document left out from Basler's *Collected Works*. The most important online publication in Lincoln studies is the *Abraham Lincoln Papers* made available at the Library of Congress, was first made accessible to the public in 1947. This archive mainly features Lincoln's incoming mail, unlike the 1953 version of Lincoln's collected works, which only features Lincoln's own writings.

1.3 Specification of research question

After reviewing the field of Lincoln biographies with an emphasis on the challenge of romantic and realistic elements within the interpretive tradition the thesis now returns to how to best structure the study of Lincoln's first nomination. Given Lincoln's lack of a nationally recognizable name as he entered the field of presidential hopefuls pursuing the Republican nomination in May 1860, we initially asked:

- *How did Lincoln become the Republican nominee for president in 1860?*

As the thesis will show, without an introduction to the theme of Lincoln's first nomination, this may appear as a logical question to ask. Although the work of the organization Lincoln set in place to lobby for his nomination in 1860 is indispensable for an understanding of how Lincoln became the Republican nominee, it is not the primary focus of this thesis. Rather, Lincoln's own actions constitutes the scope of the exposition. The thesis argues that the research question worth

asking is not how Lincoln became the Republican nominee for President, considering historians are in virtual agreement on this point. Around another question, however, there exists far greater controversy. Structured around this question, the thesis tries to encompass historiographical aspects of a question of historic significance:

- *Was Lincoln an integral part of the process which led to his nomination in 1860?*

Although at first glance the field of research on Lincoln's nomination might seem overwhelming, anyone who intends to research this period may seek comfort in the lack of, rather than the richness, lack of," "richness of," of primary sources into this period in Lincoln's life and how he was able to be nominated President in 1860. Despite the vast array of biographies on Lincoln and the continued interest in his life, one might be surprised to learn that the sources for Lincoln's role in his nomination effort is based on just a few first-hand sources. Benchmark years for research into this process include the publication of Lincoln's law partner William H. Herndon's *Herndon's Lincoln* in 1888 and *the Complete Abraham Lincoln Papers* at the Library of Congress, consisting of 20,000 documents, including telegrams, incoming mail, and drafts of Lincoln's speeches. *The Lincoln papers* was published in 1947 and digitalized in 1985, to the avail of anyone researching Lincoln's first nomination. Important years also include 1953 when *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* was published by the Abraham Lincoln Association under the leadership of editor, Roy P. Basler. This represented a watershed moment for Lincoln research, and a publication which has spurred subsequent research into Lincoln's life, including those investigating his effort to gain the nomination.

In the next chapter, which constitutes the first of three narrative-driven chapters, the thesis will, after a short background section, start a depiction of Lincoln's political life focused on the research question posed above. On November 4, 1858, Lincoln was defeated for the U.S. Senate by Democratic Senator Stephen A. Douglas. As the thesis will show, Douglas was an integral part of Lincoln's political life. As already mentioned, in 1849, when Lincoln retired from Congress, he left politics altogether, expecting never to return. But in 1854, a piece of legislation known as the Kansas-Nebraska Act was introduced by Douglas, and it brought Lincoln out of political retirement. The same year he was defeated for the Senate. It was not before 1858 he again found a chance to share a platform with Douglas to debate the ramifications of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. By now, the organization that had been established to combat the legislation was known as the Republican party. Along with its emergence, Lincoln had become a principled spokesman against slavery's westward expansion, which the Kansas-Nebraska Act had facilitated. Following seven publicized

debates between Lincoln and Douglas, Lincoln was defeated for the second time in a row. But only one and a half years later, Lincoln would be nominated president. How was this possible?

Lincoln's 1858 debates with the far more prominent Democrat Stephen A. Douglas had thrust him into the national spotlight. This however, would not have been enough for Lincoln to emerge as a possible candidate for the presidential nomination in and of itself. In order to understand how Lincoln's status as a candidate increased during the period, it is vital to review some of Lincoln's activity, examine some of his speeches, and study his political correspondence. These words and actions after the a second Senate election defeat provide the key for understanding Lincoln's work toward the nomination and how he came to be recognized as a candidate who might plausibly win the presidency for the Republicans. Given the glorified image of Lincoln as elevated above the field of politics and horse-trading (an image tainted by romanticism and mythological thinking), a new investigation is needed to discuss academically Lincoln's personal role in his nomination effort. Through this investigation, the thesis will shed light on the "strikingly dissimilar" portrayals of Lincoln in the 1840s and 60s, focusing on the transitional 1850s through three study questions supplementing the research questioned posed above. These supplementary questions investigate the diverging portrayals of Lincoln:

1. Why is Lincoln portrayed as being in a political transition during the mid-1850s? Is there any reason to portray Lincoln as "too pure" for politics, or is this depiction merely a "romantic" image greatly enhanced, exaggerated?
2. What steps do the historical documents indicate that Lincoln took during his quest for the presidential nomination and how did Lincoln's own actions, along with the cooperation of other Illinois Republicans make his nomination at first feasible and eventually plausible?
3. When can historians assert that Lincoln himself decided to make a push for the Presidency and on what sources does such impressions stem?

1.4 Historic storytelling

Given that the story of Lincoln's first presidential nomination has been told many times, is it still possible to tell this story in a new fashion? The amount of research into this crucial theme of American history should lead one to believe that the theme of Lincoln's first nomination can only be

told convincingly in a certain way. However, this thesis investigates the context from which Lincoln was nominated and launched his presidential campaign and tries to tell a new story of Lincoln's first nomination. It is, depending on the perspective, the story of a man who carefully built his image as a statesman, mainly through various praise-worthy speeches, while maintaining and cultivating an image as a modest and ordinary man. Yet, behind the scenes, is it possible that Abraham Lincoln himself became the chief strategist behind his nomination? That is, rather than transcending the realities of 1850s politics, was Lincoln an active, successful participant in political struggles? The thesis narrates a story about a man who was deeply engaged with a political issue with a clear ideology to lead a fight against a specific piece of slavery-expansion legislation. This thesis is constructed as the account of an ambitious politician who came to power with a clear goal both for public policy and his own political career. A story of Lincoln's first nomination can be the story of a man who fails, but tries again, an account of an Illinois politician who runs a successful law practice, but who is on the constant lookout for new career opportunities in the political arena.

Thesis exposition

Since the 1960s, many theoreticians of history-writing have claimed that the most "fundamental historical explanation method is to tell a story."³⁴ In this context, this story of how Lincoln was nominated focuses on how he was in a position to launch his candidacy, how it was launched, and how it gained momentum. This thesis briefly assesses the chances of other likely nominees in 1859 and also sketches something of what took place in the National Republican Convention in May 1860 as Lincoln and his allies worked to secure his nomination. In a word: the thesis will examine the principal factors of Lincoln's nomination, primarily through an academic approach to the realities of American politics in the 1850s. In describing some of the methodical issues at the core of the research, it will address several historiographical debates on the literature that discusses Lincoln's nomination. In the main part of this thesis, chapters two, three and four, the thesis presents a historical narrative for two reasons. First, to highlight that a story of Lincoln's first nomination can indeed be told differently and secondly, as a conscious way of cultivating a certain historical narrative, void of source-critical within the main text and in the footnotes. Being aware that this is a bold move given its apparent willingness to neglect the source-critical discussions indispensable to any serious work of academic history, this thesis to the contrary features such a discussion in chapter five. This chapter will discuss an overall impression of Lincoln which has colored the way

³⁴ From Andresen, Rosland, Ryymin, Skålevåg 2012 *Understanding the Past*, page 133, own translation.

his involvement in his first nomination is portrayed. Furthermore, this chapter will discuss two crucial events - unknown to the reader until this discussion - which are integral parts of the thesis' narrative on how Lincoln was nominated. However, part of this story has not been told by other historians (and we will later see why), and it is therefore left to the reader to decide, after reading the main part and ensuing source discussion, if this is a credible way of explaining how Lincoln was nominated. Hopefully, this twist preserves some of the excitement and openness for the reader while also critically and thoroughly challenging past assumptions of the theme of Lincoln's first nomination afterwards.

1.5 Methodological issues

In 1858, Lincoln ran for a seat in the U.S. Senate for the second time. During this campaign, he allegedly confided to German journalist Henry Villard that his wife Mary was sure that he one day would become a Senator, and then "President of the United States." Lincoln found the whole idea funny, exclaiming: "Just think of a sucker as me as President!"³⁵ This story is a favorite of many Lincoln biographers.³⁶ But for a historian, asking if a story like this is true is not as important as noting that the repetition of stories like this projects a particular image of Lincoln to his contemporaries and later reviewers of his life.

The thesis exposition of Lincoln historiography demonstrates that a nuanced depiction of Lincoln's transitional years is a notoriously challenging task for the historian. Thus, the thesis acknowledges that uncovering the "real Abraham Lincoln", and determining with certainty how he was able to gain a presidential nomination is an impossible task. This acknowledgment is, for any historian, not conceding defeat or expressing cynicism with regards to recovering key aspects of the past. Rather, this is a realistic acknowledgment of the limitations inherent in all types of historical investigation. Given the limitations of the historians craft, one must still conduct unbiased and independent investigations and spend much time reviewing some portion of the biographical resources available - whatever their mix of romantic and realistic elements.

As a scientific and hermeneutical enterprise, historical research calls for critical assessment of multiple sources and thoughtful choices about which to consider reliable and germane to a given research project. This is a key aspect of historical discourse and of academic history itself. As one consider how Lincoln gained the 1860 nomination, one investigate the relevant available sources,

³⁵ Henry Villard, *Memories of Lincoln*, appearing in *Atlantic Monthly* in February 1904, page 167.

³⁶ Take David Donald in his 1995 *Lincoln*, page 235 as an example.

and instead of steering clear of previous historical works, one acknowledge and critique them, in effect building on the scholarship of the past. In adding to the discourse, this thesis contributes its own narratives, explanations, and the thesis' tentative answers to difficult research questions. Yet, this thesis strives to be independent of the conclusions of past historians.

Source material

In addition to Nicolay, Hay and Herndon, other contemporaries of Lincoln wrote biographies on Abraham Lincoln after his death. Most of these authors were his friends and colleagues from his home state, Illinois. Of these friends, Ward Hill Lamon, Henry C. Whitney, and Gustave Koerner wrote full-length biographies. This thesis refers to these works, although keeping a critical distance from their views of Lincoln.³⁷ As Andresen et. al puts it: "Having been an eyewitness gives no guarantees that this account is a neutral and reliable depiction of a phenomena."³⁸ For instance, we know that William Herndon despised Mary Lincoln, something his portrayal of her clearly indicates. In part, this antipathy to Mary Todd Lincoln was why Herndon also alienated himself from Robert Lincoln who had gained custody over his mother when she became institutionalized after Lincoln's death. When Robert gained control over his father's works, he denied Herndon access to these papers.

There are several important criteria which historians use of to assess the reliability of first-hand sources. These criteria focus on assessing the accuracy of depictions of an event, and making judgements on the authors' will or incentive to be accurate.³⁹ The selection process in this thesis was thus to find reminiscences that mentioned Lincoln's nomination effort, mantaining critical judgment on the reliability of particular recollections. Equally important has been noting how other scholars have treated these sources. The recollections of Lincoln as compiled by historians, journalists and laymen often have a penchant to highlight the author's special relationship to Lincoln, a claim

³⁷ Examples include: *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, with Sketches of Generals Grant, Sherman And McClellan, Judge Davis, Leonard Swett and other contemporaries*, Herndon, William H., Weik, Jesse W. (1889) *Herndon's Life of Lincoln, The History and Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln*, Whitney, Henry C. (1907) *Lincoln the Citizen, February 12th 1809 to March 4, 1861* Hay, John, Nicolay John G. (Editor)(1904) *A Short Life of Abraham Lincoln, condensed from Nicolay & Hay's Abraham Lincoln: A history*, Reeves, Owen T., Ewing, James S., Morgan, Richard PAGE, Blades, Franklin, Bunn, John W. (1910) *Abraham Lincoln, by some men who knew him*, Rockwell, Rufus Wilson (editor), (1945) *Intimate memories of Lincoln*, Thorndike, Allen Rice (Editor) (1886) *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of his Time*, Allen Thorndike Rice, editor, *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln*, Hamilton, James A. (1869) *The Reminiscences of James A. Hamilton, Men and events at home and abroad, during three quarters of a century*.

³⁸ Andresen et. al 2012, page 74, own translation.

³⁹ Andresen et al. 2012, page 74, own translation.

of intimate ties and access to significant information. This is likely because the authors gathered information and wrote biographies after Lincoln's assassination and his subsequent elevation into a national hero—a savior-martyr. And one might ask: which of his contemporary supporters would deny themselves the chance to claim intimacy with such a figure and the chance to assert special knowledge of their hero? Of course, a critical historian should be wary of such claims and take into account how the post-assassination transformation of Lincoln's image might color the first-generation biographers' accounts.

This thesis has employed many first-hand sources to verify quotations found in other historians' works. As such, this thesis has also been a re-reading of first-hand sources and historical literature on the theme of Lincoln's first nomination. Often, this literature has aided the thesis' research in terms of the selection of sources. In the case of Lincoln's own works, however, the thesis had conducted its own thorough research. Besides constituting the majority of my source-material, Lincoln's letters, drafts and speeches have been used to construct a narrative, establish a timeline of his actions and, not least, has colored the thesis' interpretations greatly. This has made it possible to conduct a somewhat independent historical investigation into Lincoln's nomination effort, although this work has by no means been void of influence by other historians. The thesis' interpretation of these primary sources indicate that Lincoln played an essential and quite active role in his nomination effort, a more active role than is often portrayed in biographical works depicting the period after the Lincoln-Douglas debates to his election victory in the fall of 1860. The thesis emphasizes Lincoln's own effort as it discovered that this concealed effort could only be outlined through a certain "reading between the lines" not evident or even discernible in the first reading. This level of interpretation demanded careful reading of the sources and a placement of their meaning in relation to what we can infer about Lincoln and his supporters' behavior in this crucial period. In order to do this linkage, the thesis acknowledges reliance on several other historians' narratives about the political actions that were taken, and the arguments through which they have built this narrative.

The two collections used for Lincoln's own works have been Roy Basler, Marion Dolores Pratt and Lloyd A. Dunlap's *The Collected Corks of Abraham Lincoln*, Volumes I to VII. Donald E. Fehrenbacher's *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Speeches and Writings 1832-1858*, and his *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Speeches and Writings, 1859-1865* has also been consulted.⁴⁰ In addition, there are examples of other primary sources such as newspapers and journals,

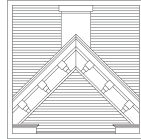
⁴⁰ Almost all mentions I have applied from Lincoln's Collected Works stems from Basler's CW. For the sake of simplicity, references to Basler's collected works is referred to as *CW* with a following number suggesting volume and the number preceding indicating the page. *CW* Vol III, page 45 indicates a reference to Basler's third volume of *the Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln* at page 45. Where the thesis refers to Fehrenbacher's collection, that collection is referred to as "Fehrenbacher 1989, volume ..., page ..", so as to avoid confusion.

but Lincoln's collected works and the Lincoln papers constitute the majority of this type of sources, and where newspapers and journals are referred to, it is mostly from references in a particular historian's work. The annotation of the thesis will make clear these references and their sources.

The history of an expanding America, the transient nature of the political parties in the 1850s, and the complexity of the slavery debates in this final decade before the Civil War all constitute a general framework as the 1860 Republican Party chooses Lincoln as its candidate. And one might mention the local history of the Illinois Republicans and the dynamic tensions among its leader, — but that is a topic for another work. History's verdict of Lincoln's first nomination contains elements of romanticism, and this has clouded his effort in some mystery.

Therefore, it is important to preface the following history by asking and reflecting on: How was the narrative of Lincoln's "comeback" constructed by earlier historians and his own contemporaries? What conflicts and varieties of interpretation do these narratives and analyses reveal? On what sources do historians rely as they consider how Lincoln gained the Republican nomination for President; what sources are available and most significant for today's historians to tell a story about the resurgent and pre-presidential politician Abraham Lincoln? How do historical documents indicate what steps Lincoln took to establish himself as a viable or at least plausible nominee for President?

Neither dead nor dying



Although the America of the of the 1830 to 1860 period is often remembered as a fragile, chaotic and divided country, it should be noted that the nation was, especially in comparison to equivalent democratic projects around the world, a remarkably stable, prosperous and consolidated nation-state. Yet, it was far from the only emergent nation-state in the eighteenth nineteenth century who through violent rebellion had rid their shackles from the grips of an aristocratic sovereign ruler claiming to have a divine right to rule his subjects as he saw fit. During the 19th century, republican revolutions were erupting all over Europe and on the American peninsula, often modelling their rebellions and constitutions after the French and American ideals which sought to limit the power of the executive in place of separation of power between three equal branches of government. But unlike many of the other fledgling democracies in Europe and South America, the American democracy proved astoundingly robust, despite several resilient threats to societal cohesiveness and the challenges of rapid economic, political and geographic expansion. Although consisting of a growing number of states with vastly different economic and societal motives, the common American constitution adopted in 1789 ensured the rights of every American citizen's "life, liberty" and even his "pursuit of happiness". Ensuring the American people would never again submit to an all-powerful rule, the system designed by the founding fathers was based on the principle of popular

sovereignty, which meant that the people would choose its ruler and the laws from which that ruler would govern, with the judicial and legislative branch checking the power of the president.

By the 1840s, the Union had grown to 29 United States, in the process becoming a consolidated, well-functioning liberal democracy providing a beacon of light for “the liberty party throughout the world” as local politician Abraham Lincoln from the western state Illinois professed.¹ Yet, even since its conception, this beacon of light - whose founders had proclaimed that “all men are created equal” - had its share of significant and glaring challenges, some of which threatened the very existence of a united federation. When an outside observer, the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville travelled around America in the 1840s, he refused to believe in the effectiveness and existence of any government that was, in his words: “called upon to hold together forty different nations spread over a territory equal to one half of Europe, to avoid all rivalry, ambition and struggles between them.”² In more than one respect, Tocqueville’s assessment had a legitimate basis. When the founding fathers wrote the constitution, they had struggled with how to reconcile the states on the issue of slavery, which contradicted the “self-evident” principle that “all men are created equal” on which the nation had been built. Increasingly, slavery was dividing the nation in half. Staunching, southerners defended slavery, arguing it was essential to their way of life. Meanwhile, northerners, who were not dependent upon slaves to sustain their economy, favored its gradual abolition, deeming the “peculiar institution” to be unbefitting of the beacon of light “for the liberty party throughout the world”, the democratic and well-functioning United States had become.³

I

Born in 1809, twenty years after the adoption of the constitution of this project - a constitution which guaranteed slavery’s right to exist in the South - Abraham Lincoln did not observe the repercussions of slavery before he settled in Illinois in 1831. As a young man holding several odd jobs in primitive Illinoisan communities, Lincoln first encountered the harsh realities of the peculiar institution.

¹ From a speech by Lincoln on October 16, 1854 at Peoria, Illinois, Basler’s CW, vol II,

² From Alexis De Tocqueville’s *Democracy in America*, 1998 edition page 366. The inclusion of Tocqueville’s prediction in the context of Victorian America is taken from Potter and Fehrenbacher 1976, page 6.

³ Potter 1976, page 228; Zinn 2003, page 189.

Working on a steamboat transporting goods to New Orleans at the age of 20 the young Abraham encountered a large number of slaves. Later in life, the sight of a gang of slaves along the Mississippi was a “continued torment” to Lincoln.⁴ At a young age he entered politics and became a Whig politician under the leadership of his political idol Kentuckian Whig leader Henry Clay, Lincoln’s “beau ideal of a statesman.” In this capacity, Lincoln saw the problem slavery posed to the Union.⁵ Adopting traditional Whig views on most issues, he ran for the state legislature promoting the view that white male citizens who paid taxes or “bear arms” should have the right to vote.⁶ Like most other Illinois politicians, however, he did not believe that African Americans or women for that matter, were entitled to cast a ballot. By the mid-1830s, Lincoln had become a state politician, and given the opportunity, he tried to combat slavery legislatively. When he failed in that endeavor, he and a party colleague went a step further and issued a statement saying slavery was “founded on both injustice and bad policy,” an extremely radical statement for a politician in central Illinois in the 1830s, where public opinion did not support anything even resembling outright abolitionism.⁷ However, Lincoln was, neither personally nor publically, a radical man and by no means an abolitionist. By nature, he was cautious, and the previously cited statement, it should be noted, also included Lincoln’s belief that “the promulgation of abolition doctrines tends rather to increase than to abate its evils.” Politically, slavery was explosive. Lincoln instead adopted a principled argument, claiming that “the Congress of the United States has no power, under the constitution, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the different States.”, and thus, should be left alone.⁸ Instead he became an advocate for re-colonizing African Americans. Lincoln promoted the idea as a possible compromise to the seemingly insurmountable controversy before eventually abandoning the scheme, realizing full-scale removal of the slave population was practically “impossible.”⁹ After serving in the Illinois state legislature for four terms, from 1847 to 1849 he witnessed up close the difficulty in efforts to abolish slavery from the nation’s capital while serving in the United States House of Representatives as a Whig Congressman in Washington D.C.¹⁰ A major challenge testing Lincoln and his colleagues in Congress and Tocqueville’s prediction came in 1848. Following

⁴ Basler’s *CW* vol II, page 230. Lincoln’s letter to Joshua Speed from August 24, 1855 show how sight of a gang of slaves came to torment him.

⁵ “Beau ideal” from Lincoln’s first campaign autobiography from December 20, 1859, Abraham Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell, Basler’s *CW* 1953, Vol III, page 511-512.

⁶ “bear arms” from Lincoln’s letter to the editor of the Springfield Journal, June 13, 1836, Basler’s *CW*, Vol I, page 48; Donald 1995, page 59.

⁷ See Burlingame’s 2008: *Abraham Lincoln, A life*, pages 397-398; “bad policy” from Lincoln and Dan Stone’s protest in the Illinois state legislature, March 3, 1837, Basler’s *CW*, Vol I, page 75.

⁸ From Lincoln and Dan Stone’s protest on March 3, 1837, Basler’s *CW*, vol I, page 75.

⁹ From his speech that since became famous at Peoria, Basler *CW*, Volume II, page 255.

¹⁰ Donald H. Riddle’s chapter on Lincoln’s political career in Eisenhower et al. Al’s, 1958, *Abraham Lincoln 150th Anniversary*, page 51.

the Mexican war, Democratic president James K. Polk had acquired an immense territory that was to be organized and admitted to the Union. Similar challenges had been raised and resolved after president Jefferson's 1803 Louisiana Purchase when Congress restricted slavery geographically by containing it to the southern parts of the new states admitted to the union, codified into national law by the so-called Missouri Compromise in 1820. Since then, states had been admitted on the principle of parity, for every slave state admitted, a free state would be admitted. But the conflict was resolved in 1850, when the bi-partisan "Compromise of 1850" essentially confirmed that slavery would not expand geographically. Thus, the Union withstood even this contentious test of its continued unified existence as the Congressional decision seemed to lay the groundwork for the continued growth, prosperity and unity of the nation.

Lincoln's personal life went through its share of difficulties in this period, as well. In 1842, Lincoln had married Mary, and in 1850 their second son four-year-old Edward succumbed to tuberculosis. Tragically, of the four sons Lincoln and Mary raised together, only one would live beyond the age eighteen. In his political career, things were not much better. In 1849, he had left Congress at the age of forty with little left to show for his public service except the moniker "Spotty Lincoln." In Congress, Lincoln had opposed Polk's Mexican War by demanding proof that the United States had owned the "spot" where first blood had been drawn, which allegedly had been the cause of the war.¹¹ In 1849, Lincoln withdrew from national politics, failing to gain re-nomination to his seat. Adding insult to injury, the seat Lincoln had held from a staunchly Whig District elected a Democrat to succeed him.¹²

Practicing law "more assiduously" than ever before, as he later put it, Lincoln expected to be done with politics as he returned to his prospering law practice with younger partner William Herndon.¹³ Escaping the controversial slavery issue, and for the most part, politics altogether, Lincoln instead focused on his legal practice and peaceful family life. In "want of mental training and method," as Herndon noted, and seeing no possibilities for higher office, it seemed that his professional life had "almost superseded the thought of politics in his mind," as his 1860 campaign biography noted.¹⁴ Believing that the Compromise of 1850 brokered between Henry Clay and Democratic Senator and Chairman of the Committee on the Territories, Stephen A. Douglas, had "settled forever" the questions surrounding slavery, Lincoln preferred to avoid pondering solutions

¹¹ Donald 1995, page 128.

¹² Whitney 1908, page 257.

¹³ From Abraham Lincoln's autobiography sent to Jesse W. Fell December 20, 1859 in Basler's *CW*, 1953, Vol III page 512.

¹⁴ "and method" from Herndon and Weik's 1888 Herndon's Lincoln, page 307, "his mind" from Abraham Lincoln's 1860 campaign autobiography, Abraham Lincoln to John L. Scripps, Circa June, 1860 in Basler's *CW* Vol IV, page 67.

to slavery. The issue was seemingly explosive and insolvable, and there seemed to be no avenues in which Lincoln could play a role to abate its eventual abolition.¹⁵ But Lincoln's views on slavery, and the man himself, were evolving. By abandoning the colonization scheme, Lincoln, like many northern Whigs, sought solace in the belief that if left alone, slavery would die out on its own accord.

II

But the slavery issue was not left alone. In 1854 came a piece of legislation organizing the western territories of Kansas and Nebraska introduced by Illinoisan Democratic Senator, Stephen A. Douglas. To speed along the process of admitting Kansas and Nebraska to the union - an issue equally important to railroad speculators as to the settlers in this region - Douglas proposed admitting the states "with or without slavery, as their constitution may prescribe."¹⁶ This was what Douglas - legitimizing his proposal by invoking the founding fathers - called his "popular sovereignty doctrine" which stated that the population of a given territory or state could decide in their state constitutions whether to permit or forbid slavery. The only problem with this approach was that the 1850 compromise, which had been meant to "settle the issue forever", had continued to restrict slavery north of the 36° 30' latitude line (established by the Missouri Compromise.) As Kansas and Nebraska lay north of this line, this made it easy for fellow Democrats, Free-Soilers, or Whigs like Lincoln, to attack slavery's westward expansion under any provision of "popular sovereignty." Although it was not Douglas' intent, he was now (whether he liked it or not), forced to address slavery, and when he returned to Illinois where he had quipped that he "could make his way home by the light of the burning effigies," he was met by the presence of Lincoln, agitated by the legislation, who was pondering a return to politics and looking for a chance to oppose the Senator in a public debate.¹⁷

The two soon renewed their rivalry, which dated back from their days in the Illinois State legislature. The rivalry would come to define Lincoln's resurgent political career, and Douglas would

¹⁵ "settled forever", from Lincoln's 1860 Cooper Union Address, February 27, 1860, New York in Fehrenbacher's *CW* 1989, page 112.

¹⁶ Potter and Fehrenbacher 1976, page 146-147.

