

Chapter Eight

“A Strong but Judicious Enemy to Slavery”:

Congressman Lincoln (1847-1849)

Lincoln’s entire public service on the national level before his election as president was a single term in the U. S. House. Though he had little chance to distinguish himself there, his experience proved a useful education in dealing with Congress and patronage.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

Arriving in Washington on December 2, 1847, the Lincolns found themselves in a “dark, narrow, unsightly” train depot, a building “literally buried in and surrounded with mud and filth of the most offensive kind.”¹ A British traveler said he could scarcely imagine a “more miserable station.”² Emerging from this “mere shed, of slight construction, designed for temporary use” which was considered “a disgrace” to the railroad company as well as “the city that tolerates it,”³ they beheld an “an ill-contrived,

¹ Saturday Evening News (Washington), 14 August 1847.

² Alexander MacKay, The Western World, or, Travels in the United States in 1846-47 (3 vols.; London: Richard Bentley, 1850), 1:162.

³ Letter by “Mercer,” n.d., Washington National Intelligencer, 16 November 1846. The author of this letter thought that the station was “in every respect bad: it is cramped in space, unsightly in appearance, inconvenient in its position, and ill adapted to minister to the comfort of travellers in the entire character of its arrangements.” Cf. Wilhelmus Bogart Bryan, A History of the National Capital from Its Foundation through the Period of the Adoption of the Organic Act (2 vols.; New York: Macmillan, 1914-16), 2:357.

ill-arranged, rambling, scrambling village” of approximately 40,000 souls.⁴ Charles Dickens described it as “the head-quarters of tobacco-tinctured saliva,” a “City of Magnificent Intentions,” with “spacious avenues, that begin in nothing, and lead nowhere; streets, miles-long, that only want houses, roads, and inhabitants; public buildings that need but a public to be complete.”⁵

Another eminent British novelist, Anthony Trollope, also found the capital unimpressive. In 1862, he wrote: “Of all places that I know it is the most ungainly,” the “most unsatisfactory,” and “the most presumptuous in its pretensions. There is a map of Washington accurately laid down; and taking that map with him in his journeyings a man may lose himself in the streets . . . as one does . . . in the deserts of the Holy Land, between Emmaus and Arimathea.” Trollope lamented that “no one knows where the places are, or is sure of their existence, and then between their presumed localities the country is wild, trackless, unbridged, uninhabited and desolate.” Trollope described a walk along one of the city’s main thoroughfares, Massachusetts Avenue: “Tucking your trousers up to your knees you will wade through the bogs, you will lose yourself among rude hillocks, you will be out of the reach of humanity.”⁶ Yet another Briton, Alexander MacKay, thought that “at best, Washington is but a small town, a fourth-rate community.”⁷ The Chevalier de Bacourt disparaged the “miserable, desolate look” of

⁴ Mrs. Winfield Scott, speaking in 1855, quoted in Marian Gouverneur, As I Remember: Recollections of American Society during the Nineteenth Century (New York: D. Appleton, 1911), 170. A general description of the capital and its buildings can be found in George Watterston, New Guide to Washington (Washington: Robert Farnham, 1847-48). Also located within the District of Columbia was Georgetown, with a population of approximately 850.

⁵ Dickens, American Notes (1842; New York: Modern Library, 1996), 149, 154.

⁶ Anthony Trollope, North America, ed. Donald Smalley and Allen Booth (1862; New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1951), 305.

⁷ MacKay, Western World, 1:177.

