

## Chapter Eleven

“Unite with Us, and Help Us to Triumph”:

Building the Illinois Republican Party (1855-1857)

“You enquire where I now stand,” Lincoln wrote to Joshua Speed in the summer of 1855. “This is a disputed point. I think I am a Whig; but others say there are no whigs, and that I am an abolitionist.” That was not the case, he averred, for “I now do no more than oppose the extension of slavery.”<sup>1</sup> To unite all who shared his goal became Lincoln’s main objective. As he helped build a new antislavery party to replace the defunct Whig organization, he little imagined that he would soon become its standard bearer.<sup>2</sup> In this endeavor, he displayed the statesmanlike qualities that would characterize his presidency: eloquence, shrewdness, industry, patience, selflessness, tact, commitment to principle, willingness to shoulder responsibility, and a preternatural sense of timing.<sup>3</sup>

Hostility to the South in general, not just to slavery, helped swell the Republican ranks.<sup>4</sup> Lincoln, however, did not appeal to sectional prejudice but focused on the evils of the peculiar institution.

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<sup>1</sup> Lincoln to Joshua Speed, Springfield, 24 August 1855, Roy P. Basler et al., eds., The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 2:322-23.

<sup>2</sup> In 1855, Lincoln, like other Whigs, bemoaned the death of his party, which had been disintegrating for three years. Michael Holt, The Rise and Fall of the Whig Party: Jacksonian Politics and the Onset of the Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 909-50.

<sup>3</sup> Don E. Fehrenbacher, Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850’s (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 161.

<sup>4</sup> Michael F. Holt, “Making and Mobilizing the Republican Party, 1854-1860,” in Robert F. Engs and Randall M. Miller, eds., The Birth of the Grand Old Party: The Republicans’ First Generation (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 29-59.

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Of all the obstacles Lincoln encountered as he pursued his goal, none was more formidable than the upsurge of nativism and prohibitionism. In 1855, the Know Nothings of Illinois united to form a branch of the American Party, which denounced Catholicism, immigrants, and slavery expansion.<sup>5</sup> Their bigotry alienated many other antislavery advocates, making it difficult to keep the successful anti-Nebraska coalition intact; antagonizing the foreign-born, who constituted 20% of Illinois' population, would be politically ruinous. So, too, would be any move that offended the nativists. David Davis, who shared Lincoln's views, complained that the "intelligent and right-minded and useful portion of the Whig party in this state will not join the K[now] N[othing]s. They cannot affiliate with them at all, believing their policy to be mean, narrow, and selfish, and hence the State will go for [Stephen A.] Douglass. The liquor vote goes for the Democrats, and the foreign vote, by the present course of things, is forced to go for them. But for the combined force of these two elements, the Democracy would have been by this time – owing to their devotion to slavery – past any chance of doing harm."<sup>6</sup>

In the summer and fall of 1855, abolitionists Owen Lovejoy, Joshua R. Giddings, Ichabod Codding, and Zebina Eastman campaigned throughout Illinois trying to enlist support for their cause and lay the groundwork for a Republican victory in the 1856 presidential election.<sup>7</sup> The Joliet Signal sneered at this effort to promote what it called "a

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen L. Hansen and Paul D. Nygard, "Abraham Lincoln and the Know Nothing Question," Lincoln Herald 94 (1992): 63.

<sup>6</sup> David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 27 December 1855, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

<sup>7</sup> Edward Magdol, Owen Lovejoy: Abolitionist in Congress (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1967), 128-29; Victor B. Howard, "The Illinois Republican Party; Part 2: The Party Becomes Conservative, 1855-1856," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 64 (1971): 285-311.

nigger-stealing, stinking, putrid abolition party,” and Whig papers expressed skepticism about the endeavor.<sup>8</sup> In Quincy at the end of July, the proselytizers managed to convince some western Illinois Whigs, Free Soilers, and anti-Nebraska Democrats to band together on a platform opposing slavery expansion.<sup>9</sup> When Lovejoy proposed that a state antislavery convention meet in Springfield that autumn, Lincoln replied that although he was ready to endorse the principles of the Quincy meeting, the time was not yet ripe for a new party. “Not even you are more anxious to prevent the extension of slavery than I,” he told Lovejoy; “and yet the political atmosphere is such, just now, that I fear to do any thing, lest I do wrong.” The Know Nothing organization had “not yet entirely crumbled to pieces,” and until the antislavery forces could win over elements of it, “there is not sufficient materials to successfully combat the Nebraska democracy with.” As long as nativists “cling to a hope of success under their own organization,” they were unlikely to abandon it. “I fear an open push by us now, may offend them, and tend to prevent our ever getting them.” In central Illinois, the Know Nothings were, Lincoln said, some of his “old political and personal friends,” among them Joseph Gillespie of Edwardsville. Lincoln “hoped their organization would die out without the painful necessity of my taking an open stand against them.” Of course he deplored their principles: “Indeed I do not perceive how any one professing to be sensitive to the wrongs of the negroes, can join in a league to degrade a class of white men.” He was not squeamish about combining with “any body who stands right,” but the Know Nothings stood wrong.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 23 November 1855.

<sup>9</sup> Howard, “Illinois Republican Party, part 2,” 291.

<sup>10</sup> Lincoln to Lovejoy, Springfield, 11 August 1855, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:316-17.

Lincoln had reason to believe that the Whig party might continue as a viable organization. In the presidential election of 1848 it had won 43% of the popular vote, and four years later its share of the vote had declined only slightly to 42%. Moreover, Whigs held four of Illinois' nine seats in the U.S. House of Representatives.

Lincoln was hardly alone in his views about a new party. Lyman Trumbull told Lovejoy that it was “very questionable” whether “it would be advisable at this time to call a State Convention of all those opposed to the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, irrespective of party.” In the Alton area “there is so much party feeling, so great aversion to what is called fusion, that very few democrats would be likely to unite in a Convention composed of all parties. If a convention of the Democracy, opposed equally to the spread of slavery, to abolition & Know Nothingism, could be called, we could, I think, get a respectable representation from this part of the State, and such a movement would probably damage the Nebraska democracy more than anything else which could be done; but I do not presume any considerable portion of the North would unite in a Convention of this kind.” To carry Illinois, “we must keep out of the pro-slavery party a large number of those who are democrats.” That would be relatively easy “were it not for old party associations, & side issues, such as Know Nothingism & the Temperance question.”<sup>11</sup> These responses by Lincoln and Trumbull caused Lovejoy and his allies to postpone plans for a statewide convention.<sup>12</sup>

Joshua Giddings as well as Lovejoy had tried to enlist Lincoln's support. In September, the Ohio congressman invited Lincoln to meet with him, Archibald Williams,

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<sup>11</sup> Lyman Trumbull to Owen Lovejoy, Alton, 20 August 1855, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>12</sup> Howard, “Illinois Republican Party, part 2,” 295; Magdol, Lovejoy, 134-35.

and Richard Yates: “You my dear sir may now by your own personal efforts give direction to those movements which are to determine the next Presidential election.”<sup>13</sup>

Because he had to be in Cincinnati on business at that time, Lincoln could not accept his friend’s invitation.

Lincoln’s doubts about launching a new party in 1855 matched his skepticism about non-violent abolition. To Kentucky attorney George Robertson, who in 1819 had predicted the peaceable elimination of slavery, Lincoln wrote: “Since then we have had thirty six years of experience” which “demonstrated, I think, that there is no peaceful extinction of slavery in prospect for us.” Lincoln pointed to the unsuccessful 1849 effort made by Kentuckians, led by Henry Clay, to abolish slavery gradually. Their defeat, “together with a thousand other signs, extinguishes that hope utterly,” Lincoln declared. He bemoaned the decline of American virtue since 1776, when the nation “called the maxim that ‘all men are created equal’ a self evident truth.” Now, he said, “we have grown so fat, and have lost all dread of being slaves ourselves, we have become so greedy to be masters that we call the same maxim ‘a self-evident lie.’” Sarcastically he observed: “The fourth of July has not quite dwindled away; it is still a great day – for burning fire crackers!!!” The idealism of the Revolutionary era, which had prompted several states to abolish slavery, “has itself become extinct,” he lamented. His compassion for the slaves shone through his assessment of their current plight: “So far as peaceful, voluntary emancipation is concerned, the condition of the negro slave in America, scarcely less terrible to the contemplation of a free mind, is now as fixed, and hopeless of change for the better, as that of the lost souls of the finally impenitent.” He

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<sup>13</sup> Giddings to Lincoln, Peoria, 18 September 1855, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

predicted that the “Autocrat of all the Russias will resign his crown, and proclaim his subjects free republicans sooner than will our American masters voluntarily give up their slaves.” Foreshadowing a speech that would make him famous three years later, Lincoln told Robertson: “Our political problem now is ‘Can we, as a nation, continue together permanently – forever – half slave, and half free?’ The problem is too mighty for me. May God, in his mercy, superintend the solution.”<sup>14</sup>

To another Kentuckian, Joshua Speed, Lincoln also unbosomed himself on the vexed question of slavery. Speed had criticized Northerners for agitating that issue, which, he maintained, was of concern to Southerners alone; the people of the North should mind their own business. Lincoln demurred, arguing that Speed should applaud the restraint shown by him and other Free State residents who were willing to honor constitutional provisions concerning fugitive slaves and states rights. With heartfelt emotion, Lincoln reminded Speed of a journey they had taken years earlier: “In 1841 you and I had together a tedious low-water trip, on a Steam Boat from Louisville to St. Louis. You may remember, as I well do, that from Louisville to the mouth of the Ohio there were, on board, ten or a dozen slaves, shackled together with irons. That sight was a continual torment to me; and I see something like it every time I touch the Ohio or any other slave-border. It is hardly fair for you to assume, that I have no interest in a thing which has, and continually exercises, the power of making me miserable. You ought rather to appreciate how much the great body of Northern people do crucify their feelings, in order to maintain their loyalty to the constitution and the Union.”

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<sup>14</sup> Lincoln to George Robertson, Springfield, 15 August 1855, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:317-18.

If Lincoln had been upset by what he had seen on the Ohio River in 1841, he was equally disturbed in 1855 by events in Kansas, where pro-slavery forces, led by Missourians, ran roughshod over Free Soilers, stealing elections by fraud and violence, passing statutes that forbade criticism of slavery and imposed the death penalty on anyone assisting runaway slaves, and expelled antislavery legislators.<sup>15</sup> When Speed declared that if he were president he would execute the so-called Missouri “border ruffians,” Lincoln replied that there was little hope for a “fair decision of the slavery question in Kansas” because the Kansas-Nebraska Act was not really a statute: “I look upon that enactment not as a law, but as violence from the beginning. It was conceived in violence, passed in violence, is maintained in violence, and is being executed in violence. I say it was conceived in violence, because the destruction of the Missouri Compromise, under the circumstances, was nothing less than violence. It was passed in violence, because it could not have passed at all but for the votes of many members, in violent disregard of the known will of their constituents. It is maintained in violence because the elections since, clearly demand it’s repeal, and this demand is openly disregarded.” Sarcastically he predicted that Kansas would enter the Union as a Slave State, even though most settlers there opposed slavery: “By every principle of law, ever held by any court, North or South, every negro taken to Kansas is free; yet in utter disregard of this – in the spirit of violence merely – that beautiful Legislature [in Kansas] gravely passes a law to hang men who shall venture to inform a negro of his legal rights.” The friends of slavery would prevail in Congress, Lincoln said, because northern politicians were

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<sup>15</sup> On 30 March 1855, Missourians voting illegally in Kansas had helped proslavery forces win a majority of seats in the newly established territorial legislature, which enacted repressive legislation. David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861, ed. Don E. Fehrenbacher (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 200-4.

corruptible. With asperity perhaps rooted in his defeat for the senate a few months earlier, he told Speed: “Standing as a unit among yourselves, you [slaveholders] can, directly, and indirectly, bribe enough of our men to carry the day – as you could on an open proposition to establish monarchy.” Scornfully he referred to the Democratic party’s iron discipline: “Get hold of some man in the North, whose position and ability is such, that he can make the support of your measure – whatever it may be – a democratic party necessity, and the thing is done.” Reluctant as he was to deny anyone “the enjoyment of property acquired, or located, in good faith,” Lincoln could not “admit that good faith, in taking a negro to Kansas, to be held in slavery, is a possibility with any man.” No sensible person could “misunderstand the outrageous character of this whole Kansas business.”

In response to Speed’s professed willingness to dissolve the Union if the rights of slaveholders were violated, Lincoln said that he would not attempt to do so if the tables were turned and Kansas were admitted as a Slave State. To be sure, Speed had expressed the hope that Kansas would be admitted as a Free State; but, Lincoln rejoined, slaveholders’ deeds belied their words. “All decent slave-holders talk that way; and I do not doubt their candor. But they never vote that way.” In private correspondence or conversation, “you will express your preference that Kansas shall be free,” but “you would vote for no man for Congress who would say the same thing publicly.” Echoing his 1854 Peoria address, Lincoln told his old friend that “slave-breeders and slave traders, are a small, odious and detested class, among you; and yet in politics, they dictate the course of all of you, and are as completely your masters, as you are the masters of your own negroes.” Though dubious about the prospects for a free Kansas, Lincoln said he



would work for that cause: “In my humble sphere, I shall advocate the restoration of the Missouri Compromise, so long as Kansas remains a territory; and when, by all these foul means, it seeks to come into the Union as a Slave-state, I shall oppose it.”<sup>16</sup>

In the fall of 1855, Lincoln stumped Illinois to carry out that pledge. As he had done the previous year, he followed Douglas around the state, responding to the Little Giant’s attempts to reunite the Democratic party and vindicate his record.<sup>17</sup> No account of Lincoln’s speeches has survived. He probably made arguments similar to the ones contained in his 1854 addresses and in his subsequent letters to Robertson and Speed. Lincoln’s efforts won the approval of Samuel M. Hitt, a prosperous farmer in Ogle County who told David Davis: “I am glad Lincoln is at Douglass’ heels. D’s friends here are using every possible means to build him up, and, lamentable to tell, they make some head way.”<sup>18</sup> In December, Davis reported that “Lincoln made a few very able speeches this fall and was to answer Douglas at Danville, when he [Douglas] was taken sick.” The Little Giant had come down with bronchitis and underwent throat surgery in December. He had worn himself out campaigning not only in Illinois but in several other states as he positioned himself for yet another presidential run. Lincoln also had his eye on the presidential race of 1856. He probably shared the view of David Davis, who noted that election results in New York and Massachusetts gave “such an impetus to this Know Nothing movement throughout the free states, and so frittered away and weakened the

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<sup>16</sup> Lincoln to Speed, Springfield, 24 August 1855, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:320-22.

<sup>17</sup> Robert W. Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 480-85. Douglas also debated Trumbull in September. Arthur C. Cole, The Era of the Civil War, 1848-1870 (vol. 3 of The Centennial History of Illinois, ed. Clarence Walworth Alvord; Springfield: Illinois Centennial Commission, 1919), 141.

<sup>18</sup> Samuel M. Hitt to David Davis, 4 November 1855, in Willard King, Lincoln’s Manager: David Davis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 10.

opposition to the Democracy, that the next Presidential race will certainly be spoiled.”<sup>19</sup> (In New York and Massachusetts, the Know Nothing candidates for secretary of state and governor, respectively, won. A prominent Bay State jurist, Rufus Choate, expressed the disgust that many Northerners, including Lincoln, felt at the nativists’ triumph: “Any thing more low, obscene, feculent, the manifold leavings of history have not cast up. We shall come to the worship of onions, cats and things vermiculate.”)<sup>20</sup>

To lay plans for combating the Know Nothing threat, Lincoln met in January 1856 with Ebenezer Peck, Lyman Trumbull, Jackson Grimshaw, Joseph Gillespie, C. D. Hay, and Gustave Koerner, among others. It was agreed that the antislavery Whigs and Democrats would have to work together, but they were not sure how to respond to the possibility that the Know Nothings might field their own candidates for office. The antislavery men favored William H. Bissell for governor.<sup>21</sup> Like their counterparts in Indiana, they realized that a former Democrat stood a much better chance of winning than an ex-Whig.<sup>22</sup>

Shortly after the 1855 elections, a group of antislavery newspapermen launched another attempt to unify the foes of slavery.<sup>23</sup> In November, Paul Selby of the

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<sup>19</sup> David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, Illinois, 27 December 1855, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts. For a brief account of Lincoln’s October 31 speech at Danville, see Donald G. Richter, Lincoln: Twenty Years on the Eastern Prairie (Mattoon, Illinois: United Graphics, 1999), 173-74.

<sup>20</sup> Choate quoted in David Donald, Charles Sumner and the Coming of the Civil War (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1960), 268.\*

<sup>21</sup> Ebenezer Peck to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 17 January 1856, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>22</sup> The antislavery forces in Indiana rallied around Democrat Oliver P. Morton for governor rather than Henry S. Lane, a Henry Clay Whig, though they admired Lane more. Walter Rice Sharp, “Henry S. Lane and the Formation of the Republican Party in Indiana” Mississippi Valley Historical Review 7 (1920): 108-9.

<sup>23</sup> Otto R. Kyle, “Mr. Lincoln Steps Out: The Anti-Nebraska Editors’ Convention,” Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 5 (1948): 25-37.

Jacksonville Morgan Journal proposed that editors of anti-Nebraska journals convene to build the foundation for a new antislavery party.<sup>24</sup> When the Winchester Chronicle seconded the idea, young John G. Nicolay, editor of the Pike County Free Press (who would later serve as Lincoln's principal White House secretary) provisionally endorsed the suggestion not only because such a convention would "be the most direct means of bringing about a triumphant victory in our next State election" but also because "it will tend to bring about a proper appreciation and recognition of the power and influence of the Political Press." To be effective, "all ultraism would have to be avoided, and conservative principles adopted as a basis of union."<sup>25</sup> Other editors also feared "too much ultraism."<sup>26</sup>

Soon after Nicolay's endorsement, more than twenty papers followed suit.<sup>27</sup> When George T. Brown of the Alton Courier and John T. Morton of the Quincy Whig suggested that the meeting be held on February 22 at Decatur, a town centrally located and well served by trains, Nicolay protested that it "will scarcely leave time to make the necessary arrangements. We have plenty of time before us, and it is not worth while to act in too much haste."<sup>28</sup> Because the other editors did not share this view, the recommendation for time and place was accepted. On January 10, a call endorsed by five papers appeared in the Decatur Illinois Chronicle, whose editor, William J. Usrey,

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<sup>24</sup> Selby, "Editorial Convention," in Ezra M. Prince, ed., Bloomington, Illinois, Republican Convention, May 29, 1856 (vol. 3, Transactions of the McLean County Historical Society [Bloomington: Pantagraph, 1900]), 34. Files of the Morgan Journal for this period have not survived.

<sup>25</sup> Pike County Free Press (Pittsfield), 20 December 1855.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Selby to Richard Yates, Jacksonville, 14 February 1856, Yates Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. The signature of this letter is torn off.

<sup>27</sup> Kyle, "Anti-Nebraska Editors' Convention," 27-29.