¹⁷ Douglas' own testimony in Gardner, 1905, page 217.

increasingly acknowledge Lincoln's abilities and be forced to defend his Kansas-Nebraska Act from one end of Illinois to the other, with Lincoln on his coattails. At the heart of Douglas' and Lincoln's disagreement over the Kansas-Nebraska Act was their differing view of the African American. Lincoln conceded that abolishing slavery, making former slaves "politically and socially our equals," was impossible, but he nonetheless regarded the Negro as a man – created equal – and he thus deserved the same legal status as any other man.¹⁸ Douglas, by contrast, found no principled argument which could convince him that a slave was to be considered as anything more than property. Thus, he found no contradiction in leaving it up to the White settlers of Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves how to manage their possessions. This would remain the essence of Douglas' popular sovereignty doctrine, namely that citizens of a given state had the right to decide for themselves how to regulate their property. According to Douglas, this was a privilege the United States Congress could not legally regulate for the state citizens, contrary to what U.S. history had shown. In effect, Congress should stay out of this decision making process, at least that was how Douglas was defending his controversial legislation. Yet, there was much to criticize about Douglas' Act. Lincoln, who had not seen any chance to combat slavery nor return to politics suddenly found a golden opportunity to both. Suddenly, he had returned, and his opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act even propelled him to run for the U.S. Senate as an Anti-Nebraska Whig in 1854. Faithful to his party and weary of radical sentiments, he initially distanced himself from the growing Anti-Nebraska organization that soon took the name of the Republican Party. Yet after his defeat for the U.S. Senate seat from Illinois (which went to Anti-Nebraska Democrat Lyman Trumbull), Lincoln joined the Republican Party in the summer of 1855, realizing it was the only viable vehicle through which he could strive for public office. By now, Lincoln had grown pessimistic about the prospects of slavery's peaceful abolition in the United States. To a friend he pondered, in a metaphor he was later to employ with great conviction: "Can we as a nation continue together permanently – forever half slave and half free?"¹⁹

But without public office to strive for, Lincoln felt there was little he could do. On May 29, 1856, he made an important speech which established him as an important figure in the Republican Party in Illinois, but apart from a series of "lost speeches" in the 1856 presidential campaign, where he unknowingly had received 110 votes as a Vice-presidential candidate at the Republican national convention, Lincoln returned to his law practice, waiting for the next opportunity to oppose Douglas.²⁰ The 1856 so-called Bloomington Convention established the Republican Party in Illinois, and by this time, Lincoln had become an important voice in this Anti-Nebraska organization. The

¹⁸ Abraham Lincoln in debate with Douglas at Ottawa, Illinois, August 21, 1858 in Basler's *CW* Vol II, page 262.

¹⁹ Abraham Lincoln to George Robertson, August 15, 1855 in Basler's *CW* Vol II, page 231.

²⁰ Whitney 1908, page 257, 258.

adoption of a cautionary resolution on the question of slavery on the suggestion of Lincoln compelled him to abandon the Whig cause permanently, as the new party better reflected his views on how to deal with slavery. According to the Convention: "Congress" possessed "full power to prohibit slavery in the territories," and the "National Constitution" ensured "justice, humanity" to its citizens, which required that the power of government "should be exerted to prevent the extension of slavery into territory heretofore free."²¹ Rather than being identified as a radical abolitionist, Lincoln sought to restore the Missouri Compromise of 1820 that originally had restricted slavery geographically. Having no record of illustrious public service to show (at least as a nationally-oriented politician), Lincoln had to wait until 1858 for his chance to oppose Douglas when the Republican Party of Illinois nominated him as its candidate for the U.S. Senate seat from Illinois to be elected in the fall of 1858. By accepting the nomination, Lincoln renewed his dispute with Douglas, who had broken with his Democratic Administration over the acceptance of the so-called Lecompton Constitution in Kansas.²² By rejecting the pro-slavery Lecompton Constitution, arguing against its validity, Douglas had become an anti-slavery hero to some eastern Republicans who were eager for him to become an anti-slavery leader even within the Republican party or possibly to become a leader of a new Anti-Democratic organization. The Illinois Republicans would have none of the sort, and they endorsed Lincoln as its "first and only choice" for U.S. Senator.²³ In a somewhat surprising use of language, by employing the ultra-radical metaphor he had used in writing a private letter to his friend three years earlier, Lincoln now stated publicly that the nation could not endure half slave and half free. No, Lincoln asserted, "A house divided itself cannot stand." Furthermore, by denouncing Douglas, Lincoln set the table for a public showdown of seven debates between the old rivals.²⁴ The seven highly publicized debates of 1858 established Lincoln as a nationally acclaimed politician, and if not the equal to Douglas, the debates demonstrated clearly to Lincoln, and to many others in the Republican Party, that he was at least a match for the Senator. But despite Lincoln's strong showing, the closely fought Illinois election could only have one winner, and again Lincoln would be the loser.

III

²¹ Whitney 1908, page 260.

²² From Fehrenbacher's 1962 *Prelude to Greatness, Lincoln in the 1850's*, page 49-50.

²³ Fehrenbacher 1987, page 39.

²⁴ Fehrenbacher's, *CW* 1989, Vol II, page 426.

On November 16, 1858, Lincoln sat down and crafted a letter to Norman B. Judd, a powerful Illinois Republican leader who had helped Lincoln arrange his debates against Douglas. Two weeks had passed since the Senate election. Yet, despite his most recent defeat, Lincoln maintained to Judd that “the fight must go on”. “The fight” Lincoln was referring to was the political endeavors to restrict slavery’s westward expansion.²⁵ To another supporter, he wrote: “The cause of civil liberty must not be surrendered at the end of one or even one hundred defeats.”²⁶ Knowing full well that his political career, the future electoral success of the Republican party and perhaps its entire existence all hinged on the upcoming presidential election in November, 1860, Lincoln quickly shifted focus from the local election to the approaching and crucial national election in two years time. In 1856, the fledgling Republican party had nominated General John C. Frémont as its presidential candidate. With him on the national ticket, the Republicans had gained the majority of votes in all Northern states apart from four northern states, Illinois, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Indiana. To many, it seemed that the Republican party was poised to gain the presidency in 1860.

Looking beyond Lincoln’s highly publicized debates and defeat at the hands of Douglas, the fall elections of 1858 had demonstrated that the Republicans were a party on the rise. As the local elections of 1858 ended, the unofficial Republican canvass for a suitable presidential candidate in little over a year in May 1860 got underway. After his second defeat in a row for the Senate, those not familiar with the apportionment of electoral districts in Illinois (which heavily favored Democratic candidates), or with Lincoln’s effort in the late debates with Douglas, were probably ruling someone like him out to become the next Republican nominee for president. These detractors were skeptical of Lincoln, to the extent that some even questioned if he had written his own speeches in the debates with Douglas. Others, with greater knowledge of the man, had more legitimate doubts as to whether Lincoln would be able to muster nationwide support if he became the Republican standard-bearer.²⁷ Being aware of these drawbacks and of his reputation as a western politician with little or no name-recognition in the populous and crucial eastern states, Lincoln himself probably looked at the upcoming presidential canvass, if anything, as an opportunity to establish himself as a nationally acclaimed Republican figure. And if there was a seat for him in a Republican cabinet or possibly even on the national ticket, that wouldn’t hurt much either.

²⁵ Lincoln to Judd on November 16, 1858, from Roy Basler’s *Abraham Lincoln’s Collected Works* published in 1953 Volume 3, pages 336, 337.

²⁶ Abraham Lincoln to Henry Asbury, November 19, 1858 in Basler, *CW* Vol III, page 339.

²⁷ Lamon 1872, page 420.

IV

Still, no matter how cheerful he was appearing, Lincoln was secretly devastated over the close loss to Douglas. Forced to put on his “generous loser mask”, Lincoln resumed his private and professional life in Springfield in November and December of 1858. This was a role he had played gallantly many times before, and he was comforted by the numerous consolatory compliments paid to him by old Illinoisan friends and, somewhat surprisingly, from political supporters from other states. David Davis, Lincoln’s longtime Illinoisan friend and colleague from the Eight Judicial circuit wrote him: “You have nothing to blame yourself for – you have made a noble canvass ... which has earned you a national reputation.”²⁸

But even a newfound national reputation did not console Lincoln on January 5, 1859. After a grueling day in court, he dragged himself up the stairs to his law office on Sixth and Adams Street in downtown Springfield.²⁹ Across the street, the democratically controlled state legislature had convened for the first time since the election, officially selecting Stephen A. Douglas to be the U.S. Senator from Illinois earlier that day.³⁰ To his friends, Lincoln admitted that he thought his second defeat in a row for the Senate would cause him to “sink out of view,” once again, just as he had after his near-withdrawal from politics after his undistinguished term in Congress had ended in 1849. Just like after his loss of the U.S. Senate seat to Trumbull in 1854, Lincoln must have felt frustrated that, despite how he personally performed, it translated to little or no success at the polls.³¹ The system of pre-17th amendment local politics meant that senators were chosen by the majority of state legislatures rather than “on a direct vote of the people”. In this system, Lincoln enjoyed little political success. Later, he would boast that only once was he defeated when the

²⁸ Letter from David Davis to Abraham Lincoln November 7, 1858 in Abraham Lincoln papers, document 0146300, Library of Congress.

²⁹ Schenk, Baringer 1960, Lincoln, 1854-1861, being the Day-by Day Activities of Abraham Lincoln from January 1, 1854 to March 4, 1861, Vol II, page 239.

³⁰ From Donald’s 1948 *Lincoln’s Herndon*, page 126.

³¹ Abraham Lincoln to Anson G. Henry November 19, 1858 in Basler’s *CW* vol III, page 339.

people directly would elect their candidate.³² Secluded in his and Herndon's law office, which for years had functioned as part-time law office, part-time sanctuary, Lincoln no longer had to keep up the appearance of the magnanimous loser. Even those old friends who had known Lincoln for a long time, like Henry C. Whitney, Lincoln's friend from the circuit and a later Lincoln-biographer, were stunned in finding Lincoln as down as he was on that day in January. Whitney, who had seen his share of Lincoln's rollercoaster moods, later reported never having seen any man in the state, let alone Lincoln so "gloomy, dejected and dispirited." As he remembered the sight of his crushed friend: "I never saw any man so radically and thoroughly depressed, so completely steeped in the bitter waters of hopeless despair."³³ Suffering from what today by all trademarks would be characterized as a serious recurring clinical depression, the forty-nine year old Lincoln lamented to his friends who had come to console him: "I expect everyone to desert me now, but Billy", referring to Herndon.³⁴ Herndon and his contemporaries, not equipped with the vocabulary of a 20th century psychiatrist often described this side of Lincoln's personality as his "melancholy". Vividly, Herndon would later describe that at times, Lincoln's melancholy was almost "dripping" from him as he walked. Some days, Lincoln could enter the law office, sit down and stare empty into space, as if in a trance.³⁵ "No element of Mr. Lincoln's character was so marked, obvious and ingrained as his mysterious and profound melancholy.", Whitney would later put it.³⁶ Lincoln's depressing proclamations were nothing new to his friends. But his prophecy that he had spoiled his best chance to reach public office since his return to politics was not completely unwarranted. Neither were his and many other Republicans fears that the Republican Party as they knew it would disintegrate entirely to give way for a new Anti-Slavery Anti-Democratic organization. For once, Lincoln's outlook was grounded in the realities confronting him rather than in his depressive outlook.

Far from a well-organized or harmonious political organization, The Republican Party, both nationally and especially in Illinois, were experiencing severe threats to a continued unified existence.³⁷ Its influential opinion leaders, with diverse backgrounds from other parties and with no long-term allegiances to the Republican banner, were now suggesting that Stephen A. Dou-

³² From Lincoln's 1860 campaign biography, Abraham Lincoln to John L. Scripps, circa June, 1860 in Basler's *CW* vol IV, page 64.

³³ From Henry C. Whitney' 1892 *Life on The Circuit With Lincoln*, page 27.

³⁴ "but Billy", from Whitney 1892, page 27; Lincoln's diagnosis as a serious clinical depression is discussed in Psychiatrist Joshua Wolf Shenck's 2005 book *Lincoln's Melancholy How Depression Challenged a president and Fueled His Greatness*. Shenck's conclusion can be found on page 4.

³⁵ Shenck's 200, page 4.

³⁶ Whitney 1892, page 27.

³⁷ Frequently, former Whigs like David Davis referred to the various political groups that had come together to form as the "the confederated factions of the Illinois Republican Party.", From Willard King's 1960 *David Davis, Lincoln's Manager*, page 241.

glas, the prominent Senator who had just defeated Lincoln in the late election, ought to lead the Anti-democratic forces. Douglas, as many saw it, was the only politician who could challenge the Buchanan wing of the dominant Democratic Party to which Douglas himself belonged.³⁸ Thinking the Republican Party would not yet be capable of presenting a united front to support a strong candidate coupled with Douglas' recent break with his own Democratic Administration, a number of Republicans believed Douglas could become a leader of the fragmented Republican part. Douglas had broken with what was fast becoming a Buchanan wing of the Democratic party over controversies surrounding the right of states to decide for themselves whether to allow or permit slavery, known as his "popular sovereignty doctrine". With the hope that he might lead a new, strengthened coalition in opposition to the Democrats, Douglas, Lincoln's nemesis and a fellow Illinoisan was being promoted, at the cost of Lincoln, who had recently emerged as an influential and respected Republican politician.³⁹ Fearing Douglas, Lincoln did what he could to combat such an outrageous proposal.

Lincoln's friends joined Lincoln in his continued opposition to Douglas. During the recent debates between Lincoln and Douglas, Lincoln had distinguished himself as the leader of the Illinois Republicans and they had, as mentioned, responded to suggestions of Douglas as a potentially unifying candidate by promoting Lincoln as its "first and only choice" for U.S. Senator in the late campaign. Ideas that Douglas could become the Illinois Republican leader remained unthinkable to many, especially to former Whigs who had spent the better part of their political careers opposing Douglas statewide and nationally. Despite his painful loss, Lincoln acknowledged the significance of the late race. As he told an old friend, he was "glad" because it had given him "a hearing on the great and durable question of the age". And although he was sure he would "now sink out of view, and shall be forgotten" he proudly insisted he had "made some marks which will tell for the cause of civil liberty long after I am gone."⁴⁰ In at least one respect, Lincoln was right. He had amassed significant political capital as a principled and significant spokesman against slavery's expansion. He felt he had won the debates against Douglas and the popular vote confirmed his reasoning.⁴¹ A friend who was watching the biggest newspapers wrote Lincoln that almost daily he was "...held up as the leading spirit of the great West," and another prominent Republican told him, "I believe you have risen to a national reputation & position more rapidly than any other man who ever rose

³⁸ Fehrenbacher 1962, page 117.

³⁹ *Ibid*, page 117.

⁴⁰ Abraham Lincoln to Anson G. Henry November 19, 1858 in Basler's *CW* vol III, page 339.

⁴¹ In a letter to his friend Anson G. Henry, Lincoln comments on the popular vote in the state in the 1858 election. Unfortunately, the ensuing part has not been preserved. See Basler's *CW* vol III, page 339.

at all.”⁴² Becoming an oft-requested speaker in the wake of the 1858 race, Lincoln could conclude that despite his loss, he was down, but not out.

As Lincoln returned to his normal life after the Christmas holiday in January 1859, he faced many challenges. Accompanying his burgeoning position as a leader of the Illinois Republicans and his position as a noteworthy national Republican after his debates with Douglas were the costs. Judd was asking Lincoln to pay off the party’s rising debt that had been amassed after, among other costs, his debates with Douglas. But for a brief time, Lincoln reluctantly turned away from politics partly because there were no campaigns to run, but most mostly because his economic predicament demanded this of him.⁴³ Beyond the public and political expectations as the sole source of income for the Lincoln household, nothing commanded his attention more than his personal financial situation which now forced him to resume his law practice. He, was, as he explained to Judd “without sufficient funds, even for household purposes.”⁴⁴ Assuming responsibility, he still pledged to pay his share to balance the debt of the state party. Lincoln’s efforts to establish some sort of semblance to the life he had led prior the debates were none to reassuring. As he and Herndon opened and replied to the mail they had received in this period, they discovered correspondence from disgruntled clients who cared little that Lincoln, albeit for a short time, had recently neglected their business to focus on his political career.

To the many political speaking requests he received in this period Lincoln respectfully declined stating that “This year I must devote to my private business,” a statement he would repeat often in the coming year, and one he would find it increasingly hard to abide to.⁴⁵ He had given a similar response after the 1856 elections, then stating, “Having devoted the most of last year to politics, it is a necessity with me, to devote this, to my private affairs.”⁴⁶ Still, Lincoln’s return to his work in 1859 differed from that of years past. Previously, he had taken great pleasure in tending to his highly successful law practice, being, “at the head of his profession, in this state” as a journalist remarked already in 1850.⁴⁷ In this earlier period, as he noted in his 1860 campaign biography, in the years leading up to 1858, and particularly the period after his return from Congress in 1849 until 1854, “his profession had almost superseded the thought of politics in his mind.”⁴⁸ According to the same biography, “Ambition could” quite simply “not tempt him.” Then, in 1854, came

⁴² Abraham Lincoln papers, document 0155100, Library of Congress, Josiah M. Lucas to Abraham Lincoln, December 21, 1858, and Abraham Lincoln papers, document 0145700, Library of Congress. Horace White to Abraham Lincoln, November 5, 1858.

⁴³ Angle (editor) Herndon, 1949, page 361.

⁴⁴ Abraham Lincoln to Norman B. Judd November 16, 1858 in Basler’s *CW*, Vol III, page 337.

⁴⁵ Abraham Lincoln to N.B. Dodson July 29, 1859 in Baslers *CW*, Vol III, page 395.

⁴⁶ Abraham Lincoln to C.D. Gilfillan, Chairman &c, May 9, 1857 in Basler’s *CW* 1953, Vol III, page 395.

⁴⁷ This mention is taken from the *Danville Illinois Citizen*, May 29, 1850, in Donald 1995, page 151.

⁴⁸ Abraham Lincoln’s 1860 campaign biography to John L. Scripps, circa June 1860 in Basler’s *CW* Vol IV, page 67.

Stephen A. Douglas' Kansas-Nebraska Act, and this re-invigorated his political interest and drove him back into public action. Since the implementation of that legislation, Lincoln had combined the law and politics as in years past, but increasingly, politics, with its public engagement and private engagement with passionate colleagues, was what lay nearest to his heart. Although he was receiving numerous political speaking invitations, he was forced to decline, stating: "I must stick to the courts awhile."⁴⁹ He continued to write friends and party workers throughout the nation as the party, both in Illinois and nationally, set a course for the future.

Despite Lincoln's close loss, the 1858 fall elections had been mainly a success for Republicans, and as a newly established party in the previous presidential election of 1856, it had already come close to winning the presidency. In the upcoming presidential election of 1860, Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey and Pennsylvania hung in the balance, meaning these states would have to be won if the Republican Party were to triumph. At this point, a North-South divide had manifested itself strongly in politics, and the Republican party realized it did not need Southern support at all to gain the presidency. But a prospective Republican candidate for president still had little hopes of winning the presidential election if he failed to have major support in these four crucial Northern states, even if he could keep the support won in the previous election in the populous eastern states. Republicans reckoned there would be little point in nominating a presidential candidate having major support in the East, but who could make no gains in Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. This assessment, at first glance, seemed to exclude Lincoln's candidacy, for although he could probably win Illinois and gain some support in the Northwestern states, he had never even given a major political speech east of Ohio, at least not in the capacity of a prominent Republican politician. In addition, although he had emerged as a rising star with some national publicity during the late debates with Douglas, the issue of establishing an uncontested leadership of the Illinois Republicans lingered. Questioning his state-wide leadership was the prominent Republican Senator, Lyman Trumbull, a man, like Lincoln, known for his rhetorical ability.⁵⁰

However, the most important factor in whether Lincoln might have a chance for the nomination in 1860 was that in early 1859 there was a clear favorite already. The name on most lips in the preliminary stages of the presidential canvass was William H. Seward of New York, the pre-eminent Republican politician of the 1850s. Since 1839, Seward had served as Governor and a Senator from his home state, New York, first as a powerful Whig before joining the fledgling Republican Party shortly after its birth. Still, although Seward's career was filled with successes, it was not without its share of political missteps. Through his leadership of the anti-slavery forces in the Senate, Seward

⁴⁹ Abraham Lincoln to W. M. Morris, March 28, 1859 in Basler's *CW* vol III, page 377.

⁵⁰ From Fehrenbacher's 1965 *Prelude to Greatness, Lincoln in the 1850s*, page 151.

had made the blunder (assessed in hindsight) of claiming that Americans should abide by a “higher law” than that most sacred of documents, the U.S. Constitution.⁵¹ Since that “radical” speech, he had also suggested that slavery presented the country with an “irrepressible conflict,” which suggested to some that he would not leave slavery alone if elected president.⁵² Combined, these two speeches had given Seward the reputation of being a radical abolitionist, set on removing slavery, by force if necessary, from the Union. Seward also had more problems. His strong relationship to his unscrupulous campaign manager, Thurlow Weed, made many question Seward’s integrity. Weed, known as the greatest political manager in America, had made many questionable deals to ensure Seward’s success. Seward’s public service, and the fears of Weed’s potential corrupting influence and his radical reputation meant that he was a flawed, but favored candidate by 1859.⁵³

Although many Republicans – including many Illinoisans – were ardently supporting Seward’s candidacy, support for a nationally acclaimed name as a potential leader of the Republican party were increasing after the fall elections of 1858.⁵⁴ Some leaders, like Weed who had used his position to virtually decide who had become the Whig candidates for president in the two previous nominations, considered promoting the prospects of a new anti-Democrat organization with Douglas as its leader. Weed’s idea had the support of Horace Greeley, the powerful erratic editor of the most popular republican newspaper in the nation, the New York Tribune. Weed and others were sure of the charismatic senator’s appeal to anti-Buchanan Democrats and Douglas’ potential to unify the fragmented republicans – a claim Seward could not make.⁵⁵ As a response, recalling that Seward had done nothing to help Lincoln in the late election and Douglas, and that he had had an amicable tone with the Little Giant’s after his break with his own Administration over the adoption of the disputed Kansas constitution, a group of Illinoisan Republicans met in Springfield on January 6, 1859 to discuss the future of the party in the state.⁵⁶ It was Douglas who had introduced the legislation that had attracted the vastly different political fragments that now comprised the Republican party, and having emerged as the leader of the Illinois republicans, Lincoln counted on the support of his friends to combat Douglas as the Illinoisan leader of the Anti-Democratic forces, Seward as his main national rival and Trumbull for the undisputed leadership of the Illinois Republican party.

⁵¹ From John M. Taylor’s 2003 *William Henry Seward, Lincoln’s right hand man*, page 85.

⁵² *Ibid*, page 107.

⁵³ Holzer 2004, page 169. Seward’s campaign manager Weed is often described as “crafty” or a “boss” by historians who emphasize his willingness to engage in shady deals to ensure political success, see for instance Holzer 2004, page 169 or Donald 1995, page 132.

⁵⁴ Swett in Wilson 1945, page 294.

⁵⁵ Fehrenbacher 1962, page 117; Whitney 1892, page 83.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, page 117; Whitney 1892 page 83.

Lincoln's twenty-three-year period in Springfield had seen the development and increasing intermixture of his professional, personal and political life. When he first arrived in Springfield as a twenty-five-year old, self-taught lawyer, he quickly found many colleagues and friends who shared his love for politics and rhetoric.⁵⁷ To ensure he had enough legal business, twice a year, for up to three months at a time, Lincoln followed the circuit judge around Central Illinois as he tried cases in a vast geographical judicial area known as the Eight Judicial Circuit.⁵⁸ Lincoln made many acquaintances on the circuit, encountering colleagues, politicians, newspaperman, and many of these had become personal friends. While some he had encountered outside of his professional activities, most had befriended Lincoln through a variation of practicing law, dabbling in politics or practicing their rhetorical abilities at local debate clubs or in the newspapers. Lincoln had the gift of making each political and personal acquaintance feel like they were his most trusted advisor, and this trait, combined with his tedious deliberation and continued unwillingness to reveal his own hand later led many, like Herndon, to believe they had a profound influence on Lincoln's later political success.⁵⁹ After the implementation of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, many of Lincoln's progressive friends had abandoned their previous party affiliations and flocked to the Republican Party.⁶⁰ Some of these friends had more personal loyalty to Lincoln than to the fragile and fledgling Republican party. Their allegiance to Lincoln meant that he could trust on an inner circle of friends for support for the various political positions he was pursuing.⁶¹

This group, which by 1858 formed a decisive part of the Illinois Republican party in Central Illinois under the leadership of Lincoln, were, as they had been before the debates against Douglas, unequivocally supportive of Lincoln as the leader of the Illinois Republicans, and vehemently opposed to the suggestion that Douglas might become a Republican standard-bearer. Fearing that his arch-rival Douglas, who had recently broken with his own Democratic administration, would replace him as the leader of the Illinois Republicans, Lincoln told Trumbull, "We should never sell old friends to buy old enemies," maintaining that "a living dog," meaning himself was, all things considered, "better than a dead lion."⁶² Although there was virtually no support for Douglas among Republicans in Central Illinois, there was hardly anyone who believed Lincoln could be the leader of the national Republican Party either, except perhaps Lincoln himself, and Jesse K. Dubois, Lin-

⁵⁷ Donald 1995, page 166-168.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, page 117.

⁵⁹ Donald 1995, page 203; See Herndon's unbridled version of his suggestions to Lincoln on the House Divided Speech in Angle (editor) Herndon 1949, page 323-324 and Cooper Union Angle (editor) Herndon 1949, page 366, from Angle as editor of *Herndon's Life of Lincoln* from 1889, pages 323-324

⁶⁰ For instance, David Davis, Jesse K. Dubois, William Herndon and Leonard Swett, Fehrenbacher 1962, page 149.

⁶¹ *Ibid*, page 149.

⁶² Fehrenbacher, *CW* 1989, page 54.

coln's neighbor and the state auditor, who near the end of a political meeting on January 5 rose and proposed, "putting Lincoln up for a place on the ticket, either for president or Vice-president – one or the other."⁶³ Not so much a preposterous idea as a relatively unrealistic one, Dubois' idea had probably been festering in the back of Lincoln's own mind for a while since his election defeat.

V

By any stretch of the imagination, it was not the first time that an as ambitious man as Lincoln had pondered the possibility. When many newspapers came out in support of a potential Lincoln-for-president campaign in 1859, this gave credence to those who had suggested that Lincoln was at least deserving of mention as a possible presidential candidate.⁶⁴ For although some of the favorable mention in the press undoubtedly was as a consolation for Lincoln's close loss to Douglas, and other writers were mainly tossing out his name for sport, there was also an increasing feeling among Illinoisan opinion leaders that perhaps Lincoln could be promoted at least as the favorite son of Illinois.⁶⁵ As he had a habit of doing, Lincoln had remained silent and listened to the suggestions that he should enter the presidential race, but for now, he revealed to no one his strategy, but probably came away from the meeting feeling optimistic and was apparently focused more on combatting Douglas than on cultivating support for his presidential candidacy as 1859 got underway. Two days after the meeting he wrote a friend: "All dallying with Douglas by Republicans," is "labor lost" and "such vexation for their own folly."⁶⁶ He also kept Trumbull in the loop: "Our friends here from different parts of the State, in and out of the Legislature, are united, resolute, and determined; and I think it is almost certain that we shall be far better organized for 1860 than ever before." Conveniently, he neglected to mention that that organization was increasingly lining up behind him, increasing his chances to earn a senatorial, gubernatorial, or, less likely, presidential nomination at the expense of Trumbull's chances.⁶⁷ As long as this tendency continued and Trumbull did not

⁶³ Whitney 1892, page 83.

⁶⁴ For the earliest mentions of Lincoln as a possible presidential candidate in the press see Donald 1995, page 235 and Fehrenbacher 1962, page 143.

⁶⁵ Fehrenbacher 1962, page 143.

⁶⁶ Abraham Lincoln to W.H. Wells, January 8, 1859 in Baslers *CW*, Volume III, page 351.

⁶⁷ Abraham Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull January 29, 1859 in Basler *CW* 1953, volume III, page 349.

publicly express his own intention to run for anything other than the Senate, Lincoln preferred to keep up his friendly correspondence with Trumbull in Washington and tend to his law practice and avoid making any enemies in the state party.

This effort of was made more difficult when John Wentworth, the former Democrat mayor of Chicago-turned Republican editor of *The Daily Democrat* published an article in late January suggesting Trumbull and Lincoln were destined for a fight for future nominations and leadership of the Illinois Republicans.⁶⁸ Normally, Wentworth's article would not have received much attention, but the complex nature of Lincoln's relationship to Wentworth and to Wentworth's arch-rival, Norman Judd, warranted a reaction, not only for harmony within the republican party but also for the sake of Lincoln's future political career. Wentworth, once a popular mayor, now suffered from declining personal popularity and the decreasing circulation of his newspaper, the *Daily Democrat*, intrinsically linked to his name.⁶⁹ To air his frustration, Wentworth resorted to politics as an excuse to engage in personal vendettas through the newspapers, and Judd received the brunt end of his frustration. Judd had ties to Wentworth's rival, *Chicago Press & Tribune*, and to Trumbull, and thus, by attacking Trumbull, Wentworth was getting at Judd, caring little that Lincoln, with whom he had an amicable relationship, might be dragged down the drain.⁷⁰ For Lincoln, Wentworth's continued attacks on Trumbull and Judd presented him with a sticky dilemma. To assume leadership of the Illinois Republicans, and perhaps contend for future political offices the next year, Lincoln needed the support of Judd and his rival Wentworth, both well-connected men who were better to have on one's side rather than against him within the party organization when favors needed to be collected in whatever process might be forthcoming in Lincoln's quest for higher office.