“the so-called city of Washington,” which in his view was “neither city nor village” but rather “a collection of houses put anywhere and everywhere with no regularity.”⁸ It enjoyed “the reputation of being by all odds the most slovenly, ill-built, forlorn seat of government in any civilized country.”⁹

Though Europeans held the American capital in low esteem, it appeared more splendid to Midwesterners like the Lincolns, despite its roaming livestock, noisome sewer system, and unpaved, unlit, garbage-strewn streets. In 1849, an Illinoisan praised Washington as “a great city as far as curiosity is concerned.” The “public buildings are superb,” he said, adding that “there is many now under the course of erection that will throw those built a few years ago entirely in the shade as regards architecture.” He especially admired the capitol, which afforded a view he considered “one of the finest that I have ever beheld,” for “you stand upon the western portico and far as the eye can reach is but one mass of buildings while away to the right is the beautiful residences of opulent citizens with their parks and yards beautifully embellished, whilst to the left rolls the majestic potomac its waters covered with vessels conveying merchandise.”¹⁰ The main thoroughfare, Pennsylvania Avenue, which was paved with uneven cobblestones that made carriage rides disconcertingly bumpy, impressed Lincoln’s Illinois friend Jesse W. Fell, who described it in 1841: “Casting my eyes into the spacious avenue that fronts the room in which I am writing and what a buisey scene is ther[e] presented. – Thousands

⁸ Adolphe Fourier de Bacourt to an unidentified correspondent, Washington, [July 1840], in Bacourt, Souvenirs of a Diplomat: Private Letters from America during the Administrations of Presidents Van Buren, Harrison, and Tyler (New York: Holt, 1885), 72.

⁹ Charles Moore, chairman of the Fine Arts Commission, “Lincoln in Washington,” talk delivered in Washington, reproduced in an unidentified clipping, [ca. 1935], Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

¹⁰ Samuel D. Boyd to “dear cousin,” Martinsburg, [Illinois], 8 August 1849, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. See also a similar letter by Mrs. Herediah Horsford, [ca. December 1847?] in Paul Findley, A. Lincoln: The Crucible of Congress (New York: Crown, 1979), 95.

of persons of every age and sex – of every character and complexion – and from almost every part of the world – constitute the living, moving mass. Some brought here on business – some sent here by the sovereign people – some in search of office – some for pleasure – some for mischief – and all of them busily intent on the prosecution of their respective objects, make up this great, bustling bab[b]le.”¹¹

Another Midwesterner, Ohio Senator Benjamin F. Wade, was less enchanted with Washington. An antislavery Radical who was to denounce Lincoln during the Civil War for his tardiness in issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, Wade found the city’s large black population objectionable.¹² He observed upon arriving at the capital in 1851: “On the whole, this is a mean God forsaken Nigger rid[d]en place. The Niggers are certainly the most intelligent part of the population but the Nigger smell I cannot bear, yet it is in on and about every thing you see.” Wade lamented that the food was “cooked by Niggers, until I can smell & taste the Nigger.”¹³ In 1854, the German-born antislavery champion Carl Schurz reported that it “is a strange-looking city. Imagine a broad street lined on both sides with hotels and shops, then wide stretches of open country and again streets interrupted by vacant lots; groups of houses scattered about in apparent disorder, with here and there a marble palace which contains one of the Government Departments. This strange jumble leaves the spectator in doubt whether all this grandeur is in a state of development or is already approaching decay.”¹⁴ He thought that the capital “had

¹¹ Jesse W. Fell to Hester V. Fell, Washington, 27 June 1841, Fell Papers, Library of Congress.

¹² In 1850, 8158 free blacks and 2113 slaves lived in Washington. Constance M. Green, Washington (2 vols.; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962-63), 1:183.

¹³ Wade to his wife, Washington, 29 December 1851, Wade Papers, Library of Congress. See Hans L. Trefousse, “Ben Wade and the Negro,” Ohio Historical Quarterly 68 (1959): 161-76.