<sup>28</sup> Pike County Free Press (Pittsfield), 16 January 1856.

predicted an attendance of fifty to seventy-five.<sup>29</sup> A severe snowstorm, however, thwarted the plans of many editors; only twelve reached Decatur for the event.<sup>30</sup>

In addition to the dozen journalists, Lincoln also participated as an informal guest.<sup>31</sup> He had grown more optimistic about the chances for successful fusion because hostility to slavery and to the South was steadily mounting throughout the North, thanks largely to the outrages in Kansas. One conservative Northern paper declared that after “fighting the battle of the South for twelve long years, defending its political rights, domestic institutions, social character, manners and habits on all occasions, recent occurrences have convinced us that the time has come for the North, with its superior numbers, intelligence, wealth and power, to take a stand, firm and fixed as its granite hills, against the threatening, bullying, brow-beating, skull-breaking spirit of the South – a spirit that tramples on Compromise; violates the sacred freedom of parliamentary debate; and murders the settlers upon our common soil for simply opposing, by voice and vote, the fastening of slavery upon a free and virgin Territory. . . . However mischievous and detestable the sentiments promulgated by [the Republicans] may be, they have never resorted to bullets and bludgeons to carry their points, or to silence their opponents.”<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Otto R. Kyle, Lincoln in Decatur (New York: Vantage Press, 1957), 30.

<sup>30</sup> They were E. W. Blaisdell of the Rockford Republican, Elias C. Daugherty of the Rockford Register, Charles Faxon of the Princeton Post, Allen Ford of the Lacon Gazette, Thomas J. Pickett of the Peoria Republican, Virgil Y. Ralston of Quincy Whig, Charles H. Ray of Chicago Tribune, George Schneider of Illinois Staats-Zeitung, Benjamin F. Shaw of Dixon Telegraph, Oliver P. Wharton of the Rock Island Advertiser, Usrey, and Selby. Nicolay did not attend. He was all set to go when the illness of a staff member forced him to stay in Pittsfield and set type. He approved of the “liberal and conservative platform” adopted at Decatur. Pike County Free Press (Pittsfield), 28 February 1856.

<sup>31</sup> Because he was not an editor, Lincoln received no formal invitation, but a week before the Decatur conclave, its chief architect, Paul Selby, told Richard Yates: “I have had an interview with Mr. Lincoln today . . . . He tells me he thinks he will try and have some business at Decatur at the time of the Convention.” Selby to Yates, Jacksonville, 14 February 1856, Yates Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>32</sup> Tyler Anbinder, Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know Nothings and the Politics of the 1850’s (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 227.

Republicans rejoiced at the ebbing of the prohibitionist and Know Nothing tide. In June 1855, the electorate of Illinois, by a wide margin, defeated a measure outlawing the sale of liquor, thus dealing the prohibition cause such a severe blow that it virtually collapsed.<sup>33</sup> The Know Nothing threat could be easily defused, according to Charles H. Ray of the Chicago Tribune, who would take a leading role in the editors' conference. To win the support of the 20,000 antislavery Germans in Illinois, it was necessary to assure them "that the party does not contemplate any change of the naturalization laws." Ray predicted that with such a plank "in our temperate platform and [William] Bissell thereupon we can whip Douglas and Nebraska clean out of the state."<sup>34</sup> Ray feared that the Democrats were scheming with the Know Nothings to have Bissell nominated by the nativists before the Republican state convention met, thus tainting him in the eyes of the Germans. "I am still of the opinion that K Nism will damage us," Ray predicted in early May. If the Republicans repudiated nativism, "we get the German, English, Protestant Irish, Scotch and Scandinavian vote – in all about 30,000 – more than double the K N strength, which in its palmyest days was not over 25,000 and is not now 15,000."<sup>35</sup>

In Decatur, Lincoln helped draft a platform containing an anti-nativist plank.<sup>36</sup> One editor, German-born George Schneider of the Chicago Staats-Zeitung, who came to Decatur "with his war paint on," had prepared a declaration sharply condemning Know

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<sup>33</sup> Cole, Era of Civil War, 209-11, 136.

<sup>34</sup> Charles H. Ray to Lyman Trumbull, Chicago, 21 March 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>35</sup> Charles H. Ray to Elihu B. Washburne, Chicago, 4 May [1856], Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>36</sup> Paul Selby recalled that Lincoln was "in conference with the committee [on resolutions] during the day, and there is reason to believe that the platform, reported by them through Dr. Ray as their chairman, and adopted by the convention, bears the stamp of his peculiar intellect." Selby, "Editorial Convention of 1856," Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3:37.

Nothingism.<sup>37</sup> Because it “raised a storm of opposition,” Schneider turned in “utter despair” to Lincoln, who, after reading it, told the editors: “The resolution introduced by Mr. Schneider is nothing new. It is already contained in the Declaration of Independence and you cannot form a new party on proscriptive principles.” Lincoln’s intervention, according to Schneider, “saved the resolution” and “helped to establish the new party on the most liberal democratic basis.”<sup>38</sup>

Schneider’s memory may have been faulty, for the resolution adopted was clearly a compromise. On the one hand, it roundly condemned prejudice in the distribution of government jobs: “in regard to office we hold merit, not birth place to be the test, deeming the rule of Thos. Jefferson – is he honest? is he capable? – the only true rule.” In dealing with immigration, the resolution declared, in language that satisfied Ray’s requirement, that “we shall maintain the Naturalization laws as they are, believing as we do, that we should welcome the exiles and emigrants from the Old World, to homes of enterprise and of freedom in the New.” On the other hand, the resolution reached out to the Know Nothings who opposed public funding of Catholic schools: “while we are in favor of the widest tolerance upon all matters of religious faith, we will repel all attacks upon our Common School System, or upon any of our Institutions of an educational character, or our civil polity by the adherents of any religious body whatever.”<sup>39</sup> Lincoln, with his strong desire to wean away the Know Nothings, may have added the passage about schools.

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<sup>37</sup> Frank I. Herriott to Albert J. Beveridge, Des Moines, Iowa, 14 December 1922, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>38</sup> Schneider in Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3:90.

<sup>39</sup> For the full text of the platform, see Kyle, Lincoln in Decatur, 139-42.

Lincoln composed the “States Rights Plank,” which read: “Resolved, That the conditions which are demanded under pleas of ‘rights’ as being essential to the security of Slavery throughout its expanded and expanding area, are inconsistent with freedom, an invasion of our rights, oppressive and unjust, and must be resisted.”<sup>40</sup> The preamble and the other resolutions called for the restoration of the Missouri Compromise and endorsed the principle that slavery was local (and hence exceptional) and freedom national (and hence the rule). But they also affirmed that the Fugitive Slave Act must be obeyed and that the federal government was not authorized to tamper with slavery in the states where it already existed.<sup>41</sup>

After adopting this declaration of principles and naming a central committee (which included Herndon), the editors called for a state convention of antislavery forces to meet in Bloomington on May 29.<sup>42</sup> It is probable that Herndon’s selection was made at the behest of Lincoln, who evidently wanted him to serve as his agent in building the party. (Selby recalled that when the committee was chosen, some of the members “were suggested by Mr. Lincoln, while the others received his approval.”)<sup>43</sup> Throughout the winter and spring, Herndon conducted an active political correspondence, wrote

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<sup>40</sup> Oliver P. Wharton, editor of the Rock Island Advertiser, “Lincoln and the Beginning of the Republican Party in Illinois,” Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society 16 (1911): 62-63; Kyle, Lincoln in Decatur, 141.

<sup>41</sup> Kyle, Lincoln in Decatur, 139-42.

<sup>42</sup> Others chosen to join Herndon on the state central committee were Selden M. Church of Rockford, William B. Ogden of Chicago, Gavion D. A. Parks of Joliet, Thomas J. Pickett of Peoria, Edward A. Dudley of Quincy, Richard J. Oglesby of Decatur, Joseph Gillespie of Edwardsville, David L. Phillips of Jonesboro, Gustave Koerner of Belleville, and Ira O. Wilkinson of Rock Island. Isaac C. Pugh of Edwardsville replaced Oglesby, who went on European tour. Dr. John Evans of Chicago replaced Ogden.

<sup>43</sup> Ida M. Tarbell, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; New York: McClure, Phillips, 1902), 1:291.

editorials, delivered speeches on behalf of the cause, and helped with preparations for the Bloomington Convention.<sup>44</sup>

The editors did not formally endorse a gubernatorial candidate, though some wanted to run Lincoln.<sup>45</sup> He, however, had been trying, along with other antislavery leaders, to woo the popular antislavery Democrat and Mexican War hero, William H. Bissell, who seemed the most electable of all the anti-Nebraska leaders.<sup>46</sup> In 1850, as a congressman, Bissell had achieved national renown by accepting Mississippi Senator Jefferson Davis's challenge to a duel; the Illinoisan specified that the weapons should be army muskets charged with ball and buckshot, to be used at close range. An eloquent speaker and a man of "considerable talent and great energy of character," Bissell suffered from poor health, which made his availability problematic.<sup>47</sup> (Lamed by syphilis that he contracted in Mexico, he would die in 1860 at the age of forty-nine.)<sup>48</sup>

At a dinner following the editors' convention, Lincoln announced his support for Bissell. When toasted as "our next candidate for the U.S. Senate," Lincoln replied that

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<sup>44</sup> David Donald, Lincoln's Herndon (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), 83-89.

<sup>45</sup> One editor touting Lincoln for governor was Thomas J. Pickett. "For Governor, Abram Lincoln," Peoria Weekly Republican, 22 February 1856. The Peoria Daily Transcript commented, "We have seen no response from any other source, and have concluded that the nomination was not a popular one. Or perhaps the papers were waiting for the action of the Decatur Convention. . . . We would suggest that the State of Illinois is rather strongly democratic in sentiment, and to nominate a 'dyed-in-the-wool whig' with the expectation of electing him to the gubernatorial chair, is calculating too much on a change in that sentiment." Peoria Daily Transcript, 26 February 1856.

<sup>46</sup> Joseph Knox to Richard Yates, Washington, 17 March 1856, Yates Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Paul Selby reported to Yates in February that Lincoln "read to me a letter from the gentleman we were speaking of last evening for Govr. which contains the assurances you have been seeking for. This he will show you when you see him, but of course this is all in confidence. I write because I shall not probably be in Jacksonville before the Convention at Decatur." Paul Selby to Yates, Jacksonville, 14 February 1856, Yates Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. The letter that Lincoln showed to Selby was evidently from Bissell, perhaps like the one he had sent to Peck in January or that he wrote to Gillespie a few days later.

<sup>47</sup> Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning (2 vols.; Springfield: Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, 1925-33), 1:399 (entry for 19 March 1860).

<sup>48</sup> Robert P. Howard, Mostly Good and Competent Men: Illinois Governors, 1818-1988 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1988), 109-15.



“he was very much in the position of the man who was attacked by a robber, demanding his money, when he answered, ‘my dear fellow, I have no money, but if you will go with me to the light, I will give you my note.’” Lincoln added: “if you will let me off, I will give you my note.” The editors would not let him off, so, after apologizing for his presence, he spoke for half an hour. He “stated that he believed he was a sort of interloper there and was reminded of the incident of a man not possessed of features the ladies would call handsome, while riding on horseback through the woods met an equestrienne. He reined his horse to one side of the bridle path and stopped, waiting for the woman to pass. She also checked her horse to a stop and looked him over in a curious sort of a way, finally remarked:

“‘Well, for land sake, you are the homeliest man I ever saw.’

“‘Yes, madam, but I can’t help it.’

“‘No, I suppose not,’ she said, ‘but you might stay at home.’”

Lincoln said “that he felt as though he might have stayed at home on that occasion.”<sup>49</sup>

Turning serious, Lincoln referred to the proposition made by some of the editors that he run for governor. “If I should be chosen,” he remarked, “the Democrats would say, it was nothing more than an attempt to resurrect the dead body of the old Whig party. I would secure the vote of that party and no more, and our defeat will follow as a matter of course. But, I can suggest a name that will secure not only the old Whig vote, but enough Anti-Nebraska Democrats to give us the victory. That man is Colonel William H. Bissell.”<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Illinois State Chronicle (Decatur), 28 February 1856; Benjamin F. Shaw in Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3:68.

<sup>50</sup> Paul Selby in Tarbell, Life of Lincoln, 1:291.

The editors' convention had in effect launched the Republican party of Illinois. Under Lincoln's leadership, it steered a moderate course to avoid alienating potential allies, especially conservative Whigs and Know Nothings, yet at the same time condemned slavery expansion forcefully. The editors had carefully avoided using the name "Republican," which, as antislavery Congressman John Wentworth of Chicago observed, connoted to many voters "a sort of [prohibitionist] Maine Law, Free Love, Spiritual Medium &c. &c. concern."<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the New York Herald charged that "Socialism in its worst form, including the most advanced theories of women's rights, the division of land, free love and the exaltation of the desires of the individual over the rights of the family, and the forced equality of all men in phalansteries, or similar organizations, are a part of the logical chain of ideas that flow from the anti-slavery theory which forms the soul of black republicanism."<sup>52</sup> In some states, when antislavery forces banded together, they called themselves "the People's Party" or "the Opposition" rather than Republicans.<sup>53</sup> The Illinois State Journal praised the editors' platform as "neither 'Know Nothing' nor 'Republican.'"<sup>54</sup>

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The gubernatorial nomination would be made at the convention which the editors summoned for May 29 at Bloomington. Three weeks before that date, the anti-Nebraska

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<sup>51</sup> John Wentworth to Lincoln, Chicago, 21 October 1856, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. In fact, many abolitionists did favor such reforms. Ronald G. Walters, The Antislavery Appeal: American Abolitionism after 1830 (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976).

<sup>52</sup> New York Herald, 19 September 1860, in Howard Cecil Perkins, ed., Northern Editorial on Secession (2 vols.; New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1942), 1:36.

<sup>53</sup> George W. Julian, "The First Republican National Convention," American Historical Review 4 (1899): 313-14.

<sup>54</sup> Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 25 February 1856.

forces in Sangamon County called for a local convention to choose delegates.<sup>55</sup> At the time, Lincoln was on the circuit, so Herndon, who was busily promoting the convention, took the liberty of signing his partner's name to the call.<sup>56</sup> (Herndon's claim that he propelled a reluctant Lincoln to throw himself into the movement to establish the Republican party is improbable. John M. Scott rightly observed that it "was mainly through his [Lincoln's] management and by his advice a state convention was called in 1856 to convene in Bloomington.")<sup>57</sup> The previous month, Herndon told Lyman Trumbull: "We intend to get the best men in our State to attend the convention in Bloomington, and where we hope to be conservative – not hunkerish – firm – conciliatory – united, putting every man's individual opinions on other questions out of sight, sinking them in the greater one of Slavery Extension" and to "frame some broad, liberal, conciliatory, firm, resolutions or platform."<sup>58</sup> E. B. Washburne urged Richard Yates to help recruit delegates for the Bloomington convention: "If we will all wheel in under that Anti-Nebraska Convention Call, and go to work to get delegations from all the counties, we can have a convention, which in point of character and ability will be without a parallel in the states history."<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:340.

<sup>56</sup> Herndon to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 17 May 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress; Herndon to Caroline Dall, Springfield, 3 January 1867 [misdated 1866], Dall Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

<sup>57</sup> \*Paul M. Angle, ed., Herndon's Life of Lincoln: The History and Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln as Originally Written by William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik (Cleveland: World, 1942), 311-12; Donald, Lincoln's Herndon, 87-88; [John M. Scott], "Lincoln on the Stump and at the Bar," enclosed in Scott to Ida M. Tarbell, Bloomington, 14 August 1895, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

<sup>58</sup> Herndon to Trumbull, Springfield, 24 April 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>59</sup> Washburne to Yates, Washington, 2 April 1856, Richard Yates and Catherine Yates Pickering, Richard Yates, Civil War Governor, ed. John H. Krenkel (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers, 1966), 116.

Most important, the anti-Nebraska forces needed to select a popular gubernatorial candidate. As Lincoln had suggested at Decatur, William Bissell was the obvious choice. In January, he had indicated a willingness to run for governor, saying that although his health was shaky and that he would prefer to serve as a private in the ranks rather than a leader, he would do whatever the party thought best.<sup>60</sup> By early May, he had changed his mind. He explained to Trumbull: “The Convention at Bloomington is too likely to be composed of the same persons, and very few others, that composed the Decatur Convention. And nominations by such a convention are but the surest modes of killing off the nominees. I am inclined to think, with you, that the anti Nebraska Democrats ought to have rallied, and taken the control and direction of this Bloomington Convention – made it, and its candidates, their own. Otherwise this convention ought not to have been called, or held at all – but a candidate or candidates taken up and [centered?] upon by general consent without the machinery of a convention. And in this way I think, the candidate would have commanded the most strength. You have seen my name mentioned in connexion with the office of Governor. Under a different state of things I should have had no objections to running, even with every probability of success against me. But, from the way in which things are now shaping I see no sort of inducement to mix myself up with them. And my present inclination is to decline a nomination, should one be tendered me.”<sup>61</sup>

Bissell’s reluctance placed the entire movement in jeopardy. No record of Lincoln’s direct attempts to reassure him survives, but through Herndon he did so indirectly. Nine

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<sup>60</sup> Bissell to Ebenezer Peck, Belleville, 21 January 1856, Gillespie Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. He said the same thing, more vigorously, to Gillespie, Belleville, 17 February 1856, *ibid.*

<sup>61</sup> Bissell to Trumbull, Belleville, 5 May 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

days before the Bloomington convention, Herndon told Trumbull of a discussion he had just held with his partner: “Lincoln & myself had a long talk in reference to affairs, and I have never seen him so sanguine of success, as in this Election – he is warm. I gathered this from him, – recollect he has been round our Judicial Circuit –, that the people are warm and full of feeling on this question – this great & mighty issue. They have moved more since Bissell wrote you than in the past year – never saw so much ‘dogged determination’ to fight it out; – that Democrats are coming to us daily – . . . and if you will look over our papers you will see that Lincoln is correct. He says this – that some few corrupt old line whigs who are gaping for office in and about towns, are going with the nigger driving gentlemen [i.e., Democrats], but that the whigs & Democrats in the country are all right on the question, and are becoming more so every day – riper and riper they grow for Freedom the longer the time is extended.”<sup>62</sup>

Four days later, Bissell once again reversed course, informing George T. Brown, a leading organizer of the Bloomington Convention, that he would in fact accept the gubernatorial nomination, even though his health was so impaired that he could not campaign vigorously.<sup>63</sup> Brown, who would preside at the opening of the conclave at Bloomington, had worked hard to assure that the tone of “the proceedings will be conservative.”<sup>64</sup> On May 27, Lincoln probably felt relieved as he boarded a train in Danville, where he had been attending court, and headed off to Bloomington; there, if Brown’s efforts proved effective, if Bissell honored his most recent pledge, and if the

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<sup>62</sup> Herndon to Trumbull, Springfield, 20 May 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>63</sup> Bissell to George T. Brown, Belleville, 24 May 1856, in Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3:154-55.