Diffusing the rivalry temporarily, Lincoln soothed Trumbull and Judd by writing Trumbull that Wentworth's suggestions had no basis in reality. Although the two may be destined to a contest for the Illinois seat in the Senate in 1860, the same seat Lincoln had lost in 1854, "Any effort to put enmity between you and me," as Lincoln wrote, was "as idle as the wind."⁷¹ Meanwhile, Trumbull castigated Wentworth's attempt to rile up agitation between Lincoln and himself, suggesting that it "would take a man of Wentworth's character to be guilty of such a "despicably mean thing."⁷² Trumbull also updated Lincoln on Douglas' movements, assuring Lincoln that Douglas was not "intimate with any party" and that he was sure Douglas meant "to keep in the Democratic organization."⁷³

⁶⁸ Fehrenbacher 1962, page 149.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, page 150.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, page 150.

⁷¹ Abraham Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, January 29, 1859 in Basler *CW* 1953, Volume III, pages 355, 356.

⁷² Lincoln papers, Library of Congress, Document 0161900; Lyman Trumbull to Abraham Lincoln, January 29, 1859.

⁷³ Lincoln papers, Library of Congress, document 0164300; Lyman Trumbull to Abraham Lincoln, February 15, 1859.

But Lincoln was not soothed by Trumbull's assurances, and continued to view Douglas as his main political rival, and it did not hurt that his arch enemy was one of the most famous politicians in the country, either. In his first public appearance since the debates in Chicago in March 1859, Lincoln continued to warn against "Douglas-ism", by rebuking Douglas' popular sovereignty doctrine. Urging Republicans to stand "shoulder to shoulder to-night in harmony and strength around the Republican banner," Lincoln tried to re-generate the fervor the debates with Douglas had ignited.⁷⁴ An increasingly likely scenario, and one he had first-hand experience with, was, as he turned away from politics and resumed his quiet personal life, was that he could be remembered as a political shooting star. Therefore, Lincoln sought to exploit the interest spawned by the widespread media coverage of the debates. He had conserved the transcripts of the debates with Douglas, and now, three five months after the election, Lincoln was eager to have these transcripts published, energetically pursuing all avenues at his disposal for such a publication and circulation.⁷⁵

Being occupied with legal matters, and his family with two small boys, Tad and Willie, Lincoln only made public statements when the sake of what he considered to be Republican principles required it. Such an occasion came in May 1859 when the republican-controlled Massachusetts state legislature had adopted an amendment requiring naturalized citizens to wait two years before being eligible to vote. The measure, adopted to please the strong nativist faction in the Massachusetts Republican Party, worried immigrants nationwide, because the measure contradicted the Republican platform of 1856 which stated that the Republican Party would fight nativism. Being well aware that the Germans, who were afflicted by this amendment, held the power of balance in Illinois, Lincoln and other Republican leaders came out publicly to denounce the measure. In a public letter to Theodore Canisius, a German doctor he had partnered with in a new German newspaper located in Springfield, Lincoln explained his opposition to the measure stating that he, among other things, understood, "the spirit of our institutions to aim at the elevation of men" and he was "opposed to whatever tends to degrade them."⁷⁶ Canisius, who served as the editor of the joint venture with Lincoln, ensured the widespread circulation of Lincoln's public letter. Initially, Lincoln had hesitated to denounce publicly the Massachusetts amendment in fear of alienating potential nativist voters. But when Gustavus Koerner, Lincoln's German ally, voiced many immigrants' concern over the signs of a Republican zeal against nativism, Lincoln could no longer continue his preferred tactic of waiting and seeing. He organized meetings for Germans to explain the Republican position, and in the poignant letter public letter to Canisius, he further explained his opposition to the measure.⁷⁷

⁷⁴ Lincoln's speech in Chicag, March 1, 1859 in Baslers *CW* Volume 3, page 367.

⁷⁵ Abraham Lincoln to Horace White February 1859 in Basler's *CW* Volume III, page 341, 343.

⁷⁶ Abraham Lincoln to Theodore Canisius, May 17, 1859 in Baslers *CW* Vol III, pages 380-381.

⁷⁷ Herriot 1915, page 30.

Discreetly, Lincoln was also meddling in the business of Republicans outside Illinois. To Salmon P. Chase, a prominent radical Republican from Ohio and a potential presidential candidate, he wrote that a repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which the Ohio Republicans supported, would likely “explode the convention and the party.”⁷⁸ Advising against Maryland Republicans’ wish to deny a re-opening of the African slave trade, he wrote Nathan Sargent, a Maryland Republican leader: “It would gain nothing in the South, and lose everything in the North.”⁷⁹ Lincoln maintained a message of moderation and party harmony by expressing his fears of a growing tendency among Republicans to endorse policies that might garner support in a given state, but that would be a “firebrand elsewhere, and especially in a National convention.”, as he advised Indiana Republican Schuyler Colfax. To Colfax, Lincoln included a warning that could have just as well been the internal Republican slogan for 1859. Lincoln urged Colfax and Indiana republicans to try to: “Look beyond our noses; and at least say nothing on points where it is probable we shall disagree.”⁸⁰ Acknowledging that his party was in dire need of national leadership and cohesiveness in the off-year 1859, Lincoln was gladly taking on a new role as a nationally influential republican policy advisor.

But far from all political correspondence in which Lincoln engaged required him to advise caution, moderation and harmony. He was receiving dozens of letters from Republican friends throughout the nation. Invitations varied in topic: while some wanted to hear Lincoln speak on virtually any subject, others, including many Republican state organizations, were eager to hear Lincoln’s advice and wanted his participation in their state campaigns. Republicans from Minnesota, Kansas, Pennsylvania, Ohio and Indiana were sending invitations to Lincoln pleading him to come to their state and speak, asking for advice on what he deemed to be core Republican principles while praising his efforts against the Little Giant. Although tempted to make journeys outside Illinois, Lincoln willingly offered advice but continued to state a variation of his earlier proclamation that, “This year I must devote to my private business.” One of the most persistent correspondents was Lincoln’s old friend Mark Delahay, who had moved to Kansas and was pressing Lincoln to support his work of establishing a viable Republican organization there. When he and others tried to push Lincoln to launch himself as an entrant in the upcoming race for president, as if he needed any pushing at all, Lincoln politely brushed the proposal aside, telling Thomas J. Pickett, a republican editor, that he was flattered to be thought of “in that connection” but did not consider himself “fit for the presidency.”⁸¹ On April 16, 1859 Lincoln had given his first apparent refusal to join the

⁷⁸ Abraham Lincoln to Salmon P. Chase, June 20, 1859 in Baslers *CW* Vol III, page 386.

⁷⁹ Abraham Lincoln to Nathan Sargent, June 23, 1859 in Baslers *CW* Vol III, pages 387,388.

⁸⁰ Abraham Lincoln to Schuyler Colfax July 6, 1859 in Basler’s *CW* vol III, page 390, 391.

⁸¹ Abraham Lincoln to Thomas J. Pickett April 16, 1859 in Basler’s *CW* vol III, page 377.

presidential canvass, and he issued his last in the summer of that year. In the spring of 1859, he employed varying proclamations that he was somehow “unfit” for the presidency to whomever made such proposals.⁸² These proclamations were not only expressions of excessive modesty from the cautious Lincoln. By all accounts, he was, in fact, unfit for the presidency. Apart from his law practice, he had no administrative experience. He had received almost no formal schooling. To the crucial eastern voters, he was virtually unknown outside the republican leadership, and he had no political manager to promote a candidacy, if he was to launch one. Combined, these circumstances essentially ruled him out of the race for the presidential nomination in May 1860. Yet increasingly, Lincoln came to understand that the most immediate obstacle standing in the way of future political success was not his lack of eastern fame and connections, although these were major obstacles in their own right. Paradoxically, Lincoln understood that the widespread belief that he could not compete with national names like Chase, Seward, Trumbull within the Illinois republican Party was his biggest and most immediate obstacle. Lincoln knew that many believed he could not even edge out Edward Bates from Missouri, a conservative politician, who would likely pursue the Republican presidential nomination. But then again, why shouldn’t he enter the race for president? There was little, next to nothing to lose, and apart from the obvious new disappointment it might lead to, this was expected. As the summer of 1859 was approaching, Davis, Dubois and perhaps most of all Lincoln himself had little faith that he could be nominated come May next year. Although he was receiving numerous invitations to make political speeches, Lincoln was forced by his professional duties to focus on the caseload he had amassed since the senatorial campaign the previous year through the summer of 1859.

VI

But in August he finally found more time to devote to politics. The speeches he presented in the next months regenerated the momentum Lincoln felt he had lost since the debates against Douglas. Giving speeches in Iowa in August and Ohio in September, Lincoln was back in the public political sphere. In Ohio he renewed his criticism of Douglas, responding to a recently published article

⁸² See Abraham Lincoln to Samuel Galloway, July 28, 1859 in Basler’s *CW* vol III, page 395-96.

in Harper's Magazine where Douglas had defended his popular sovereignty doctrine, calling the doctrine the will of the Founding Fathers.⁸³ Lincoln was incensed by the article, and this inspired him to find new arguments against the Little Giant. After several weeks on the circuit and some political speech-making in Milwaukee, where he delivered four speeches in late September, Lincoln returned home in the middle of October. At home he found an invitation enquiring: "Will you lecture in Broolyn?"⁸⁴ The speeches Lincoln had given the previous months, especially those in Cincinnati, Ohio had been noticed by a group of influential easterners led by William Cullen Bryant, the famed poet and editor of the New York Evening Post and Horace Greeley, the powerful New York Tribune editor.⁸⁵ Greeley, who for long had been a loyal friend to his fellow New Yorker Seward and Seward's campaign manager Thurlow Weed, had during the fall of 1859 turned against his former friends because of Seward's support of an editor of a rival New York-newspaper. Bryant was now organizing a secret Anti-Seward movement in New York State, and Greeley was ready to re-print speeches en mass from whoever could successfully prove a match for the esteemed Senator. To showcase what the "wild west" had to offer, the movement was inviting great western orators to come to New York, in the hopes of convincing influential easterners that perhaps a western statesman could lead the Republicans, trying to demonstrate that Seward's nomination in the spring was far from as inevitable as it appeared.⁸⁶ The telegram exhilarated Lincoln. It spoke volumes of the position Lincoln had cemented as a nationally requested speaker, and the invitation to speak in the East, his first ever, gave him, thought one of his friends "more heartfelt pleasure" than any other event of his life.⁸⁷

As mentioned, Lincoln knew that if he was ever to launch a presidential candidacy, his lack of contacts in the populous eastern states would be a major obstacle. After pondering the invitation for a month, he concluded that a speech given in the media capital of the nation, on "any subject," as the invitation stated, was too tempting. He responded simply, "I shall be on hand."⁸⁸ When Lincoln returned to his family and legal practice in October and November, the potentially life-altering speech he was to give in Brooklyn was probably at the back of his mind. Politically, Lincoln was certain that only through positioning himself as a moderate Republican, somewhere between the radical abolitionists and the slavery-compromising elements of the party, could he convince the

⁸³ Fehrenbacher 1962, page 93.

⁸⁴ From Holzer's 2004 *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The speech that made Lincoln president*, page 18.

⁸⁵ It was in fact James A. Briggs who invited Lincoln initially, but Bryant eventually took over sponsorship of the speaking engagement, see Holzer 2004, page 10.

⁸⁶ Holzer 2004, page 11.

⁸⁷ Lamon 1872, page 424.

⁸⁸ "I shall be on.." from Luthin 1964, page 79.

eastern crowd that he was the unifying candidate they were looking for, the candidate the party desperately needed to ensure electoral success.

The white abolitionist John Brown's raid in October confirmed such reasoning.⁸⁹ Brown's unsuccessful attempts to incite a slave rebellion at Harper's Ferry, Virginia, represented a real problem for Republicans, who were now increasingly convinced that only a moderate candidate could win the presidential election in the next year. Increasingly, many southerners believed there was no middle-ground on the question of slavery within the "black republican party".⁹⁰ But in reality, there was a huge discrepancy between those who advocated for more radical means of abolition and those, like Lincoln, who sought to restrict legally restrict slavery's expansion to the western territories. These fears gave moderates like Lincoln the chance to emerge as a viable candidate with considerable popular appeal in contrast to more widely known candidates with a reputation of radicalism including Salmon Chase, William Seward, and even Lyman Trumbull. In December, 1859, some, like Indiana republican Schuyler Colfax, went so far as to state that there was "no serious talk of any one" for the Republican nomination for president.⁹¹ Such talk encouraged Lincoln, who shortly after the 1858 race against Douglas had garnered the first mention in the press of a possible Lincoln presidential nomination and was now pondering when to launch a presidential campaign. Although republicans were divided on which candidate should represent their party in the 1860, in the fall of 1859 most still had Seward pegged as the obvious choice in view of his illustrious record in the Senate and his leadership of the eastern Republicans since the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act.⁹²

Most newspapers who had started the whispers of Lincoln as a possible presidential candidate just after the 1858 election gave passing mention to him as a sort of consolation prize for his loss to Douglas. However, there were also others who believed that while others had more faith in Lincoln, believing he had earned the position of a presidential candidate. While almost all mentions of Lincoln were from Illinoisan newspapers and thus highly partisan, there were also references to Lincoln in other states, including an Ohioan newspaper energetically promoting the candidacy of "Abram Lincoln for president in 1860" already in November 1858.⁹³ Some newspapers, if they gave any detail, suggested that Lincoln should be promoted as the preferred candidate from Illinois, giving him the status of a "favorite son," a popular state candidate without a serious possibility to actually become the national presidential nominee. Yet, in the spring of 1859, as a local editor

⁸⁹ Potter 1976, p. 384

⁹⁰ Ibid, page 356.

⁹¹ Quoted from Michael Burlingame's 2008, *Abraham Lincoln, a Life*, page 1525.

⁹² Zinn 2003, p. 187

⁹³ *The Sandusky Commercial Register*, printed this from their masthead on November 6, 1858. See Donald 1995, page 235 for early mentions of a Lincoln presidential campaign in the press.

later remembered, Lincoln's name was apparently "not spoken of" in connection to the presidency, "in any newspaper publication that I knew anything about."⁹⁴ Appraisals of Lincoln's political prospects like those of Wentworth's *Daily Democrat* was perhaps more realistic. It argued that the moderate Westerner Lincoln could prove to be the perfect running mate of the radical Easterner Seward.

Whether a promotion of Lincoln on the first or second place on the national ticket left him in the most competitive position against more prominent candidates was still not clear. But the popular vote from the late Senate race indicated that Illinois would in either case require special attention if the state was to go Republican in 1860. It also helped Lincoln's outlook that the speeches he had given in Iowa, Ohio, Indiana and Wisconsin in the fall of 1859 gave many in those places the idea that perhaps Lincoln could be placed on the national ticket.

VII

As Lincoln returned from a speaking tour in Kansas, he continued his effort to broaden his celebrity status by furnishing an autobiographical sketch at the request of Joseph J. Lewis who would make use of the biography for campaign purposes. Lewis was convinced that Lincoln should launch a presidential campaign. The biographical sketch, upon which Lewis himself expanded, was reprinted in several Republican newspapers and this is the first written biography on Lincoln. Meanwhile, Lincoln tried to relieve the grievances of Judd, who had grown tired of the repetitious accusations hurled at him by Wentworth, Davis and other of the Central Illinois Lincoln-men. Despite the differences within this conglomeration of political advisors, the group could all agree on their dislike of the former Democrat Judd. Their unified criticism revolved around Judd's management of the 1858 campaign against Douglas where the group contended that Judd, in the capacity of chairman of the Illinois republican Party, had concentrated too much on the Northern parts of Illinois—like Chicago where Judd and Trumbull resided. Moreover, the Lincoln men felt Judd had neglected the closely fought Central Illinois and thus had betrayed Lincoln by using his power and party funds to

⁹⁴ William O. Stoddard's recollection in Wilson 1945, page 221.

for the intention only of promoting Trumbull for the presidency and himself for the governorship, both elections also to be held in 1860.

The most outspoken of these critics was Lincoln's rambunctious younger partner William Herndon. While Lincoln was busily enlisting Judd's support and maintaining harmony in the party through 1859, he also had to deal with Herndon's frequent and fervent attacks on Judd. When he was asked by Judd to curb his outspoken partner, he complied and as a consequence never shared political secrets with Herndon again. Probably agreeing with more of Herndon's critical statements against Judd than he could admit for the sake of party unity, Lincoln publicly defended Judd, being keenly aware that his political future likely hinged upon the support of the well-connected man.⁹⁵ As a case in point, Judd had in December 1859 ensured that the national convention would be held in Chicago, Illinois, a decision which Lincoln attached little consequence to at the time, but nonetheless a factor which seriously increased his chances if he was to launch a presidential campaign. Rather shrewdly, Judd had argued that Chicago could serve as neutral location for the Convention in May since Illinois, according to Judd, had no entrants in the upcoming race for the nomination for the presidency.⁹⁶ Bolstering the chances of any Illinoisan who wanted the nomination, the decision also gave Judd, who was responsible for seating arrangements at the convention, more power, as he could promote an Illinoisan for the presidency and thus collect the favors if this candidate was selected.⁹⁷

The bickering between Judd and Wentworth had escalated throughout 1859 and developed into a bitter feud, with neither men budging or seeing good reason for silence, even for the sake of party harmony.⁹⁸ Fearing the feud would handicap the republican cause in the state by undermining the image of a united front he had longed worked so hard to project, Lincoln, with his intimate knowledge of both men, decided to step in and act as mediator between the two belligerent parties. Although Lincoln initially had hesitated to take sides in the feud, which by this point seemed headed only toward a legal solution and a messy conclusion for the party, he could no longer stand "idly by," as Judd was accusing him of doing.⁹⁹ Diplomatically, Lincoln diffused the situation by warmly praising Judd in a public letter while affirming his own neutrality in the gubernatorial race which, he said, "many of his friends" were seeking. Privately, he advised Wentworth to settle the lawsuit raised against him by Judd for libelous comments in his newspaper.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁵ Basler's *CW* Volume III, page 505.

⁹⁶ Luthin 1964, pages 20-21; Orman 1916, page 5

⁹⁷ Luthin 1964, page 21.

⁹⁸ Fehrenbacher 1987, pages 39-40.

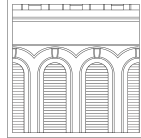
⁹⁹ Luthin 1964, page 130.

¹⁰⁰ Fehrenbacher 1962, page 50.

In January 1859, Lincoln had vowed to devote the year to his private business. Keeping his pledge, he spent the first part of the year spent conducting legal business, but in the second half of the year, he found the time to travel to Ohio, Wisconsin and Kansas. He could simply no longer resist the numerous invitations he had received. The widely praised speeches opposing Douglas' popular sovereignty doctrine had established Lincoln as more than a local politician. He was well-known in the West, at least. The continuing denials he issued to whoever who had the audacity to suggest he should make a run for the presidency meant little coming from the ambitious Lincoln, who, for now, was simply biding his time. Although he had suffered another bitter defeat, the previous year had clearly demonstrated to him that he was, politically speaking, as he assured a friend shortly after his defeat by Douglas; "neither dead nor dying."¹⁰¹

¹⁰¹ Abraham Lincoln to Alexander Sympson, December 12, 1858 in Basler's *CW* Vol III, page 346.

The taste is in my mouth a little



The year 1859 had been another typical year in Lincoln's life. Devoted "to his private business" and to his family, he only made the occasional speaking trips, and as usual, served on the circuit. This was a rhythm he had grown accustomed to since his days in the Illinois state legislature, where he first had had to learn how to juggle political activities with his professional career. But whereas 1859 was an off-year without any public offices to pursue, the spring of 1860 would see Lincoln launch the eighth political campaign of his life. Two campaigns in a row he had pursued a seat in the U.S. Senate, and twice he had been defeated for that position. This time, however, the campaign Lincoln was to launch was not focused on a senatorial seat, but rather on obtaining the republican nomination for president of the United States. To some, this might seem as a bold move given his prior defeats. But much had changed since Lincoln had served in the state legislature in the 1830s and even since he returned to politics in 1854, both in the way others perceived him, and probably also in the way he was perceiving himself. As Herndon later noted, Lincoln's self-confidence had grown to "unwonted proportions" after his debates with Douglas, and unlike his past political career, his political activities were centered on the seemingly insurmountable national issue of how to deal with slavery, which, increasingly had become a paralyzing local issue as well. But the speeches he gave on the issue, mostly a principled argument seeking to restrict slavery's geographical expansion, were

no longer confined to the vicinity of Springfield.¹ In the fall of 1859 he had travelled both east and west, and in late February 1860 he had scheduled a speaking trip of the northeast before Republicans who could influence the fortunes of the presidential campaign he unceremoniously launched before he was set to depart for Brooklyn. Lincoln knew that the speeches had the potential to thrust him into the national spotlight and establish him as a serious presidential candidate. Although many in the east may have read about him during the 1858 campaign, few had heard him speak. Even fewer believed he was a serious contender for the presidential nomination. But as the national convention neared, a number of political opportunities arose, and the tour of the east was the first and most challenging domino that would have to fall if Lincoln was to be viewed as something more than the favorite son from Illinois. And if he failed in reaching that objective, the tour of the east nonetheless represented a once in a lifetime opportunity for him to convince eastern republicans as well as Illinois republicans that he was a force with which to be reckoned as a respected republican politician and possibly one who deserved a place in a likely Republican cabinet. But Lincoln's chances were still slim. When Henry Barber, the chair of the Washington County Republicans, was asked about the upcoming presidential canvass in March 1860, he replied, "No one expects Lincoln to get the nomination."²

I

Early in 1860, a group of Lincoln's closest advisers and state republicans gathered at a meeting in Springfield to discuss the upcoming presidential canvass. Lincoln had disguised the real purpose by asking Grimshaw, a friend of Lincoln and a member of the State Central Committee, to call the meeting under the pretense of discussing how delegates to "the National convention shall be appointed," but it quickly became clear that Lincoln had far more devious plans.³ Present was Judd, Ozias M. Hatch the Illinois secretary of state who's office the men were convening in, Ebenezer

¹ William Herndon and Jesse Weik, 1889 *Herndon's Lincoln*, page 369-370.

² Burlingame 2008, page 1581.

³ From Lincoln's 1859 campaign biography. Abraham Lincoln Jesse W. Fell, December 20, 1859 in Basler's *CW*, volume IV, page 510

Peck, a Republican congressman from Illinois in addition to Lincoln and Grimshaw.⁴ Lincoln was wavering between the idea of consolidating his position as the leader of the Illinois Republicans, using the presidential canvass as the vehicle through which he cemented this local power. Especially in Northern Illinois, many backed Seward, and had little faith in Lincoln, even in a favorite-son capacity.⁵ Nonetheless, entering the race for the Republican nomination would be impossible without the support of powerful Illinois Republicans whose enthusiasm might be bolstered in this meeting. Among the members present at the meeting was Ward Hill Lamon, a protégé Lincoln had befriended on the circuit and another circuit friend and neighbor, Ozias Hatch. Jesse K. Dubois, the state auditor, was also present. He was the man who a year earlier in a Republican meeting in January 1859, had suggested that Lincoln deserved the support of the Illinois Republicans as a presidential or Vice-presidential aspirant.⁶ A year later, these supporters and several others like Ebenezer Peck, an intimate of Judd, gathered to discuss the upcoming national convention in the state.

If Lincoln were to launch a campaign, his path to the presidency would be unlike any other presidential candidate. At this stage of his life, the more typical career ladder for Lincoln, who harbored presidential aspirations but was yet to be elected as a Senator or hold any other public office since his term in the House of Representatives had ended in 1849, would have been to make a run for Governor in 1860, and then maybe seek the Senate again in 1864, before finally being in the position to run for the presidency in 1868, (after a likely Republican president had ended his two terms). Another route could be to run as a Vice-presidential candidate, attached to a popular name like Seward's. Yet for some reason, Lincoln never expressed an interest in running for these offices in 1860. He had never been interested in running for Governor, perhaps because he was mainly concerned with national issues like the expansion of slavery or the growth of the national economy. Although his political defeats had frustrated him, Abraham Lincoln still burned with ambition. Once he had lamented to Herndon: "How hard, oh how hard it is to die and leave one's Country no better than if one had never lived for it."⁷ With his keen understanding of history and state politics, Lincoln may have submitted to the harsh judgment of this this assessment, but spurred on by his celebrity status achieved in the 1858 debates, he was convinced to persist and pursue his political ambition for higher office.

Now remained the difficult task of convincing those Republicans at the meeting who were not already convinced that the effort of the Illinois Republican Party should be to promote Lincoln for president. Never doubting his own ability, Lincoln wanted to gauge the support he might receive

⁴ Angle (editor) Herndon 1949, page 366.

⁵ Swett's recollections of Seward's Illinoisan support in Wilson 1945, page 294.

⁶ Donald 1995, page 203.

⁷ Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, March 6, 1870, quoted in Donald's 1995 *Lincoln*, page 162.

if he were to enter the upcoming presidential race, and therefore he had instructed Grimshaw to present the idea to the influential Republicans in Springfield. When the topic of the upcoming National Convention came up, the discussion of the group centered around the strategies that included Lincoln on the national ticket and which of these could best yield electoral victory for their man.

One viable idea floating among groups of Republicans around the nation since the Lincoln-Douglas debates had been to work for a national ticket headed by Simon Cameron, a flagrantly corrupt and powerful Republican politician from Pennsylvania.⁸ Many believed the support of a crucial populous state like Pennsylvania with an Illinoisan on the national ticket in the upcoming election might secure the support of the entire Northwest.⁹ Although the thinking had some merit, Lincoln had initially opposed the suggestion in the spring of 1859 stating that the Vice-presidency “was scarcely big enough for one who had aspired to a seat in the Senate of the United States.”¹⁰ By January 1860, Lincoln continued to deny the suggestion, but now because he allegedly had been “mentioned rather too prominently for the first place on the ticket for me to think of accepting the second.”¹¹ Judd agreed with Lincoln, and later remembered that the “proper and only thing to do was to claim the presidency “for Lincoln” and “nothing less”.¹² Among his core followers, which constituted a considerable part of the Illinois party and who outnumbered the others present at the meeting, there was already strong support for Lincoln to be promoted as the favorite son of Illinois at the national convention. When those present not in favor of such a plan suggested that they should promote Lincoln as a Vice-presidential candidate with Cameron heading the national ticket, Lincoln himself had had enough. The Cameron supporters had argued that an effort to promote Lincoln for the place on the national ticket appeared to be the only viable plan and that it would be a political blunder for the party to nominate Lincoln on the first slot, given his lack of fame in the East which meant he had little chance as a nominee and presidential candidate. A second-place slot behind Cameron might, however, be successful. Exactly what happened from this point on is unclear, but Lincoln and his supporters managed to convince the others to work for his nomination as president, though it is highly unlikely that Lincoln would not have been too unhappy with the Vice-presidential nomination if he had received it when the convention started in May. Out of respect, self-interest, or a genuine belief that Lincoln represented the best chance of placing an Illinoisan on the national ticket, or perhaps a combination of the three, the group agreed that the following months would be spent working for Lincoln’s nomination. Lincoln’s decision to push the group to work with this

⁸ Whitney 1907, p. 289.

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¹⁰ Burlingame 2008, page 1561.

¹¹ Ibid, page 1582.

¹² Ibid, page 1581.

goal in mind was well thought out. It established him as a leader of the Illinois Republicans, and by working strenuously toward the nomination, Lincoln could establish himself as more than just a favorite son candidate, but as a serious candidate with a reasonable chance—not only to gain the nomination—but to win the presidency by bringing the crucial Western votes together with the Eastern support already evident in the 1856 election.