¹⁴ Carl Schurz to his wife, Washington, 15 March 1854, Frederic Bancroft, ed., Speeches, Correspondence and Political Papers of Carl Schurz (6 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam’s, 1913), 1:9.

throughout a slouchy, unenterprising, unprogressive appearance.” The “departments of State, of War, and of the Navy were quartered in small, very insignificant-looking houses which might have been the dwellings of some well-to-do shopkeepers who did not care for show. There was not one solidly built-up street in the whole city – scarcely a block without gaps of empty dreariness.” Few residences “had the appearance of refined, elegant, and comfortable homes. The streets, ill-paved, if paved at all, were constantly covered with mud or dust.” Along those streets “geese, chickens, pigs, and cows had still a scarcely disputed right of way.”¹⁵ (One day in 1858, while strolling about the city, Senator John P. Hale was sent sprawling to the pavement by “a great, dirty pig.”)¹⁶

For the political elite, social life in Washington was “a strange jumble of magnificence and squalor.” Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood, daughter of a New Hampshire congressman and a social leader at the capital, found dinner parties “handsome and very social, the talk delightful,” but deplored the conduct of congressmen from the Southwest who “got fearfully drunk at dinners.”¹⁷ Decades later, Mrs. Sherwood exclaimed: “How primitive Washington was in those days!” The “small, straggling city, with very muddy streets,” she wrote, was “cold and dreary in winter then; the houses were insufficiently heated, the hotels abominable.” But in a capital noted for “the proud

¹⁵ Carl Schurz, The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz (3 vols.; New York: McClure, 1907-8), 2:20.

¹⁶ Mary Abigail Dodge to an unidentified correspondent, Washington, 14 December 1858, in Dodge, Gail Hamilton's Life in Letters (2 vols.; Boston: Lee and Shepard, 1901), 1:203.

¹⁷ Benjamin P. Thomas, “Lincoln from 1847 to 1853,” in Thomas, “Lincoln's Humor” and Other Essays, ed. Michael Burlingame (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 97. Two notoriously bibulous Southern Congressmen were Thomas F. Marshall of Kentucky and Felix G. McConnell of Alabama. See Benjamin Brown French, Witness to the Young Republic: A Yankee's Journal, 1828-1870, ed. Donald B. Cole and John J. McDonough (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1989), 122, 184-85 (entries for 29 August 1841 and 15 February 1846).

prominence of intellect over material prosperity,” she believed that “high thinking” helped offset “plain living.”¹⁸

In Washington, the civilizing influence of women was in short supply, for the wives of most members of Congress did not accompany their spouses. Those footloose lawmakers were “exposed to many strong temptations” and hence were “too often corrupted by evil example and impure association.”¹⁹ A British visitor grew disenchanted with the “coarse, unattractive surface” of Washington society, where “the social sway of women” was limited.²⁰

The capital’s “magnificent distances” constituted another drawback. A Bostonian protested that Washington “covers too much ground to generate a cheerful spirit, for vastness is repellant to the social pleasure of unceremonious visiting. The condensation so necessary for sociable cosyness is lacking, neither does the metropolis boast the native aristocracy of wealth or talent to be found in the commercial cities.”²¹ The city reminded an Englishwoman “of a vast plantation with houses purposely kept far apart to give them room to grow and spread.”²²

The only excitement occurred during sessions of Congress. When it adjourned, the city once again became “a quiet, monotonous town” whose most notable features were “cohesive mud and penetrating dust.”²³

¹⁸ Mary Elizabeth Wilson Sherwood, An Epistle to Posterity, Being Rambling Recollections of Many Years of My Life (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1897), 48-49, 56.

¹⁹ “Washington Life,” Washington News, 12 April 1851.

²⁰ MacKay, Western World, 1:181, 179.

²¹ Washington correspondence by Ben: Perley Poore, 3 March, Boston Atlas, 10 March 1848.

²² Lady Emmeline Stuart Wortley, Travels in the United States, etc. during 1849 and 1850 (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851), 83.

²³ Washington correspondence by Grant, 26 January 1862, New York Evening Express, 28 January 1862.