<sup>64</sup> Brown to Lyman Trumbull, Alton, 12 May 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

delegates ratified a moderate platform like the one hammered out at the editors' conference in February, the prospects of victory would be bright indeed.

While in Danville, Lincoln had actively solicited support for the upcoming convention and recruited several young lawyers and editors to accompany him to Bloomington.<sup>65</sup> One of his traveling companions, attorney Henry C. Whitney, recalled that during a layover in Decatur, they strolled about the town. Upon reaching the courthouse, Lincoln grew reminiscent. "Here on this spot, twenty-six years ago, I made my first halt in Illinois," he said; "here I stood, and there our wagon stood, with all that we owned in the world." Lincoln then told Whitney "of his early adventures in both Macon and Sangamon counties, the Hanks family, etc.; also his early struggles in life."<sup>66</sup> Later that afternoon, while seated on a tree trunk in a brush thicket, he expressed to his colleagues, including Joseph O. Cunningham, "his hopes and fears of the results of the coming convention, and of his earnest wish that the old Whig element from Southern Illinois might be well represented there."<sup>67</sup> He did not, Cunningham recalled, "attempt to conceal fears and misgivings entertained by him as to the outcome of the gathering. He

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<sup>65</sup> J. O. Cunningham, "Some Recollections of Abraham Lincoln: Delivered before the Firelands Pioneer Association, at Norwalk, Ohio, July 4, 1907, and reprinted from the Pioneer of Dec. 1909" (pamphlet), 6.

<sup>66</sup> Henry Clay Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (1892; Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1940), 43, 90-91. In 1887, Whitney told William H. Herndon that "Lincoln at Decatur showed me exactly where they went through Decatur on that trip" from Indiana to Illinois. Whitney to Herndon, Chicago, 27 August 1887, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 628. James O. Cunningham had a similar recollection: "A number of delegates and others from the eastern counties, mostly young men, happened on the Wabash train with Mr. Lincoln and arrived at Decatur about the middle of the afternoon. No train coming to Bloomington until the next morning, made it necessary that we spend the afternoon and night at Decatur. The afternoon was spent by Mr. Lincoln in sauntering about the town and in talking of his early experiences there twenty-five years before. After a while he proposed going to the woods then a little way south or southwest of the village, in the Sangamon bottoms. His proposition was assented to and all went to the timber. A convenient log by the side of the road, in a patch of brush, afforded seats for the company, where the time was spent listening to the playful and familiar talks of Mr. Lincoln." Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3:91.

<sup>67</sup> Cunningham, "Some Recollections of Abraham Lincoln," 6.

was well assured that the radical element of the northern counties would be there in force, and feared the effect upon the conservative element of the central and southern parts of the State.”<sup>68</sup> The next day, while rolling northward toward Bloomington, Lincoln anxiously inquired of fellow passengers if they were delegates from southern Illinois, where antislavery sentiment was weak. He was jubilant upon discovering two trainmates from Egypt who would attend the convention.<sup>69</sup> Upon arriving in Bloomington the next day, Lincoln eagerly sought out Whig friends from southern Illinois, among them Jesse K. Dubois.<sup>70</sup> Lincoln’s task was to persuade Dubois and other conservatives to unite with the abolitionists of the north and the moderates of central Illinois. Energetically but discreetly, he met that challenge, holding no official position other than the chairman of the nominations committee. A Chicago delegate, John Locke Scripps, thought that “no other man exerted so wide and salutary an influence in harmonizing differences, in softening and obliterating prejudices, and bringing into a cordial union those who for years had been bitterly hostile to each other.”<sup>71</sup> According to Whitney, throughout “all the various steps preceding and during the entire work of the convention, Lincoln was active, alert, energetic, and enthusiastic.” Whitney “never saw him more busily engaged, more energetically at work, or with his mind and heart so thoroughly enlisted.” Although he “was in a state of excitement throughout the convention,” Lincoln “kept his mental balance, and was not swerved a hair’s breadth from perfect equipoise in speech or

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<sup>68</sup> J. O. Cunningham, “The Bloomington Convention of 1856 and Those Who Participated in It,” Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society 10 (1905): 104.

<sup>69</sup> Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 91.

<sup>70</sup> J. O. Cunningham in Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3:92.

<sup>71</sup> John Locke Scripps, Life of Abraham Lincoln, ed. Roy P. Basler and Lloyd Dunlap, (1860; Bloomington: University of Indiana Press, 1961), 121.

action.” (Whitney was in a good position to observe Lincoln, for he stayed with him at David Davis’s house during the convention.)<sup>72</sup>

Similarly, Judge John M. Scott of Bloomington recalled that Lincoln was the master spirit of the convention, who managed through some political alchemy to convince former enemies to set aside their differences and cooperate for the greater good: “That incongruous assembly had to be made harmonious if anything worthy of their coming together was to be accomplished. In that work Mr. Lincoln seemingly had less to do than any one else and yet he was the one who did more than all others to effect a union of forces and a oneness of purpose. Silently and without seeming to do so, he so planned, so arranged and so advised that when the time for decisive action came every man in that incongruous convention was moved as if by a strange yet forceful influence to do the right thing at the exact time as though he had known from the beginning what he was expected to do and just when to do it.”<sup>73</sup>

According to Joseph Medill, who was a delegate from Chicago, Lincoln “counselled every step that was taken in his quiet, persuasive way,” most notably in deliberations over the party platform. When a heated dispute between Radicals and Conservatives on the platform committee, “Lincoln acted as a peacemaker and counsellor. He advised the committee to endorse the Declaration of Independence and the rights of man, and to declare that in accordance with the opinions and practices of the great statesmen of all parties for the past sixty years, Congress possessed full constitutional power to prohibit slavery in all territories and that such power should be exerted to prevent such extension, which was done.” To placate the conservatives, their spokesman, Orville H. Browning,

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<sup>72</sup> Whitney, Life on Circuit, ed. Angle, 92; Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 259.

<sup>73</sup> Scott, “Lincoln on the Stump and at the Bar.”



“was allowed to add some high sounding platitudes to the platform.”<sup>74</sup> In exercising a moderating influence on the convention, Lincoln had help from T. Lyle Dickey and Archibald Williams, who were also staying at the Davis home. Those three, said Whitney, “did more than all others combined in shaping the moderate and conservative” platform.<sup>75</sup> In particular, Whitney explained, they helped craft the main slavery plank in the platform, which said: “Resolved, That we hold, in accordance with the opinions and practices of all the great statesmen of all parties, for the first sixty years of the administration of the government, that, under the constitution, congress possesses full power to prohibit slavery in the territories; and that while we maintain all constitutional rights of the south, we also hold that justice, humanity, the principles of freedom as expressed in our Declaration of Independence, and our national constitution and the purity and perpetuity of our government, require that that power should be exerted to prevent the extension of slavery into territories heretofore free.”<sup>76</sup> In justifying this stance to more radical delegates like Anti-Nebraska Democrats Norman B. Judd and Ebenezer Peck, Lincoln said: “Your party is so mad at Douglas for wrecking his party that it will gulp down anything; but our party [Whig] is fresh from Kentucky and must not be forced to radical measures; the Abolitionists will go with us anyway, and your wing of the Democratic party the same, but the Whigs hold the balance of power and will be hard to manage, anyway. Why I had a hard time to hold Dubois when he found Lovejoy and Codding here; he insisted on going home at once.”<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Joseph Medill to the editor of McClure’s Magazine, Chicago, 15 May 1896, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.

<sup>75</sup> Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 260.

<sup>76</sup> Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 160-61.

<sup>77</sup> Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 260-61.

The rest of the platform, based on the document adopted at the Decatur editors' conference, denounced the violence in Kansas, called for the restoration of the Missouri Compromise, urged the admission of Kansas as a free state, professed devotion to the Union, pledged to "support the constitution in all its provisions," criticized nativist bigotry ("we will proscribe no one, by legislation or otherwise, on account of religious opinions, or in consequence of place of birth"), and attacked the administration of Governor Matteson.<sup>78</sup> George Schneider, who described Lincoln as "the guiding spirit of that convention," recalled that each platform plank "was adopted after consultation with him, and with his sanction and approval."<sup>79</sup> The resolutions "passed with one thundering AYE, and without a single no."<sup>80</sup>

A slate of presidential electors was chosen, headed by Lincoln and Frederick Hecker, a German-born antislavery leader who persuaded many of his fellow countrymen to support the Republican party.<sup>81</sup> Lincoln was also named a delegate to the Republican national convention, scheduled to meet in June at Philadelphia.

Helping to unite the delegates was their indignation at recent events in Kansas, where on May 21 pro-slavery militia had sacked the Free Soil town of Lawrence, and in Washington, where on May 22 Congressman Preston Brooks of South Carolina had cudged abolitionist Senator Charles Sumner of Massachusetts into insensibility at the capitol. Earlier in May, another Southern-born Democratic Congressman, Philemon T. Herbert of California, shot and killed an Irish waiter in a Washington hotel dining room.

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<sup>78</sup> Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 160-62.

<sup>79</sup> Chicago Times-Herald, 8 September 1895.

<sup>80</sup> Belleville Weekly Advocate, 4 June 1856.

<sup>81</sup> Gustave Koerner to Lyman Trumbull, Belleville, 31 March 1861, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

Those violent acts created an unparalleled rage that swept the North. In the subsequent election campaign, Republicans aroused the Free States with their appeal to remember “bleeding Kansas and bleeding Sumner.”<sup>82</sup> Fueling the anger in Bloomington were refugees from Kansas, including Governor Andrew H. Reeder, who on the night of May 28 described to a crowd the violence he had observed in that territory before being compelled to flee for his life. The people who heard Reeder called for Lincoln, who briefly compared the abrogation of the Missouri Compromise to the destruction of a fence, thus allowing one man’s cattle to eat the crops belonging to his neighbor, and spoke of the outrages in Kansas, including the destruction of newspaper offices and the dismissal of government employees for political reasons.<sup>83</sup>

The next day, the Kansas outrages were portrayed by another fugitive from that territory, James S. Emery of Lawrence, who related how his “home city had been sacked,” the “newspaper office demolished, and the types and printing presses thrown into the raging Kaw [River].” When Emery finished his “rather discursive talk,” Lincoln strode to the podium “with a giraffe-like swing.”<sup>84</sup> His appearance was unimpressive, for his hair was tousled, his clothes were not very neat, and his shoulders were stooped. More impressive was “his intense serious look.” Emery recalled that he “at once held his big audience and handled it like the master he was before the people, pleading in a great and just cause.”<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> William E. Gienapp, “The Caning of Charles Sumner and the Rise of the Republican Party,” Civil War History 25 (1979): 218-45; Holt, “Making and Mobilizing the Republican Party,” 45-46.

<sup>83</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:340-41.

<sup>84</sup> Emery, “Old John Brown and Lincoln’s ‘Lost Speech,’” undated typescript, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland; Joseph Medill, interviewed by Newton MacMillan, Washington Post, 14 April 1895.

<sup>85</sup> Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3:93-94.

Incredibly, Lincoln’s words have not survived, hence this oration, alleged to rank as one of his masterpieces, has become known as the “lost speech.” Reporters were allegedly so carried away that they dropped their pencils and listened spellbound.<sup>86</sup> (Such was the case when Edward Bates delivered a stirring address at the Chicago River and Harbor Convention in 1847.)<sup>87</sup> Although many journalists were present, only two brief accounts of the speech’s substance are extant. According the Alton Courier, edited by George T. Brown, Lincoln “enumerated the pressing reasons of the present movement,” said he “was here ready to fuse with anyone would unite with him to oppose the slave power,” and referred to “the bugbear of disunion which was so vaguely threatened.” Apropos of Southern threats to secede, he said: “It must be remembered that the Union must be preserved in the purity of its principles as well as in the integrity of its territorial parts.” He quoted from Daniel Webster’s famous reply to Robert Hayne in 1830: “Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable.” Lincoln also rejected Douglas’s contention that his doctrine of popular sovereignty squared with the teachings of Henry Clay. He further maintained that a “sentiment in favor of white slavery now prevailed in all the slave state papers” except in a few Border States.<sup>88</sup>

(Lincoln was doubtless referring to the Richmond Enquirer, which he saw regularly. That journal ran several inflammatory editorials declaring, among other things: “Slavery is the natural and normal condition of the laboring man, whether white or black.” “Make the laboring man the slave of one man, instead of the slave of society, and he would be far better off.” “Two hundred years of labor have made laborers a pauper

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<sup>86</sup> Angle, ed., Herndon’s Lincoln, 313; Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3:180.

<sup>87</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2005), p?\*

<sup>88</sup> Alton Weekly Courier, 5 June 1856, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:341.

banditti. Free society has failed, and that which is not free must be substituted.” “We do not adopt the theory that Ham was the ancestor of the negro race. The Jewish slaves were not negroes; and to confine the jurisdiction of slavery to that race would be to weaken its scriptural authority, for we read of no negro slavery in ancient times. Slavery, black or white, is necessary.”<sup>89</sup>

The only other contemporary account of Lincoln’s remarks appeared in the Belleville Advocate, edited by Nathaniel Niles, a delegate to the convention: “Abraham Lincoln by his wonderful eloquence electrified the audience of two thousand men . . . and excelled himself. Men who had heard him often said he never spoke as well before. . . . He paid his respects to those ‘National Whigs,’ as they call themselves, who are all the time stepping about to the music of the Union! He had no doubt but that the music of an overseer’s lash upon a mulatto girl’s back would make some of them dance a Virginia hornpipe. ‘Let them step,’ said he, ‘let them dance to the music of the Union, while we, my old Whig friends, stand fast by Principle and Freedom and the Union, together.’”<sup>90</sup>

That day, John Locke Scripps described the delivery and reception of Lincoln’s speech: “For an hour and a half he held the assemblage spell-bound by the power of his argument, the intense irony of his invective, and the deep earnestness and fervid brilliancy of his eloquence. When he concluded, the audience sprang to their feet, and cheer after cheer told how deeply their hearts had been touched, and their souls warmed up to a generous enthusiasm.”<sup>91</sup> The Bloomington Pantagraph said of it: “Several most heart-stirring and powerful speeches were made during the Convention; but without

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<sup>89</sup> Richmond Enquirer, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 16 October 1858.

<sup>90</sup> Belleville Weekly Advocate, 4 June 1856.

<sup>91</sup> Bloomington correspondence, 29 May, Chicago Democratic Press, 31 May 1856, in Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3: 174. See also Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 121.

being invidious, we must say that Mr. Lincoln, on Thursday evening, surpassed all others – even himself. His points were unanswerable, and the force and power of his appeals, irresistible.”<sup>92</sup>

Reminiscent accounts tend to confirm these meager press reports. Thomas J. Henderson recalled that at one point, Lincoln, “after repelling with great power and earnestness the charge of disunion made against the Anti-Nebraska party,” stood up “as if on tip-toe, his tall form erect, his long arms extended, his face fairly radiant with the flush of excitement, and as if addressing those preferring the charge of disunionism, he slowly, but earnestly and impressively, said: ‘We do not intend to dissolve the Union, nor do we intend to let you dissolve it.’” Then, Henderson said, “everybody present rose as one man to their feet, and there was a universal burst of applause . . . such as I have never seen on any other occasion. It was amid the wildest excitement and enthusiasm, continued for several minutes before Mr. Lincoln resumed his speech.”<sup>93</sup> Others remembered Lincoln uttering a slightly different version of that rousing sentence: “We say to our Southern brethren: ‘We won’t go out of the Union, and you shan’t!’”<sup>94</sup> (Southern leaders had been threatening disunion if an antislavery candidate won the presidency.)<sup>95</sup>

Judge John M. Scott of Bloomington recollected that as Lincoln began speaking, there “was an expression on his face of intense emotion seldom if ever seen upon any one before. It was the emotion of a great soul. Even in stature he appeared greater. A sudden

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<sup>92</sup> Bloomington Pantagraph, 4 June 1856.

<sup>93</sup> Prince, ed., Bloomington Convention, 3:81; Thomas J. Henderson to Ida M. Tarbell, 12 September 1895, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College; Henderson’s reminiscences in the Los Angeles Times, 9 February 1896.

<sup>94</sup> William Pitt Kellogg, “The Recollections of William Pitt Kellogg,” ed. Paul M. Angle, Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 3 (1945): 323; Cunningham, “Recollections of Lincoln,” 8.

<sup>95</sup> Potter, Impending Crisis, 262-63; Allan Nevins, The Ordeal of the Union (2 vols.; New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1947), 2:497-99.

stillness settled over that body of thoughtful men as Mr. Lincoln commenced to speak. Every one wanted to hear what he had to say. When he commenced, he spoke slowly as if selecting words that would best express his views and until he could get his subject well in hand. Gradually he increased in power and strength of utterance until every word that fell from his lips had a fullness of meaning not before so fully appreciated. The scene in that old hall was one of impressive grandeur. Every man, the venerable as well as the young and the strong, stood upon his feet. In a brief moment every one in that . . . assembly came to feel as one man, to think as one man and to purpose and resolve as one man. Rarely if ever was so wonderful an effect produced by an oration. It was the speech of his life in the estimation of many who heard it. . . . Never was an orator more the master of the presence before which he spoke. The great audience before him was as clay in the hands of the potter. He fashioned and molded it after his own great purpose. It was a triumph that comes to but few speakers. It was an effect that could only be produced by the truest eloquence.”<sup>96</sup> Other reminiscent testimony by eyewitnesses is similar.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Scott, “Lincoln on the Stump and at the Bar.”

<sup>97</sup> Joseph Medill recollected that once Emery had finished his remarks, “Lincoln was vociferously called for from all parts of Major’s large hall. He came forward and took the platform beside the presiding officer. At first his voice was shrill and hesitating. There was a curious introspective look in his eyes, which lasted for a few moments. Then his voice began to move steadily and smoothly forward. And the modulations were under perfect control from thence-forward to the finish. He warmed up as he went on and spoke more rapidly; he looked a foot taller as he straightened himself to his full height and his eyes flashed fire; his countenance became wrapped in intense emotion; he rushed along like a thunder storm. He prophesied war as the outcome of these aggressions and poured forth hot denunciations upon the slave power. The convention was kept in an uproar applauding and cheering and stamping; and this reacted on the speaker and gave him a tongue of fire. . . . There stood Lincoln in the forefront erect, tall and majestic in appearance, hurling thunderbolts at the foes of freedom, while the great convention roared its endorsement! I never witnessed such a scene before or since. As he described the aims and aggressions of the unappeasable slave holders and the servility of their Northern allies as illustrated by the perfidious repeal of the Missouri Compromise two years previously, and their grasping after the rich prairies of Kansas and Nebraska to blight them with slavery and to deprive free labor of this rich inheritance, and exhorted the friends of freedom to resist them to the death.” Medill to the editor of McClure’s Magazine, Chicago, 15 May 1896, Ida Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. See also Elwell Crissey, Lincoln’s Lost Speech: The Pivot of his Career (New York: Hawthorn Books, 1967), 213-21, 234-42. Half a dozen informants were less favorably impressed. Ibid., 242-44.