Lincoln's fledgling prospects in early February 1860 were bothered less by the inclusion of William Pennington of New Jersey on the list of presidential hopefuls and the continued talk of Douglas than the serious doubts cast by Republicans in Illinois. In southern Illinois, the doubts went beyond Lincoln's electability. Lincoln would, according to one vocal critic who voiced his concerns to Trumbull, "Not do at all. He has been beaten twice for Congress – he is not available – Nor do I think he has talent or standing for the place. Why he is named at all I cannot see."¹³ The problems Lincoln faced in the doubts from Southern Illinoisans were negligible compared to the importance of the doubts cast by his inner circle of political allies in Central and Northern Illinois. For instance, when prominent Republicans like Governor William. H Bissell, who often leaned on Lincoln for help in drafting speeches and legislation, doubted his electability. Although Bissell knew Lincoln well, he had little faith in his nomination, and was committed to Salmon P. Chase of Ohio. He explained to Chase that talk of Lincoln-for-president had started to emerge, and therefore it would be "ungracious to start "anybody as his seeming rival."¹⁴ The strong support for Lincoln in Illinois dissuaded the Governor of publicly pursuing a Chase nomination. Bissell's assessment of Lincoln was shared by many Illinois Republicans. He conceded that although Lincoln was "everything that we can reasonably ask in a man, and a politician," he did "not suppose that many of our friends seriously expect to secure his nomination." "In fact", he told Chase, "they would be very well satisfied, probably, if he could secure the 2d place on the ticket."¹⁵

Adding to the list of skeptical political advisors was Orville H. Browning, Lincoln's friend and political mentor from the Circuit.¹⁶ The conservative Browning was, like many men from Central and Southern Illinois, convinced that Edward Bates was the most electable republican candidate. When Browning, a native of Quincy in Central Illinois, visited nearby Springfield on legal business, Lincoln visited him in his hotel room on February 8 where the two had, according to Browning's diary, "a free talk about the presidency."¹⁷ In their conversation, which Bates wrote down in his diary, Lincoln apparently conceded that Mr. Bates was "the strongest and best man we can run," and

¹³ A.M. Blackburn to Lyman Trumbull, February 3, 1860, Abraham Lincoln papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁴ Baringer 1937, p. 145.

¹⁵ Taken from Fehrenbacher 1962, page 154, and treated in Baringer 1937, pages 144-145, the letter was sent on February 4, 1860.

¹⁶ Rice ed. 1886 *Reminiscences of Lincoln* page 603.

¹⁷ Randall, James G. (Editor) *The diary of Orville Hickman Browning, Volume I, 1850-1864*, page 395.

that Bates was conservative enough to attract voters that may “go for Mr. Bates, and for no other man.” Yet the impression Lincoln left on Browning that “by the time the National convention meets in Chicago he may be of opinion that the very best that can be done will be to nominate Mr. Bates.”, may have been Lincoln’s genuine belief, but one he would work hard to dissuade in the following months.¹⁸ One who would help him in reaching that objective and soon emerge as his campaign manager, Davis Davis, had his own doubts. In February 1860, he wrote a friend: “Of course I should like it, if Lincoln could be nominated, but I am afraid it is a foregone conclusion since it would either be Mr. Bates or Gov Seward” who would gain the nomination.¹⁹ Especially worrying was Davis’ assessment because, unlike Browning or Bissell, who were committed to Chase and Bates respectively, Davis had no skin in the game and genuinely wished to support and promote only Lincoln in his bid for the nomination. Despite the doubts to his electability though, Lincoln was consolidating his power as the sole presidential candidate from Illinois, and even those who doubted that he could gain the nomination were forced to take notice. Illinois republicans had to instruct their county delegations that, because, as Bissell told Chase: “our folks have recently taken a notion to talk up Lincoln” Lincoln was an emerging presidential candidate and was to be promoted as the Illinois favorite son.²⁰

Despite Lincoln’s unorthodox path towards becoming a viable presidential candidate he had, in fact, spent the last twenty-six years of his life engaged in political activity. Although the few major successes and notable defeats in his political life had clearly demonstrated to him that a carefully crafted public image was by no means a guarantee for electoral success, Lincoln continued to be painstakingly conscious of how he was perceived to the public at large. According to Herndon, he “never overlooked a newspaper man who had it in his power to say a good or bad thing of him.”²¹ And as February wore on, he turned his concentration to the pivotal event where he could convince many Illinoisans of his presidential qualities at the end of the month. Usually, he researched his speeches exhaustively, but he prepared for his Brooklyn Address like none other in his political life.²² The many well-received speeches Lincoln had given before could not compare to the importance of a speech given in Brooklyn, New York, a short boat ride across the river from the headquarters of the national media, like those of Greeley’s *New York Tribune*.²³ Without

¹⁸ Ibid, page 395. See Randall 1945, Volume 1, page 91 for a fuller description of Browning and his relationship to Lincoln.

¹⁹ David Davis to Henry E. Dummer, Bloomington, February 20, 1860, *David Davis Papers*, Lincoln presidential library. Taken from Burlingame 2008, page 1580.

²⁰ Baringer 1937, p. 145

²¹ *Herndon's Lincoln*, Herndon, Weik, Angle (editor), 1942, page 304.

²² Donald 1995, page 237.

²³ Orman 1916, p. 17; Potter 1976, page 420; Nevins 1950, page 239.

the support of influential newspapers who could reach potential voters outside Illinois, Lincoln's candidacy was doomed. But Lincoln's connections were for the most part fellow Illinoisans, and following the sobering conversation with Browning and somewhat distressed by the signals against his candidacy, Lincoln sat down the next day and wrote a somber-sounding letter, telling Norman B. Judd, "I am not in a position where it would hurt much for me not to be nominated on the national ticket; But I am where it would hurt some for me to not get the Illinois delegates." Convinced that his candidacy was doomed if "Judd's" ambitious men from Illinois were not supportive of Lincoln's candidacy and opposed him by laying the "Bates Egg in the South" and the "Seward Egg in the North," Lincoln pleaded with Judd, "Can you not help me a little in this matter in your end of the vineyard?"²⁴ With his connections chiefly but not exclusively within Illinois, Judd could reach many voters through the Chicago Press & Tribune which was edited by Joseph Medill, a crafty Republican who was loyal to Judd and Trumbull.

Shortly before Lincoln departed for Brooklyn, there came the good news that Judd had come to Lincoln's aid. On February 16, the Chicago Press & Tribune informed readers that "While others are intriguing and trading," Lincoln was "at his professional work, content to be let alone... Abraham Lincoln will never be president by virtue of intrigue and bargain..."²⁵ Sensing that Lincoln was emerging as a potential Republican nominee, Judd wrote Lincoln and asked "You saw what the Tribune wrote about you. Was it satisfactory?"²⁶ Four days later, Medill wrote an article supporting Lincoln as the most electable republican candidate, and the day Lincoln left for Brooklyn, the Press lavishly urged its readers: "Let us have Lincoln clubs in every ward of every city and in every precinct and township in Illinois. We take it for granted that LINCOLN is the first choice of every Republican in the state."²⁷ The Chicago Press & Tribune built up Lincoln's confidence in his own bid for the nomination because the ringing endorsement by the Press meant that Lincoln had gained the support of Judd and in essence could leave for Brooklyn confident of his own unquestioned leadership of the Illinois Republicans. He could also be encouraged by Medill's crafty plan of a progressive editorial support among Republican newspapers in the northwest and his personal plans to go to Washington to lobby for Lincoln among the Republican caucus.²⁸ One theory as to why Trumbull and Judd never made a run for the presidency in 1860 could be that in mid-February, it seemed that no one could seriously threaten Seward's likely nomination, not Trumbull and least of all Lincoln. Out of respect and perhaps loyalty, Judd felt obliged to sup-

²⁴ Abraham Lincoln to Norman B. Judd, February 9, 1860 in Basler's *CW*, vol III, page 515.

²⁵ Baringer 1937, page 149.

²⁶ Norman B. Judd to Abraham Lincoln, February 21, 1860, *Lincoln papers*, Library of Congress.

²⁷ February 24, 1860, in Baringer 1937; Burlingame 2008, page 1585.

²⁸ Baringer 1937, page 150.

port Lincoln, while Trumbull did not stand in Lincoln's way for the support of the Illinois state Republican Party. In addition, Trumbull may have had hopes of becoming U.S. Supreme Court Justice John Mclean's running mate in May. Yet, not everyone shared the vigorous enthusiasm displayed by the Republican press as Lincoln was preparing to go to Brooklyn. The local Democratic newspaper reported on Lincoln's leaving for New York in a sarcastic tone, "Significant, The Hon. Abraham Lincoln departs today for Brooklyn under an engagement to deliver a lecture before the Young Men's Association in that city in Beecher's church. Subject: not known. Consideration: 200\$ and expenses. Object: presidential capital. Effect: disappointment."²⁹ This was Lincoln's make or break moment.

II

Despite the emphatic endorsement by the Chicago Press & Tribune, the waning support of his own state party must have worried Lincoln as he boarded a train to New York on February 22. Knowing what was at stake, he had tried his best to prepare himself for the momentous occasion of delivering a speech in the media and financial capital of the nation, where, despite his frequent travels to other states in recent years, he had never delivered a major speech. Adding to Lincoln's anxiety had long been his lack of certainty about the topic he might declaim, but luckily his adversarial relationship with Douglas and popular sovereignty would, once again, come to his aid.³⁰ He was relaxed by the company of a neighbor and her baby who accompanied him for part of the journey. But upon arriving in New York, however, he was distressed by the news that the venue had been changed from an abolitionist church in Brooklyn to Cooper Union Institute in Manhattan.³¹ Luckily for Lincoln, who had arrived in New York on a Friday, his speech was not until Monday. He was able to spend the weekend revising his 7,500-word manuscript to fit the secular audience in the sophisticated venue located in the middle of the city. On Monday, February 27, Lincoln was taken to Matthew Brady's studio to have his portrait made, then taken to the basement of the Cooper Union Institute, where several speeches were to be given. The sophisticated bourgeois of New York and

²⁹ Luthin 1964, page 80.

³⁰ Burlingame 2008, page 1540.

³¹ Ibid, page 1591.

the members of the Young Men's Association had taken over the sponsorship of the speech since Lincoln accepted the invitation to come to Brooklyn. The figure they laid their eyes on when he arrived in New York looked nothing like a statesman the New Yorkers were expecting to combat William Seward's seemingly inevitable nomination. Lincoln's new suit, which he had bought for this occasion, was ill-fitting, and on the trip to New York it had become wrinkled, looking as if "it had 5, 000 wrinkles in it," as one New Yorker observed.³² Another noted Lincoln's odd appearance coupled with his extreme height, which led this observer to remark that Lincoln looked like a "half-alligator and-half horse" and certainly like "no other public man he had never seen."³³ William Cullen Bryant, the famed poet and editor of the Albany Evening Journal who had been instrumental in bringing Lincoln to New York, gave the introduction, praising Lincoln for his 1858 debates with Douglas. Then Lincoln took the podium. Some detected anxiousness as he began to speak, and others were annoyed by his high-pitched voice and Kentucky accent. One reporter jotted down, "Old fellow, you won't do. It's all very well for the wild west, but this will never go down in New York."³⁴ Then as Lincoln settled in, his gestures, which many found at first to be a bit awkward, started to synchronize to Lincoln's careful elaboration, and his voice, which at the outset had been high pitched and piercing was soon to seem far more pleasing. He was "captivating," according to the same journalist who had dismissed Lincoln at the outset of his speech, and soon, Lincoln had the crowd in the palm of his hand.³⁵ He had constructed his Cooper Union Address, as it was to be known in the newspapers the next day, in the three distinct parts. In the first part, he argued logically, after an exposition of the Founding Fathers' voting records in the Constitutional Convention in 1787 that Douglas "popular sovereignty doctrine was neither the only "American solution" to the question of slavery, as he lamented, nor the intention of the Founding Fathers.³⁶ Maintaining his view that the Founders had only reluctantly accepted slavery for the sake of national harmony, Lincoln was, in effect, still debating his old rival like he had responded to Douglas' article in Harper's Magazine the previous fall. In the second part, Lincoln tried to appeal to the South "if they would listen – as I suppose they will not."³⁷ Applying the legal language and method with which he had become so familiar over his long legal career, Lincoln argued that the burden of proof lay upon the South as it treated the issue of which party was the more fanatical, the northern faction or their southern brethren. In commenting on the John Brown raid, Lincoln called the called man "insane" and conceded that although he in principle agreed with Brown, he differed in the means by

³² Burlingame 2008, page 1593.

³³ Dohan 1955, page 31

³⁴ Journalist Cornelius A. Runkle re-iterated in Burlingame 2008, page 1598-1599.

³⁵ Burlingame 2008, 1599.

³⁶ Abraham Lincoln at Cooper Union, New York, February 27, 1860 in Fehrenbacher (Editor), *CW*, 1989, page 112.

³⁷ *Ibid*, page 120.

which to best get rid of a “great evil.”³⁸ In the concluding section, Lincoln appealed to his fellow Republicans, and especially those moderate forces which could consider supporting him as the foremost candidate against Seward, by repeating his arguments against slavery’s expansion, ending with this appeal, “Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.”³⁹ In stressing his moderate position by arguing only against slavery’s expansion and its moral injustice, but not explicitly advocating its abolition, Lincoln was carefully positioning himself as the moderate vehicle through which the divided Republicans could unite. He was perfectly aware that Seward was perceived to be more radical than himself and that the John Brown raid had given some credence to those Republicans who argued for a moderate candidate to combat the New Yorker. At his best when applying vivid metaphors, Lincoln made use of one wherein he stressed his pragmatism towards the South while highlighting their lack of reason: “That is cool,” Lincoln said of the southern threats of secession, “A highwayman holds a pistol to my ear, and mutters through his teeth, ‘stand and deliver, or I shall kill you, and then you will be a murderer!’”⁴⁰ The next day, 140,000 potential voters awoke to find a copy of Lincoln’s Cooper Union Speech on their doorstep. The newspaper hailed Lincoln as “the greatest man since St. Paul,” claiming no speaker “ever made such” a first impression on “a New York audience.”⁴¹ Greeley’s New York Tribune described the speech as “the most systematic and complete defense yet made of the republican position with regard to slavery.” Thoroughly convinced, Greeley calling the speech “the very best political address to which I ever listened,” and Bryant concurred. In his estimation Lincoln’s address was “the best political speech” he had ever heard.⁴² Charles Caverno, a Lincoln-supporter from Wisconsin who was in the East when Lincoln gave his speech, echoed these sentiments:

I was in the East when that Cooper Institute speech was delivered. Have you ever watched the turning of the tide – a slow, resistless motion in one direction and a moment later a slow resistless motion in another? That was what you could see in the East as the result of that speech. Men said as they read it, ‘Well, what? Who is this? Here is a strong man – a man of grasp and force. Why, this man would do for the presidency.’⁴³

³⁸ Ibid, page 123-125 Donald 1995, page 239.

³⁹ Lincoln at Cooper Union, February 27, 1860, Basler’s *CW*, vol III, page 550.

⁴⁰ Lincoln at Cooper Union, February 27, 1860 in Fehrenbacher (Editor), *CW*, 1989, page 127.

⁴¹ Burlingame 2008, page 1605. Bryant’s testimony is from his New York Evening Post from February 28, 1860, while Greeley’s came from the Tribune and the latter quote from Greeley’s estimate of Lincoln: An unpublished address by Horace Greeley from 1891.

⁴² Burlingame 2008, page 1605.

⁴³ From Rufus Rockwell Wilson’s 1945 *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, page 211.

To have compared the praise he was receiving and the increased likelihood of his nomination in May to a tidal wave would have been far too strong a statement for the modestly inclined Lincoln. Understating the effects of his performance, he nonetheless disclosed to Mary that he thought his appearance at Cooper Union had gone “passably well,” giving him “no trouble whatever.”⁴⁴ The speech prompted Lincoln to receive invitations from Pennsylvania, Connecticut and New Jersey. Originally, Lincoln had plans to visit his son, Robert, in New Hampshire, but he agreed to include the “Granite State” and Rhode Island on his trip before returning to Springfield. Curiously enough, Lincoln turned down invitations to speak in Pennsylvania and New Jersey, both crucial swing states, and in addition declined an invitation to speak in the Massachusetts legislature. Perhaps Lincoln deemed Seward’s support to be too strong in parts of New England and in New Jersey and Cameron’s too strong in Pennsylvania.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Lincoln’s tour of the East was a great success. The biggest problem for Lincoln as speaker, apparently, was finding new ways to repeat the same message, since most people had already read the bulk of his speech at Cooper Union as he proceeded North from New York.⁴⁶

III

Upon Lincoln’s return to Springfield on March 16, he learned of the growing support for his candidacy among Illinois Republicans. Milton Hay, his old friend and colleague, told him that “no inconsiderable portion” of Illinoisans now believed Lincoln should become the Republican candidate for president, and Trumbull himself wrote Lincoln that in Washington he had “not heard a single man speak of your speeches but in the highest terms.”⁴⁷ Satisfied with his performance, and apart from a speech in nearby Bloomington on April 10, Lincoln tried, for some weeks, to steer clear of the political scene claiming “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.”⁴⁸ Compared to the two busiest weeks of cam-

⁴⁴ Whitney 1892, page 148; *CW*; Fehrenbacher 1989, page 131.

⁴⁵ Burlingame 2008, 1622.

⁴⁶ Fehrenbacher’s *CW* 1989, page 131.

⁴⁷ Burlingame 2008, page 1624, Trumbull to Lincoln, Washington, March 26, 1860, *Abraham Lincoln papers*, Library of Congress.

⁴⁸ Donald 1995, page 242.

paigning in Lincoln's life at the end of February and beginning of March, the two months preceding the National Convention in the middle of May was a frustratingly quiet period for him. The next scheduled trip on his calendar was to Decatur on May 9 where the Illinois Republicans would choose their candidates for the fall elections. Lincoln was now forced to trust the organization he had set in place to work not only for statewide support, but also for support among other state delegations, and quietly, the team worked to cultivate support among doubtful state delegations. Leonard Swett had gone home to Maine to enlist support among its delegation bound for Chicago while Herndon and Davis were to visit Ohio, Pennsylvania, Indiana and Maryland to lobby on Lincoln's behalf.⁴⁹

Lincoln's sudden emergence had awarded him an advantage the Lincoln men could use to their benefit, one Seward and Chase did not have. Being "new in the field," as he put it, his lack of national experience and administrative experience might even work in his favor and give his organization the luxury of nurturing a dark-horse candidacy.⁵⁰ The dark horse himself was reportedly in "excellent health and his usual spirits" and was soon hatching final plans for the organization, as time drew short before the opening of the national convention.⁵¹ To ensure continuous media attention, he made sure that his Cooper Union Address was held in circulation, and the scrap-book of the debates with Douglas was published and became an immediate best-seller.⁵² Lincoln instructed his organization to "give offense to none and leave them in a mood to come to us."⁵³ This would be the strategy of the club in the months preceding Chicago and even as the convention got under way. As Lincoln remarked "Maybe they will give up their first love," thus enabling the Lincoln to emerge, partly because he was a non-threatening rival; then he could gain momentum and win the nomination if Seward could not gain the requisite majority on the first ballot, which seemed to be an increasingly likely scenario in the last few weeks prior to the convention.⁵⁴ Fueling Lincoln's efforts in organizing his own presidential campaign was his insatiable ambition. On several occasions, Herndon described this side of Lincoln. Famously he described it as "a little engine that knew no rest." and insisted that Lincoln was "inordinately ambitious."⁵⁵ Many of his acquaintances and colleagues thought of Lincoln as a benevolent magnanimous local politician convinced of slavery's injustice, but took little notice of his personal ambition and drive to achieve something important in his political life. Although his conviction that slavery not be extended into the West had reignited his political interest and brought him back to vigorous political activity after the introduction of

⁴⁹ Whitney 1892, page 85; Rice ed. 1886, page 639.

⁵⁰ Fehrenbachers *CW*, 1989, page 152.

⁵¹ Luthin 1964, page 81; *CW* Fehrenbacher 1989, page 109; Rockwell 1945, page 4; Angle 1933, page 324.

⁵² Potter 1976, page 419, Donald 1995, page 227.

⁵³ Fehrenbacher's *CW*, 1989, page 152.

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, page 152.

⁵⁵ Herndon & Weik 1921, page 205.

the Kansas-Nebraska Act, it would be his actions since Douglas defeated him that best suggests that the ambitious, politically hungry Lincoln had found a way to achieve personal greatness in the endeavor. Only those close to him knew how possessed he was with achieving greatness, or how driven he was to link his name “with something that would redound in the interest of his fellow man,” as he once told Joshua Speed, the most intimate friend Lincoln ever had.⁵⁶ In the spring of 1860, Lincoln had found an opportunity to channel his inner unquenched ambition and had a chance to enforce his “imperial will,” as Davis called it, on the Illinois Republican organization. In cultivating and spurring on Lincoln’s personal ambition, was also his wife Mary. In a different context she noted that Lincoln could be a “terribly firm man when he set his foot down.”, and even Mary nor any man “could rule him after he had made up his mind.”⁵⁷ And Mary possessed a considerable deal of ambition in her own right. When Ward Hill Lamon, a protégé of Lincoln in the 1850s first visited the Lincoln household, he told her that Lincoln was a favorite in the eastern part of Illinois, where Lamon had joined Lincoln on the circuit. Mary replied: “Yes, he is a great favorite everywhere. He is to be president of the United States some day ; if I had not thought so I never would have married him, for you can see that he is not pretty. But look at him! Doesn’t he look as if he would make a magnificent president?”⁵⁸ As the convention grew nearer, Lincoln and Mary had never been closer to reaching the objective she had jokingly talked about since the 1840s and he had dreamt about all his life.⁵⁹ Now decided on his push for the Republican nomination, Lincoln was asserting his will on the organization, giving each member a “specific task to perform” while he kept up with correspondence and tended his practice back in Springfield.⁶⁰ Davis, who was emerging as Lincoln’s unofficial campaign manager, was entrusted with planning and coordinating the Illinois delegation’s efforts in Chicago. Davis had plans to book rooms at the Tremont House, a short walk from the huge wooden construction known as “The Wigwam,” where the convention would open on May 16. Yet given his lack of faith in Lincoln’s chances, Davis had postponed this task till the last possible minute.⁶¹ What is more, while Davis continued to doubt Lincoln’s chances, Wentworth was raising serious doubts over Davis’ ability to lead the Lincoln organization that would soon travel to Chicago. Being an astute and savvy politician, Wentworth advised Lincoln to, “Do like Seward does,” referring to the skillful Thurlow Weed, and “get someone to run you.”⁶² Wentworth, wanting to place himself as Lincoln’s manager, tried to convince

⁵⁶ Donald 1948, page 138.

⁵⁷ Donald 1995, page 270.

⁵⁸ Lamon 1872, page 21.

⁵⁹ Henry Villard, *Memories of Lincoln*, appearing in *Atlantic Monthly* in February 1904, page 167.

⁶⁰ Emmanuel Hertz’ 1925 address *Lincoln the Seer*, page 5.

⁶¹ Burlingame 2008, 1640.

⁶² Whitney 1892, page 146.

Lincoln that Judd would probably promote Trumbull for the presidency once the convention neared. Wentworth's was not the only advice Lincoln received who told him that his approach to Judd and convention politics was based on a great deal of naivety. Mark Delahay, his supporter in Kansas, also implored Lincoln to utilize Seward's strategy in Kansas, arguing that Lincoln would have to spend money to secure influence. Lincoln replied to Delahay that looking beyond the fact that "it is wrong, ...I have not, and can not get the money."⁶³ Wentworth's suggestions were easier to brush aside. It is likely that Lincoln had already been given assurances that he had Judd's full support; thus he was not basing his approach on naivety, but rather on trust and the pledges from Judd, given after Lincoln had supported Judd in the feud with Wentworth.

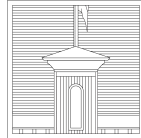
In the year that had passed since his debates with Douglas, Lincoln had repeatedly dismissed the requests he had received which suggested he should enter the field of prominent Republicans who were pursuing the presidential nomination. But in January 1860, he could apparently no longer stay out of the race. By May, he had become an emerging prospective candidate. Since he returned to Springfield after delivering his now-celebrated speech at Cooper Union on February 27, he had tried to lay low and steer clear of the political scene. Lincoln did not want to give anyone the impression that he believed he could obtain the nomination. Seemingly, this even extended to his inner circle of political friends. According to David Davis, who had emerged as Lincoln's unofficial campaign manager, Lincoln "never confided to me anything."⁶⁴ Lincoln, however boasted that, as far his campaign manager was concerned, "I keep no secrets from him". Apparently, Lincoln was more forthright with Trumbull. When he asked Lincoln what his thoughts were for the upcoming convention, Lincoln could no longer hide contain his excitement. He responded with a subdued expression of what can only be characterized as outright giddiness coming from the reticent Lincoln. On his thoughts for the presidential nomination, he simply responded: "I will be entirely frank. The taste *is* in my mouth a little."⁶⁵

⁶³ Abraham Lincoln to Mark Delahay March 16, 1860 in Basler's *CW*, Vol IV, page 44.

⁶⁴ "Secrets from" Donald 1995, p. 242; "to me anything" King 1960, page 128.

⁶⁵ Abraham Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull April 29, 1860 in Baslers *CW*, 1953, Volume IV, pages 44-45.

Make no contracts that will bind me



A short week before the national convention was to open in Chicago, the Illinois Republicans convened in Decatur, northeast in Illinois, to hold their state nominating event. Here they would be making their picks for Governor, Senator and most importantly, a presidential candidate to back in the national convention only a few miles away in northern Chicago. Only a short ride from Springfield, Lincoln had made the trip and tried, as discreetly as he could, to enter the convention without being noticed.¹ Failing to keep himself hidden, Lincoln was observed just inside the door as the proceedings began, and when Richard Oglesby, the chairman of the convention, rose and informed the raucous crowd that “a distinguished citizen of Illinois” was present, most understood his reference, and Lincoln was soon lifted from the floor to the stage. Lincoln tried his best to act surprised and convey his gratitude.² Never at his best when giving unprepared remarks, he was relieved when Oglesby delivered another cryptic message claiming there was “an old Democrat outside” who wished to present “something” to the Convention. Through the door came an elderly man carrying two “rails,” wooden planks that had been split to later fit into a fence attached was a banner reading:

¹ Lamon 1872, page 444.

² Ibid pages 444, 445.

“ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The rail candidate

FOR president IN 1860

Two rails from a lot made by Abraham Lincoln and John Hanks in Sangamon Bottom, in the year 1830”³

“The old man,” whom Oglesby had teased the audience about during his introduction of Lincoln was Lincoln’s maternal cousin Dennis Hanks.⁴ Hanks had grown up with Lincoln and had “split rails” with him, giving Lincoln, who was aware that Oglesby had plans to depict him as a “rail-splitter”, the opportunity to present himself as both a “statesman of Cooper Union” and a frontier hero of sorts. The campaign was reminiscent of that which had elected William Henry Harrison president in 1840 by using a campaign symbol of a log cabin. Laughingly, Lincoln could only think to say that although he was uncertain whether Hanks’ and he had, in fact, “made these rails or not,” he claimed, “I think I could make better than these now.”⁵

Although Lincoln would not be directly involved in the proceedings at the national convention in Chicago, he had a strong sense of what tactic should be employed to earn him the nomination. He gave the “lay of the land”, as he put it, to an Ohioan Republican:

”First then, I think the Illinois delegation will be unanimous for me at the start; and no other delegation will. A few individuals in other delegations would like to go for me at the start, but may be restrained by their colleagues. It is represented to me, by men who ought to know, that the whole of Indiana might not be difficult to get. You know how it is in Ohio. I am certainly not the first choice there; and yet I have not heard that any one makes any positive objection to me. It is just so everywhere so far as I can perceive. Everywhere, except in Illinois, and possibly Indiana, one or another is preferred to me, but there is no positive objection. This is the ground as it now appears. I believe you personally know C. M. Allen, of Vincennes, Ia. [2] He is a delegate, and has notified me that the entire Ia. delegation will be in Chicago the same day you name—Saturday the 12th. My friends Jesse K. Dubois, our Auditor, & Judge David Davis, will probably be there ready to confer with friends from other States.”⁶

³ Ibid, page 445.