The failure of newspapers other than the Alton Courier and the Belleville Advocate to report the gist of Lincoln's remarks may have resulted from a deliberate political decision. Lincoln had prepared a speech, as he told the crowd on the night before the convention.<sup>98</sup> He may have meant that he had prepared notes or an outline. According to Joseph Medill, although "Lincoln did not write out even a memorandum of his Bloomington speech beforehand," it was not extemporaneous. "He intended days before to make it, and conned it over in his mind in outline and gathered his facts and arranged his arguments in regular order and trusted to the inspiration of the occasion to furnish him the diction with which to clothe the skeleton of his great oration. . . . Mr. Lincoln was strongly urged by party friends to write out his speech to be used as a campaign document for the Fremont Presidential contest of that year; but he declared that 'it would be impossible for him to recall the language he used on that occasion, as he had spoken under some excitement.'" Medill believed "that after Mr. Lincoln cooled down he was rather pleased that his speech had not been reported, as it was too radical in expression on the slavery question for the digestion of Central and Southern Illinois at that time, and that he preferred to let it stand as a remembrance in the minds of his audience."<sup>99</sup> In 1908, Eugene F. Baldwin, a Peoria editor and publisher, claimed that "the great mass of the leaders felt that Lincoln made too radical a speech and they did not want it produced for fear it would damage the party. Lincoln himself said he had put his foot into it and asked the reporters to simply report the meeting and not attempt to record his words and they

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<sup>98</sup> The Springfield Register paraphrased Lincoln's remarks thus: "he didn't expect to make a speech then; that he had prepared himself for one, but 'twas not suitable at that time; but that after awhile he would make them a most excellent one." Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:340.

<sup>99</sup> Medill to the editor of McClure's Magazine, Chicago, 15 May 1896, Ida Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College.



agreed to it.”<sup>100</sup> Some biographers have endorsed this conclusion, which seems plausible, though no hard evidence supports it.<sup>101</sup> In 1858, he would deliver an exceptionally radical extempore speech in Chicago that was reported verbatim; Democrats quoted from it repeatedly to prove that he was a dyed-in-the-wool abolitionist. That speech helped doom his bid for a U.S. senate seat.<sup>102</sup>

Returning from Bloomington to Springfield, Lincoln was accosted on the train by a delegate who declared: “Lincoln, I never swear, but that was the damndest best speech I ever heard.”<sup>103</sup>

On June 10, before a crowd at the Springfield courthouse, Lincoln hailed the work of the convention.<sup>104</sup> The Democratic Register sneered: “his niggerism has as dark a hue as that of [William Lloyd] Garrison or Fred Douglass.”<sup>105</sup>

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With Bissell heading their ticket, Anti-Nebraskaites had reason to be optimistic. “Since the nomination of Bissell we are in good trim in Illinois,” Lincoln reported. “If we can save pretty nearly all the whigs, we shall elect him, I think by a very large majority.”<sup>106</sup> But saving the old-line Whigs would not be easy; Archibald Williams described such a Whig as “a gentleman who takes his toddy regularly, and votes the

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<sup>100</sup> Peoria Sunday Star, 1 March 1908. According to another Peorian, Ernest E. East, “There is ground for the belief that Lincoln’s utterances were so radical that his associates abandoned a plan to print his speech as a campaign document.” Peoria Journal Transcript, 11 November 1934.

<sup>101</sup> Crissey, Lost Speech, 229-32.

<sup>102</sup> See supra, chapter 12.

<sup>103</sup> Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 261.

<sup>104</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:344-45. Herndon’s contention that only a handful attended this event is implausible. Donald, Lincoln’s Herndon, 90.

<sup>105</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:344.

<sup>106</sup> Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 7 June 1856, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:342.

Democratic ticket occasionally.”<sup>107</sup>

The Democrats at their national convention, sensitive to the public revulsion against the Kansas-Nebraska Act and the turmoil in Kansas, rejected both incumbent president Franklin Pierce and Stephen A. Douglas in favor of James Buchanan of Pennsylvania, who had recently been in London serving as U.S. minister to the Court of St. James and thus was untainted by the Kansas-Nebraska legislation and its consequences. Alarmed by this nomination, Lincoln observed that “a good many whigs, of conservative feelings, and slight pro-slavery proclivities, withal, are inclining to go for him, and will do it, unless the Anti-Nebraska nomination be such as to divert them.” Lincoln hoped the Republican national convention, meeting in mid-June at Philadelphia, would select as its standard bearer John McLean, whose nomination, he thought, “would save every whig, except those who have already gone over hook and line.” The mainstream Whigs might, however, go for Buchanan if the Republicans chose someone as radical on the slavery issue as Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, Nathaniel P. Banks of Massachusetts, William Henry Seward of New York, Francis P. Blair of Missouri, or John C. Frémont of California. The latter two might be acceptable to Illinois Whigs for vice-president, but not president. To former Democrat Lyman Trumbull, Lincoln pointed out that ninety per cent of the Anti-Nebraska votes came from “old whigs.” Rhetorically he asked: “In setting stakes, can it be safe to totally disregard them? Can we possibly win, if we do so?” Alluding to his own defeat at the hands of Trumbull, he noted: “So far they have been disregarded. I need not point out the instances.” Lincoln assured Trumbull that he was “in, and shall go for any one nominated unless he be ‘platformed’ expressly, or

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<sup>107</sup> John M. Palmer, ed., The Bench and Bar of Illinois: Historical and Reminiscent (2 vols.; Chicago: Lewis Publishing Co., 1899), 1:2-3.

impliedly, on some ground which I may think wrong.”<sup>108</sup> Lincoln’s view was shared by his friend Orville H. Browning, who told Trumbull: “McLean, in my opinion, would be stronger in this state than any one whose name has been suggested. We have many, very many, tender footed whigs, who are frightened by ugly names, that could not be carried for Fremont, but who would readily unite with us upon McLean.”<sup>109</sup>

Though chosen a delegate to the Republican national convention, Lincoln did not attend. At Bloomington, he had declined the honor “on account of his poverty and business engagements,” but when Jesse W. Fell offered to pay his expenses, Lincoln said he might be able go after all. At the last minute, Lincoln wired Fell that he could not accept, so Kersey H. Fell, Jesse’s brother, went as his replacement.<sup>110</sup> At the same time, Lincoln, who was on the circuit, urged Trumbull to attend. On June 15, the senator replied that he had hesitated to go “but your letter just received decides the question. I will go . . . and do what I can to have a conservative man nominated and conservative measures adopted.”<sup>111</sup>

At Philadelphia, a conservative man was not chosen. To Lincoln’s dismay, John C. Frémont, a former Democrat known as “the Pathfinder” for his celebrated explorations in the West, secured the presidential nomination.<sup>112</sup> Though chagrined by that choice, Lincoln doubtless found some consolation in the 110 votes he himself received for vice-president. The Illinois delegation had supported McLean for president; when he lost, a

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<sup>108</sup> Lincoln to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 7 June 1856, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:342-43.

<sup>109</sup> Browning to Trumbull, Quincy, 19 May 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>110</sup> Etzard Duis, The Good Old Times on McLean County, Illinois (Bloomington: Leader, 1874), 334.

<sup>111</sup> Trumbull to Lincoln, Washington, 15 June 1856, Trumbull Family Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>112</sup> Tom Chaffin, Pathfinder: John Charles Frémont and the Course of American Empire (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002).

leading Prairie State delegate, Congressman William B. Archer, resolved to nominate Lincoln for the second spot on the ticket.<sup>113</sup> Working well into the night with Nathaniel Green Wilcox and Martin P. Sweet, Archer lined up support for Lincoln. At the Illinois caucus, Trumbull declared that they should pick “a man of decided Whig antecedents” for vice president. When Wilcox suggested Lincoln, Trumbull said he had named “very good man.” No one, however, seconded the motion. Several hours later, well into the night, Wilcox met with Archer and others, including two delegates from Indiana, Caleb B. Smith and Schuyler Colfax. Upon learning that Easterners were uniting on William L. Dayton of New Jersey, Wilcox again suggested to Archer that they back Lincoln. Archer responded positively and summoned the other Illinois delegates, who resolved to present Lincoln’s name to the convention. Archer, Wilcox, William Ross and others lobbied throughout the night, calling on Daniel S. Dickinson and Thurlow Weed of New York, Thaddeus Stevens of Pennsylvania, and Chauncey F. Cleveland of Connecticut. Archer asked a fellow congressman from Pennsylvania, John Allison, to nominate Lincoln.<sup>114</sup>

The next day Allison complied, describing Lincoln as a “prince of good fellows, and an Old-Line Whig.” Archer seconded the nomination, declaring that he “had been acquainted with the man who had been named for 30 years. He had lived in Illinois 40 years. He had gone there when Illinois was a Territory, and had lived there until it had grown to be a populous and flourishing State. During thirty years of that time, he had known Abraham Lincoln, and he knew him well. He was born in gallant Kentucky, and

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<sup>113</sup> According to the Chicago Daily Democrat, Illinois delegates had shied away from Frémont in part because they wanted Lincoln nominated for vice president and feared that if the Pathfinder won the presidential nomination, Lincoln’s chances for the second place on the ticket would be harmed. Chicago Daily Democrat, 26 June 1856.

<sup>114</sup> W. B. Archer to Lincoln, Washington, 21 June 1856, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; Nathaniel G. Wilcox to Lincoln, Frederick, Illinois, 6 June 1864, and Wilcox to Lincoln, Rushville, 21 October 1858, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

was now in the prime of life . . . and enjoying remarkable good health. And, besides, the speaker knew him to be as pure a patriot as ever lived. He would give the Convention to understand, that with him on the ticket, there was no danger of Northern Illinois. Illinois was safe with him, and he believed she was safe without him. With him, however, she was doubly safe.”<sup>115</sup> Suddenly an Ohio delegate interrupted Archer, asking “in a loud and solemn tone, ‘Will he fight?’” To the amusement of the delegates, Archer, “a grey-haired old gent, slightly bent with age,” then “jumped straight from the floor, as high as the Secretaries’ table, and cried out, shrill and wild, ‘Yes.’” The delegates were “convulsed, and a tremendous yell of approbation substantially inserted a fighting plank in the platform.” Archer “slightly spoiled the effect of his vaulting performance, adding: ‘Why, he’s from Kentucky, and all Kentuckians will fight.’ There was a peculiar restlessness and heavy breathing through the multitude, showing that they were strong in the faith that men born north of the Ohio could fight as well as those who had suffered the accident of birth on the other side of that stream.”<sup>116</sup>

Also seconding Lincoln’s nomination was John M. Palmer, who said: “I have known him long, and I know he is a good man and a hard worker in the field, although I never heard him – for when he was on the stump, I dodged. He is my first choice; Dayton, of New Jersey, is the next, and David Wilmot is the next. I admire Judge Wilmot, and I am going to name my next boy after him. We can lick Buchanan any way, but I think we can do it a little easier if we have Lincoln on the ticket with John C.

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<sup>115</sup> Proceedings of the First Three Republican National Conventions of 1856, 1860 and 1864 (Minneapolis: Charles W. Johnson, 1893), 61-63.

<sup>116</sup> H. [Murat Halstead], Cincinnati Commercial, 23 June 1856.

Fremont.”<sup>117</sup> Representative John Van Dyke of New Jersey, who had served with Lincoln in the Thirtieth Congress, added his voice to the modest chorus of praise: “I knew Abraham Lincoln in Congress well, and for months I sat by his side. I knew him all through, and knew him to be a first-rate man in every respect; and if it had not been the will and pleasure of the Convention to have selected William L. Dayton, I know with what perfect alacrity I would have gone for him.”<sup>118</sup>

While these accolades was gratifying, they came too late; Dayton won on the second ballot, largely because of his conservative Whig background, because his state was doubtful, because he had supported McLean, because he was not a Know Nothing, and because he had ingratiated himself with the antislavery forces by endorsing an amendment to the Fugitive Slave Act providing jury trials for accused runaways.<sup>119</sup>

Wilcox told Lincoln: “If the whole delegation had gone to work for you when I first suggested your name, and if the nomination had been postponed a few hours, you would have won.”<sup>120</sup>

Lincoln did not actively encourage friends to promote his candidacy. He had earlier told O. B. Ficklin, who suggested that he might be suitable for that honor: “There is one office I am not fitted for – the office of vice-president.” Ficklin “knew he referred to his lack of grace and elegant manners, so desirable in a presiding officer [of the U. S. Senate]. He had no thought of becoming President – the Senate was his aim.”<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Proceedings of the First Three Republican National Conventions, 62.

<sup>118</sup> Quoted in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:346.

<sup>119</sup> William E. Gienapp, Origins of the Republican Party, 1852-1856 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 344.

<sup>120</sup> Source?\*

<sup>121</sup> O. B. Ficklin, interview with William Melvin McConnell, The Classmate: A Paper for Young People (Cincinnati), 6 February 1926. Ficklin’s reminiscences originally appeared in the Charleston, Illinois,

Word that he had been seriously considered for the vice presidency may have changed Lincoln’s mind. Jesse W. Weik wrote that this “tribute to his genius and ability” reportedly “afforded him more real gratification than any other which came to him during the years of his political activity.”<sup>122</sup> When the news arrived of his near-nomination for vice president, Lincoln modestly shrugged it off, saying the candidate was probably Levi Lincoln of Massachusetts. When friends showed him that indeed he was the Lincoln who almost won the vice-presidential nomination, he remained seemingly unmoved, but according to James H. Matheny, it may have first inspired him to think of running for the presidency, and Henry C. Whitney believed that “from that time Lincoln trimmed his sails to catch the breeze which might waft him to the White House.”<sup>123</sup>

Lincoln probably was flattered to read notices in the Republican press. The Chicago Democrat said: “We are glad Mr. Lincoln got so many votes for Vice President. There is no political Maine Lawism or Know-Nothingism about him and a better Fremont man does not live.”<sup>124</sup> The Ottawa Republican was even more complimentary: “we would have supported Mr. Lincoln for the second office in the gift of the people though we hope some day to vote for him for the first. He is among the men who endure.”<sup>125</sup>

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Plaindealer in 1878. Joseph C. Ficklin to Albert J. Beveridge, Chicago, 23 March 1926, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>122</sup> Jesse W. Weik, “Lincoln’s Vote for Vice-President in the Philadelphia Convention of 1856,” Century Magazine, June 1908, 187.

<sup>123</sup> Henry C. Whitney, statement for Herndon, [November 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 406; Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 96.

<sup>124</sup> Chicago Daily Democrat, 26 June 1856.

<sup>125</sup> Ottawa Republican, 4 July 1856, in C. C. Tisler and Aleita G. Tisler, “Lincoln Was Here for Another Go at Douglas” (pamphlet; Jackson, Tennessee: McCowat-Mercer Press, 1958), 23.

The difficulty caused by Frémont’s nomination was compounded by anti-Nebraskaites in Illinois’ third congressional district, where on July 2 Owen Lovejoy narrowly defeated Leonard Swett’s bid to run for a U.S. House seat.<sup>126</sup> Lovejoy, whose brother Elijah had been murdered in 1837 by an anti-abolitionist mob in Alton, seemed too radical for mainstream voters. A Congregationalist minister, he fiercely opposed slavery. Short, stout, “with a face of flint, a mouth of decision, and in every way and motion, bearing the mark of a radical, suggestive, and indomitable man,” he was “quick and peremptory, and not over courteous in his bearing, looking like one more ready to demand his rights, and to enforce them, than to ask favors.”<sup>127</sup> Some conservatives threatened to bolt the nomination and place another candidate in the running. On July 16, they chose T. Lyle Dickey to challenge Lovejoy and his Democratic opponent. Lincoln did not directly urge his good friend Dickey to withdraw, but he did so indirectly through David Davis, who despised Lovejoy.<sup>128</sup> To Davis he explained on July 7: “When I heard that Swett was beaten, and Lovejoy nominated, it turned me blind. I was, by invitation, on my way to Princeton [where Lovejoy lived]; and I really thought of turning back. However, on reaching that region, and seeing the people there – their great enthusiasm for Lovejoy – considering the activity they will carry into the contest with him – and their great disappointment, if he should now be torn from them, I really think it best to let the matter stand.” Acknowledging that it “is not my business to advise in the case,” he nonetheless told Davis to show his letter to others, including Ashahel Gridley, who had

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<sup>126</sup> In a closely divided convention, Lovejoy managed to triumph by a one-vote margin. Parker Earle to “my dear General,” Roswell, New Mexico, 9 January 1908, typescript, Lovejoy Papers, Clements Library, University of Michigan.

<sup>127</sup> Illinois Republican, n.d., copied in the Albany Evening Journal, 1 May 1860.

<sup>128</sup> Robert H. Browne, Abraham Lincoln and the Men of His Time (2 vols.; Chicago, Blakely-Oswald, 1907), 2:168-76.



denounced Lovejoy as a “nigger thief.”<sup>129</sup> Two days after the Bloomington conclave, Davis, echoing Lincoln’s arguments, informed Dickey that even though the “nomination of Lovejoy deadens enthusiasm, dispirits and causes all the people who really love the Union of the States to pause,” the sentiment in his favor was strong throughout the district because “the outrages in Kansas, and the general conduct of the Administration, with the attack on Mr. Sumner, have made Abolitionists of those who never dreamed they were drifting into it.” The many Whigs who objected to Lovejoy’s nomination still preferred him as an opponent of slavery expansion to a Democrat who did not oppose it. Others felt that Lovejoy had won the nomination fairly, that the process should be honored, and that they had agreed to fuse and must abide by the decision of the fusion convention. Lovejoy’s “views and opinions are becoming the views and opinions of a majority of the people,” Davis observed; if Dickey ran, Lovejoy would surely lose.<sup>130</sup> Dickey was reluctant to withdraw, but in mid-September he finally agreed to do so. Lovejoy won in November by more than 6,000 votes.<sup>131</sup>

Lincoln was also concerned about the congressional nomination in his own district, where Yates declined to try to regain the seat he had lost two years earlier. In July, Lincoln met with Yates, Trumbull, James Matheny, and other Republican leaders in an attempt to persuade John M. Palmer to run and former Whigs to support him if he did. Palmer, however, refused, and the little-known John Williams chosen as a sacrificial

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<sup>129</sup> Lincoln to Davis, Springfield, 7 July 1856, Roy P. Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), 27; Magdol, Lovejoy, 157.

<sup>130</sup> David Davis to Dickey, Bloomington, 18 July 1856, Isabel Wallace, ed., Life and Letters of General W. H. L. Wallace (Chicago: R. R. Donnelley, 1909), 74-76. Soon thereafter Davis said, “I want Dickey to withdraw before he gets his feelings so aroused that he would continue on the track through mere pride.” David Davis to W. H. L. Wallace, Bloomington, 19 July 1856, ibid., 76. See also “A Republican” [Lincoln] to the editor of the Chicago Tribune, Bloomington, 8 June 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement, 31-32.