⁴ Burlingame 2008, page 1637

⁵ Lamon 1872, pages 444 - 445.

⁶ Abraham Lincoln to Richard M. Corwine, May 2, 1860 in Basler’s *CW*, vol IV, page 48, 49.

As Lincoln predicted, the Illinois convention unanimously supported his candidacy for president, and he also had a notion that the Indiana delegation would do the same.⁷ Although Lincoln believed that no other state delegation had any “positive objections” to his candidacy, he continued to pursue the risky strategy of cultivating mostly second ballot support to win the nomination.⁸ What made this strategy risky was that it counted on the half-hearted national support for the popular proven Republican Seward on the first ballot. Further complicating the plot was the strategy’s dependence upon other state delegations to abandon their favorite sons on subsequent ballots, which in previous years had made possible the emergence of unforeseen compromise candidates like “dark horse” democratic nominees and later presidents, James K. Polk and Franklin Pierce. Lincoln voiced these concerns to the team of official and unofficial delegates he selected to represent him in Chicago. In addition to the official delegates, Davis, Judd, Browning, Koerner and Swett, there were a flurry of unofficial friends and supporters travelling to Chicago, of whom included Herndon, Hatch, Dubois and Fell.⁹ Having done everything he personally could to achieve success, Lincoln would now have count on Davis’ leadership to make the necessary deals to ensure second-ballot support and bring Lincoln closer to the nomination. Davis, who would arrive in Chicago on May 12 had not even booked rooms for the Lincoln organization at the Tremont House. Yet, Davis and the team set out for Chicago with Lincoln’s message ingrained in his memory and the luxury of promoting an appealing and electable candidate with a presidential image.

Ahead of the Convention, Lincoln had written Trumbull to make sure he would not interfere with Lincoln’s burgeoning position as the leader of the Illinois Republicans or stand in the way of his possible proclamation as the national standard-bearer. Uncharacteristically, Lincoln, who liked to suggest rather than instruct, wrote Trumbull firmly that he “better write no letters which can possibly be distorted into opposition, or even quasi opposition to me.”¹⁰ Lincoln added, “I have hesitated some to write this paragraph, lest you should suspect I do it for my own benefit,” explaining his strong-worded instruction. The wording suggests that Lincoln was so firmly set on the nomination that he needed to avoid Trumbull’ opposition, fearing that Trumbull might try to position himself as a possible western Vice-presidential nominee to match the likely nomination of an easterner like Seward.¹¹

⁷ Abraham Lincoln to Samuel Corwine, May 2, 1860, from Fehrenbacher’s *CW*1989, page 156.

⁸ Fehrenbacher’s *CW*1989, page 156.

⁹ Whitney 1892, page 92.

¹⁰ Abraham Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, April 29, 1860 in Baslers *CW*1953, Volume IV, pages 44-45.

¹¹ Fehrenbacher 1962, page 153.

I

“What the Republican Party wants” and needed to “insure success in 1860,” Jesse W. Fell declared in May 1860; “is a man of popular origin, of acknowledged ability, committed against slavery aggressions, who has no record to defend and no radicalism of an offensive character.”¹² Coincidentally, these were also the qualities which Lincoln had ensured would be connected to himself in the months preceding the national convention. As many state delegations were preparing the long journey West to Chicago, the quality to which Fell referred to as “no record to defend” seemed to make Lincoln an increasingly attractive candidate. Many preferred a candidate like him who, at least yet, owed few or even no political favors and who had no controversial record to defend.¹³ The image of a rail splitter which had been constructed by the Illinois Republicans played on Lincoln’s physical fortitude and this coupled with the statesman-like reputation from the speech given and the portrait taken prior to Cooper Union, proved to be a good sales pitch to those delegations not familiar with Lincoln.¹⁴ There were other and more geographically oriented concerns to ponder as well. On the one hand, the candidate needed the “radical” appeal which would attract the upper Northwest while also attracting more conservative states like New Jersey, Pennsylvania and the eastern states, not only to be nominated, but also to win the presidential election in November.¹⁵ Four years earlier, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Indiana and Illinois had been lost to the Democrats, and this concerned many because the Republican support among eastern states seemed more solid compared to the more closely divided states in the west.¹⁶ One representative described the geographical challenges confronting the Republican Party: “Without the radical Yankees and Germans of Michigan, Wisconsin and northern Illinois” the party “might lose the Northwest, while if it meets the wishes of this wing, it will repel voters in the Middle States.”¹⁷

Although Lincoln fit the mold of a potential Republican nominee, he remained one of the more unlikely candidates behind other men who also filled the criteria and in addition had a solid political record both to boast about and defend, like Seward, Bates and Chase. In two campaign pamphlets

¹² Oldroyd, ed. (editor) 1882, pages 473-476.

¹³ King 1960, page 134.

¹⁴ Holzer 2004, page 1.

¹⁵ Maisel 1991, page 292.

¹⁶ Nevins 1950, page 235.

¹⁷ Ibid, page 234.

released just before the convention, Lincoln's main drawback – his lack of celebrity – became evident. While the one pamphlet failed to even mention Lincoln's name, the other, which featured pictures of the candidates suggested Lincoln's candidacy was at best that of a dark horse and at worst a mere favorite son of Illinois, with his unusual and often misspelled name connected to a picture placed far from the center and far from Bates', Seward's and Chase's likenesses.¹⁸ Luckily for Lincoln, these pamphlets revealed nothing of the work of his club, and as previous presidential nominations had proven, prominence was not necessarily a criterion for being chosen as presidential nominee.¹⁹

A candidate who certainly projected prominence was Seward.²⁰ But Seward's reputation of being a radical abolitionist increasingly led many to doubt his electability, and on the eve of the convention, it appeared that Edward Bates, the sixty-six-year-old former Whig, was emerging as the strongest contender to Seward.²¹ Unlike Seward, Bates was not saddled with a reputation of radicalism, and this helped elevate his status as a potential nominee.²² To many, Bates' conservatism was appealing because it in contrast to Seward, Lincoln or Chase, Bates could potentially appeal to conservative voters in the states of the lower North and possibly even in the Upper South.²³ Like Lincoln, Bates' candidacy presupposed the support of the Anti-Seward movement and the possibility that that movement might grow and prevail in the convention. Bates' appeal also emanated from his personal charm, his charisma, and not necessarily because of his political or presidential qualities.²⁴ To some, Bates' lack of commitment to the Republican Party which he had not even joined by 1860 and his lack of commitment to "radical principles" perhaps made Bates a fitting compromise candidate, but he certainly would not poll well with ardent abolitionists or more radical voters.²⁵ Another candidate, who could not be denied the nomination because of fears of excessive conservatism was Salmon P. Chase, the radical and skillful Ohioan who in physical stature and powerful intellect made a strikingly presidential figure.²⁶ Chase's political life, however, was marred by his gigantic ego matched only by his lacking diplomatic skills which had left him without the political friends. And by convention time, Chase had not developed a political apparatus that might enable

¹⁸ Failed to even mention his name" from Potter 1976, page 419; "far from the center", from *Harper's Magazine* on May 12, 1860, taken from Holzer 2004, centerfold.

¹⁹ Potter 1976, page 419; Donald 1995, page 227.

²⁰ Luthin 1964, page 25.

²¹ Fehrenbacher's *CW* volume I, page 109.

²² Luthin 1964, page 68.

²³ Donald 1995, page 236.

²⁴ Nevins 1950, page 239.

²⁵ Donald 1995, page 244.

²⁶ Donald 1995, page 236.

him to succeed on the national political scene.²⁷ Despite their glaring deficiencies, Bates, Chase and Seward led the pack of possible presidential nominees as the convention grew nearer. But it seemed that the race for president was relatively open, because no single candidate possessed a combination of the right political opinions, track record and popular appeal. Behind the front-runners, there were numerous hopefuls, but most of these men had little chance of support beyond their own states. These, candidates including Cassius M. Clay of Kentucky, Henry Lane of Pennsylvania and Simon Cameron from Pennsylvania only had a hope of emerging as a dark-horse in a deadlocked convention.²⁸ There were also others, such as Benjamin Wade of Ohio, William Dayton of New Jersey, John Frémont from Virginia, who all had more elaborate plans of how to gain the nomination.²⁹ Additionally, there was an increasingly emerging and available candidate who Seward unflatteringly described as “that prairie statesman”, namely Abraham Lincoln of Illinois.³⁰

II

Chicago, May 14, 1860:

Norman B. Judd, Chairman of the Illinois Republican Committee, walks swiftly home. He is in a hurry; the Republican national committee has just given him the responsibility of seating arrangements in the Wigwam building where the Republican National Convention will be held in two days' time. He rushes in the door, lights the lamp at his desk, grabs a pencil and a piece of paper. After half an hour, totally consumed in the work of placing the different delegations, Norman doesn't notice that his wife is awake, out of bed, and looking over his shoulder. He remarks to himself: “By cracky, Abe's nominated!” “What do you mean, Norman?” His wife asks. Norman turns and shows the paper he's been filling out. “The national committee met this afternoon and

²⁷ Nevins 1950, page 242.

²⁸ Randall, 1945, vol I, page 160.

²⁹ Whitney 1892, page 77.

³⁰ From Paul M. Angle and Earl Shenck Mier (editors) 1960 *Fire The Salute! Abe Lincoln's nominated!*, notes from Mural Halstead's reporting of the 1860 National Republican Convention, preface.

assigned to me the seating of the delegates in the convention, and, sure as shooting, Abe's nominated!"³¹

Following tradition, Lincoln was not planning to attend the Chicago convention, telling Swett he considered himself to be, "too much of a candidate to be there, I reckon; yet not enough of a candidate to stay away."³² Instead, Lincoln tried to stay informed and coordinate his team from Springfield. Davis and the rest had left for Chicago on May 12 to establish headquarters at the Tremont House near the Wigwam, where the team would work at convincing undecided delegates ahead of the balloting for resident, expected to take place on May 17. As the Republican national convention opened on Wednesday May 16, the crowd pouring into Chicago were brimming with optimism, some declaring that "All the auguries are that we shall meet the enemy and they shall be ours," alluding to the Democratic convention which two weeks earlier had been dissolved without a presidential candidate.³³ To Lincoln, who was hoping that Douglas would become the Democratic nominee (having already proved his worth against the esteemed Senator), the news was taken heavier than by most others in the Republican Party, who were feeling almost invincible, rejoicing in the Democrats' divisions. The presidential election four years earlier, where then Republican candidate, John C. Frémont, had almost become president, the electoral victories in 1858 and 1859, and the Democratic rupture combined to suggest that the Republican nominee would likely become the next president of the United States.

As delegates started arriving in Chicago the week prior to the grand second national Republican convention, the decision to choose this small, almost rural city as the venue for the convention that would likely nominate the first Republican president must have seemed even stranger than when the decision had been reached the previous December. Estimates of how many legitimate delegates, supporters and outright hooligans who gathered in Chicago in the third week of May 1860 vary greatly, but to venture that the city's population of 75,000 doubled during the proceedings seems likely, given the average of estimates.³⁴ The convention size spoke volumes not only of the rapid growth of the nation and the rising importance of the West, but also of the Republican Party itself. Four years earlier, two thousand seats had been sufficient to seat the delegates attending the national

³¹ This entire paragraph is taken from Rufus Rockwell Wilson's 1945 *Intimate memories of Lincoln*, pages 4-5, but has been re-written to function as an introduction to the Republican National Convention, which Edward Judd remembered the preceding days to.

³² Whitney 1892, page 87.

³³ Nevins 1950, page 229; Maisel 1991, page 291.

³⁴ See for instance, Nevins, 1950, page 229 or Orman 1916, page 15.

convention. This time, the convention represented perhaps the largest gathering of any kind in the nation's young history, and it was certainly the biggest political gathering ever recorded.³⁵ On the morning of May 16, the Wigwam, the name of the massive wooden structure erected for this sole purpose, was overfilled with enthusiastic supporters. Davis had instructed the loyal Lincoln supporters to arrive early at the Wigwam, hoping to leave many of the Seward men outside. From all over the state, many Lincoln men had arrived by train, either to cheer for Illinois' favorite son, watch the spectacle, or simply heckle all other factions. As the 460 official delegates entered the wigwam, they marveled at the gigantic two-story structure, which, with its capacity of up to fifteen thousand people, made it the largest audience room in the nation. Judd, who had been responsible for seating the delegates, had shrewdly placed the pro-Seward New York delegation at the very front, isolated from other delegations that were supportive of Seward and far away from the undecided delegations including the large and crucial Ohio and Pennsylvania delegations who were still squabbling over a viable candidate to support.³⁶ Placing the delegations in this way, Judd ensured that the New York men could not converse during the balloting with the crucial states; he surrounded the New York delegation with delegates of the pro-Lincoln states, Indiana and Illinois. Coupled with the second story reserved for spectators, many of whom were cheering on Lincoln, this gave many in the vast room the impression that Lincoln's support was bigger than it really was.³⁷

According to an eye witness, the convention was so loud that, "A thousand steam whistles, ten acres of hotel gongs, a tribe of Comanches, headed by a choice vanguard from pandemonium, might have mingled in the scene unnoticed."³⁸ The first order of business for the convention was the adoption of a political platform, and after the principles which would be established in the platform were introduced, the floor was opened for debate. Marked by chaos, haste, impatience and rudeness, the debate took so long that its official adoption had to be postponed until the next day. As is common in political gatherings of this nature, the end of the formal proceedings marked the beginning of the more important informal ones. Tactics varied from delegation to delegation. For instance, unlike the Weed-lead Seward delegation, the Lincoln camp had no money to offer hesitant delegates, and instead spent the first night trying personally to convince the crucial Pennsylvania delegation with its many delegates of Lincoln's superior electability. The Pennsylvania delegation were in a unique position to back the eventual nominee, but refused the Lincoln men's attempts, preferring to see how far its support for its favorite son, Simon Cameron, might take them. Having received far less support than they counted on, the Lincoln men went into the second day of the

³⁵ Orman 1916, page 15.

³⁶ King 1960, page 139.

³⁷ Ibid, page 139-140.

³⁸ Rockwell 1945, page 295.

convention with a great deal of trepidation over how strong Seward's support actually was, and if they could count on the promises they had already been given.

IV

Minor discussions arising over the inclusion of certain parts of the Declaration of Independence dominated the second day of proceedings, which culminated with the enthusiastic adoption of a Republican platform. Left in a frenzy, the crowd was eagerly demanding to push ahead with the business of nominating the presidential and vice-presidential candidates who would run on this platform. Yet at six o' clock in the evening, an announcement that there was a lack of paper to tally the votes convinced the convention to adjourn until the next morning. For Davis and his team, this was welcome news. Time was of the essence. Davis quickly assembled his team back at the Tremont House where he for the past five days had sat behind a table giving orders, receiving intelligence and urging greater efforts. Removed from the intrigue taking place in Chicago, Lincoln anxiously awaited news from the Illinois delegation. On the second day in a short break before the official adoption of the platform, he had received a telegram from Davis saying: "Am very hopeful. Don't be excited. Nearly dead with fatigue. Telegraph or write here very little."³⁹ A second telegram from the exuberant Dubois informed Lincoln that their efforts to secure Pennsylvania would be fruitful if Cameron could be promised the post of Secretary of the Treasury. Out of the loop on what deals were being struck to improve his chances, Lincoln felt frustrated and powerless back in Springfield. Fearing the deals that his organization were making and the predicament it would put him in if nominated, Lincoln replied to Dubois telegram: "I authorize no bargains and will be bound by none."⁴⁰ Fearing the deals that his organization were making and the predicament they might put him in if nominated, Lincoln had also sent a copy of the newspaper the Missouri Democrat to the organization in Chicago the previous day. It featured an article on Seward's slavery position. Lincoln had marked three paragraphs with a pencil and on the margin had written, "I agree with Seward in his 'irrepressible conflict,' but I do not endorse his 'higher law' doctrine." This came as

³⁹ King 1960, page 139.

⁴⁰ Whitney 1908, page 289.

news to the organization (the so-called Lincoln men), and in the absence of Lincoln, a clarification was perhaps needed to improve the Lincoln sale pitch. Yet it was Lincoln's last sentence, which instructed the team to "make no contracts that will bind me," that caught the organization off-guard.⁴¹ How could the righteous Lincoln so far removed from the action in Springfield have the nerve to instruct the hard-working team immersed in all sorts of shady deals to ensure his nomination to give the clear instruction to make no contracts that would bind him? The group went "mad," according to one witness. Yelling out "Damn Lincoln," Dubois was interrupted by Swett who calmly stated that "I am very sure if Lincoln was aware of the necessities" before Herndon aired off. Finally, Davis calmed the group down, saying, "Lincoln ain't here, and don't know what we have to meet, so we will go ahead, as if we hadn't heard from him, and he must ratify it."⁴² Messages Lincoln had received worried him greatly. Four days earlier Dubois had telegraphed him: "Judge Davis is furious... Never saw him work so hard and so quiet in all my life."⁴³

Ignoring Lincoln's seemingly naïve message to make no binding deals, Davis' tactics remained the same. He pushed on, instructing his team to identify delegations pondering voting for Seward on the first ballot and trying to convince these delegations to vote instead for their favorite son on the first ballot before switching to Lincoln. Davis had faith that this tactic would prevail in the end. By employing this strategy, and making a number of "binding deals," Davis had already secured the support of Indiana, by most likely promising Hoosier Caleb Smith a place in Lincoln's possible cabinet.⁴⁴ Illinois and Indiana would combine to cast a block of 48 votes. Using this concrete and considerable support as leverage over other potentially emerging candidates, Davis was now trying to convince the crucial Pennsylvania and New Jersey delegations to support Lincoln on the second ballot, and essentially the same message was communicated to Eastern delegations. Observing the strength of anti-Seward sentiment in many states, the Lincoln team's biggest concern had gone from convincing delegations of Lincoln's greater electability to avoiding deadlocking the convention with a head-on race against Seward on the ballot. This, the Lincoln-men felt, could potentially mean the emergence of a dark-horse, something Lincoln no was – and would mean the downfall of Lincoln and Seward's candidacy.

In this complicated context, after the Convention had adjourned at six o' clock on May 17, the Lincoln men focused their efforts on Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. As night fell, a sub-convention

⁴¹ Lincoln's message on the margins of the *Missouri Democrat* on May 17, 1860 in Basler's *CW* 1953, Volume IV page 50.

⁴² This is based on Whitney's account in his 1907 *Lincoln the Citizen* page 289; Potter 1976, page 428.

⁴³ King 1960, page 136.

⁴⁴ Henry C. Whitney claims in his 1892 *Lincoln the Citizen* that the promise to give Caleb Smith a place in Lincoln's cabinet was a prerequisite for the Indiana delegation's support, but for instance Fehrenbacher disputes such claims, Whitney 1892, page 85.

was formed with delegates from Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey and Pennsylvania, four states who had been lost to the party in the election four years earlier and whose support was needed to win the North in the upcoming election that would decide the presidency.⁴⁵ This gave the sub-convention the opportunity of virtually deciding the presidential candidate. But the negotiations took a long time. At 11:40 PM, Greeley sent a dispatch to New York concluding that “the opposition cannot concentrate on any candidate, and that he [Seward] will be nominated.”⁴⁶ But for the Sub-convention convening at the Tremont House, things were not so clear. In fact, they were getting closer were now concentrating on which state candidate should be chosen as a compromise candidate. While New Jersey, Indiana and Pennsylvania all had favorite son candidates to back, they were also aware that Lincoln, Bates and Seward were in reality the only candidates capable of mustering the requisite support outside their own states. New Jersey and Indiana argued that placing Seward on the national ticket would make success for their state candidates more difficult. Davis certainly voiced no objections to these concerns, and when he convinced the other delegations of Lincoln’s electability, Seward was ruled out. Bates’ candidacy, however, had far stronger support among the other delegations. Yet after Davis had ensured that Lincoln would be a fitting president given his moderate reputation and after he had shown that Lincoln already had the support the Northwest, what remained was negotiating a fair deal in return for second-ballot support for Lincoln.⁴⁷ The sub-convention decided to support Lincoln and to balance the ticket geographically, Hannibal Hamlin from Maine was selected as the Vice-presidential candidate. The agreement reached by the sub-committee was based on the understanding that: “These negotiations shall forever be secret and confidential.”⁴⁸ The Illinois men gave no guarantees, but they gave tacit confirmation to Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania that he would also have a place in Lincoln’s cabinet if he was elected. Having thus pledged to support Lincoln, Indiana and Pennsylvania agreed to swing their votes to Lincoln on the second-ballot.

V

⁴⁵ King 1960, page 140.

⁴⁶ Halstead, 1960, page 32.

⁴⁷ Ibid, page 140.

⁴⁸ Whitney 1892, page 86; Hamilton 1869, pages 453-454.

The first round of balloting the next day revealed that Lincoln's support was greater than even his friends had anticipated. While Seward received 173 ½ votes, Lincoln received 102 votes on the first ballot, more than twice the original block of 48 votes from Illinois and Indiana. On the second ballot, Seward's strength grew to 184 ½ votes while Lincoln made enormous strides receiving 181 votes, as Pennsylvania, parts of Ohio, the entire Indiana, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Delaware all swung their votes to Lincoln.⁴⁹ The tactic was working. The third round essentially displayed that the race was over. Lincoln fell three votes short of the nomination as more delegates from Ohio, Maryland and Massachusetts went for Lincoln, giving the Illinois candidate 231 ½ votes.⁵⁰ For a moment, the crowd grew silent before erupting in a deafening competition over who could give Lincoln the necessary majority. Ohio won out, giving Lincoln four more votes on the fourth ballot, before his nomination was made unanimous on the fifth.⁵¹ The celebration which ensued was only disrupted by a loud bang coming from the roof.⁵² It was the cannon on top of the Wigwam going off, indicating the end of the convention and the selection of the Republican nominee for president, the second in its history, Abraham Lincoln from Illinois.

Having trouble sleeping, Lincoln rose early on May 18. When he heard that his old friend James C. Conkling had returned from Chicago, he rushed to his law office in downtown Springfield. Trying to appear unaffected when he learned of Conkling's prediction that he would most likely get the nomination, Lincoln avoided tempting fate by stating that either Bates or Chase would be the choice. On his way out, he turned to Conkling and said, "Well, Conkling, I believe I will go back to my office and practice law."⁵³ Instead, Lincoln apparently went to play ball with some friends to combat "the unnatural excitement that threatened to possess him," as Herndon later put it.⁵⁴ When news of the balloting started to arrive, Lincoln went to Edward Baker's office in downtown Springfield.⁵⁵ When the telegram of his unanimous nomination was received, Lincoln had difficulty containing his emotions and instead started to put on his coat and hat. As he left Baker's office, he accepted the many well-wishers' congratulations and jokingly told them, "Gentlemen, you had better come up and shake my hand while you can – honors elevate some men." Putting kidding aside, he proceeded to tell them, "Well Gentlemen there is a little woman at our house who is

⁴⁹ Nevins 1950, page 242.

⁵⁰ Ibid, page 239.

⁵¹ King 1960, page 141.

⁵² Ibid, page 141.

⁵³ This episode is taken from Jesse W. Weik's 1922 *The Real Lincoln: a Portrait*, page 266-267.

⁵⁴ Ibid, page 463.

⁵⁵ Herndon 1889, page 463.

probably more interested in this dispatch than I am,” referring to Mary waiting at home.⁵⁶ When he arrived there, he found his house and entire street filled with well-wishers and friends.⁵⁷ After giving a short speech on the steps of his home he invited all who could fit in. The next day he issued a more official acceptance in a telegram to the national committee, expressing “profoundest thanks for the high honor done me, which you now formally announce.”⁵⁸ Modestly asserting the graveness of the situation while formally accepting the committee’s nomination he deemed it, “a responsibility which I could almost wish had fallen upon some one of the far more eminent men and experienced statesmen whose distinguished names were before the Convention.” Ending the telegram, he expressed his joy, “Not doubting now, that the platform will be found satisfactory, and the nomination [gratefully] accepted. And now, I will not longer defer the pleasure of taking you, and each of you, by the hand.”⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Taken from Donald 1995, page 250, who in turn refers to Charles s. Zane’s 1912 article in *Sunset Magazine* entitled *Lincoln as I knew him*. Accounts of how Lincoln received the news of his nomination vary slightly, but relay much of the same message. For instance, a similar story is found in Herndon 1889, page 463.

⁵⁷ Abraham Lincoln’s reply to the Committee of the Republican National Convention, May 19, 1860 in Basler’s *CW* Vol IV, page 50.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, page 51.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*, page 51.

Historiography and constructed images



Leaving the cultivated narrative behind, the thesis will now discuss on what basis the thesis' image of Lincoln rests, and how this image differs from other historians' images who have researched and written about Lincoln's first nomination. The image of Lincoln presented in this thesis and how he was nominated emphasizes that Lincoln played a more active role than others historians have depicted, yet this interpretation is based on the same sources which are and have been available to other historians. Thus, the historian's perception of "who Lincoln was" is intrinsically linked to how depictions of his quest for the nomination are constructed. In this chapter the thesis will discuss an impression of Lincoln which in turn will illuminate why the narrative is constructed as it is before the thesis will turn to two crucial events in Lincoln's nominative quest where the source-material is disputable.

5.1 The modest myth

Unlike many later biographers, William Herndon and John Hay, who had known Lincoln well offered nothing to the biographer looking to describe Lincoln as a modest man. Biographers like Herndon and Hay, who knew Lincoln from separate stages of his life and had strikingly different portrayals of the Lincoln they knew, could at least agree on one thing: Lincoln was not a modest man. In a letter to Herndon, Hay asserted, "It is absurd to call him a modest man. No great man was ever modest."¹ Some reminiscences describing Lincoln's role in the nomination suggests that Lincoln did not push to launch his presidential campaign, an impression, one should add, not reiterated in the narrative of this thesis. In the next section, the thesis will return to these reminiscences. These accounts suggests that Lincoln, for whatever reason, was hesitant about launching a Presidential candidacy. If Lincoln ever hesitated about his abilities to be nominated President, it was probably not because he felt - what he stated publicly - that he was "unfit" to serve as President. Rather, it is far more likely that Lincoln hesitated only because he felt that his candidacy had no real possibility - at that time - of gaining the nomination.

As Donald Fehrenbacher puts it in his *Prelude to Greatness* from 1962, Lincoln "refused to take the idea" of becoming a presidential candidate "seriously and more than once protested that he was "not fit for the presidency." "But," according to Fehrenbacher, "a change gradually came over Lincoln in 1859; this was his year of self-discovery."² Fehrenbacher claims that by the autumn of 1859, after delivering speeches in Ohio, Wisconsin and Kansas, Lincoln was "fast becoming, without acknowledging it, a Presidential candidate in earnest."³ Furthermore, Fehrenbacher asserts that Lincoln had achieved some measure of fame in the 1858 debates and that he tried to regenerate this momentum throughout 1859 while being "devoted to his private business," before being persuaded by his friends and political supporters in 1860 to launch a residential campaign.

One problem with this classic depiction of Lincoln's pre-presidential life is its perpetuation of Lincoln as somehow detached and reluctant in the context of launching a presidential campaign in the 1850s. Historians like Fehrenbacher would have us believe that Lincoln somehow was not the prime mover behind his own presidential candidacy. This is in accordance with the Lincoln many historians have constructed, who, correctly, on two different occasions publicly claimed he was unfit for the Presidency. This is the same Lincoln who was lifted by his friends to the presidential nomination. However, the notion that Lincoln somehow refused to enter the race for president

¹ John Hay to William H. Herndon, September 5, 1866 in Wilson & Davis' *Herndon's informants* page 332.

² Fehrenbacher 1962, page 143.

³ *Ibid*, page 144.

because he believed he was somehow “unfit” to serve, or that he was “without acknowledging it,” becoming a presidential candidate, is, to put it bluntly, a ludicrous claim.

If any political figure in the 1850s were acknowledging and keeping stock of their political capital, it was Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln realized that, for all intents and purposes, he appeared unfit for the presidency. As of yet, he had not generated enough political capital. Although Lincoln had a national reputation, he still had not held public office for over ten years. Thus it was it was a wise decision on Lincoln’s part to hold off from acting on the suggestion that he should throw himself into the highly contested race for the presidential nomination. However, although a logical conclusion, this was not because Lincoln was modest meaning doubtful or unassuming of his own abilities. Rather, Lincoln realized, probably more than anyone, that he did not have the right presidential image in order to launch a campaign in 1859, to say nothing of the foolishness of launching a campaign at this time. But his self-confidence coupled with his enormous appetite to achieve something “redounding in the interest of my fellow man,” as he had once told Speed, meant that Lincoln probably never really doubted whether he was, in fact, fit for the presidency. Rather, Lincoln acknowledged that to all outward appearances, it seemed that he indeed was. Instead, Lincoln questioned the timing of a proposal to launch a presidential candidacy in his public capacity as “humble Abraham Lincoln”, but when his friends approached him with similar schemes, he was far less “humble”, as one soon will see. Knowing full well that his approval of a launching of a presidential campaign entailed that Lincoln - and nobody else - would be in charge of how his public persona was presented, Lincoln wisely waited. In a time where the volatile political milieu allowed little or no missteps, Lincoln avoided making fatal political missteps, unlike Seward. Lincoln had been skillful in his construction of a public image. By 1860, he was perceived as having a certain integrity, thanks in large part to his conscious idea of how to present himself to the public.

However, this did not mean that Lincoln did not have grave doubts as to whether he could, in fact, gain the Republican nomination for president in May. Still, it is highly unlikely that the confident Lincoln was doubtful about his abilities or that he genuinely felt “his unfittedness” impeded him in his quest for the nomination. If he had such doubts, how does one explain Lincoln’s “sudden” willingness in early January 1860 to enter the field of presidential hopefuls? Was he not unfit after all?

To Fehrenbacher’s point, a change certainly did occur during 1859. But rather than bolstering Lincoln’s own belief in his presidential stature, it was rather the way in which he was perceived as “presidential” which dramatically changed during 1859 - mainly due to Lincoln’s own speeches and actions, one might add. The problem with a rigid image of Lincoln as modest, perhaps first and foremost, is that it provides a static understanding of the man’s personality. By dismissing any

suggestion that Lincoln was indeed highly ambitious and assertive within his quest for power on account of his alleged modesty, one rules out many plausible theories regarding Lincoln's role in the nominative effort. There is, in my estimation, no contradiction between portraying Lincoln as both modest and as ambitious, rather, it is highly likely that he was both, and completely implausible that he just sat by and waited for the nomination to fall in his lap – innocent in the workings of 1850s politics. Lincoln was highly ambitious and modest in the meaning that he cultivated an image of a public persona who behaved in a manner intended to avoid impropriety or indecency.

How could Lincoln be claimed to somehow be doubtful of his own abilities, considering that he was defeated in 1854 and 1858 before launching a Presidential campaign in 1860? Are Lincoln's actions really indicative of a man believing he was "unfit for the Presidency"?

The challenge for Lincoln - and any ambitious politician in 19th century America - was that his ambition did not mesh well with the Victorian society from which he emerged.⁴ "What Lincoln lacked in refined manners," Lincoln-scholar Harold Holzer asserts, "he possessed abundantly in self-confidence."⁵ The self-confident and strategically astute Lincoln was not modest and certainly not unfit for the presidency, but this was the impression he knew he made. Thus, he refused to leave the impression that he was not cognizant of such an impression, and he certainly did not want to give the impression that he had any real belief in his own chances to become president, a sensible political stance in mid 19th century America. The persistent myth that Lincoln was somehow modest about his abilities to become President or that he played but a limited and "modest role" in the campaign seems in much need of the type of review proffered by the present study; especially considering that Lincoln carefully crafted such an image of public reticence and political modesty – which historians have neglected to adequately question or critique. Ever since Lincoln had entered politics as a young man and contrary to his carelessness when it came to dressing well or appearing well groomed in everyday activities, Lincoln was painstakingly conscious of his public image. In his first political speech launching his candidacy for the state legislature, he told voters "I was born and have ever remained in the most humble walks of life."⁶ Since that speech, on thirty-five different occasions before 1860, he spoke of himself as the "humble" Abraham Lincoln.⁷

There were good tactical reasons to present himself in this fashion. Ever since he was born, Lincoln had noticed the public fears of a despotic tyrant becoming President. He had read Parson Mason Weem's biography on George Washington repeatedly, and he probably dreamt of how he

⁴ Angle (editor) Herndon 1949, page 366.

⁵ Holzer 2004, page 57.

⁶ Abraham Lincoln in his first political speech to the people of Sangamon County March 9, 1832 in Basler's *CW*, Vol I, page 8.

⁷ Donald 1995, page 43.

could achieve similar greatness.⁸ Yet public fears of “less pure” men than Washington were not only based on the moral code of Victorian America, but also on the fact that the young nation was also, like similar democratic projects around the world, fragile and weary of tyrants. It had set in place a constitution aimed at reducing the power of the executive. Democracies built with similar separation of powers had proved to be failing all over the world. Acknowledging this, Lincoln himself warned against ambitious men: “Many great and good men, sufficiently qualified for any task they should undertake, may ever be found whose ambition would aspire to nothing beyond a seat in Congress, a gubernatorial or a presidential chair; but such belong not to the family of the lion or the tribe of the eagle. What! think you these places would satisfy an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Napoleon? Never!”⁹ Little did anyone know that consciously or not, Lincoln was offering a telling description of his own political ambitions. Thus, Lincoln’s many modest assertions were not just an expression of his courtesy but also the result of a careful consideration of how most effectively to channel his strong ambition while distancing himself from power-hungry men - which he certainly may be described as. In his 1860 campaign biography sketch, which he sent to his friend Jesse W. Fell, the same sense of Lincoln’s propriety is evident:

”If anything be made out of it, I wish it to be modest, and not to go beyond the materials. If it were thought necessary to incorporate anything from any of my speeches, I suppose there would be no objection. Of course, it must not appear to have been written by myself. Yours very truly A. Lincoln.¹⁰

It is not an altogether unlikely theory that Lincoln, being the keen student of history that he was, had a sense that his writings and public image may later be used by historians to construct an image of him as a person. Perhaps Lincoln wanted to do his part to make sure that image was as flattering as possible, while of the Lincoln behind the scenes one must acknowledge that there is much one simply do not know. Perhaps in Lincoln’s Presidential campaign, one first see his expression of a modest nature start to wither away to make place for the emergent strong, confident leader of the Illinois Republicans. In lavish language, Henry C. Whitney concluded that when Lincoln, “commenced the world: he was shy, modest and diffident: - necessity and ambition forced him to take a bolder stand than his native disposition prompted.”¹¹ I contend, that rather than being forced to become assertive, Lincoln by 1860 had become assertive and self-confident enough to

⁸ Donald 1995, page 31.

⁹ Abraham Lincoln’s speech to the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, January 27, 1838 in Basler’s *CW*, Vol I, page 109.

¹⁰ Abraham Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell December 20, 1859 in Basler’s *CW*, Vol III, pages 511-512.

¹¹ Whitney 1892, page 56.

launch a major political campaign which successfully brought him the Republican nomination for President. It is worth noting that only those who did not know Lincoln intimately - and very few people ever did - had a tendency to perceive him as modest. For instance, according to Whitney, in 1856 when Lincoln learned he had received 110 votes as a Vice-Presidential candidate at the Republican national convention in Philadelphia, he allegedly told Whitney: "I reckon that ain't me; there's another great man in Massachusetts named Lincoln, and I reckon it's him."¹² What Lincoln really was thinking though, was probably, to put it mildly, slightly less modest.

Those close to Lincoln, like his wife Mary, remembered that Lincoln was a "terribly firm man when he set his foot down," claiming that no woman or man "could rule him after he had made up his mind."¹³ For all her flattering recollections of her husband, Mary certainly never described Lincoln as modest. Neither she nor her husband were ever modest, in many respects; rather, they were a highly ambitious "professional" couple, realistic and strategic about the prospects of Lincoln's political career. Davis Davis, who was close to Lincoln during his nominative quest, remembered Lincoln as having an "imperial will," a trait directly contradicting portrayals of Lincoln as somehow naturally modest. According to Davis, who had come to know Lincoln quite well by 1860, the first time he "ever heard the name of Lincoln used in connection with the Presidency was by the lips of Lincoln himself" and not by friends spurring him on.¹⁴ This portrayal certainly contradicts the impression left by historians that Lincoln was somehow a passive spectator in his own Presidential campaign. Lincoln often left the impression on new or even old acquaintances that he was somehow modest and even "charmingly innocent" as to how politics worked, as one observer scrutinizing Lincoln at Cooper Union noted.¹⁵ Yet as Harold Holzer correctly asserts in his 2004 *Lincoln at Cooper Union*: "Lincoln was neither innocent nor ignorant about public relations in general, particularly when it came to stimulating newspaper reprints."¹⁶ When Lincoln occasionally made this impression, it was, according to Holzer, because "political aspirants of the day were trained to exude modesty, not ambition."¹⁷ Working closely with Lincoln until his nomination, Herndon observed the same side of Lincoln, noting that he "never overlooked a newspaper man who had it in his power to say a good or bad thing of him.", and Herndon certainly never described Lincoln as anything remotely close to "charmingly innocent" into the darker workings of politics.¹⁸ Lincoln was not vain in the classic sense of the word, about his appearance, except when it could be used

¹² Whitney 1892, page 80.

¹³ Donald 1995, page 270.

¹⁴ From Emmanuel Hertz' 1925 address *Lincoln the Seer*, page 5.

¹⁵ Holzer 2004, page 85.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, page 85.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, page 85.

¹⁸ *Herndons Lincoln*, Herndon, Weik, Angle (editor), 1942, page 304.

to accumulate political capital, and frequently, he made himself available to photographers. By the time Lincoln was nominated President in May 1860, seventeen attempts to capture his likeness had been made, only one of which, according to Mary Lincoln, came close to depicting his appearance.¹⁹ By the time the last picture of Lincoln was taken on March 6, 1865, he had become the most photographed person of the 19th century.²⁰ There is little doubt that Lincoln understood and sought to capitalize on the power of the newspapers and that he was, to put it mildly, greatly concerned with how he was perceived by the public at large. Years later, Lincoln noted in a different context that: “commendation in newspapers and by distinguished individuals is all that a vain man could wish for.”²¹

5.2 The launching of Lincoln’s Presidential campaign

Unfortunately, in the case of Lincoln’s first nomination, there does not exist an overwhelming amount of “hard-evidence” to highlight some of the unanswered questions which still linger about how Lincoln gained the nomination. Therefore, historians have had and continue to rely on reminiscences to form a fuller picture, often from people who claim to have been present at seemingly inconsequential but also – at least deemed by posterity - crucial points in Lincoln’s nominative quest. Although this second-hand source material largely has remained the same since 1953 when Lincoln’s *Collected Works* were published, the essential events, without which Lincoln would not be nominated, have long been known to historians and no new significant or major event has been uncovered in the addition of new sources to the immense collection that had already been gathered by the early 1950s. Contemporary sources also include newspapers, including an edition of Horace Greeley’s *New York Tribune* on February 28, 1860, the day after Lincoln had given his now-famous speech at Cooper Institute. Beyond the direct assessment that “No man ever before made such an impression on his first appeal to a New-York audience,” historians can draw many conclusions from this single copy.²² As one reviews this source-material, one evident problem which quickly surfaces is the many later reminiscences’ tendency to show that they supported Lincoln from the get-go, an arguably false impression. But the details regarding most of the so-called essential events, such as Lincoln’s speeches in the West in the fall of 1859, his Cooper Union speech, the conventions in

¹⁹ Holzer 2004, page 90.

²⁰ From Charles Hamilton and Lloyd Ostendorf’s 1963 *Lincoln in Photographs: An Album of Every Known Pose*, pages 214, 215.

²¹ Abraham Lincoln to Hannibal Hamlin September 28, 1862 in Basler’s *CW*, vol V, page 444.

²² *New York Tribune* February 28, 1860, Holzer 2004, page 157.

Decatur and Chicago are, luckily, based on more than one source. Into this mix of arguably important events comes a decidedly crucial event – the semi-official launching or hatching of Lincoln’s Presidential campaign – which remains clouded in some mystery. A problem with the lengthiest reminiscences of the critical meeting that marks this launching is that neither Grimshaw, Herndon, nor Whitney - who all wrote on this meeting - were in Lincoln’s inner circle by 1860, at least not to the extent that the likes of David Davis, Leonard Swett or Jesse Dubois were, at this time. Two seemingly similar and detailed reminiscences exist which describe the meeting, yet they only concur on three aspects.

1. A political meeting was held in Springfield in the offices of then-Illinois Secretary of State, Ozias M. Hatch.
2. Hatch, Norman B. Judd, Ebenezer Peck, Jackson Grimshaw and Lincoln were present.
3. A suggestion was made to place Lincoln on the national ticket.

The contradicting reminiscences can, and often have been, discarded because of faulty memories and therefore, they are frequently not discussed further by historians. However, the accounts can be used to shed new light on Lincoln’s nomination and his own role in the quest for the Presidential bid. Are there still questions surrounding Lincoln’s role in his nominative quest that need to be asked, or does one sufficiently “know what actually happened?” Can and should the story of Lincoln’s first nomination be told differently than it already has been?

The first account specifically describing a political meeting to launch Lincoln’s Presidential campaign comes from Jackson Grimshaw, a member of the Republican State Central Committee in Illinois at the time. Grimshaw’s account, which includes a claim that a meeting took place “in the winter of 1860.” in which he was present, was later reiterated by William Herndon.²³ The second account comes from Lincoln’s colleague and later biographer, Henry C. Whitney, who disputes Grimshaw’s and Herndon’s claim, asserting the meeting actually took place on January 6, 1859.²⁴ In *Abraham Lincoln: A life from 2008*, the most thoroughly researched work on Lincoln ever, by Lincoln-scholar Michael Burlingame, a leading authority on Lincoln, he asserts, “In late January 1860 at Springfield, Judd and Lincoln attended a caucus of leading Republicans who wished to boost Lincoln’s vice-presidential candidacy.”²⁵ William Baringer, who wrote the first full-length volume dedicated to the theme of Lincoln’s first nomination, came to the same conclusion in his

²³ Angle (editor) Herndon 1949, pages 366-367.

²⁴ Whitney 1892, pages 83-85.

²⁵ Burlingame 2008, pages 1579-1580.

1937 Lincoln's Rise to Power.²⁶ All biographers one has examined in the course of thesis' research have come to the same conclusion on the date of this meeting.²⁷

Grimshaw's reminiscence and Herndon's rendition

Grimshaw's testimony came in the form a letter to Herndon dated April 28, 1866.²⁸ Weeks after Lincoln's assassination, Herndon had decided to write a biography on his older law partner, allegedly because he felt that "The stories" he heard floating around were "more or less untrue in part or as a whole." In this period, from 1865 to 1889, when Herndon's Lincoln was first published, Herndon had collected vast amounts of data, (information crucial to later research, one might add).²⁹ In preparing this work or perhaps even at the time, he had most likely heard about the meeting and as he was writing his biography, he reached out to Grimshaw for details. Obliging, Grimshaw wrote down his story and proceeded to tell Herndon, "You may use this for your book if you choose, it will come better in a narrative form." As Grimshaw recalled:

"In the Winter of 1860 while at Springfield attending the Courts, I spoke to Mr. Lincoln about the propriety of allowing his name to be used as a Candidate for the Presidency (..) We all expressed a personal preference for Mr. Lincoln as the Illinois candidate for the Presidency, and asked him if his name might be used at once in connection with the nomination and election. With his characteristic modesty he doubted whether he could get the nomination even if he wished it, and asked until the next morning to answer as to whether his name might be announced as one who was to be a candidate for office of President before the Republican (Con)vention. The next day he authorized us to consider him and work for him if we please as a Candidate for the Presidency."³⁰

Appearing in its first historic work in Herndon's Lincoln in 1889, the meeting and Grimshaw's account of it have since been claimed as the most reliable source on what transpired. Among historians, the narrative constructed from this source has typically stated that after Lincoln was defeated

²⁶ Baringer 1937, pages 142-143.

²⁷ However, it should be noted that Gary Ecelbarger's 2008 *The Great Comeback: How Abraham Lincoln Beat the Odds to Win the 1860 Republican Nomination* has late in the process of writing a masters thesis been brought to the attention of the author and had has this unfortunately not been included in this thesis.

²⁸ Herndon and Weik 1889, page 369; Jackson Grimshaw to William H. Herndon, April 28, 1866, from Rodney O. Davis and Douglas L. Wilson's 1998 *Herndon's Informants*, pages 247-248.

²⁹ From David Donald's 1948 *Lincoln's Herndon*, page 112.

³⁰ Jackson Grimshaw to William H. Herndon, April 28, 1866, Wilson & Davis, 1998, pages 247-248.

by Douglas and before he was nominated, one only know of one political meeting – a meeting taking place in 1860, the object of which was to launch Lincoln for the Presidency. By the time Herndon published his version twenty-three years later, he referred to the letter from Grimshaw, but also included several other details:

The first effort in his behalf as a Presidential aspirant was the action taken by his friends at a meeting held in the State House early in 1860, in the rooms of O. M. Hatch, then Secretary of State. Besides Hatch, there were present Norman B. Judd, chairman of the Republican State Committee, Ebenezer Peck, Jackson Grimshaw, and others of equal prominence in the party. “We all expressed a personal preference for Mr. Lincoln,” relates one who was a participant in the meeting, “as the Illinois candidate for the Presidency,” and asked if his name might be used at once in connection with the nomination and election. With his characteristic modesty, he doubted whether he could get the nomination even if he wished it, and asked until the next morning to answer us whether his name might be announced. Late the next day he authorized us, if he thought proper to do so, to place him in the field. ”To the question from Mr. Grimshaw whether, if the nomination for President could not be obtained, he would accept the post of Vice-president, he answered that he would not; that his name having been used for the office of President, he would not permit it to be used for any other office, however honorable it might be. This meeting was preliminary to the Decatur convention and was also the first concerted action in his behalf on the part of his friends.”³¹

Herndon added some details and he also misquoted Grimshaw, claiming Grimshaw told Herndon that Lincoln had instructed the men to “place him in the field.” Perhaps Herndon had ample evidence to assert that Lincoln, in fact, instructed his team to do this, but it is not known from where he has based such a claim. More importantly, it is perhaps that Herndon probably deduced that the time of the meeting was “preliminary to the Decatur convention” and that this was “the first concerted action in his behalf on the part of his friends.” Although Herndon misrepresents details about his letter from Grimshaw, the gist of Herndon’s story remains the same as what Grimshaw had told him.

³¹ Angle (editor) Herndon 1949, pages 366-367.

Whitney's reminiscence

Further complicating investigation into the meeting is the second source that contradicts key details of Herndon's rendition of Grimshaw's account and contradicts Grimshaw's reminiscence itself. In 1892, Henry C. Whitney published his first Lincoln biography, *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln*, a year after Herndon had passed away. Whitney had known Lincoln since 1854, and the two had formed a close professional relationship. Appearing three years after the publication of Herndon's *Lincoln*, Whitney had a different version of what happened at the meeting:

On the evening of January 6, 1859, of the day succeeding the day that Stephen A. Douglas was elected to the Senate, a small party of Lincoln's most intimate personal friends met in the inner office of the Secretary of State at Springfield to counsel together about the future of the Republican Party – whether it was to have any future, etc. At that time, John J. Crittenden and Horace Greeley, and perhaps others, leaders in opposition to the Democratic Party, were in favor of running Douglas as the candidate for President, in opposition to the administration Democratic Party, thus designing to crush out the party of Seward and Lincoln, between the upper stone of Douglas and “Anti-Lecompton,” and the nether stone of Buchanan and his Lecompton Constitution; and the outlook was gloomy enough, for Douglas had just been officially endorsed by his own state; had the support of the greatest Republican editor in the nation, and was apparently striding on, like a Colossus, “conquering and to conquer.” On the authority of Jack Grimshaw, Herndon fixes the date of this meeting as “early in 1860.” In this, he is in error; the occurrence was on the night succeeding the election of Douglas, on January 5, 1859. The Persons whom I recollect to have been present were Lincoln, Dubois, John M. Palmer, Jo. Gillespie, Jackson Grimshaw and myself; but I am of opinion that Hatch (secretary of State), Judd (State Senator), and Peck, of Chicago were also present. The proceedings were entirely informal – and the meeting was not held in order to bring Lincoln out for President. Palmer spoke first; and said in substance, that this meeting was called in order to determine whether it was expedient to try longer to keep the party afloat, in view of the defection of Greeley – the endorsement of Douglas, etc. He said, “I am decidedly in favor of maintaining the party, and I see no valid reason for discouragement,” etc., and showed good reasons for proceeding, undismayed. Others spoke in a similar strain, but no allusion was made to Lincoln's candidacy, until Jesse K. Dubouis spoke, and, at the end of his speech, he said, “And I am also in favor of

putting Lincoln up for a place on the ticket, either for President or Vice-President – one or the other. This sentiment was cheered; and when Dubois had concluded, Lincoln was called for and made a modest speech, at the close of which he said, “As to the matter of my name on the National Ticket” – when he was stopped by several of us, and he subsided.³²

The traditional view

The basic assumption in historical narratives has been that the meeting was indeed held in 1860 to place an Illinois candidate on the national ticket for the upcoming convention – not as a consolatory prize for Lincoln’s close loss in early January, 1859, as Whitney claims. There is a great deal of evidence to support these claims and that a Lincoln-for-President campaign was launched in January 1860. For instance, on December 15, 1859, at the request of Judd, Lincoln contacted none other than Jackson Grimshaw to call a meeting. Grimshaw was as mentioned a member of the State Central Committee, and Lincoln informed him that Judd was going to New York for a meeting of the national Republican committee. Upon Judd’s return, Lincoln and Judd wanted to assemble some members from the State Committee to do discuss a topic “upon a matter which I can tell you better when I see you than I can write about it.”³³ Cryptically, he added, “In a general way I may say it was relative to whether Delegates to the National convention shall be appointed, by general convention, or by districts.”³⁴

The reason for Grimshaw to remember the meeting: big deal, Lincoln launched for the Presidency as the national convention nears. For Whitney, not so much, as his candidacy most likely was not launched, but rather discussed, at a time when the chances of placing Lincoln on the national ticket seemed far-fetched.

Since the publication of Herndon’s *Lincoln*, historians have attached great consequence to the political meeting to which Herndon and Grimshaw refer. For most narratives on Lincoln’s nomination, the meeting represents the unofficial launching of a Lincoln-for-President campaign, which by most accounts was unceremoniously officially launched before Lincoln boarded a train to New York on February 23, 1860.³⁵ Historians have focused more on the different times provided by

³² Whitney 1892, pages 83-85.

³³ Abraham Lincoln to Jackson Grimshaw, December 15, 1859 in Basler’s *CW* volume III, page 510.

³⁴ *Ibid*, page 510.

³⁵ See for instance Fehrenbacher 1962, page 145. In Rufus Rockwell Wilson’s 1945 *Intimate Memories of Lincoln*, Franklin G. Adams remembers that Lincoln was “known to be a candidate for the Presidency” in the fall of 1859,

Herndon and Whitney than on the substantive differences in their accounts. According to Michael Burlingame, there is “good reason to believe that Whitney was mistaken” in setting the precise date at January 5.³⁶ Historian Benjamin Thomas, deemed Whitney to be a man who was not known “to underestimate his own powers.”, and Donald and Virginia Fehrenbacher came to the same conclusion.³⁷ “Like many recollective writers”, they argued, “Whitney tended to exaggerate the degree of his intimacy with Lincoln and to remember past events with mingled accuracy and inaccuracy.”³⁸ Whitney made his claim in his 1892 book, and although it may have been written before 1892, he was much further removed in time from the events when he recollected them than Grimshaw, who wrote his version in 1866, and, seeing as Grimshaw and Herndon had both passed away, a further elaboration and specification between the three unfortunately never took place.

Two meetings, not one?

By believing that a meeting took place in early 1860, historians have accepted that Lincoln's candidacy was launched at this time. Still, one sentence in Whitney's account warrants mention, as it may help to explain why there has been a near consensus among historians that Whitney was garbling details, seemingly confusing years in hindsight. As the thesis has shown, he writes, in agreement with Jackson's recollection of who was present at the meeting: “Jackson Grimshaw and myself; but I am of opinion that Hatch (secretary of State), Judd (State Senator), and Peck, of Chicago were also present.” For a man describing a meeting strikingly dissimilar to Grimshaw's, these details seem almost too in accordance with Grimshaw's testimony. Could it not be that Whitney confused and garbled the details because he was genuinely convinced that he, Grimshaw, and Herndon – like later historians - were describing the same meeting?

It would be easy enough to resolve these seeming contradictory statements by subjecting the testimonies and source discussion to the principle of contradiction, and so they have been. The principle of contradiction states that two statements of the same purported event cannot be true at the same time.³⁹ From this, it should follow - as has been the conclusion by near-positivistic “hard-fact” driven first “Golden-age historians” (as one have labeled them earlier in the thesis) settling

yet this recollection is clearly by the power of Adams' deduction, and does not describe Lincoln in Kansas as part of a Lincoln-for-President campaign, but as Adams correctly points out, he may as well have been, Wilson 1945, page 213.

³⁶ Burlingame 2008, page 1580.

³⁷ From Benjamin Thomas' 1947 *Portrait for Posterity: Lincoln and his Biographers*, page 165.

³⁸ Fehrenbacher, 1996, page 490.

³⁹ Myhre 2014, page 40.

for no arguments deriving from anything other than “hard-facts” - that either Grimshaw or Whitney was, as Burlingame points out, “mistaken” in their recollection of the meeting. M[skives om Yet, one can ask, why would Whitney contradict Herndon so strongly, if he were indeed uncertain of the specifics of the meeting, or even the year it was held? One should also ask: Why would Whitney make up a story contradicting Grimshaw’s testimony which appears substantially different in his recollection? Many historians have failed to address these questions or even to entertain the idea that Whitney was present at a meeting of which he attached little consequence to at the time, like most of the many routine political meetings Whitney, Herndon, Grimshaw and Lincoln attended at the time. They have also not asked: “Why was Whitney’s recollection so glaringly different than that of Grimshaw’s?” Of course, Whitney, like anyone else in the Illinois Republican party at the time, probably had little faith in Lincoln’s chances to gain the nomination in 1859. But historians have treated Whitney’s testimony like nuclear waste, dismissing the interesting details he provides the historian altogether. Such a conclusion, built on the principle of contradiction and the premise that the two were describing the same event, seems a perfectly valid argument, one that has manifested as a near-consensus among historians writing on the era. This has become such an established timeline that anyone presenting alternate stories might be seen as introducing merely “a theory,” an implausible innovative account. But what if the two events are strikingly different precisely because Whitney and Grimshaw were presenting two different realities – not only in the philosophical sense – but also were remembering two noticeably different events?

As mentioned, historians’ judgments are based on the assumption that Herndon and Whitney were describing the same meeting. While this certainly is a plausible conclusion, it is also possible that the two depictions are strikingly different because Herndon and Whitney were actually describing two different meetings, despite their many seemingly similar details that are presented among the garbled details that can be discerned in the two accounts. I might add that the meeting described must have been one of a dozen or more formal and informal meetings taking place in this period of which one knows absolutely nothing about. Luckily, and contrary to Grimshaw’s testimony, Whitney provides several pieces of information that may help us with approximating the time of the meeting in which he refers to. In *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln*, Whitney not only describes what he remembers about January 6, but also, as he remembers it, describes in detail the events of the preceding day, on January 5. As mentioned in the thesis, Whitney mentions that he visited Lincoln in his law office on this day, noting, “I never saw any man so radically and thoroughly depressed, so completely steeped in the bitter waters of hopeless despair.”⁴⁰ In the thesis, I have constructed the meetings as separate, indicating that I believe that it is highly plausible that

⁴⁰ Whitney 1892, page 27.

a meeting in fact did occur in January 1859, and that the Presidential canvass must have been discussed, and that Lincoln likely was brought forth as a candidate, in one form or another. I have done this because it appears questionable that Whitney would confuse a meeting the following day with a meeting a year later, and far more likely, that he would remember the events in connection with each other, especially as he was contemplating on how to construct a narrative in the context of a Lincoln biography. It appears a plausible narrative, both in accordance with Whitney's memory and the historical context from which Lincoln emerged, that, following his defeat by Douglas, Lincoln attended a political meeting where the usual crowd of Republican political members attended. It is also highly likely that this meeting took place while State Senators such as Judd were in town during the opening of the first term of the state legislature in 1859 to officially select Douglas as U.S. Senator from Illinois.