<sup>131</sup> Magdol, Lovejoy, 154-66.

lamb to run in his place.<sup>132</sup>

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Lincoln threw himself into the presidential campaign, delivering over fifty speeches throughout Illinois during “a contest hitherto unparalleled in bitterness and violence.”<sup>133</sup> Lincoln’s principal concern was to woo disaffected Whigs like his old friend Joseph Gillespie, who still resented the Anti-Nebraska Democrats who had refused to vote for Lincoln for senator the previous year and was tempted to support the American party ticket, headed by former president Millard Fillmore. In June, Gillespie told Lincoln that when he saw the results of the Bloomington Convention, he had “hoped that all conservative men in the State could unite at least in supporting so much of the ticket as would secure a real practical triumph over the enemies of the Country (to wit) Douglass, Pierce & co.” But when he read in a leading anti-Nebraska Democratic paper in central Illinois an editorial endorsing James Buchanan for president, he concluded “that the so called Democrats at the Bloomington Convention are going for Buchanan and that it will turn out a clean sell of the Whigs and true conservative men of the State.” If “this is the ground I am for a thorough organization for Filmore & Donalson whether we sink or swim. They are honest sound conservative men and it would be more creditable to be fighting under that banner than to triumph in such company as I fear some of the wire workers at Bloomington are . . . . This move is but the first effort to carry out in my opinion a forgone conclusion to give the support of the Anti Nebraska men of the Country to Buchanan[.] For my part rather than vote for him I would vote for

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<sup>132</sup> John M. Palmer to Norman B. Judd, Carlinville, 6 August 1856, Lincoln Collection, Brown University; Jack Nortrup, “Lincoln and Yates: The Climb to Power,” Lincoln Herald 73 (1971): 246.

<sup>133</sup> Thomas J. McCormack, ed., Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1896 (2 vols.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1909), 2:32-33.

the Devil or even Douglass[.] I was disposed at first to remain quiet or even acquiesce in the nominations made at Bloomington if that would conduce most to an union against the Nullifiers but I shall wait now and see what the future will bring forth.”<sup>134</sup> Lincoln heard from others to the same effect. A Southern Illinoisan told him that “as Mr. Fillmore was Elected to the vice presidency as a Whig, many of the Whigs in this Section of our County Still adhere to him Not Considering by Whom he was Nominated, hence the Difficulty here to Git all the Whigs here to drop him.”<sup>135</sup>

Other old line Whigs who opposed the Kansas-Nebraska bill hesitated to vote for Frémont lest the Union be dissolved. John M. Palmer reported that in southern Illinois “the wolf howl or rather the dog howl of Abolitionism-Black Republicanism has alarmed many” old Whigs. In addition, others “feel that they are called specially to the patriotic duty of ‘saving the Union’ which can only be done by throwing their votes away on Fillmore.”<sup>136</sup> Lincoln was informed that his friend Edwin B. Webb “is really right, & wants to have Richardson & Douglass defeated, but stands opposed to Abolitionism, & is afraid of separating the Union, through any means, & fancies the Republican Movements are likely to do it. – Mr. Webb is a good Soul, a right minded man all over him, but timidly afraid of doing mischief to the integrity & perpetuity of the Union.”<sup>137</sup> From Springfield, Benjamin S. Edwards reported that Frémont’s nomination was “particularly unfortunate,” for in central Illinois “a great many are startled . . . by the cry of abolitionist – and will shrink from the support of a man of so little reputation as F[rémont], & one

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<sup>134</sup> Gillespie to Lincoln, Edwardsville, 6 June 1856, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. The offending editorial appeared in the Alton Courier.

<sup>135</sup> John Hawes to Lincoln, Eminence, 15 September 1856, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>136</sup> John M. Palmer to Norman B. Judd, Carlinville, 6 August 1856, Lincoln Collection, Brown University.

<sup>137</sup> William Pickering to Lyman Trumbull, Albion, 6 June 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

whom they are persuaded was forced on the public by abolitionists. Nor is he liked by the Whigs, who though willing to support a democrat in opposition to Buchanan, are not yet prepared to support unhesitatingly a man whose antecedents have so little to recommend him.” Edwards told Lyman Trumbull that “if you carry Illinois, it will be with great difficulty and by great exertions – You have no time to lose. Already your cause is suffering for want of immediate energetic action. . . . You need prompt, active, organized effort, even though few openly unite at first – and a thorough exposition of the views and opinions of your candidate, and particularly the vindication against the charges of abolition, and opposition to the Union which however unfounded they may be are yet made, and must be met.”<sup>138</sup>

Lincoln fully understood the need for energetic campaigning and efficient organization. Along with Herndon, he stumped extensively, devoting much of his time to southern Illinois, where his services were in demand.<sup>139</sup> It was often disagreeable work, for things did not always go smoothly. Gustave Koerner vividly described the rigors of campaigning in southern Illinois: “For some reason or another failures will happen. The invitation committee gives you a thousand reasons for it. The posters were put out too late; there was a big circus at some neighboring place; the creeks were up; some opposition rascals had spread the rumor that a case of smallpox was in town.” In fact, the real reason “was that there were not enough people of the right political color in the country to make up a respectable crowd.” In rural areas “the processions were often most

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<sup>138</sup> Benjamin S. Edwards to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 24 July 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>139</sup> William Bissell to Lincoln, Belleville, 15 August 1856, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; James Miller to Lincoln, Lawrenceville, 15 August 1856, *ibid.*; Jesse K. Dubois to Lyman Trumbull, Lawrenceville, 6 August 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress; Donald, Herndon, 92-97.

grotesque. A half a dozen marshals could be seen riding about frantically. Finally, they would take their place at the head of the procession; then followed the unavoidable brass band, and the carriage with the speaker and committeemen; but in spite of the efforts of the marshals to make the crowd fall in and march in the procession, the farmers, not being drilled to it like the city people, were shy and stayed out, making the parade a fizzle. They were, however, at the speaking place all the same.” Speakers were often pestered by “bores who annoy you to death by the protestations of loyalty to the party and by tales of their party work. Other horrible inflictions are the campaign glee-clubs – male and female – singing ridiculous party-ditties through their noses, brass bands playing within doors, and the stench of petroleum torches.”<sup>140</sup>

Lincoln began stumping in July with speeches at Lovejoy’s hometown of Princeton; he proceeded to Dixon, Sterling, Chicago, Galena, and Oregon City. No full text of these or his many other Illinois addresses that year has survived, but a fragment in Lincoln’s hand, evidently a draft of his Galena speech, is extant. In it, Lincoln rejected the charge of sectionalism leveled against the Republicans, a charge he called “the most difficult objection we have to meet.” The “naked issue” that divided the Democrats from his party he summarized briefly: “Shall slavery be allowed to extend into U.S. territory, now legally free?” Appealing to fair-minded voters, he asked “how is one side of this question, more sectional than the other?” If the parties were, like most other institutions, divided along sectional lines, how should the problem be solved? The answer was simple, he declared: one side must yield. Republicans “boldly say, let all who really think slavery ought to spread into free territory, openly go over against us.” But why, he asked, should

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<sup>140</sup> Koerner, Memoirs, 1:597-98.

anyone who opposed slavery vote Democratic? “Do they really think the right ought to yield to the wrong? Are they afraid to stand by the right? Do they really think that by right surrendering to wrong, the hopes of our constitution, our Union, and our liberties, can possibly be bettered?”

To those who objected that Frémont and Dayton were both from Free States, he pointed out that the Constitution stipulated that the president and vice president must come from different states, not different sections. While it was customary for one of the standard bearers to be a resident of a Free State and his running mate from a Slave State, it was not mandatory. He conceded that Frémont would probably receive all his electoral votes from Free States, but he pointed out that Buchanan expected to win mainly with the votes of Slave States, with some help north of the Mason-Dixon line. Why, Lincoln asked, was this the case? “It is not because one side of the question dividing them, is more sectional than the other; nor because of any difference in the mental or moral structure of the people North and South. It is because, in that question, the people of the South have an immediate and palpable and immensely great pecuniary interest; while, with the people of the North, it is merely an abstract question of moral right, with only slight, and remote pecuniary interest added.” The value of Southern slaves, which he estimated at \$3,000,000, would double if slavery were allowed to expand; it would be reduced if slavery were bottled up. This consideration “unites the Southern people, as one man. But it can not be demonstrated that the North will gain a dollar by restricting it.” It was a pity, Lincoln observed, that moral principle constituted “a looser bond, than pecuniary interest.” He excoriated Northern Democratic presidential aspirants for selling out to the South. Scornfully he noted that they “commit themselves to the utmost verge

that, through their own greediness, they have the least hope their Northern supporters will bear.” The party lash and personal ambition led them to auction off their principles and abandon “their own honest impulses, and sense of right.”<sup>141</sup>

A Galena newspaper printed some of this speech. Echoing his Bloomington remarks and anticipating his first inaugural address, Lincoln boldly asked critics who called the Republicans disunionists: “who are the disunionists, you or we? We, the majority, would not strive to dissolve the Union; and if any attempt is made it must be by you, who so loudly stigmatize us as disunionists. But the Union, in any event, won’t be dissolved. We don’t want to dissolve it, and if you attempt it, we won’t let you. With the purse and the sword, the army and navy and treasury in our hands and at our command, you couldn’t do it. This Government would be very weak, indeed, if a majority with a disciplined army and navy, and a well-filled treasury, could not preserve itself, when attacked by an unarmed, undisciplined, unorganized minority. All this talk about the dissolution of the Union is humbug – nothing but folly. We WON’T dissolve the Union, and you SHAN’T.”<sup>142</sup> At Tremont, he expressed a similarly firm resolve to resist secession: “The Constitution requires us to submit to an election of a president in a lawful manner, and if Fremont is lawfully elected by a majority of the American people, and a minority won’t submit to the election, we’ll make ’em.”<sup>143</sup>

At Princeton, young Clark E. Carr attended Lincoln’s speech, which he found disappointing. “From what I had heard of Mr. Lincoln I expected to be interested in his

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<sup>141</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:349-53.

<sup>142</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:354-55. Portions of this account of Lincoln’s remarks are of dubious authenticity. Don E. Fehrenbacher, “The Galena Speech: A Problem in Historical Method,” in Fehrenbacher, Lincoln in Text: Collected Essays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 15-23.

<sup>143</sup> George W. Shaw, Personal Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln (Moline, Illinois: Carlson, 1924), 18.

speech – to be greatly moved and charmed by his eloquence,” Carr wrote. But there “was not a brilliant utterance, no flight of oratory, no well-rounded periods, no rhetorical climax, simply a plain, homely talk, rather an apology than otherwise for being a Republican. He took great pains to make the audience understand that, while he abhorred slavery, to be a Republican did not by any means imply an effort to overthrow slavery, but simply to prevent its extension into new territory. He gave a history of the Missouri Compromise . . . and made a lawyer’s argument to prove that it was constitutional, and that there was no justification for its repeal. Among other things, he declared himself not to be opposed to the Fugitive Slave law. He used such homely illustrations as that the thing was ‘as plain as the nose of a man’s face,’ ‘like rain running off from a duck’s back,’ and ‘the longest pole gets the persimmons.’ He did not attempt to conceal the fact that he had always been a high tariff Whig, but he handled that matter gingerly, so as not to drive away the Free Soil Democrats who were inclined to come into the new Republican party.”<sup>144</sup>

The journalist Noah Brooks, who heard Lincoln speak at Dixon, offered a different assessment of the speaker’s oratorical power. His “irresistible force of logic,” “clinging power of argument,” and “manly disregard of everything like sophistry or clap-trap” impressed not only Republicans like Brooks but also rock-ribbed Democrats “who had withstood the arguments and truths of scores of able men.” They “were forced to confess that their reason was held captive while they listened to the plain, straight-forward and sledge-hammer logic of the speaker.” Brooks remembered that when Lincoln

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<sup>144</sup> Clark E. Carr, My Day and Generation (Chicago: McClurg, 1908), 274-75. Cf. Clark E. Carr, The Illini: A Story of the Prairies (8<sup>th</sup> ed.; Chicago: McClurg, 1920), 231: “I heard him several times, – once, I especially remember, at a great mass-meeting at Princeton. I was not particularly impressed by his speech. It was a logical lawyer’s argument, but had none of the fire and force that are expected in a political speech.”



first stood on the platform, “almost everyone was disappointed” by his personal appearance; but once he started to explain “the reasonableness of what was asked by the North, and the madness and folly of the demand of the South that all governmental power and legislative action should be subservient to the interests of her own peculiar institutions, his manner and appearance were entirely lost and forgotten in the magic of his eloquence and in the fund of irresistible argument which he poured forth.” Lincoln’s “manner, never tedious or harsh, became instinct with life, energy and electric vivacity. Every motion was graceful, every inflection of his voice melodious, and, when dropping for the moment, argument, he good-naturedly appealed to his fellow-republicans to admit certain alleged charges, and then went on to show how, notwithstanding all this, the platform and principles of the party were untouched and uninjured, his consummate shrewdness and long-headed, astute perceptions of the truth never failed to touch the audience with a sudden shock of pleasure and surprise, which brought forth spontaneous bursts of applause from friends and opponents.” When heckled by “an unusually impertinent and persistent” man, Lincoln replied: “Look here, my friend, you are only making a fool of yourself by exposing yourself to the ridicule which I have thus far succeeded in bringing upon you every time you have interrupted me. You ought to know that men whose business it is to speak in public, make it a part of their business to have something always ready for just such fellows as you are. You see you stand no show against a man who has met, a hundred times, just such flings as you seem to fancy are original with yourself; so you may as well, to use a popular expression, ‘dry up’ at once.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> Marysville, California, Appeal, 4 November 1860.

Later in the campaign, Lincoln also encountered hecklers in Vandalia, where he once again proved himself to be a master of repartee. When a Democratic physician interrupted him, calling Frémont a “wooly head,” Lincoln retorted: “What . . . has Fremont said, that you call him a wooly head? I ask you, sir?”

The doctor offered no response.

“You can make this charge, and yet, when called upon to justify it, your lips are sealed,” Lincoln said.

As the doctor consulted with friends, Lincoln remarked: “That’s right, gentlemen, take counsel together, and give me your answer.”

Finally the heckler said that Frémont “found the wooly horse and ate dogs.”

“That ain[’]t true – but if it was, how does it prove that Fremont is a wooly head – how?” Lincoln queried.

The doctor, “wearing the expression of a man standing on a bed of live coals, did not get off any answer.” Lincoln closed the colloquy saying, “You’re treed, my friend.”<sup>146</sup>

In early August, Lincoln campaigned in towns throughout southeastern Illinois, including Grand View. There he was accompanied by an attorney from Charleston, Henry P. H. Bromwell, who recalled that Lincoln “made one of the most masterly speeches of his life, and his jovial spirit seemed to fill the assembly” containing more than a hundred Fillmore and Buchanan supporters and only half a dozen Republicans.<sup>147</sup> In nearby Shelbyville, Lincoln and Democrat Anthony Thornton, an “aristocrat in mien,

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<sup>146</sup> Speech in Vandalia, 23 September 1856, Chicago Democratic Press, 27 September 1856, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:377-78.

<sup>147</sup> Denver Tribune, 18 May 1879.

deportment, and bearing, commensurately financed, elegantly attired and possessing unusual ability with energy to use it,” were to debate on August 9. Thornton recollected that because “it was my meeting and as a matter of courtesy, I consented that Mr. Lincoln should open the discussion. He commenced at two o’clock and spoke until nearly five. He knew he was addressing people who sympathized with the South, and he made a most ingenious and plausible speech. He, however, spoke so very long that I became apprehensive as to any effort I might make to a wearied crowd. I began my reply by telling one of Mr. Lincoln’s stories and thus obtained the attention of the crowd and made a short speech.”<sup>148</sup> The Democratic press ridiculed Lincoln’s address as “prosy and dull in the extreme – all about ‘freedom,’ ‘liberty’ and niggers.”<sup>149</sup> With characteristic modesty, Lincoln said that since there were only sixteen registered Republicans in Shelby County, “however poorly I may defend my cause, I can hardly harm it, if I do it no good.”<sup>150</sup>

Later that month, Lincoln spoke in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Alluding to Stephen A. Douglas’s reluctance to specify just how and when the people of Kansas could, under the popular sovereignty doctrine, prohibit slavery in their midst, Lincoln sarcastically referred to the Little Giant as “a great man – at keeping from answering questions he don’t want to answer.” Cogently Lincoln argued that once slavery had managed to take root in Kansas, attempts to expel it would fail: “suppose that there are ten men who go to Kansas to settle. Nine of these are opposed to slavery. One has ten slaves. The

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<sup>148</sup> Homer H. Cooper, “The Lincoln-Thornton Debate, 1856, Shelbyville, Illinois,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 10 (1917): 101-22 (quotes on 104, 106).

<sup>149</sup> Illinois State Register (Springfield), 19 August 1856, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:359.

<sup>150</sup> Newton Bateman and Paul Selby, Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois and History of Shelby County (Chicago: Munsell, 1910), 786.\*CHECK

slaveholder is a good man in other respects; he is a good neighbor, and being a wealthy man, he is enabled to do the others many neighborly kindnesses. They like the man, though they don't like the system by which he holds his fellow-men in bondage. And here let me say, that in intellectual and physical structure, our Southern brethren do not differ from us. They are, like us, subject to passions, and it is only their odious institution of slavery, that makes the breach between us. These ten men of whom I was speaking, live together three or four years; they intermarry; their family ties are strengthened. And who wonders that in time, the people learn to look upon slavery with complacency? This is the way in which slavery is planted, and gains so firm a foothold. I think this is a strong card that the Nebraska party have played, and won upon in this game."

Since Michigan was a hotbed of antislavery sentiment, he urged all opponents of the peculiar institution to abjure Fillmore, even though the former president was not an avowed friend of slavery or the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Fillmore, Lincoln said, "tickles a few of his friends with the notion that he is not the cause of the door being opened" to slavery in Kansas, but he "tries to get both sides, one by denouncing those who opened the door [Douglas and President Pierce] and the other by hinting that he doesn't care a fig for its being open." Of those "who hate slavery and love freedom" he asked: "why not, as Fillmore and Buchanan are on the same ground, vote for Fremont?" To those who denied that Northerners had any stake in the slavery expansion debate, he repeated arguments he had used in the 1854 campaign and in his letter to Joshua Speed the following year. He emphasized that Northerners had an obvious interest in assuring that the territories "should be kept open for the homes of free white people." Northerners also had an interest in keeping the principle of freedom alive, for the nation prospered and grew

strong because it was free and “every man can make himself.”

Lincoln protested against the Richmond Enquirer's assertion that “slaves are far better off than freeman.” In response he exclaimed: “What a mistaken view do these men have of Northern laborers! They think that men are always to remain laborers here – but there is no such class. The man who labored for another last year, this year labors for himself, and next year he will hire others to labor for him.”

Turning to the Southern threats to secede if Frémont won, Lincoln declared that it was “a shameful thing that the subject is talked of so much.” He asked: “How is the dissolution of the Union to be consummated? Who will divide it? Is it those who make the charge” that the Republicans threaten the existence of the Union? “Are they themselves the persons who wish to see this result? A majority will never dissolve the union. Can a minority do it?”

Lincoln denied that Frémont and his party were abolitionists: “I know of no word in the language that has been used so much as that one ‘abolitionist,’ having no definition.” Anticipating his famous “House Divided” speech of 1858, Lincoln argued that the federal government must be “put on a new track. Slavery is to be made a ruling element in our government. The question can be avoided in but two ways. By the one, we must submit, and allow slavery to triumph, or, by the other, we must triumph over the black demon. We have chosen the latter manner. If you of the North wish to get rid of this question, you must decide between these two ways – submit and vote for Buchanan, submit and vote that slavery is a just and good thing and immediately get rid of the question; or unite with us, and help us to triumph. We would all like to have the question done away with, but we cannot submit.”

In a stirring peroration, Lincoln appealed to Democrats to honor the principles they had espoused before the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act. Their party, he said, “has ever prided itself, that it was the friend of individual, universal freedom.” Now, to support Douglas’s handiwork, Democrats have abandoned their idealism. In closing, he implored Democrats to “come forward. Throw off these things, and come to the rescue of this great principle of equality.” He would not exclude former Whigs from his exhortation: “to all who love these great and true principles” he beckoned: “Come, and keep coming! Strike, and strike again! So sure as God lives, the victory shall be yours.”<sup>151</sup>

According to a Democratic paper, Lincoln’s “very fair and argumentative address” proved “far too conservative and Union loving in his sentiments to suit his audience,” which frowned when he “proclaimed that the southern men had hearts, consciences and intellects like those around him.”<sup>152</sup>

Returning to Illinois, Lincoln reiterated his warning about the inevitable conflict between slavery and freedom. At Bloomington in September, he addressed a large crowd: “It is my sincere belief that this government can not last always part slave and part free. – Either Slavery will be abolished – or it must become equally lawful everywhere – or this Union will be dissolved. There is natural incompatibility between the institutions incident to Slave-holding States – so irreconcilable in their character, that they can not co-exist perpetually under the same Government.” When T. Lyle Dickey warned him that preaching such a doctrine would hasten the outbreak of a bloody civil war, Lincoln

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<sup>151</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:361-66.

<sup>152</sup> Kalamazoo Gazette, n.d., copied in the Grand Rapids Daily Enquirer, 1 September 1856, Michigan Magazine of History 5 (1921): 287-88.

reluctantly agreed to stop doing so.<sup>153</sup>

Lincoln also spoke in Petersburg, where the local Democratic journal labeled him the “great high-priest of abolitionism,” the “depot master of the underground railroad,” and “the post mortem candidate for the vice presidency of the abolition political cock-boat.”<sup>154</sup> In Jacksonville, the opposition press was more charitable, calling him “a fine speaker” and “certainly the ablest black republican that has taken the stump at this place.”<sup>155</sup> Another observer praised Lincoln’s speech in Jacksonville, where the speaker “held a great audience in breathless attention for some three hours, in sunshine & rain with their umbrellas over their heads, still shouting ‘go on’ – while he was demolishing the Bucchaneers & Filmorites right & left so effectively that not a soul of them have dared to peep since except to say ‘I am for Fremont.’”<sup>156</sup>

At Tremont, Lincoln humorously rebutted the Democrats’ racial demagoguery. “They tell me that if the Republicans prevail, slavery will be abolished and whites and blacks will intermarry and form a mongrel race. Now, I have a sister-in-law down in Kentucky, and if any one can show me that if Fremont is elected she will have to marry a Negro, I will vote against Fremont, and if that isn’t argumentum ad hominem it is argumentum ad womanum.”<sup>157</sup>

In August, Lincoln and Herndon felt optimistic about the outcome of the

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<sup>153</sup> Dickey to Ward Hill Lamon, Ottawa, 5 June 1871, Jeremiah S. Black Papers, Library of Congress. See Dickey to Herndon, Ottawa, 8 December 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 504. Dickey seems to refer to Lincoln’s speech of September 12, which foreshadows in some ways his 1858 House Divided speech. Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:37; Fehrenbacher, Prelude to Greatness, 87.

<sup>154</sup> Illinois State Register (Springfield), 4 September 1856, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:368.

<sup>155</sup> The Illinois Sentinel (Jacksonville), 12 September 1856, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:373.

<sup>156</sup> John B. Turner to Lincoln, Springfield, 9 September 1856, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>157</sup> Shaw, Personal Reminiscences of Lincoln, 18.

election.<sup>158</sup> “We are gaining on the nigger Democracy every day,” Herndon informed Lyman Trumbull.<sup>159</sup> Lincoln told the senator: “we shall ultimately get all the Fillmore men who are real[l]y anti-slavery extension – the rest will probably go to Buchanan, where they rightfully belong.” The “great difficulty” in persuading antislavery Fillmore supporters to back Fremont “is that they suppose Fillmore as good as Fremont” on slavery expansion “and it is a delicate point to argue them out of it,” for “they are so ready to think you are abusing Mr. Fillmore.”<sup>160</sup>

Winning over enough Fillmore men to carry Illinois proved harder than expected. George T. Brown observed in July that the “Fillmorites are making a good deal of stir. Jo Gillespie is moving heaven and Earth.”<sup>161</sup> The following month Richard Yates, after conferring with Lincoln, reported from Jacksonville that “the Fillmore diversion is large in this section of the State – splitting the Anti-Nebraska vote right in the middle. We have slight hopes of making it right yet, but very slight. If it’s leaders were true to their professions we would soon get them back, but with some of them I fear that a fondness for the ‘peculiar institution’ is a dominant motive.”<sup>162</sup> In September, Yates told Lincoln that in central Illinois “there are five times as many proslavery whigs as we have estimated.”<sup>163</sup> Lincoln appealed in vain to those erstwhile allies. At a Springfield meeting in September, he “received as many curses as blessings from the crowd,” which contained “insolent” Democrats, “surly” Know Nothings, and others who were “cold and

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<sup>158</sup> Richard Yates to Lyman Trumbull, Jacksonville, 3 August 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>159</sup> Herndon to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 11 August 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>160</sup> Lincoln to Trumbull, Springfield, 11 August 1856, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:360.

<sup>161</sup> George T. Brown to Lyman Trumbull, Alton, 28 July 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>162</sup> Richard Yates to Trumbull, Jacksonville, 3 August 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>163</sup> Yates to Lincoln, Jacksonville, 18 September 1856, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.



suspicious.”<sup>164</sup> In late September, Herndon told the abolitionist Wendell Phillips: “Had we a few months longer to go on I think we would carry this State for Fremont. Were the Republicans and the Americans to join, we could easily, now – at this moment, carry the State for Fremont.”<sup>165</sup> But the American party adherents would not fuse with the Republicans.

Lincoln, who guessed that Buchanan had about 85,000 votes, Frémont 78,000, and Fillmore 21,000, urged an old friend, John Bennett of Petersburg, to reconsider his support for the ex-president: “Every vote taken from Fremont and given to Fillmore, is just so much in favor of Buchanan. The Buchanan men see this; and hence their great anxiety in favor of the Fillmore movement. They know where the shoe pinches. They now greatly prefer having a man of your character go for Fillmore than for Buchanan, because they expect several to go with you, who would go for Fremont, if you were to go directly for Buchanan.”<sup>166</sup>

On September 8, Lincoln wrote a form letter to the supporters of the American party’s candidate, arguing that Fillmore could only win if the election were thrown into the House of Representatives, where the former president might prevail as a compromise candidate. But that would never happen if Buchanan carried Illinois, whose electoral votes, when combined with those of the South and of the Democratic standard bearer’s home state of Pennsylvania, would assure his election. Therefore Fillmore backers in Illinois should vote for Frémont because Fillmore had no chance of carrying the state.

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<sup>164</sup> Joseph Medill to Lincoln, Chicago, 9 August 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Medill doubtless referred to the meeting of September 25 in Springfield.

<sup>165</sup> Herndon to Wendell Phillips, Springfield, 28 September 1856, Phillips Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>166</sup> Lincoln to John Bennett, Springfield, 4 August 1856, Basler ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:358.

“This is as plain as the adding up of the weights of three small hogs,” Lincoln declared.<sup>167</sup>

He sent this letter, marked “confidential,” to many “good, steady Fillmore men”

throughout the state.<sup>168</sup>

In Bloomington on September 16, Lincoln ridiculed Douglas’s popular sovereignty scheme, which “reminded him of the man who went into a restaurant and called for a ginger cake which was handed to him but spying the sign ‘Sweet Cider for sale’ he handed the cake back and said he would take a glass of cider in its place.” After drinking the cider he started to leave, whereupon “the keeper called to him to come back and pay for his cider.” The customer replied: “Cider? Why I gave you the cake for the cider.”

“Well then pay me for the cake.”

“Pay you for the cake. I didn’t have the cake.”

“‘Well,’ replied the keeper scratching his head, ‘that is so but it seems to me I am cheated some way in the deal.’”

“And so,” said Lincoln, “somebody, the North or South, is bound to be cheated by Mr. Douglass’ theory of squatter sovereignty.”<sup>169</sup>

In mid-September, Lincoln spent a week stumping southern Illinois, where the Frémont-Dayton ticket enjoyed little popularity.<sup>170</sup> There, he said, “my efforts are more

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<sup>167</sup> Form letter dated Springfield, 8 September 1856, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:374.

<sup>168</sup> Lincoln to Jesse A. Pickrell, Springfield, 15 September 1856, The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Second Supplement, 1848-1865, ed. Roy P. Basler and Christian O. Basler (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 12.

<sup>169</sup> Ezra M. Prince, “A Day with Abraham Lincoln,” Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>170</sup> Dayton was too radical for Egypt, according to Thomas Quick, who told Lyman Trumbull: “I would rather that some one else than Dayton had been nominated for vice president. Still we can go him but I merely mention this to shew that others might have [been] selected who were less objectionable. His course on the fugitive slave law will I fear work against him considerably in Southern Illinois.” Thomas Quick to Lyman Trumbull, Belleville, Illinois, 2 July 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

needed” than elsewhere.<sup>171</sup> The challenge was daunting, for Old Whigs leaning toward Frémont were dissuaded by Edward Bates of Missouri, who was especially effective in Morgan, Sangamon, and Madison Counties, where the outcome of the election would be determined.<sup>172</sup> The following month, Lincoln addressed a rally at Ottawa, where he was introduced as “Our next United States Senator.”<sup>173</sup> In Belleville, the largest city of Egypt and home to many German-Americans, including lieutenant-governor Gustave Koerner, Lincoln “referred to the Germans and the noble position taken by them in just and dignified terms. When he called down the blessings of the Almighty on their heads, a thrill of sympathy ran through this whole audience.”<sup>174</sup> Koerner, who introduced Lincoln to the crowd, recalled that he “spoke in an almost conversational tone, but with such earnestness and such deep feeling upon the questions of the day that he struck the hearts of all his hearers. Referring to the fact that here, as well as in other places where he had spoken, he had found the Germans more enthusiastic for the cause of freedom than all other nationalities, he, almost with tears in his eyes, broke out in the words: ‘God bless the Dutch!’ Everybody felt that he said this in the simplicity of his heart, using the familiar name of Dutch as the Americans do when amongst themselves. A smart politician would not have failed to say ‘Germans.’ But no one took offense.”<sup>175</sup>

Soon thereafter, Lincoln won the life-long devotion of another German, John G.

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<sup>171</sup> Lincoln to Henry O’Conner, Springfield, 14 September 1856, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:376; George W. Smith, When Lincoln Came to Egypt (Herrin, Illinois: Trovillion, 1940), 81-86; Elihu Washburne to Lincoln, Washington, 3 June 1856, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>172</sup> N. M. Knapp to O. M. Hatch, Winchester, Illinois, 12 March 1860, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Marvin R. Cain, Lincoln’s Attorney General: Edward Bates of Missouri (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1965), 85; William Jayne to John M. Palmer, Springfield, 11 July 1856, Palmer Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

<sup>173</sup> Ottawa Free Trader, n.d., in Tisler and Tisler, “Lincoln Was Here,” 21.

<sup>174</sup> Belleville Weekly Advocate, 22 October 1856, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:380.

<sup>175</sup> Koerner, Memoirs, 2:32-33.

Nicolay, who was to become his chief personal secretary in the White House. While in Pittsfield to deliver a speech, Lincoln, eager to have a printing job done quickly, called at the office of the Pike County Free Press, where Nicolay worked.<sup>176</sup> The young journalist had helped arrange a political rally for Lincoln. That evening, as a member of the Republican committee, Nicolay was introduced to the speaker. “When the first brief handshake and word of greeting on the speakers’ platform was over, Nicolay was an ardent personal follower of Abraham Lincoln. The rugged features, lighted by a kindly smile, the earnest eyes, the hearty grip, the simple, sincere words of one man of the plain people speaking to another, won the young politician’s heart and soul. Later, during and after the speech, the wonderful magnetism of the orator held Nicolay spellbound and cemented his devotion.”<sup>177</sup>

Nicolay’s fellow Germans were “opposed to slavery and nothing but their love of the name of Democracy and their strong sympathy with Douglas in his hatred of Know-Nothingism could induce them to support the Nebraska Party.”<sup>178</sup> The Germans were especially enthusiastic about William Bissell’s candidacy. A leading Democrat said in April that the “only danger we have to fear is that the Republicans will nominate Bissle, in which event our German vote may be endangered – We cannot persuade them that Bissle is not a Democrat and with a Catholic wife Know-Nothingism won’t take a good hold upon him.”<sup>179</sup> Lincoln urged the widespread dissemination of antislavery German

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<sup>176</sup> Pike County Republican (Pittsfield, Illinois), 8 February 1939.

<sup>177</sup> Nicolay’s recollections, paraphrased in an interview conducted by Edward Marshall, 6 February, The Press (New York), 11 February 1894.

<sup>178</sup> Samuel C. Parks to Lyman Trumbull, Lincoln, 10 February 1856, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>179</sup> J. L. D. Morrison to Douglas, Belleville, 16 April 1856, Douglas Papers, quoted in Mildred C. Stoler, “The Democratic Element in the New Republican Party in Illinois, 1856-1860,” Papers in Illinois History and Transactions for the Year 1942 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Society, 1944): 42.

newspapers and helped raise funds for the relief of Frederick Hecker, a prominent German campaigner whose house had burned down in August.<sup>180</sup>

Democrats nevertheless tried to pin the nativist label on the Republicans. In September, Lincoln heard rumors that Chicago Germans were deserting the party; “scared a little,” he asked Charles H. Ray if there were any truth in such reports.<sup>181</sup> (The fear proved groundless, for the Republicans captured over half the German vote in November.)<sup>182</sup>

The Democratic press also denounced Frémont supporters as “nigger-worshippers.” An account in the Joliet Signal of a Republican rally there on October 8 sarcastically observed that it “was a wonderful day for the niggers and nigger-worshippers of this county. Our city was literally filled with enthusiastic Fremonters.” (The Signal thought that “Lovejoy was the best spokesman . . . Trumbull and Abe Lincoln coming in second best.”)<sup>183</sup> In fact, the crowd had been so enthralled by Lovejoy that they found Lincoln unsatisfactory by comparison and many of them left during his speech.)<sup>184</sup> The following week the Springfield Register declared: “Black republicanism not only teaches the doctrines of amalgamation with negroes, but it sets its negro advocates up to preach a dissolution of the confederacy. Can white men, who love their

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<sup>180</sup> Lincoln to Charles H. Ray, Springfield, 8 September 1856, Wayne C. Temple, ed., “The Linguistic Lincolns: A New Lincoln Letter,” Lincoln Herald 94 (1992): 109; Lincoln to Hecker, Springfield, 14 September 1856, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:376.

<sup>181</sup> Lincoln to Ray, Bloomington, 13 September 1856, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement, 27-28; “Chicago’s Flirtation with Political Nativism, 1854-56” Records of the American Catholic Historical Society 82 (1971): 131-58.

<sup>182</sup> James M. Bergquist, “People and Politics in Transition: The Illinois Germans, 1850-1860,” in Frederick C. Leubke, Ethnic Voters and the Election of Lincoln (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1971), 209-30.

<sup>183</sup> Joliet Signal, 14 October 1856.

<sup>184</sup> Samuel C. Parks’s remarks at a banquet in Joliet, Washington Post, 1 April 1883.

country, participate in this unholy work?”<sup>185</sup> Another Democratic paper described the Republican program thus: “Down with the Foreigners and Up with the Darkies. . . . Imagine a big, burly, thick-lipped African crowding Gen. Shields away from the polls on election day! That is the practical working of the Fusion policy.”<sup>186</sup> Democrats sang racist ditties like the following:

Come Democrats and listen,  
 And I will sing you a song.  
 'Tis all about the nigger-worshippers  
 And it will not take me long.  
 Fremont is on their platform,  
 And their principles endorse,  
 To worship niggers night and morn,  
 And ride the Woolly Horse.  
 But those crazy nigger worshippers  
 The Union would destroy.<sup>187</sup>

The Democrats' tactics worked, for Buchanan carried Illinois handily, winning 105,528 votes to Frémont's 96,278 and Fillmore's 37,531.<sup>188</sup> Frémont received 74% of the vote in northern Illinois, 37% in central part of the state, and 23% in Egypt (mostly

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<sup>185</sup> Illinois State Register (Springfield), 13 October 1856.

<sup>186</sup> Our Constitution (Urbana), 24 July 1856.

<sup>187</sup> “Empire Club Song,” The Campaign Democrat (New York), 30 July 1856.\* THIS IS AT THE AAS

<sup>188</sup> Howard W. Allen and Vincent A. Lacey, eds. Illinois Elections, 1818-1990: Candidates and County Returns for President, Governor, Senate, and House of Representatives (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 137.

from Germans living near St. Louis).<sup>189</sup> Nationwide the Democratic nominee garnered 174 electoral votes to Frémont's 114 and Fillmore's 8; in the popular vote Buchanan won 45% of the ballots cast, Frémont 33%, and Fillmore 21%. Like Republicans throughout the North, the Frémonters of Illinois had failed to gain the support of both the conservative Whigs, who feared disunion, and of the Know Nothings, who believed the false charge that Frémont was a Catholic as well as the allegation that he was too radical on the slavery issue.

Bissell, a moderate opponent of slavery, did far better than Frémont among the 1852 Scott voters, especially in the southern and central Illinois.<sup>190</sup> He won the governor's race with 111,466 votes (47%) to his opponent's 106,769 (45%).<sup>191</sup> "This is glory enough for Ill[inoi]s," Herndon crowed. "We Fremont men feel as if victory perched on our banner."<sup>192</sup> Despite his victory, a conscience-stricken Bissell was reluctant to take the oath of office, for in 1850 he had accepted Jefferson Davis's challenge to a duel and was, he thought, therefore ineligible to serve as governor.<sup>193</sup> Lincoln and other party leaders persuaded him to overcome his scruples and assume the governorship.<sup>194</sup>

Lincoln accurately ascribed Buchanan's success to lack of cooperation among the

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<sup>189</sup> Stephen L. Hansen, The Making of the Third Party System: Voters and Parties in Illinois, 1850-1876 (Ann Arbor: UMI Research Press, 1980), 84-85.