According to Lincoln biographer, Francis Fisher Brown, who based his narrative on Elijah M. Haine's testimony, Lincoln had approached Haines, who was a Republican member of the Illinois House of Representatives "as early as the spring of 1859," to discuss the Presidential canvass: This is contrary to the popular belief that Lincoln was somehow persuaded during the course of 1859 and start of 1860 to consider himself as a viable Presidential candidate. Brown deduces, based on Haines' testimony and in accordance with Whitney's account, that "It would seem that the original intention of Lincoln's friends had been to bring him out as a candidate for the Vice-Presidency," because, according to Haines, "some of the Republican members discussed the feasibility of urging Lincoln's name for the Vice-Presidency" ... "as early as the spring of 1859." According to Haines, Lincoln could scarcely consider "himself a big enough man for President, while the Vice-Presidency was scarcely big enough office for one who had aspired to a seat in the Senate of the United States."⁴¹ But Haines' testimony confirms an impression that Lincoln in 1859 was testing the waters rather than shying away from the Presidential canvass, set to intensify in the spring of 1860.

A meeting taking place the day after Lincoln's official defeat, which, according to Whitney was called to discuss "whether it was expedient to longer try to keep the party afloat," not to determine "whether Delegates to the National convention shall be appointed, by general convention, or by districts," as Lincoln wrote Grimshaw in December, 1859, seems likely to have been a meeting where participants would have discussed the idea of placing Lincoln on the national ticket.⁴² It is also possible that the idea of placing Lincoln with Cameron on such a ticket stems from a meeting taking place around this time – an idea Lincoln by 1860 definitively rejected. In a letter dated November 1, 1859, Lincoln refused to support Cameron for the Presidency, and seemingly, had

⁴¹ Browne 1913, pages 228-229.

⁴² Whitney 1892, pages 83-85; "by districts" Basler's *CW*, volume 4, page 510.

great confidence in other plans: “For my single self, I have enlisted for the permanent success of the Republican cause; and for this object I shall labor faithfully in the ranks, unless, as I think not probable, the judgement of the party shall assign me a different position.”⁴³

Several reminiscences confirm Lincoln saying something to the effect that he was “unfit” to serve as President. On April 16 and July 28 he also made these statements, seemingly to men not intimate with him and who were important figures in states outside Illinois.⁴⁴ On April 16, he wrote Thomas J. Pickett, the editor of the Rockford Island Register in Illinois, one of the first newspaper to endorse Lincoln’s later candidacy for the Presidency. Lincoln wrote:

As to the other matter you kindly mention, I must, in candor, say I do not think myself fit for the Presidency. I certainly am flattered, and gratified, that some partial friends think of me in that connection; but I really think it best for our cause that no concerted effort, such as you suggest, should be made.⁴⁵

Others also remember him saying something to the effect that “the office of Vice-Presidency was scarcely big enough office for one who had aspired to a seat in the Senate of the United States,” and, one should add, failed twice. Yet, the way Lincoln phrases his letter from November 1, 1859, it sounds as if Lincoln apparently knew what the party and he himself had planned for the upcoming Presidential canvass.⁴⁶ This does not necessarily imply that he had attended a meeting a January in which he became convinced of statewide support, however half-hearted, as the Illinois favorite son, but it certainly suggests that it is likely that a meeting in January could indeed have instilled confidence in Lincoln that this certainly was probably scenario come 1860, as his letter to Trumbull from January 1859 confirms. Lincoln’s remarks of his own unitedness, however, must be seen as merely excessively modest political statements by Lincoln. By 1860, Lincoln had adamantly rejected the idea of working towards a Vice-Presidential nomination, by this time, according to Ward Hill Lamon, because his name had been “mentioned rather too prominently for the first place on the ticket for me to think of accepting the second.” In the fall of 1859, this was not the case, certainly not to the same extent as “by the winter of 1860.”⁴⁷ As opposed to Grimshaw’s testimony, the 59’ January meeting was, according to Whitney, certainly “not held in order to bring Lincoln out for President.”⁴⁸ According to Whitney, “John M. Palmer,” whom he remembers to have been

⁴³ Abraham Lincoln to William Frazer, November 1, 1859 in Basler’s *CW*, Vol III, page 491.

⁴⁴ Abraham Lincoln to Thomas J. Pickett April 16, 1859 in Basler’s *CW*, vol III, page 377 and Abraham Lincoln to Samuel Galloway, July 28, 1859 in Basler’s *CW*, vol III, page 395-96.

⁴⁵ Abraham Lincoln to Thomas J. Pickett, April 16, 1859 in Basler’s *CW*, vol III, page 377.

⁴⁶ Browne 1913, pages 228-229.

⁴⁷ Burlingame 2008, page 1582.

⁴⁸ Henry C. Whitney’s 1892 *Life on the Circuit*, pages 82-83.

present (and Grimshaw did not), saw “no valid reason for discouragement” for the Illinois Republicans present at meeting.⁴⁹ But it makes more sense that the Illinois Republicans had reason to be discouraged if they met the day after Lincoln was officially defeated for the U.S. Senate, certainly more than by the winter of 1860, when Lincoln’s stock, and the Republican party as a whole, was rising. As Palmer allegedly, pointed out, the fall elections of 1858 had been a major success for Republicans, and there were no valid reasons for abandoning the Republican cause for future electoral success.

Here is the crux of Whitney and Grimshaw’s differing testimonies, and perhaps the strongest evidence that suggest they were offering recollections of two separate events. While Grimshaw claims the whole object of the meeting he describes was to bring Lincoln out for President, Whitney claims that the meeting he remembered was rather held to discuss if the party should be kept “afloat,”... “in view of the defection of Greeley – the endorsement of Douglas. Etc.,” as he puts it. Disconcerting as it was for the Illinois Republicans, this issue had surfaced and reached its peak in the 1858 campaign between Douglas and Lincoln, and by 1860 rendered a non-issue. Even Lincoln, who knew Greeley personally after they had served in the United States House of Representatives felt forced to address the issue, but this was during the summer of 1858, not “in the winter of 1860”. It appears that the start of 1859 seems like a reasonable time for many Republicans to be worried about the continued existence of the Republican party, not only statewide, but nationally. Remember Donald Fehrenbacher’s assessment that “Why Republicanism was born is perhaps a less important question than how it survived.”⁵⁰ Political parties were appearing, re-appearing and disappearing at an alarming rate in the 1850s, and when a nationally prominent Republican like Greeley openly (and secretly) endorsed Douglas ahead of Lincoln, this certainly seems like the time to call a meeting while State Senators were in Springfield, especially considering Lincoln had just lost at the election to precisely Douglas. In the summer of 1858 Lincoln told a friend that he believed Greeley supported his arch-enemy because “his re-election” would “do the general cause of republicanism more good” ... than having an undistinguished “pure republican,” (which Lincoln may have used to refer to himself) elected.⁵¹ Yet, Republicans in Illinois and Lincoln himself conceded that Greeley’s dissension would “continue to be a drag upon” the Republican Party, even after the 1858 campaign.⁵² When Lincoln failed in his bid for the Senate in November 1858, Illinois Republicans were left with many questions, including those surrounding Greeley’s dissension and his inclination towards supporting Douglas. By 1860 though, this dissension had, largely, withered away, and Greeley had

⁴⁹ Ibid, pages 82-83.

⁵⁰ Fehrenbacher 1987, page 46.

⁵¹ Abraham Lincoln to Charles L. Wilson June 1, 1858 in Basler’s *CW*, Vol II, page 456.

⁵² Ibid, page 456.

turned his attention to blocking the election of his old friend, William Seward, who together with Weed had stopped Greeley's wish to run for lieutenant governor of New York in 1854. Additionally, John J. Crittenden, a Kentucky Whig to which Whitney refers, had in October 1858 backed Douglas, and Lincoln himself suspected that it had cost him the election.⁵³ Certainly, discussing Greeley and Crittenden's dissension and the future of the Republican Party seems far more likely to have occurred in early 1859 following Lincoln's defeat than in 1860, when the topic of the national convention was far more likely to have been discussed, as Lincoln wrote Grimshaw and to which Grimshaw refers, but Whitney does not mention.

Images of Lincoln's role in his Presidential campaign

This leads to a discussion of what Lincoln's role in the meeting(s) and what his subsequent political activity in this period may have been. The two accounts have in common a claim that Lincoln was present. As Grimshaw and Whitney both remembered, Lincoln tried modestly to shrug aside suggestions that he should launch a Presidential campaign. Besides Haines' testimony, Lincoln provides more clues on this issue in a letter to Trumbull sent January 29, 1859, which if one would take Whitney's dating for meeting, would have been a little over three weeks since the meeting Lincoln attended. Lincoln wrote:

“When you can find leisure, write me your present impression of Douglas' movements. Our friends here from different parts of the State, in and out of the Legislature, are united, resolute, and determined; and I think it is almost certain that we shall be far better organized for 1860 than ever before.”

Why would Lincoln, who was almost never optimistic and even more rarely expressed his frank predictions for the future, express himself in this way to Trumbull? In sum, many aspects of Lincoln's letter to Trumbull sketches out reasons to believe that a political meeting, official or semi-official nonetheless, indeed had taken place in January 1859. For instance, note the confidence with which Lincoln remarked that it is “almost certain” that “our friends” from “different parts of the state” were united. This could suggest that Judd and Peck from northern Illinois who were “in” “the state legislature,” had recently attended a meeting of a semi-official nature while he was in Springfield attending the opening of the state legislature on January 5. Moreover, it is highly possible that the people “out” of the legislature in which Lincoln was referring to were friends like Jesse K. Dubois

⁵³ See Basler's *CW*, vol III, page 335-336, Abraham Lincoln to John J. Crittenden, November 4, 1858.

or other political friends from Springfield, who according to Whitney was present, of course in addition to Whitney himself.⁵⁴ Furthermore, the letter to Trumbull suggests both that Lincoln was worried about Douglas' movements and that he had just attended a meeting that very likely discussed the future of the Republican Party just like the meeting Whitney describes. It is, of course, possible that Lincoln had a general sense of how the Illinois Republican Party would be organized in Illinois come 1860, but his correspondence does not indicate that he had a clear idea of how the party statewide would be organized and which candidate would be promoted come time for the national convention. A meeting however, would have give Lincoln many assurances, which could lead him to assert - as he did to Trumbull - that the Illinois Republican Party was "united, resolute and determined" for the upcoming 1860 campaign. If Whitney is correct, Lincoln could leave the meeting feeling assured that he still had the support of the Illinois Republican party and that they would not vault, supporting Douglas as a new standard-bearer. On January 8, 1859, which, if one again take Whitney's word for it, was two days after the meeting, he wrote W.H. Wells, "All dallying with Douglas by Republicans, who are such at heart, is, at the very least, time and labor lost; and all such, who dally with him, will yet bite their lips in vexation for their own folly."⁵⁵ Strong words for a man defeated by the nation's most famous and charismatic Senator, who recently had been supported by the foremost Republican editor of the nation.

For whether the two accounts are describing two separate meetings remains a matter of dispute, but they also support two different interpretations of Lincoln (even as both portray him as reluctant in his role in a future campaign.) Grimshaw claims that Lincoln with his "characteristic modesty" allegedly "doubted whether he could get the nomination even if he wished it."⁵⁶ According to Grimshaw, the members present at the meeting "asked him if his name might be used at once in connection with the nomination and election."⁵⁷ This suggests that the meeting took place in 1860, for no Presidential campaign for Lincoln-for-President was launched in 1859, this being too early and that early, there would have been no credible chance that such a campaign might succeed.

Both Grimshaw and Whitney, who wrote lengthy biographies on Lincoln, emphasize Lincoln's modesty in their accounts when Lincoln was encouraged to launch a campaign for the Presidency or Vice Presidency "one or the other," as Whitney recalls.⁵⁸

In light of the evidence presented above, it appears plausible that there were probably two meetings of which one can deduce something from. However, there is little doubt that many details were

⁵⁴ Abraham Lincoln W.H. Wells January 8, 1859 in Basler *CW* 1953, Volume III, page 351.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, page 351.

⁵⁶ Angle (editor) Herndon 1949, pages 366-367.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, page 367.

⁵⁸ Whitney 1892, page 82; Angle (editor) Herndon 1949, pages 366-367.

garbled in these meetings, mostly by Whitney, who may have adapted his version because he believed his meeting was the same one that Grimshaw recalled. If there were two meetings, they were different, not only in their substantive differences – one launched Lincoln for President, and in the thesis’ interpretation the other one did not – but also in the different images of Lincoln they portrayed. For if Lincoln was launched for President (or launched himself) in “early 1860,” Whitney’s meeting in January 1859 shows that Lincoln tactically declined the “overtures”, to quote a later historian, when he rejected launching a campaign in 1859, as the thesis have shown, for tactical reasons - not because he was “unfit for the Presidency”.⁵⁹

5.3 Lincoln’s role in the negotiations at the national convention

Unfortunately, the full extent of what deals were made to ensure the support of New Jersey, Pennsylvania and Indiana are not known. Without the support of these three crucial states, Lincoln would never have been nominated. However, there exists some sources which may illuminate Lincoln’s role in the days preceding the convention and which may help us understand how Lincoln directed - or perhaps failed to direct - his team in Chicago, while he was back in Springfield, anxiously awaiting news. Two sources of decisive importance in the thesis’ depiction of Lincoln’s first nomination and how Lincoln has been portrayed in his quest for the presidential nomination are the two messages he sent to his campaign organization in Chicago, one by telegram and one penciled down on a newspaper. On the eve of the convention, Lincoln sent a stern telegram to the team: “I authorize no bargains and will be bound by none”⁶⁰ Two days later, the team received another explicit message from Lincoln. On the margins of a newspaper, he had written in pencil, and possibly underscored: “Make no contracts that will bind me!”⁶¹ Interestingly, this message, which has been included in Lincoln’s *Collected Works*, compiled by historians from the *Abraham Lincoln Association*, who finished their collection in 1953, an annotation is included after the section representing the source: “Herndon, III, 462. According to Herndon, “The day before the nomination the editor [Edward L. Baker] of the Springfield Journal arrived in Chicago with a copy of the Missouri Democrat, in which Lincoln had marked three passages referring to Seward’s position on the slavery question. On the margin of the paper he had written in pencil . . . ” the communication as above.”⁶² As Basler

⁵⁹ Thomas 1952, page 195, “Presidency”, Abraham Lincoln to Thomas J. Pickett April 16, 1859 in Basler’s *CW*, vol III, page 377

⁶⁰ From Henry C. Whitney’s 1892 *Life on the Circuit with Lincoln*, page 289.

⁶¹ Abraham Lincoln on the margins of the *Missouri Democrat*, May 17, 1860 in Basler’s *CW*, vol IV, page 50

⁶² Basler’s *CW*, vol IV, page 50

refers to Herndon, perhaps this indicates that the newspaper on which Lincoln hastily scribbled his message has been lost and that this message is known only because of Herndon's memory of it. This begs the question: What can we assert with a considerable amount of confidence about Lincoln's role at the national convention and about his knowledge about the nature of the deals being struck?

It must have frustrated Lincoln, who was used to dictating the terms of his public persona, that he could only stand idly by in Springfield as his team made deals beyond his control, and which could influence his presidency. It is also possible that Lincoln had a sense that his support was greater than his supporters had any knowledge of, after all, they did not accompany Lincoln east on his speaking tour. In sum, these evidences suggest that Lincoln perhaps knew something many others involved in his nomination did not. Perhaps he had assurances from Judd, and perhaps he knew that he had the support of Illinois Republican party. Yet his correspondence suggests that he had some trepidation even to this as the date of the convention grew nearer. Or perhaps Lincoln knew he had the support he needed, and therefore he implored the team to "make no contracts" that would bind him. Based on this support, perhaps this was why Lincoln told the team he would "authorize no bargains and be bound by none".

As we have alluded to in chapter four, Lincoln was not passive in the weeks ahead of the convention. We know of several letters he sent to supporters in this period, and these indicate that Lincoln had instructed his team, led by Davis, to only approach the negotiations in a certain fashion. They also indicate that Dubois "our State auditor", as Lincoln called him, had become a central figure in the campaign. Two weeks ahead of the Convention, Lincoln told Ohioan Richard M. Corwine what was "the lay of the land", as he put it:

"First then, I think the Illinois delegation will be unanimous for me at the start; and no other delegation will. A few individuals in other delegations would like to go for me at the start, but may be restrained by their colleagues. It is represented to me, by men who ought to know, that the whole of Indiana might not be difficult to get. You know how it is in Ohio. I am certainly not the first choice there; and yet I have not heard that any one makes any positive objection to me. It is just so everywhere so far as I can perceive. Everywhere, except in Illinois, and possibly Indiana, one or another is preferred to me, but there is no positive objection. This is the ground as it now appears. I believe you personally know C. M. Allen, of Vincennes, Ia. [2] He is a delegate, and has notified me that the entire Ia. delegation will be in Chicago the same day you name—Saturday the 12th. My friends Jesse K. Dubois, our Auditor, & Judge David Davis, will probably be there ready to confer with friends from other States."⁶³

⁶³ Abraham Lincoln to Richard M. Corwine, May 2, 1860 in Basler's *CW*, vol IV, page 48, 49.

On May 12, three days after Lincoln had been selected as the Illinoisan nominee for the Presidency, Lincoln sent two letters. The first was to Mark Delahay, who was going with the Kansas delegation to Chicago. Lincoln told Delahay, who supported Lincoln in his bid for the nomination, to "be careful to give no offence, and keep cool under all circumstances"⁶⁴ Although Lincoln had refused to pay off delegates, he had sent money with Dubois, who had the same day Lincoln wrote his letter to Delahay, left for Chicago, covering Delahays expenses for the trip where he would lobby for Lincoln. Lincoln instructed Delahay: "Look to Minnesota and Iowa rather, especially Iowa."⁶⁵

Additionally, Lincoln sent a copy of his views on the tariff question, an immensely important issue to the Pennsylvania delegation, with Edward Wallace, the brother of Mary's brother-in-law, William Wallace. Lincoln wrote Wallace: "I do wish to thrust no letter before the public now, upon any subject."⁶⁶ Lincoln enclosed an envelope to Wallace featuring a document describing Lincoln's views on the tariff question. As a man of his times, Lincoln could not give the impression that he, in fact, was anxious and excited about his prospects as the convention neared. Such actions was considered incommensurate with a man of presidential stature.

Two days ahead of the convention, Lincoln wrote Carl Schurz, an influential German Republican who had become the spokesmen of the Wisconsin-delegation at Chicago. Lincoln wrote: "Allow me to introduce my friend, Jesse K. Dubois, our Illinois State Auditor. Yours truly A. LINCOLN."⁶⁷ In the debates between Lincoln and Douglas in 1858, Schurz had promoted Lincoln in German, and Lincoln tried to enlist his support as he headed to Chicago by establishing contact with Dubois, who, it seems, had become the point of communication between Davis and team and Lincoln.

The evidence accounted for above is the sum of actions we can establish that Lincoln took as he prepared his team for the convention on May 16. Still, it appears only logical to deduce that Lincoln had instructed Davis and, the team of official and unofficial delegates headed to Chicago on May 12, rather clearly on what types of deals he was comfortable with, and also which deals he considered to be unnecessary. It appears that Lincoln wanted to be nominated president almost unimpeachably. Based on his support, Lincoln must have given strong directives to the organization. But perhaps Davis, who had known Lincoln for a long time and had formed a congenial relationship to him, had little faith that Lincoln, who he knew as the life of the party and a distinguished lawyer, did not see Lincoln as presidential material. Besides, Davis was aware of Seward's strong position. This side of Lincoln, where he imposed his "imperial will" on the team, as Davis later remembered, is

⁶⁴ Abraham Lincoln to Mark W. Delahay, May 12, 1860 in Baslers *CW*, vol IV, page 49.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, page 49.

⁶⁶ Abraham Lincoln to Edward Wallace, May 12, 1860, in Basler's *CW*, vol IV, page 49.

⁶⁷ Abraham Lincoln to Carl Schurz, May 14, 1860 in Basler's *CW*, vol IV, page 50.

rarely discussed by historians. Perhaps this is because there is little explicit evidence supporting such an image. Yet, considering the realities of 1850 politics, one could argue it is far more likely that Lincoln imposed his imperial will on an organization representing him and working towards his nomination, than depicting Lincoln as passive back in Springfield, waiting for the nomination to 'fall in his lap', as Herndon once noted depictions of this period had a tendency to do.⁶⁸

Binding deals

Although not much evidence has surfaced about Lincoln's role in the negotiations, perhaps because there was none, there exists evidence which shows Lincoln was made aware of how the team was conducting their negotiations with delegations in Chicago. On May 15, he received a telegram from Davis, saying: "Am very hopeful. Don't be excited. Nearly dead with fatigue. Telegraph or write here very little"⁶⁹ But as Davis was busily directing the team, it seems that Dubois had become the main point of contact between Springfield and Chicago as he later on May 15 allegedly informed Lincoln that the team's efforts to secure Pennsylvania would be fruitful if Cameron could be promised the post of Secretary of the Treasury.⁷⁰ At a point where the team - or almost anyone else for that matter - had little confidence in the chances of their man, what induced Lincoln to so strongly instruct to make no binding deals remains something of a mystery. A typical explanation in literature has been to say that Lincoln did not want to gain the nomination based on a series of corrupted deals. Although this certainly is a valid explanation for Lincoln's actions, it seems to feed into the impression of Lincoln as a naive and innocent participant in a campaign which could fulfill a yearning ambition deep within the flawless Lincoln. Although the team who had gone to Chicago knew Lincoln well, none of the members present in Chicago had accompanied Lincoln on his speaking tour of the east and what had led Lincoln to claim that he had heard by "men who ought to know, that the whole of Indiana might not be difficult to get".⁷¹ As we have seen, Lincoln assertively referred Corwine to C.M. Allen who had notified Lincoln that "the entire Ia. delegation" would be in Chicago on May 12.⁷² Although Lincoln claimed that he had heard this from "men who ought know", probably referring to one of his proxies, what seems clear is that, if anybody ought

⁶⁸ From William Herndon and Jesse Weik's 1889 *Herndon's Lincoln*, page 369-370.

⁶⁹ From Willard L. King's 1960 *David Davis, Lincoln's manager*, page 139.

⁷⁰ Whitney 1908, page 289.

⁷¹ Abraham Lincoln to Richard M. Corwine, May 2, 1860 in Baslers *CW*, vol IV, page 47.

⁷² *Ibid*, page 48.

to know, it was Lincoln. There is little doubt that Lincoln knew more than he was telling anybody, fearful of giving the wrong impression.

Two primary reminiscences can shed some light on what transpired, and to what extent Lincoln was involved. Herndon wrote:

”the day before the nomination the editor of the Springfield Journal[Edward L. Baker] arrived in Chicago with a copy of the Missouri democrat, in which Lincoln had marked three passages referring to Seward’s position on the slavery question. On the margin of the paper he had written in pencil, ”I agree with Seward’s ’irrepressible conflict’, but do not agree with his ’higher law’ doctrine. Then he added in words underscored ”Make no contracts that will bind me”. This paper was brought into the room where Davis, Judd, Logan and I were gathered, and was read to us. But Lincoln was down in Springfield, some distance away from Chicago, and could therefore not appreciate the gravity of the situation; at least so Davis argued, and viewing it in that light, the latter went ahead with his negotiations.”⁷³

According to Whitney, this is what happened:

”The next block of votes that was lying around loose was the Cameron strength in Pennsylvania. This was more difficult to manage. Not having yet been made acquainted with Lincoln’s ethical tendencies, Davis got Dubois to telegraph to Lincoln that they could secure the Cameron delegates from Pennsylvania if they might promise Cameron the Treasury. Lincoln replied: ”I authorize no bargains and will be bound by none.” Just ten words - the normal length of a telegraphic message! Not satisfied with this, however, he sent a copy of the Missouri Democrat to Herndon with three extracts from Seward’s speeches marked ; and on the margin of which he had written: ”I agree with Seward’s irrepressible conflict,’ but do not agree with his ’higher law’ doctrine. And he added, ”Make no contracts that will bind me”.⁷⁴

As Whitney depicted, the Pennsylvanians were eager to make a deal with Davis. Apparently, they could rest assured that Lincoln would keep whatever promise the team made, as Whitney later claimed.⁷⁵ Yet, this seems like a highly unlikely claim. In fact, it appears that Lincoln did not authorize any deals, whether before or after the Chicago convention.⁷⁶

⁷³ First appearing in *Herndon’s Lincoln* from 1889, here re-iterated from Angle (editor)*Herndon’s Life of Lincoln*, 1949, page 373-374.

⁷⁴ From Whitney’s 1907 *Lincoln The Citizen*, page 289.

⁷⁵ From Whitney’s 1907, *Lincoln the Citizen*, 289 and Whitney’s 1892, *Life on the Circuit*, ed. Angle, 101.

⁷⁶ Whitney, *Life on the Circuit*, page 87

On the day of Lincoln's nomination, he received a telegram from Davis: "Write no letters and make no promises till You see me."⁷⁷ It seemed that Davis wanted to inform Lincoln personally on what it took to ensure his nomination. Meanwhile, Lincoln had received a letter from Joshua Giddings from Chicago, emphasizing that Lincoln had been elected because of his "honesty and freedom from corrupt men and that should place himself under obligations to no one."⁷⁸ Lincoln replied: "It is indeed, most grateful to my feelings, that the responsible position assigned me, comes without conditions, save only such honorable ones as are fairly implied."⁷⁹ Rather than being disingenuous, it seems Lincoln was not as of yet made aware of what deals had brought him the nomination. On November 19, two weeks after he was elected President and had probably started to reflect on how to assemble his cabinet, he received a letter from Davis, saying:

"No one rendered more efficient service from Indiana, at the Chicago Convention than he [Smith] did. . . . without his active aid co-operation, the Indiana delegation, could not have been got as a unit to go for you. And until we had got the Indiana delegation entirely united, we could not properly appeal to the other delegations for votes."⁸⁰

As opposed to highlighting Lincoln's involvement in the process, an overwhelming amount of evidence shows that Lincoln had cause for concern as he sent two clear messages instructing the team to avoid shady deals that would later put him in a bind. Fifteen years after Lincoln's nomination, Cameron remembered:

"Lincoln told me that he was more indebted to Judd than any other one man for his nomination, but I told him I thought Davis and Swett did more for him. They bought all my men – Casey and Sanderson and the rest of them. I was for Seward[.] I knew I couldn't be nominated but I wanted a complimentary vote from my own State. But Davis and the rest of them stole all my men. Seward accused me of having cheated him."⁸¹

Meanwhile, the Pennsylvanian chairman of the Republican State Committee, remembered that "Two positions in the Cabinet, one for Pennsylvania and one for Indiana, were positively promised by David Davis at an early period of the contest"⁸² Edward Judd, who vividly remembered how his father, Norman B. Judd had three days ahead of Lincoln's nomination, realized a scheme to achieve

⁷⁷ David Davis to Abraham Lincoln, Chicago, 18 May 1860, in the *Abraham Lincoln Papers*, Library of Congress.

⁷⁸ Joshua Giddings to Abraham Lincoln, May 19, 1860 in *Abraham Lincoln papers*, Library of Congress.

⁷⁹ Abraham Lincoln to Joshua R. Giddings, May 21, 1860 in Baslers *CW*, vol IV, page 51-51

⁸⁰ David Davis to Lincoln, November 19, 1860 in the *Abraham Lincoln Papers*, Library of Congress.