<sup>190</sup> Gienapp, Origins of the Republican Party, 416-18.

<sup>191</sup> Allen and Lacey, Illinois Elections, 139.

<sup>192</sup> Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 12 November 1856, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

<sup>193</sup> Robert P. Howard, "Abraham Lincoln, Governor William H. Bissell and Perjury: The Illinois Campaign of 1856," Lincoln Herald 87 (1985): 39-48.

<sup>194</sup> Bissell told this story to Gustave Koerner, who in turn told it to W. H. Snyder; it was confirmed to him by Trumbull. Snyder then told it to John F. Snyder. Notes John F. Snyder made for a biography of Bissell, Snyder Papers, box 32, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

opponents of the Pennsylvanian. Republicans, Lincoln told his political allies, “were without party history, party pride, or party idols,” merely “a collection of individuals, but recently in political hostility, one to another; and thus subject to all that distrust, and suspicion, and jealousy could do.” The Democrats enjoyed a significant advantage, for their ranks contained “old party and personal friends, jibing, and jeering, and framing deceitful arguments against us” while dodging the real issue. “We were constantly charged with seeking an amalgamation of the white and black races; and thousands turned from us, not believing the charge (no one believed it) but fearing to face it themselves.”<sup>195</sup>

Still, Lincoln hailed the election result as a milestone on the road to equal rights. “Our government rests in public opinion,” he told Republican banqueters in December. “Whatever can change public opinion, can change the government, practically just so much. Public opinion, on any subject, always has a ‘central idea,’ from which all its minor thoughts radiate. That ‘central idea’ in our political public opinion, at the beginning was, and until recently has continued to be, ‘the equality of men.’ And although it always submitted patiently to whatever of inequality there seemed to be as matter of actual necessity, its constant working has been a steady progress towards the practical equality of all men.” Reiterating a theme he had stressed at the Bloomington convention six months earlier, Lincoln called the presidential contest “a struggle, by one party, to discard that central idea, and to substitute for it the opposite idea that slavery is right, in the abstract, the workings of which, as a central idea, may be the perpetuity of human slavery, and its extension to all countries and colors.” To promote the ideal of

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<sup>195</sup> Notes for a speech at Chicago, 28 February 1857, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:390-91.



equality, opponents of Buchanan, who comprised a solid majority of the voters, must unite. “Let every one who really believes, and is resolved, that free society is not, and shall not be, a failure, and who can conscientiously declare that in the past contest he has done only what he thought best – let every such one have charity to believe that every one can say as much. Thus let by-gones be by-gones. Let past differences as nothing be; and with steady eye on the real issue, let us reinaugurate the good old ‘central ideas’ of the Republic. We can do it. The human heart is with us – God is with us. We shall again be able not to declare, that ‘all States as States, are equal,’ nor yet that ‘all citizens as citizens are equal,’ but to renew the broader, better declaration, including both these and much more, that ‘all men are created equal.’”<sup>196</sup>

This eloquent address helped clinch Lincoln’s reputation as the leader of Illinois’ Republicans. A correspondent of the Illinois State Journal declared: “There is no man upon whom they would so gladly confer the highest honors within their gift, and I trust an opportunity may not long be wanting which will enable them to place him in a station that seems to be by universal consent conceded to him, and which he is so admirably qualified by nature to adorn.”<sup>197</sup>

To Noah Brooks, Lincoln expressed guarded optimism about the future. While “the Free Soil party is bound to win in the long run,” it was not certain that its victory was imminent. “Everything depends on the course of the Democracy. There’s a big antislavery element in the Democratic party, and if we could get hold of that, we might possibly elect our man in 1860. But it’s doubtful – very doubtful. Perhaps we shall be

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<sup>196</sup> Speech in Chicago, 10 December 1856, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:385.

<sup>197</sup> Letter by B., Chicago, 11 December, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 13 December 1856.

able to fetch it by 1864; perhaps not.”<sup>198</sup> Lincoln’s pessimism seemed justified in April 1857, when Republicans lost the Springfield municipal elections.<sup>199</sup> “We quarreled over Temperance,” Herndon explained; “we ran some K[now] N[othing]s, and the Dutch to a man united against this proceeding: we are whipped badly. . . . We have learned a good lesson – do better next time.”<sup>200</sup>

Newspapers would play a central role in building up the party.<sup>201</sup> Anticipating the 1860 election, Lincoln and Frank Blair laid plans to have the Missouri Democrat of St. Louis, which had a large circulation in southern Illinois, become a Republican paper that year. In addition, the Louisville Journal would follow suit, as would an unnamed Virginia newspaper. All this was to appear coincidental and thus make the Republican party appear strong and growing stronger.<sup>202</sup> Lincoln also helped found the Republican Club of Springfield, organized by the photographer John G. Stewart, a friend of Robert Lincoln and a veteran of the Frémont campaign.<sup>203</sup>

Throughout the winter of 1856-57, Lincoln continued to help build the Republican party in Illinois, often attending caucuses of legislators. One of them, Henry G. Little, recalled that whenever he and his colleagues were in doubt about how to deal

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<sup>198</sup> Brooks, “Personal Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” Scribner’s Monthly, 15 (February 1878): 562. Cf. Brooks, “Some Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” Maryville, California, Appeal, 4 November 1860.

<sup>199</sup> On April 7, the Democrats won all the municipal offices save city treasurer. Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 9 April 1857.

<sup>200</sup> Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 8 April 1857, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

<sup>201</sup> On the need for Republicans to establish newspapers in the immediate aftermath of Frémont’s defeat, see Richard Yates to L. U. Reavis, Jacksonville, 29 November 1856, Reavis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

<sup>202</sup> Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 8 April 1857, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

<sup>203</sup> Reminiscences of J. G. Stewart, in the Bloomington High School Aegis, February 1906, p. 72, and in the Bloomington Pantagraph, 20 November 1901. In 1857, Stewart joined with John Hopper and John Baker in issuing a call to establish the club. The call was signed by Lincoln and several others. Call dated 7 October 1857, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:424. Stewart said they “chose Lincoln as our party leader.”

with the Democrats, Norman B. Judd would say: “I will go round and bring in Old Abe tomorrow night.” Lincoln obliged, offering much-appreciated advice about legislative strategy, particularly in combating a reapportionment law that would have ruined the Republicans’ electoral prospects. The lawmakers, said Little, “sat in astonished silence, marveling at the ease with which the great man penetrated the thoughts and plans of our sharp-witted opponents, and saw, beyond all their sharpness, the course which would match and master theirs.” Lincoln would regularly “invite the members of the Legislature, without regard to party, to spend a social evening, with their ladies, at his home. ‘Abe’s parties’ were regarded as the most enjoyable of the season.”<sup>204</sup>

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Much as he wanted to help the Republican cause, Lincoln was forced by economic necessity to devote most of his energy to the law in 1857. “I lost nearly all the working part of last year, giving my time to the canvass,” he wrote in August, “and I am altogether too poor to lose two years together.”<sup>205</sup> To replenish his coffers, Lincoln sued the Illinois Central Railroad for \$5000 as a fee for services in the case of Illinois Central Railroad vs. McLean County, Illinois and Parke. Accounts of Lincoln’s efforts to collect his fee, the largest of his career, differ. According to Herndon, when Lincoln submitted a bill for \$2000, a company official expostulated: “Why, sir, Daniel Webster would not have charged that much.”<sup>206</sup> (Mason Brayman, who hired Lincoln to argue the case,

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<sup>204</sup> Reminiscences of Henry G. Little, given in June 1886, recorded in a memorandum dated Chicago, 20 December 1886, by John A. Jameson, Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress; Little, “Personal Recollections of Lincoln,” Des Moines, Iowa, Leader, 1 April 1900. See also William Herndon to Lyman Trumbull, Springfield, 17 February and 2 March 1857, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>205</sup> Lincoln to James W. Grimes, Springfield, [ca. 17] August 1857, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:413. Cf. Lincoln to Charles D. Gilfillan, Springfield, 9 May 1857, ibid., 2:395.

<sup>206</sup> Herndon, “Analysis of the Character of Lincoln,” 429.

testified that he offered a fee of \$1250, and when Lincoln presented his bill to George B. McClellan, the latter replied: “Why that is as much as a first-class city lawyer would charge.”<sup>207</sup> Lincoln, “[s]tung by the rebuff,” returned to Springfield, en route stopping in Bloomington, where he consulted prominent attorneys; they told him that that he should have asked for \$5000 and urged him to sue for that amount. Lincoln did so and won.<sup>208</sup>

Sources connected with the Illinois Central maintain that the suit was a mere formality and that the company had all along intended to pay Lincoln his fee. Documents in the company files indicate that Lincoln submitted his bill to John M. Douglas, an acquaintance of his who served as solicitor for the company. Douglas referred the matter to the head of the company’s law department, Ebenezer Lane, who in turn passed it along to the president, William H. Osborn. In the summer of 1856, Osborn asked James F. Joy his opinion of Lincoln’s bill.<sup>209</sup> Joy’s reply is not extant, but he later recalled telling Lincoln that his fee was excessive. Joy had “an exalted opinion of himself” and “spoke contemptuously” of Lincoln “as a ‘common country lawyer.’”<sup>210</sup> (For his role in the case, Joy had received only \$1200 above and beyond his regular salary. “I think there would have been no difficulty with Mr. Lincoln’s bill if I had charged as, perhaps, I ought to have done, five thousand dollars,” Joy later mused.)<sup>211</sup> In response, Lincoln “said that he had done good work; that the amount in litigation far exceeded the fee many thousand

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<sup>207</sup> “One of Lincoln’s Fees,” an article from the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), n.d., typed copy, box 47, Illinois Central Railroad Archives, Newberry Library, Chicago.

<sup>208</sup> Angle, ed., Herndon’s Lincoln, 284.\*

<sup>209</sup> Osborn to Joy, 21 July 1856, in Carlton J. Corliss, “Abraham Lincoln and the Illinois Central Railroad, Main Line of Mid-America” (pamphlet distributed by the Illinois Central Railroad, n.d.), 9.

<sup>210</sup> Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 184.

<sup>211</sup> Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 153.

times over, and that he thought he ought to get a good fee.”<sup>212</sup> Joy recollected that the Illinois Central leaders said to Lincoln (in effect): “Bring suit against the company for the amount demanded and no attempt will be made to defend against it. If by the testimony of other lawyers it shall appear to be a fair charge and there shall be a judgment for the amount, then we shall be justified in paying it.”<sup>213</sup>

This reminiscence may be inaccurate, for less than a month after filing suit for his fee, Lincoln told some potential clients: “I have been in the regular retainer of the [Illinois Central] Co[mpany] for two or three years; but I expect they do not wish to retain me any longer. . . . I am going to Chicago . . . on the 21st inst. and I will then ascertain whether they discharge me; & if they do, as I expect, I will attend to your business.”<sup>214</sup> There may have been some bad blood between Lincoln and Joy; Charles L. Capen, an eminent attorney who investigated the handling of the fee, reported that the “the whole trouble was with Mr. James F. Joy . . . whom Mr. Lincoln afterward despised.”<sup>215</sup> In 1855, Joy had questioned a modest bill Lincoln submitted for services to the company.<sup>216</sup> Joy, after auditing the bill, “treated Lincoln rudely.”<sup>217</sup> (In 1862, John M.

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<sup>212</sup> James F. Joy, undated clipping from the Chicago Tribune, “New Stories of Lincoln,” Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne. On another occasion, Joy reported that “Lincoln did not then render a bill to the company, but he wrote me that he should like to have the company give him for his services a particular section of land which he described, and asked me if I could not intercede with the company to get it for him, saying that for once in his life he thought he was entitled to a large fee.” When company officials told Joy it was not possible, he relayed that message to Lincoln. “Abraham Lincoln’s Fee,” news story datelined Detroit, 6 May, Detroit Tribune, n.d., copied in the St. Louis Globe-Democrat, 10 May 1889. No documentation supports this story.

<sup>213</sup> Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 153-54.

<sup>214</sup> Lincoln to James Steele and Charles Summers, Springfield, 12 February 1857, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:389.

<sup>215</sup> Capen to John G. Drennan, 6 April 1906, in Albert J. Beveridge, Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 1:591n. Drennan was the general attorney for the Illinois Central. John W. Starr, Lincoln and the Railroads: A Biographical Study (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1927), 76.

<sup>216</sup> Lincoln to Joy, Cincinnati, Cincinnati, September 1855, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:326.

Douglas, a friend of Judge Thomas Drummond – who aspired to a seat on the U.S. Supreme Court – thought it best not to have Joy lobby Lincoln on the judge’s behalf. Douglas said “it would do no good for Joy to see Lincoln but possibly [do] harm growing out of past relations.”<sup>218</sup>

The case was slated for trial at Bloomington on June 18, 1857; there Lincoln was prepared to fight hard for his fee, suggesting that the suit was not a friendly one. In notes for his plea, he alleged that he, not Joy, had “made the point & argument on which the case turned,” and asked: “Are or [are] not the amount of labor, the doubtfulness and difficulty of the question, the degree of success in the results; and the amount of pecuniary interest involved, not merely in the particular case, but covered by the principle decided, and thereby secured to the client, all proper elements, by the custom of the profession to consider in determining what is a reasonable fee in a given case[?]” He concluded that “\$5000 is not an unreasonable fee in this case.”<sup>219</sup> To buttress his argument, he supplied a deposition signed by attorneys Norman B. Judd, Grant Goodrich, Orville H. Browning, Archibald Williams, Norman H. Purple, and Stephen T. Logan, all of whom agreed that the amount asked was reasonable.<sup>220</sup> Gustave Koerner told him that he would have been justified in asking twice as much.<sup>221</sup> On the day of the trial, John M. Douglas, the company attorney, did not appear, leading the judge to award Lincoln his fee by default. Mortified by his failure to be in court when the case was tried, Douglas

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<sup>217</sup> Whitney to Herndon, Chicago, 27 August 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 633; Starr, Lincoln and the Railroads, 76.

<sup>218</sup> W. H. Bradley to E. B. Washburne, Chicago, 11 July 1862, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

<sup>219</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:397-98.

<sup>220</sup> Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 154; Thomas Lewis, “New Light on Lincoln’s Life,” Frank Leslie’s Weekly, 16 February 1899, 134-15.

<sup>221</sup> Koerner, Memoirs, 2:111-12.

asked that it be retried, evidently to save face; he did not want his superiors to see that the company had lost by default. Lincoln decided to forego his victory, agreeing with opposing counsel to have a perfunctory second trial with a predetermined outcome. On June 25, the court, after a very brief trial, again awarded Lincoln his requested fee. The railroad could have appealed but instead consented to give Lincoln his \$5000.<sup>222</sup>

(Douglas did not admire Lincoln. In 1860, he told George B. McClellan that Lincoln “is not a bold man. He has not nerve to differ with his party and its leaders.”)<sup>223</sup>

Why Illinois Central executives required Lincoln to sue them is unclear. Joy’s explanation that it was “a friendly suit” is contradicted by Lincoln’s notes for a brief and by his fear of losing his retainer with the company. Perhaps officials of the Illinois Central, which was in desperate financial straits, suspected that the corporate directors in New York would object to such a large sum; at that time, shareholders in Great Britain were sending agents to inspect the company’s books, and they may have balked at a \$5000 fee.<sup>224</sup> In any event, as Judge John M. Scott observed, it “was very much to the discredit of the managing officers of the company that they questioned the reasonableness of his fee and never did pay it until after he obtained a judgment in the McLean County Circuit Court against the company for the amount.”<sup>225</sup>

Though it may not be obvious why the Illinois Central wanted Lincoln to sue for

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<sup>222</sup> Account of the trial by Charles L. Capen, in John G. Drennan, “A. Lincoln, Once Illinois Central Attorney,” Illinois Central Magazine 10 (February 1922): 8; Mark E. Steiner, An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006),\*

<sup>223</sup> Douglas to McClellan, 26 January 1861, in Stephen W. Sears, George B. McClellan: The Young Napoleon (New York: Ticknor and Fields, 1988), 59-60.

<sup>224</sup> Harry E. Pratt, The Finances of Abraham Lincoln (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1943), 53; Corliss, “Lincoln and the Illinois Central,” 7-8; Drennan, “A. Lincoln, Once Illinois Central Attorney,” 8; Beveridge, Lincoln, 2:590-92.

<sup>225</sup> Scott, “Lincoln on the Stump and at the Bar.”

his fee, the company's motive for settling is: its executives wanted Lincoln to represent them in another tax suit which the state of Illinois threatened to file. To prosecute the case, Lincoln's friend, State Auditor Jesse K. Dubois, wished to hire Lincoln, who would probably have accepted if he had not been on retainer to the Illinois Central. He declined, and in December 1857 urged Dubois to abandon his plan.<sup>226</sup> Henry C. Whitney, who represented the Illinois Central in Champaign County, told officials of the company that "we could not afford to have Lincoln as our enemy, instead of our ally."<sup>227</sup> The Illinois Central's chief attorney explained to its president: "We can now look back & in some degree estimate the narrow escape we have made, (I hope & believe entirely,) from burdens of the most serious character. While Lincoln was prosecuting his lawsuit for fees, it was natural for him to expect a dismissal from the Company's service, & being a Politician aspiring to the Senate, to entertain plans of making an attack upon the Company not only in revengeful spirit, but as subservient to his future advancement. He had seen the obscurity of those sections of our charter, relating to taxation, which, unexplained by the History of the Charter, seem[s] to bear (even more naturally) such a construction as would impose on us an amount not exceeding 3/4/100 in addition to the 5 per cent. He kept this to himself; but before our settlement with him, the Auditor, a vain, self-sufficient but weak man approached him, with a view to retain him for the State for Consultation. Lincoln answered, he was not free from his engagement to us, but expected a discharge. He therefore gave him no detailed opinion, but expressed his sense of the great magnitude of the question, & the importance of the interest of the State, which the

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<sup>226</sup> Corliss, "Lincoln and the Illinois Central," 12-13; Lincoln to Dubois, Bloomington, 21 December 1857, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:429. Dubois did bring suit in 1858 (State of Illinois vs. the Illinois Central Railroad.)

<sup>227</sup> Starr, Lincoln and the Railroads, 76.



Auditor was bound to protect. This had no other effect probably than to raise still higher the Auditor's opinion of himself. Meanwhile we settled with Lincoln, & fortunately took him out of the field, or rather engaged him in our interests. This is the more fortunate, as he proves to be, not only the most prominent [member] of his political party, but the acknowledged special adviser of the Bissel[1] Administration."<sup>228</sup>

A year later, Stephen A. Douglas, referring to the \$5000 fee, accused Lincoln of "taking the side of the company against the people."<sup>229</sup> In reply, Lincoln explained that because the McLean County tax case "was worth half a million dollars" to the Illinois Central, he thought a fee of \$5000 reasonable, while the company "wanted to pay me about \$500." That, Lincoln said, constituted "the whole truth about the fee; and what tendency it has to prove that I received any of the people's money, or that I am on very cozy terms with the Railroad Company, I do not comprehend."<sup>230</sup> (It has been suggested that Lincoln's fee in this case enabled him to run against Douglas for the senate in 1858, but that seems unlikely, for he split the money evenly with Herndon and then lent his share to Norman B. Judd, who did not repay it until 1865.)<sup>231</sup>

The charge that Lincoln was a railroad lawyer siding with corporations against the people is misguided. While he did represent the Illinois Central and other roads successfully on many occasions, he often brought suit against them. Like most other lawyers of his time and place, he was prepared to represent virtually any client. A major

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<sup>228</sup> Ebenezer Lane to Osborn, Chicago, 14 August 1857, Illinois Central Railroad Archives, box 94, Newberry Library, Chicago. A typed copy of this letter, used by Harry E. Pratt and other historians, was misdated May 17.

<sup>229</sup> Douglas's speech at Oquawka, 4 October 1858, Oquawka correspondence, 4 October, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 9 October 1858.

<sup>230</sup> Speech at Carthage, Illinois, 22 October 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:331.

<sup>231</sup> Pratt, Finances of Lincoln, 54.

exception was the Illinois Central, whose retainer prevented him from suing it. For that company he worked steadily from 1852 to 1860, handling forty-seven documented cases, but his work for it constituted a small percentage of his business. (It is impossible to determine with precision what portion of Lincoln's income derived from various clients.) Aside from the large fee he wrested from it in the McLean County tax case, he received modest sums; his annual retainer was \$250 and his fee for trying most cases was \$10.<sup>232</sup>

But Lincoln was grateful to earn whatever he did receive from the Illinois Central. He told Herndon: "Billy, it seems to me that it will be bad taste on your part to keep on saying the severe things I have heard from you about railroads and other corporations. The truth is, instead of criticizing them, you and I ought to thank God for letting this one fall into our hands." Henry C. Whitney, who was employed by the Illinois Central, told an interviewer: "I had authority to employ additional counsel whenever I chose to do so, and in Judge Davis's circuit I frequently applied to Lincoln when I needed aid. I never found him unwilling to appear in behalf of a great 'soulless corporation.'"<sup>233</sup> According to Whitney, Lincoln said during the trial of a case in which he represented the railroad corporation: "Counsel avers that his client has a soul. This is possible, of course; but from the way he has testified under oath in this case, to gain, or hope to gain, a few paltry dollars he would sell; nay, has already sold, his little soul very low. But our client is but a conventional name for thousands of widows and orphans whose husbands' and parents' hard earnings are represented by this defendant, and who possess souls which they would not swear away as the plaintiff has done for ten million times as much as is at stake

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<sup>232</sup> Charles Leroy Brown, "Abraham Lincoln and the Illinois Central Railroad, 1857-1860," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 36 (1943): 121-163; Starr,

Lincoln and the Railroads, 57-79; Steiner, An Honorable Calling, \*

<sup>233</sup> Weik, Real Lincoln, ed. Burlingame, 155, 194.

here.”<sup>234</sup>

In July 1857, Lincoln with his family traveled to New York, evidently to collect the \$5000 fee awarded to him.<sup>235</sup> (Company officials refused to pay, so Lincoln on August 1 had the sheriff of McLean County issue an execution on the corporation, which only then agreed to comply with the court order.) He later recalled that he spent his time there “visiting with his wife the various ‘lions’ of the city.”<sup>236</sup> Mary Lincoln reported to her half-sister Emilie in September: “This summer has strangely & rapidly passed away – some portion of it, was spent most pleasantly in travelling east, we visited Niagara, Canada, New York & other points of interest.” She added that “when I saw the large steamers at the New York landing, ready for their European voyage, I felt in my heart, inclined to sigh, that poverty was my portion, how I long to get to Europe. I often laugh & tell Mr. L- that I am determined my next Husband shall be rich.”<sup>237</sup> The family had visited Niagara nine years earlier, when Lincoln returned home from his Massachusetts campaign swing.<sup>238</sup> The majesty of the falls inspired Lincoln to meditate on “the indefinite past.” He marveled that when “Columbus first sought this continent – when Christ suffered on the cross – when Moses led Israel through the Red-Sea – nay, even, when Adam first came from the hand of his Maker – then, as now, Niagara was roaring here.” Mastodons and mammoths, “now so long dead, that fragments of their monstrous bones, alone testify, that they ever lived, have gazed on Niagara. In that long – long time,

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<sup>234</sup> Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 237-38.

<sup>235</sup> James T. Hickey, “Abraham Lincoln’s Lot in Lincoln, Illinois,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 46 (1953): 85.

<sup>236</sup> Springfield correspondence, 4 September, New York Evening Post, 8 September 1860.

<sup>237</sup> Mary Lincoln to Emilie Todd Helm, Springfield, 20 September [1857], Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 50.

<sup>238</sup> The trip is described in Wayne C. Temple, Lincoln’s Connections with the Illinois & Michigan Canal, His Return from Congress in ’48, and His Invention (Springfield: Illinois Bell, 1986), 32-54.

never still for a single moment. Never dried, never froze, never slept, never rested.”<sup>239</sup>

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When the year 1857 opened, the tide of political unrest seemed to be ebbing. On New Year’s day, the Illinois State Journal announced that the mood “throughout our Republic is buoyant and encouraging. The prospect before the nation is well calculated at once to induce gratitude to Divine Providence.”<sup>240</sup> The violence in Kansas had finally been quelled, thereby cooling off both Southern disunionism and Northern antislavery zeal.<sup>241</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court shattered that calm on March 6, 1857, when it handed down its decision in the case of Dred Scott v. Sandford, ruling that Congress could not prohibit slavery from entering the federal territories and that blacks, both slave and free, were not American citizens.<sup>242</sup> The Chicago Tribune spoke for millions of Free State residents when it called the majority opinion of Chief Justice Roger B. Taney and six colleagues “Sudden, unexpected and shocking to the sensibilities and aspirations of lovers of freedom and humanity,” reversing “the current of progressive ideas and christian humanity,” and bidding fair to reintroduce “the iniquitous despotism and legalized inhumanity of barbarian ages.”<sup>243</sup>

In June at Springfield, Lincoln denounced the Court in one of his most eloquent speeches, prompted by Stephen A. Douglas’s address there two weeks earlier. The Little Giant had declared: “The history of the times clearly shows that our fathers did not regard

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<sup>239</sup> Fragment on Niagara Falls, [ca. 25-30 September 1848], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:10-11.

<sup>240</sup> “The Lessons of the New Year,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 1 January 1857.

<sup>241</sup> Kenneth M. Stampp, America in 1857: A Nation on the Brink (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 3-14.

<sup>242</sup> Don E. Fehrenbacher, The Dred Scott Case: Its Significance in American Law and Politics (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

<sup>243</sup> “Possible Citizenship of Negroes,” Chicago Tribune, 10 April 1857.

the African race as any kin to them, and determined so to lay the foundations of society and government that they should never be of kin to their posterity. (Immense applause.)” But, Douglas added, “when you confer upon the African race the privileges of citizenship, and put them on an equality with white men at the polls, in the jury box, on the bench, in the executive chair, and in the councils of the nation, upon what principle will you deny their equality at the festive board and in the domestic circle?” He also denounced Republican criticism of the Dred Scott decision, declaring that anyone who “resists the final decision of the highest judicial tribunal aims a deadly blow to our whole republican system of government” and is “an Amagamationist.”<sup>244</sup>

In reply, Lincoln stated that the Republicans “offer no resistance” to the Dred Scott decision, for the court might change its mind. (Lincoln had first-hand knowledge of such a reversal, for in the one case that he argued before that august tribunal— Lewis v. Lewis in 1849 – the court overruled a decision it had issued ten years earlier.)<sup>245</sup> “We know the court that made it, has often over-ruled its own decisions, and we shall do what we can to have it to over-rule this.” He conceded that it would be “revolutionary” not to “acquiesce in it as a precedent” if, and only if, it “had been made by the unanimous concurrence of the judges, and without any apparent partisan bias, and in accordance with legal public expectation, and with the steady practice of the departments throughout our history, and had been in no part, based on assumed historical facts which are not really true; or, if wanting in some of these, it had been before the court more than once, and had

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<sup>244</sup> Speech of 12 June, New York Herald, 3 July 1857; Springfield correspondence by William Herndon, 23 June 1857, Chicago Tribune, n.d., clipping enclosed in Herndon to Wendell Phillips, Springfield, 29 June 1857, Phillips Papers, Harvard University. In 1856, Douglas had declared during a senate debate: “We do not believe in the equality of the negro, socially or politically, with the white man. Our people are a white people; our State is a white State; and we mean to preserve the race pure, without any mixture with the negro.” Johannsen, Douglas, 501.

<sup>245</sup> John P. Frank, Lincoln as a Lawyer (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 80-81.

there been affirmed and re-affirmed through a course of years.” But because the decision satisfied none of those requirements, it was “not resistance,” “not factious,” “not even disrespectful” to regard it “as not having yet quite established a settled doctrine.”

(This was truly a restrictive definition of the power of judicial review. Curiously Lincoln did not make the common Republican argument, raised by dissenting justices in the case, that the decision regarding congressional power to prohibit slavery in the territories was obiter dictum and had no force of law.)

Heatedly Lincoln challenged Taney’s suggestion that the condition of American blacks had improved since the adoption of the Constitution. Pointing out that in 1857 fewer states allowed blacks to vote or masters to manumit their slaves than had done so seventy years earlier, Lincoln eloquently and compassionately described the plight of the black man in America: “All the powers of the earth seem rapidly combining against him. Mammon is after him; ambition follows, and philosophy follows, and the Theology of the day is fast joining the cry. They have him in his prison house; they have searched his person, and left no prying instrument with him. One after another they have closed the heavy iron doors upon him, and now they have him, as it were, bolted in with a lock of a hundred keys, which can never be unlocked without the concurrence of every key; the keys in the hands of a hundred different men and they scattered to a hundred different and distant places; and they stand musing as to what invention, in all the dominions of mind and matter, can be produced to make the impossibility of his escape more complete than it is. It is grossly incorrect to say or assume, that the public estimate of the negro is more favorable now than it was at the origin of the government.”

Indignantly Lincoln protested against Douglas’s racial demagoguery. Conceding

that there was “a natural disgust in the minds of nearly all white people, to the idea of indiscriminate amalgamation of the white and black races,” Lincoln scornfully observed that Douglas “evidently is basing his chief hope, upon the chances of being able to appropriate the benefit of this disgust to himself. If he can, by much drumming and repeating, fasten the odium of that idea upon his adversaries, he thinks he can struggle through the storm. He therefore clings to this hope, as a drowning man to the last plank. He makes an occasion for lugging it in from the proposition of the Dred Scott decision. He finds the Republicans insisting that the Declaration of Independence includes ALL men, black as well as white; and forthwith he boldly denies that it includes negroes at all, and proceeds to argue gravely that all who contend it does, do so only because they want to vote, and eat, and sleep, and marry with negroes!” Bosh! said Lincoln. “I protest against that counterfeit logic which concludes that, because I do not want a black woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife. I need not have her for either, I can just leave her alone. In some respects she certainly is not my equal; but in her natural right to eat the bread she earns with her own hands without asking leave of any one else, she is my equal, and the equal of all others.”

Cleverly Lincoln showed that Douglas’s complaint about the Republicans’ desire to promote racial mixing was better directed at whites in the South, where the mulatto population of 405,751 dwarfed the mulatto population of the North (56,649). These figures demonstrated that “slavery is the greatest source of amalgamation.” If Douglas were sincere in his desire to prevent racial amalgamation, he should oppose the expansion of the peculiar institution. “A separation of the races is the only perfect preventative of amalgamation but as an immediate separation is impossible the next best thing is to keep

them apart where they are not already together. If white and black people never get together in Kansas, they will never mix blood in Kansas.” Lincoln hastened to add that he had “no right to say all the members of the Republican party are in favor of this” policy of separation of the races, “nor to say that as a party they are in favor of it. There is nothing in their platform directly on the subject. But I can say a very large proportion of its members are for it, and that the chief plank in their platform – opposition to the spread of slavery – is most favorable to that separation.” Colonization of blacks abroad would also help achieve the same end, he added.

Lincoln was especially indignant at the way that Douglas made “a mere wreck – mangled ruin” out of the Declaration of Independence, which “contemplated the progressive improvement in the condition of all men everywhere,” by insisting that it “referred to the white race alone, and not the African.” The authors of that “glorious” document, Lincoln averred, “intended to include all men,” black as well as white, “but they did not intend to declare all men equal in all respects. They did not mean to say all were equal in color, size, intellect, moral developments, or social capacity. They defined with tolerable distinctness, in what respects they did consider all men created equal – equal in ‘certain inalienable rights, among which are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.’” They “did not mean to assert the obvious untruth, that all were then actually enjoying that equality, nor yet, that they were about to confer it immediately upon them.” Rather they “meant to set up a standard maxim for free society, which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly approximated, and thereby constantly spreading and deepening its influence, and augmenting the happiness and value of life to all people of all colors everywhere.” The Declaration’s statement about



equality was intended to be “a stumbling block to those who in after times might seek to turn a free people back into the hateful paths of despotism.” Its authors “knew the proneness of prosperity to breed tyrants, and they meant when such should re-appear in this fair land and commence their vocation they should find left for them at least one hard nut to crack.”

Lincoln chided Douglas for inconsistency in his application of the popular sovereignty doctrine. Whereas the Little Giant opposed federal intervention in the Kansas Territory to forbid slavery, he supported federal intervention in the Utah Territory to control Mormon settlers. This double standard “is only additional proof . . . that that doctrine was a mere pretense for the benefit of slavery.”

In closing, Lincoln passionately drew a distinction between the two parties: “The Republicans inculcate, with whatever ability they can, that the negro is a man; that his bondage is cruelly wrong; and that the field of his oppression ought not to be enlarged. The Democrats deny his manhood; deny, or dwarf to insignificance, the wrong of his bondage; so far as possible, crush all sympathy for him, and cultivate and excite hatred and disgust against him; compliment themselves as Union-savers for doing so; and call the indefinite outspreading of his bondage ‘a sacred right of self-government.’”

Economic self-interest helped explain the Democrats’ views: “The plainest print cannot be read through a gold eagle [coin]; and it will be ever hard to find many men who will send a slave to Liberia, and pay his passage while they can send him to a new country, Kansas, for instance, and sell him for fifteen hundred dollars.”<sup>246</sup>

Curiously, Lincoln dwelt at much greater length on the Supreme Court’s denial of

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<sup>246</sup> Speech in Springfield, 26 June 1857, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:398-410.

black citizenship than he did on its overthrow of the Missouri Compromise. Politically it would have been safer to focus on the latter rather than the former, given the intense Negrophobia of the Illinois electorate. Moreover, he did not attempt to show how the decision might affect Douglas's popular sovereignty doctrine; that task he postponed for a year.<sup>247</sup> Given the weak reasoning of Court's majority opinion and concurring opinions, the vigorous dissents of Justices Benjamin R. Curtis and John McLean, and the significance of the slavery issue in American life, Lincoln was justified in maintaining that Dred Scott did not definitively settle the question of slavery in the territories.<sup>248</sup>

The Southern Illinoisan called Lincoln's speech an "able and masterly refutation of Douglas' slanders."<sup>249</sup> In the Chicago Tribune, Herndon praised it for containing "no rant – no fustian – no bombast." Instead, "there was something in it of more force and power than these; the heart felt, and he gave utterance to the heart inspiration, clothed in the eternal maxims of purest reason."<sup>250</sup> Herndon told friends in Massachusetts that "Lincoln 'burst[ed] Douglas wide open' as we say [in the] west" with his "gentlemanly – strong – powerful and conclusive speech," which contrasted sharply with the Little Giant's "low, gutter, rabble-rousing" effort.<sup>251</sup> Gustave Koerner, however, found Lincoln's remarks "too much on the old conservative order." Lincoln, he said, was "an excellent man, but no match to such impudent Jesuits & sophists as Douglas."<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Fehrenbacher, Dred Scott Case, 486-87.

<sup>248</sup> Daniel Farber, Lincoln's Constitution (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 177-88.

<sup>249</sup> Southern Illinoisan, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 16 July 1857.

<sup>250</sup> [William Herndon], Springfield correspondence, 27 June 1857, Chicago Tribune, n.d., clipping enclosed in Herndon to Wendell Phillips, Springfield, 4 July 1857, Phillips Papers, Harvard University.

<sup>251</sup> Herndon to Wendell Phillips, Springfield, 29 June 1857, Phillips Papers, Harvard University; Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 29 June 1857, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

<sup>252</sup> Gustave Koerner to Lyman Trumbull, Belleville, 4 July 1857, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

The speech attracted attention outside Illinois. The New York Times ran excerpts, though it incorrectly identified the site where it was given as Indianapolis.<sup>253</sup> The New York Tribune published a synopsis submitted by an Illinoisan who declared that “there is not a man in this State whose opinions on political subjects command more universal respect by all classes of men, than his.”<sup>254</sup>

A striking feature of this speech was Lincoln’s compassionate description of the plight of blacks. Usually he shied away from expressing concern for the suffering of the slaves, probably because Illinois voters would be unresponsive to such antislavery appeals. But when Julian M. Sturtevant commented to him that St. Louis opponents of slavery seemed to care only for the well-being of whites, Lincoln replied: “I must take into account the rights of the poor negro.”<sup>255</sup>

A Democratic paper, in commenting on this address, sneered at Lincoln as a failure in whatever he turned his hand to. He probably would not have disagreed strenuously. Around that time he wrote a private memo contrasting his lack of success with Douglas’s string of accomplishments: “Twenty-two years ago Judge Douglas and I first became acquainted. We were both young then; he a trifle younger than I. Even then, we were both ambitious; I, perhaps, quite as much so as he. With me, the race of ambition has been a failure – a flat failure; with him it has been one of splendid success. His name fills the nation; and is not unknown, even, in foreign lands. I affect no contempt for the high eminence he has reached. So reached, that the oppressed of my species, might have shared with me in the elevation, I would rather stand on that eminence, than

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<sup>253</sup> New York Times, 4 July 1857.

<sup>254</sup> Springfield correspondence, 30 June, New York Tribune, 6 July 1857.

<sup>255</sup> Statement by J. M. Sturtevant, Jacksonville, 1882, in Osborn H. Oldroyd, ed., The Lincoln Memorial: Album Immortelles (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1883), 274.

wear the richest crown that ever pressed a monarch's brow."<sup>256</sup>

In 1858, the relatively obscure Lincoln would challenge the internationally famous Douglas in what became known as the Lincoln-Douglas debates, not the Douglas-Lincoln debates. They would help raise Lincoln to national prominence and fatally injure the Little Giant's chances to win the presidency. In time, most people would remember Douglas only as Lincoln's debate opponent, while the name of Lincoln would "fill the nation" and be revered in foreign lands.

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<sup>256</sup> Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 382-83.