⁸¹ Burlingame 2008, page 1683

⁸² *Ibid*, page 1683

the nomination and allegedly exclaiming "By cracky, Abe's nominated", remembered that his father once described a deal. This deal entailed that Lincoln received Pennsylvania's support on the second ballot and in return, Pennsylvania would receive an unspecified cabinet post.⁸³

An overwhelming amount of evidence suggests that Lincoln was only later made aware of the deals his team had made, and which indeed constricted Lincoln as to the appointments he would make to his cabinet. Leonard Swett told Lincoln in November 1860:

"The truth is, at Chicago we thought the Cameron influence was the controlling element and tried to procure that rather than the factions. The negotiations we had with them, so far as I can judge was one of the reasons, which induced the Cameron leaders to throw the bulk of that force to you."⁸⁴

Lincoln was made aware that the team had made deals to enlist second-ballot and, in the case of the Indiana delegation, first-ballot support. A week after the convention, he wrote Indiana Republican Caleb B. Smith (who would later be placed in his cabinet), "I am indeed, much indebted to Indiana; and, as my home friends tell me, much to you personally."⁸⁵ Lincoln was held to the promises by his surrogates in Chicago. When he made his picks for cabinet, conspicuously, Indiana and Pennsylvania were strongly represented by the presence of Simon Cameron of Pennsylvania, Caleb Smith of Indiana and by William T. Otto, a Hoosier who became Assistant Secretary of the Interior.

Historians' judgement

Only some historians have dismissed Whitney's version of the events, which claimed that the Lincoln team made a deal with the Pennsylvania-delegation. However, one notable exception is Lincoln scholar David Herbert Donald in his seminal *Lincoln* from 1995. Donald concludes that "there was no bargain, partly because Davis, Swett and Lincoln .. flatly denied it".⁸⁶ Historian Willard L. King, author of *David Davis, Lincoln's Manager* concluded that Davis made "a qualified pledge of his personal support to Cameron."⁸⁷ Yet, it was Swett who was held accountable after Cameron's emissaries had visited Lincoln in Springfield after the nomination, only to find Lincoln reluctant to make any guarantees that Cameron was sure of a place in Lincoln's cabinet.⁸⁸ The vast majority of

⁸³ Edward Judd in the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*, February 6, 1916.

⁸⁴ Swett to Lincoln, Bloomington, 25 May, 30 November 1860, *Lincoln Papers*, Library of Congress.

⁸⁵ Abraham Lincoln to Schuyler Colfax on: C.B. Smith, May 26, 1860 in Basler's CW, vol IV, page 45.

⁸⁶ Donald 1995, page 638

⁸⁷ King 1960, page 141

⁸⁸ Sanderson to Simon Cameron, 20 July 1860, in Burlingame 2008, page 1686

historians and Lincoln scholars have come to a quite different conclusion than Donald. Burlingame asserts that Whitney's version seems "plausible", given the abundance of testimonies confirming that a deal was struck between a surrogate of the Lincoln campaign and the Pennsylvania delegation.⁸⁹ Allan Nevins came to the same conclusion in his *The Emergence of Lincoln* from 1950.⁹⁰ Doris Kearns Goodwin - who has called her biography on Lincoln and his leadership during the Civil War *Team of Rivals*, in large part because of the composition of his cabinet made on the basis of deals during the Chicago convention - has come to the same conclusion.⁹¹

Still, a problem with a theory claiming Lincoln knew something nobody else did, namely that he had the loyal support of more delegates than anyone knew, is that it presupposes - as many historians have done in the case of Lincoln's first nomination - that Lincoln was never focused on the "petty" rewards of the present, meaning his nomination, but rather always had an eye on the bigger picture. There is no doubt that Lincoln had a tendency to prefer slow deliberation towards a larger goal, but it is questionable that this applied to the fierce circumstance the obtainment of a Presidential nomination constituted.

These circumstances raises many interesting questions far beyond Lincoln's nomination. Did his nomination affect how one should view the formation of his cabinet, the secession of seven southern states, and consequentially the causes of the war. Although one should be careful to comment on the causes of the civil war which arguably one of the most researched and commented themes in American historiography and thus has largely been avoided in this thesis, it still is tempting to ask: was Lincoln skeptical of confinements in his picks for the cabinet because many southern elements had issued threats of secession if the a "black Republican" was elected? Perhaps Lincoln did not want to rock the boat by being restricted in the conservative Republican he perhaps most wanted to comprise his cabinet?

⁸⁹ Burlingame 2008, page 1682

⁹⁰ Nevins 1950, volume II, page 256.

⁹¹ Goodwin 2005, page 246.

Concluding remarks



The primary research question posed the beginning of the thesis was formulated as:

- *Was Lincoln an integral part of the process which led to his nomination in 1860?*

Given the inclination by American historians to embellish certain aspects of Lincoln's life, especially the story of his political comeback and alleged passive role in the 1860 Presidential canvass, three additional study questions were raised:

1. Why is Lincoln portrayed as being in a political transition during the mid-1850s? Is there any reason to portray Lincoln as "too pure" for politics, or is this depiction merely a "romantic" image greatly enhanced, indeed much exaggerated?
2. What steps do the historical documents indicate that Lincoln took during his quest for the Presidential nomination and how did Lincoln's own actions, along with the cooperation of other Illinois Republicans make his nomination at first plausible and eventually feasible?
3. When can historians assert that Lincoln himself decided to make a push for the presidency?

A major challenge to answer the relatively straight-forward research questions is that Lincoln's path to the Presidential nomination was anything but straightforward. Beyond the answers hard facts provides, little is known of Lincoln's leadership in the Presidential campaign other than his general tactic and his own travels, correspondence and speeches, which reveals next to nothing of his leadership of the group. Although some aspects are known about Lincoln's own quest toward the nomination, one has little or no knowledge of the deals struck in Springfield, to say nothing of the events in Chicago. These political contacts, intra-party negotiations, and semi-corrupt decisions were made by Lincoln's team, as well as by Lincoln himself, both indirectly and directly. As a result, Lincoln, like all Presidential candidates and incumbents, owed a substantial amount of favors upon his inauguration.

Lincoln's careful building of his image as a modest man gave generations of historians the misleading impression that he was a somewhat reluctant and passive participant in his own presidential nomination process. Many of political contacts, intra-party negotiations, and semi-corrupt decisions which brought Lincoln closer to the presidency were made by Lincoln's team, as well as by Lincoln himself, both indirectly and directly. As a result, Lincoln, like all Presidential candidates and incumbents, owed a substantial amount of favors upon his inauguration. Although we may not know the extent of what deals were struck to ensure Lincoln's nomination, the thesis has presented a great deal of evidence to outline what Lincoln did during the one and half years after his loss to Douglas in the Senate election in November 1858. As the thesis has shown, Lincoln acted with political skill, spoke cogently to express his core principles to successfully establish himself in the field of Presidential nominees.

When assessing how Lincoln constructed an organization to work on his behalf and personally struggled to preserve harmony within the fragile Illinois Republican coalition - so as to facilitate his own return to national politics - some historians in the so-called "golden age" of Lincoln studies have neglected a serious discussion of Lincoln's unique personality and political acumen. They have tended to relegate this dimension of Lincoln's political comeback to the dubious field of psycho-history, with their assessments of Lincoln's personality identifying three traits as Lincoln's key personality features: his modesty, his ambition, and his tendencies towards serious clinical depression. But even in treating these traits, historians have failed to elaborate them in their full complexity. Without an ambitious, assertive and tactical disposition, Lincoln's political successful political career in his later life would be impossible in the fierce 1850s, especially considering his background as a failed politician with one term as a Whig congressman.

In 1909, on the centenary of his birth, Russian poet Leo Tolstoy described Lincoln as a “Christ in miniature” and as a “saint of humanity”, an impression shared by millions of Americans.¹ But rather than being a divine creature, Lincoln was an astute political observer with a gift for seeing the bigger picture and born with an uncanny sense of timing as well as with a conscious effort to refuse to ake things personally. To achieve his success, in other words, he made a number of tactically wise decisions. One of the most important of these tactical choices is seen in his realization that the longer he waited to announce his candidacy for the presidency the better off he would be. With this choice, his opponents did not have much of a chance to attack him, and he could then emerge as a dark horse. To keep a low profile and avoid political criticism: for months in public, Lincoln, after his defeat to Douglas, for over a year claimed that he was “unfit” for the presidency and did not reveal his desire to make a serious run for the nomination, although it is certain that his ambition for higher office was burning brighter than ever within him. Lincoln engaged in this behavior and exercised such self-restraint—even as he probably had much bigger plans than anyone in his inner circle might have guessed, certainly more than he communicated openly. Lincoln might well have been discouraged by his Senate defeat in November 1858, he may have been “down”, but he was definitively not out—as the next months would clearly demonstrate.

The narrative presented in this thesis emphasizes the fortunate realities of Lincoln’s nomination, and rather than depicting Lincoln as a passive and benevolent leader of a movement that worked in his behalf, it shows that Lincoln’s candidacy was under the control of Lincoln himself. What is more, looking back at Lincoln’s trajectory towards the Republican nomination and peeling of layers of mystery and folklore, his nomination appears to be less of a mystery than at first glance. Lincoln lived in a key city in a key-state of growing importance, and when the Presidential canvass of 1860 got under way, this was a huge advantage to him. It appears that the Republican Central Committee did not believe the selection of Chicago as host to the National Convention in May 1860 would give advantage to any individual who might be seeking the Presidential nomination. Yet this selection did turn out to be of decisive importance. In addition, most state delegates believed Seward was the foregone conclusion even as they projected some temporary, symbolic, hope for their own favorite sons. By acting in this way, they gave Lincoln and his supporters their chance to project Lincoln as a favorite son (even as they worked to enhance his national standing.) In the last few months before the convention, most Republican leaders grossly underestimated Lincoln’s candidacy, a candidacy that had not yet been launched publicly in December 1859 when Chicago was selected as the convention site. As historian Benjamin Thomas underlined, Lincoln: “acted wisely in declining

¹ Holzer, 2009, page 386.

the overtures of those who wished to push him forward. Premature announcement of his candidacy would immediately have brought him under rival fire.”²

Our brief treatment of the details of this decision has permitted the thesis to call attention to yet another key aspect of Lincoln’s success, his political timing and his ability to assess his own chances. Lincoln’s candidacy was launched almost at the perfect time, in mid-January 1860. Even so, by early February 1860, it seemed that perhaps it had been premature or maybe it lacked a realistic opportunity, for the campaign appeared to be losing steam. Lincoln’s political skill played a key role at this point. He reached out to Judd for help, and a few days later Judd and the Chicago Tribune’s editor, Joseph Medill, executed a plan to endorse Lincoln throughout the Northwest, thus creating a domino-effect of popular support for the as of yet unknown Lincoln. He was not to remain unknown for long though, for his aforementioned speech at the Cooper Union Institute and his subsequent speaking tour of the East bolstered his reputation “out East,” where he had been relatively unknown. Historian Harold Holzer goes so far as to claim that had Lincoln failed at Cooper Union he would “never have been nominated.”³ As the thesis has shown, somewhat surprisingly, this also boosted Lincoln’s status within his own state. And yet another political benefit was generated after Lincoln returned to Springfield. The famous Senator Trumbull decided, for some reason, not to make a push for the presidency; maybe Trumbull made this decision, not exclusively because of Lincoln’s admonition for him to back off, but more likely because of Lincoln’s sudden national emergence.

Years before that national emergence, the Kansas-Nebraska Act had renewed the public debate over slavery like never before. As a consequence, it had changed the alignment of the party system and, as luck would have it, brought Lincoln out of retirement. Historians have failed to highlight the specific dimensions of Lincoln’s comeback which might best illustrate his driving ambition and his channeling of political motivations into effective action in order to strive for higher office, despite earlier defeats. Historians have not explored the sources to address why did Lincoln not remain content in Springfield, to continue work as a lawyer and to pursue family responsibilities. Why, one might ask, after a lifetime of political activity, did he not turn away from pursuits that had so often frustrated him? Such questions should be pursued, but reliance on psychological explanations will not be adequate, an examination of the political scene of Illinois politics, Republican Party development, and a realistic assessment of the national rivalry between the established Democratic Party and the newcomer Republicans should dominate the inquiry. In this context of political investigation, professional historians often emphasize several events that took place to influence Lincoln’s successful quest for a presidential nomination, and they highlight the political opportunities

² Thomas 1952, page 195.

³ From Holzer’s 2006 *Lincoln at Cooper Union: The speech that made Lincoln President*, page 1.

within these specific circumstances and focus on his personal actions (rather than his psychological makeup) that enabled him to gain political advantages. One pivotal event which should be viewed as a turning point for Lincoln's maybe-too-ambitious campaign that was launched in January 1860, is the Cooper Institute Speech given the following month in New York City. Just as Lincoln's personal reputation (from a distance) and his history of political opposition to Stephen Douglas - rather than his inner character or psychological makeup - prompted the invitation to New York, fortuitous circumstances and deliberate personal and collaborative actions spurred his campaign in early 1860. These things are important to the development of this thesis and have been highlighted.

Fearing slavery's potential to fragment the American union, Lincoln remained a political realist, purporting that slavery should not spread, but that it was the rights of the Southern states to retain their slaves. As the thesis has shown, Lincoln's views on slavery were just radical enough to attract abolitionists and just conservative enough to give Lincoln a reputation as a moderate on the issue of slavery, at least within his own party. Lincoln's opposition to Douglas and his so-called "popular sovereignty" doctrine particularly, made it possible for Lincoln to attack slavery on principal rather than moral grounds, while distancing himself from radical abolitionist elements within the Republican party. Thus, the answer to how Lincoln was nominated can also be found in the political attitudes of most republicans.⁴ According to historian James McPherson, Lincoln was a "conservative reformer, while historian James Oakes believes Lincoln was "as opposed to slavery as any abolitionist."⁵ McPherson joins Lincoln scholar James G. Randall who essentially felt Lincoln was a conservative if being a conservative meant: "caution" and "prudent adherence to tested values".⁶

In a time where the very mention of the word "abolitionist" proved to be the Republican kiss of death - as Seward came to find out the hard way - Lincoln seemed to possess the right image of moderation on the question of slavery.⁷ In debating Lincoln's later election and sentiments towards slavery, many historians have argued that Lincoln was on the one hand conservative enough to win an election, and on the other, as we have not discussed, radical enough to set off a major rebellion.⁸ Some have used the term "conservative reformer" to describe Lincoln's presidency and rather than doubting Lincoln's abolitionist zeal, they have emphasized Lincoln's political pragmatism which in the end prevailed and led to the abolition of slavery.⁹ Proving the terms "conservative" and "radical's" relativity, it is questionable if Lincoln was conservative in his own time when half the electorate deemed him to radical to be elected President. Historian Howard Zinn, for instance,

⁴ Fehrenbacher 1987, page 45.

⁵ Oakes 2007, page 42.

⁶ Randall in McPherson 1992, page 23.

⁷ Kiss of death analogy taken from Holzer 2004, page 12.

⁸ Fehrenbacher 1987, page 45.

⁹ Oakes 2007, page 42.

argued that although perceived differently, John Brown and Lincoln - although different in their measures - worked towards the same goal, namely abolishing slavery. *Zinn 1980, page 184.*

Becoming a Presidential candidate and nominee virtually excluded, and still does, the possibility of being anything resembling a “Christ in miniature” or a “saint of humanity”, as Tolstoy later described Lincoln. The process of becoming the nominee was a dirty process, and hard to reconcile with the Christ-like figure Lincoln became as a martyred President. Lincoln’s careful cultivation of an image as a moderate Republican however, helped him emerge as an available candidate as the national convention in 1860 neared, as well as the favorable impression he made “out East” among Republican opponents of Seward. It is one of the twists of fate of history that Lincoln had remained relatively unknown nationally prior to his Cooper Union Speech, and the speech (and others like it given immediately thereafter in New England venues) enabled him to emerge as an available (electable) candidate, apparently more so than the early favorite, William Seward. Lincoln conceded as much in a letter written a week after his nomination claiming he was “...The humblest of all whose names were before the convention...”¹⁰ Seward’s illustrious public service in the fight against slavery, was supposed to be nominated by virtue of his merits, but in the end, this very record proved to be his downfall.

Consider Lincoln’s earlier application of the “House-divided” analogy, a prominent rhetorical theme which somehow failed to stick him with the label of being “too radical,” even though the phrase might well have been perceived just as controversial as the more famous Seward’s “irrepressible conflict” (that was spoken around the same time). Lincoln’s avoidance of notoriety could indicate that he may well have benefited because of his low profile, the Midwestern locale of the speech metaphor, and the fact that he was not yet under the scrutiny of a national audience. On June 16, 1858, when Lincoln gave the speech, he had not yet engaged in the Senate campaign debates with Douglas. And even with the publicity later given to these campaign debates, few Republicans outside Illinois knew Lincoln’s thoughts on the divisive slavery issue. Subsequently, and as he later tried to obtain the nomination, he was not - like Seward - haunted by his own rhetorical history or a high-profile political reputation. Herndon once described how Lincoln’s first nomination and his political interest in the 1850s had developed. According to Herndon, Lincoln after the debates had begun to gradually:

lose his interest in the law and to trim his political sails at the same time. His recent success had stimulated his self-confidence to unwonted proportions. He wrote to influential party workers everywhere. I know the idea prevails that Lincoln sat still in his chair in Springfield, and that one of those unlooked-for tides in human affairs came

¹⁰ Abraham Lincoln to Salmon P. Chase, May 26, 1860 in Basler’s *CW*, vol IV, page page 53.

along and cast the nomination into his lap; but any man who has had experience in such things knows that great political prizes are not obtained in that way. The truth is, Lincoln was as vigilant as he was ambitious, and there is no denying the fact that he understood the situation perfectly from the start.¹¹

Still, one might ask, what was it that Lincoln understood perfectly from the start? If we assess the field of contenders for the presidency within the Republican party, Lincoln knew, perfectly well, that many had objections towards the other candidates in the field. Take Samuel Galloway's letter to Lincoln in the summer of 1859 as an example: "The objections to Seward and Banks are quite as formidable as those which may be noted against Chase ..."¹². It can also be claimed that Lincoln's own oratorical gifts, which are evident in the "House-Divided Speech", and his moral, but not moralistic, and practical arguments against slavery and its extension, combined with his driving ambition and political acumen explain how he (after his loss to Douglas) found himself in a position to gain the Republican nomination for President. To return to the thesis' frequent references to "Lincoln's comeback:" Altogether, Lincoln gave thirty speeches outside Illinois in eight different states and in the Kansas Territory between his U.S. Senate defeat in the Illinois legislature in January 1859 and his Presidential nomination in May 1860.

However, this thesis does not emphasize Lincoln's rhetoric, so much as it calls attention to Lincoln's political activity and how he was aided by the concerted effort of numerous Illinois Republican supporters, whom he cultivated over many months with much patience and skill. As this thesis has also shown, Lincoln achieved his goal by going beyond Illinois to secure the political support of leaders in several Midwestern Republican parties (as well as Republicans in New York, Pennsylvania and New England.) For the first time in his career Lincoln had put himself on speaking tours and had participated in the political discussion beyond Illinois. In addition, he corresponded with leaders in numerous states and worked strenuously to enhance the unity and political influence of the national party he had earlier joined to further his fight against the expansion of slavery and the policies of the Democrats. Even as he looked beyond Illinois boundaries, he enlisted the support of Germans in Illinois and rallied them to the Republicans' state and national causes. By gaining these and other powerful and politically vital allies to work on his behalf, or to consider his availability, Lincoln was able to go to key states, those vital to the future Presidential hope of the Republicans, and give widely praised speeches in the Northeast as well as the Midwest. He did these many things without antagonizing members of his own party, and, most importantly, he advanced the fight against the expansion of slavery as a key Republican Party principle.

¹¹ From William Herndon and Jesse Weik's 1889 *Herndon's Lincoln*, page 369-370.

¹² Samuel Galloway to Abraham Lincoln, July 23 1859, *Lincoln papers*, Library of Congress, document d0178500.

It can also be discussed to what extent Lincoln could ever see his star as declining, as all actions he took to make a name for himself after re-appearing on the political scene to fight the Kansas-Nebraska Act made him a slowly growing force to be reckoned with. Although these endeavors did not lead him to success in obtaining political office, already in 1854 photographer George Schneider assessed Lincoln's position: "He was already a man necessary to know."¹³ Yet, the validity of Schneider's statement is debatable because it presupposes that Lincoln's rise was inevitable collected by Lincoln biographer Ida Tarbell, and published fifty-two years after the fact. However, this excerpt speaks to the correct impression that Lincoln did not emerge from virtual obscurity in Illinois, and rather carefully built an image from 1854 until 1860.

As the 1860 nomination process came to a dramatic culmination in May, Lincoln's qualities and his Illinois residency had made him an attractive candidate. For one thing, he had more than a half-decade of political experience in debating a distinctive policy position on the expansion of slavery and other criticisms of the institution, consistently fighting the national issue on a local stage. This would eventually serve him well and earn him a national recognition. His engagement with the slavery issue also supported Lincoln's personal ambition and enhanced the plausibility of his nomination among various Republicans in Illinois and the influential "party men" in other states. These Republicans would consider him as a viable Presidential candidate by the time of the canvass of 1860. In this process, his own lack of national experience was to a real extent turned into a benefit for Lincoln. It afforded him the luxury of having few, indeed, almost no enemies within the party and Lincoln capitalized on this advantage. Eight days after returning from the East where he had delivered his Cooper Union Address, Lincoln wrote Ohioan Samuel Galloway:

If I have any chance, it consists mainly in the fact that the whole opposition would vote for me if nominated. (I don't mean to include the pro-slavery opposition of the South, of course.) My name is new in the field; and I suppose I am not the first choice of a very great many. Our 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.¹⁴

major drawback of Lincoln's candidacy was paradoxically, also his greatest strength. His lack of recognition among the northern electorate and maybe even an image of his being a backwards, uncouth and inexperienced politician certainly was no fortunate, it seemed, but it did not prove to be an insurmountable obstacle. Luckily for Lincoln, it did not take much to convince delegates who

¹³ From an article appearing in *McClure's Magazine* by Journalist and Lincoln biographer Ida Tarbell, page 105, vol VI, no. 2, January 1896.

¹⁴ Abraham Lincoln to Samuel Galloway, March 24, 1860 in Basler's *CW*, vol IV, page 34.

were skeptical of William Seward to turn toward an available alternative, and Lincoln's speaking tour of the East capitalized on these Anti-Seward sentiments. Without the relatively well-organized Anti-Seward movement, operating mainly out of New York, it is almost impossible to conceive how Lincoln and his Illinois "club" could have (by themselves) achieved a national movement to oppose Seward. Even Lincoln's positions on non-slavery issues turned out to be helpful and would persuade delegations in the East that Lincoln could be a strong presidential candidate. His background as a Whig who believed in high tariffs and encouraged homestead legislation made him a most available candidate at the National Republican Convention in Chicago, especially for the key Pennsylvania delegates who strenuously supported these policies.

We have also seen that Lincoln's geographical position turned out to be yet another of those fortuitous circumstances that spoke in his favor. Already in 1856, Lincoln's location as an Illinois Republican had proved to be an advantage for him. That year he was, without his own active campaigning and knowledge, supported with 110 votes for the Vice-presidency at the Republican National Convention, which indicated that Illinois was an important state (maybe a more important factor than the fact that Lincoln was a suitable compromise candidate.)

Lincoln's "House-Divided" Speech in 1858, although not nationally publicized, would initiate a series of debates against the famous Stephen A. Douglas. The speech established that Lincoln was a name to be respected within the state of Illinois. The campaign debates in the Senate race contributed greatly to Lincoln's celebrity and enhanced his image as a staunch defender of the Constitution and opponent of the westward expansion of slavery. After his loss to Douglas following those debates, the speeches he gave in Ohio and Kansas proved to be important (although this thesis unfortunately has not had the space to review the major content of those speeches). Lincoln's ability to help keep the Illinois Republicans united (despite widespread squabbling) along with his support of other mid-western Republican organizations, proved to be of crucial importance, for there was no guarantee that the organization of the young Republican Party might not yield to sectional divisions and intra-party conflicts over personal jealousies, slavery, and several other political issues. The ringing endorsement by the Decatur Convention on May 9, along with Lincoln's designation of a savvy delegate team that would work (with his other Illinois supporters) for his nomination in Chicago a week later, was also instrumental. In Chicago, not far from Springfield, cheap railway fares ensured the presence of many of Lincoln's old friends and supporters at the major convention event.

But as we have shown, it may seem that Lincoln prior to the 1850s might and most likely would retire from the field of local and national politics and instead have focused on his prosperous legal career and enjoying his family life. This Lincoln could have remained a footnote of history, but rather it is the field of academic history which has been relegated to the footnotes in trying

to reconcile vastly different depictions on his life. Look only at the content of his speeches, not tackled chiefly or exclusively by historians or rhetorical experts, but which rather has become a part of curricula in many American schools—with some speeches and phrasing engraved in the collective memory of the American people. For Abraham Lincoln, driven by ambition, aided by his own political skill, the cooperation of fellow Illinois Republicans, taking advantage of the favorable circumstances of political intrigue and public speaking opportunities, pushed his way towards an implausible goal, from November 1858 to May 1860. Lincoln was cognizant of the bickering within the group which by 1860 formed a strong presidential campaign. Masterfully, Lincoln orchestrated the Republican movement and gained a powerful position within the poorly organized Republican party.

Finally, it must be stated that the insight into practical political events, the convention diplomacy, and the mix of political corruption and the unscrupulous “horse-trading” by the “Lincoln Club,” led by Lincoln’s close associate Judge David Davis, can neither be underestimated. By promising the Indiana-delegation the control of the Interior Department and the Indian Bureau, with the Treasury Department for Pennsylvania, the Lincolnites secured strong support for Lincoln on the first ballot, and this led to a shift in momentum from the first ballot, when Seward was close to being nominated.

Seward himself had too many enemies and a perceived reputation of being a rabid abolitionist, and this was perceived to mean that he was not quite an electable general candidate. We can say this: what spoke most in Seward’s favor was his fame and his long record of service to the Anti-Slavery cause and the Republican Party. Yet by the time of the convention vote, Abraham Lincoln had these attributes as well, plus unquestioned availability and the added benefit of several months of astute political activity, in Illinois and across many states - to say nothing of the convention floor and its back rooms. Perhaps then, Lincoln’s quest for the nomination, can, as Baringer tried, be summed up in a brief commentary, this time, by yours truly: Abraham Lincoln was made the fragile coalition known as the Republican Party’s Presidential nominee by strenuous work securing consonance within that organization both in his home state of Illinois and even nationally. By gaining a number of powerful allies and enlisting several mentors, like Davis, Judd and Browning, Lincoln was able to count on the help of these friends as he decided in early January 1860 to make a push for the presidency.

In other words, perhaps the impression that Lincoln was wavering, hesitant or even unsure of his position and support going into the 1860 Presidential canvass should be re-visited. Lincoln had a sense of what it took to be nominated. Therefore, Lincoln felt he had made the deals and had the support he needed, unlike Davis who went to Chicago with a lack of faith in Lincoln’s chances.

Gradually, Davis' hopes grew, and eventually he became as convinced as Lincoln had been prior to his nomination. Lincoln felt he had lost control when his team went to Chicago, but his team did not view him the way many other national politicians did. Lincoln was respected and did, in fact, receive nationwide support long before his Cooper Union speech and with integral and moderate forces from Indiana and Kansas. As time went on, politicians from New Jersey, Maine and Pennsylvania were convinced that Lincoln could be a contender to the more radically perceived Seward. The decision to locate the national convention in rural Chicago near Lincoln's hometown afforded Lincoln with the opportunity to challenge the distinguished Senator. There was nothing special about the emergence, political rise, resurgence or comeback of Abraham Lincoln. If one argues that Lincoln's defeats made his eventual nomination extraordinary, one fails to consider Lincoln's increased celebrity from 1854 and on as anything less than a political emergence spanning six years of hard work. It seems Lincoln had found his true calling, though his political experience had showed him that there was no guarantee that his superior intellect translated into success in an administrative position. Despite this, Lincoln continued to strive and work for higher office, and sometime during 1859 and perhaps much earlier, he decided that his position was strong enough to make a push for the presidency. And these circumstances found Lincoln, the unfulfilled, occasionally depressed, yet extremely competent, diplomatic, and gifted politician, neither reluctant nor unwilling. Lincoln was ready.

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