POPULARITY

For a few days, the newly-arrived Lincolns resided at The Indian Queen, a “miserably untidy” hotel, “an unimposing structure even for Pennsylvania Avenue, then but a ragged thoroughfare . . . notable for the great gaps between houses.”²⁴ Soon thereafter, like most members of the Thirtieth Congress, they settled at one of the city’s boarding houses, which were so numerous that Washington might well have been “named the city of boarding-houses, instead of magnificent distances.”²⁵ They chose Mrs. Ann Sprigg’s, located on a site where the Library of Congress was later built. It formed part of Carroll Row, across from the capitol (then surmounted by a wooden dome and lacking the wings it would eventually acquire). Theodore Dwight Weld, a prominent abolitionist who roomed at Mrs. Sprigg’s in 1842, depicted it thus: “The iron railing around the Capitol Park comes within fifty feet of our door. Our dining room overlooks the whole Capitol Park which is one mile around and filled with shade trees and shrubbery. I have a pleasant room on the second floor with a good bed, plenty of covering, a bureau, table, chairs, closets and clothes press, a good fire place, and plenty of dry wood to burn in it. We have about twenty boarders, mostly members of Congress.” Weld explained that his Virginia-bred landlady was “not a slaveholder, but hires slaves. She has eight servants all colored, 3 men, one boy and 4 women. All are free but 3 which

²⁴ Green, Washington, 1:108; Virginia Clay-Clopton, A Belle of the Fifties: Memoirs of Mrs. Clay, of Alabama, covering Social and Political Life in Washington and the South, 1853-66, Put into Narrative Form by Ada Sterling (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1905), 42.

²⁵ Washington correspondence, 7 July, Baltimore Sun, 8 July 1848.

she hires and these are buying themselves.”²⁶ The Lincolns admired Mrs. Sprigg. During the Civil War, Lincoln called her “a most worthy and deserving lady,” and his wife told the secretary of the interior, “We boarded some months, with Mrs. Sprigg, & found her a most estimable lady.”²⁷

In 1847-1848, eight of Lincoln’s fellow Congressmen lived at Mrs. Sprigg’s, known informally as “the Abolition house.”²⁸ Among them was Joshua R. Giddings of Ohio, the most radical antislavery representative, whose sobriquets included “the Blucher of abolitionism” and “the Lion of Ashtabula.” A large man, six feet two inches tall, “fearless, self-possessed and not to be put down by threats or bluster” and “ready . . . to become a martyr in a righteous cause,” he declared that in Congress “I always make the fir fly.”²⁹ In 1846, he taunted a Georgia representative who threatened him with a pistol and a sword-cane: “Come on! The people of Ohio don’t send cowards here!”³⁰ Upon Congressman John Quincy Adams’ death in February 1848, Giddings assumed leadership of the antislavery forces in the House. Another of Lincoln’s messmates opposed to slavery, John Dickey of Pennsylvania, was “a very offensive man in manner and

²⁶ T. D. Weld to Angelina G. Weld, Washington, 1, 2 January, 9 February 1842, Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds., Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimke Weld, and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844 (2 vols.; Washington, D.C.: American Historical Association, 1934) 2:883, 885, 914.

²⁷ Lincoln to Caleb B. Smith, Washington, 31 May 1861, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:391; Mary Lincoln to Caleb B. Smith, [Washington, 31 May 1861], Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner, eds., Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 87.

²⁸ Theodore Dwight Weld to Angelina G. Weld, Washington, 27 December 1842, Barnes and Dumond, eds., Letters of Weld, 2:947.

²⁹ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 21 September 1855; Theodore Dwight Weld to Angelina Grimke Weld, Washington, 1 January 1842, Barnes and Dumond, eds., Letters of Weld, 2:883; French, Witness to the Young Republic, ed. Cole and McDonough, 208 (entry for 21 January 1849); Giddings to his son Addison, Washington, 27 December 1840, quoted in Richard W. Solberg, “Joshua Giddings: Politician and Idealist” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1952), 149.

³⁰ Washington correspondence, 21 February, New York Tribune, 22 February 1859. See also George W. Julian, The Life of Joshua R. Giddings (Chicago: McClurg, 1892), 172-74.

conversation,” who “seemed to take special pleasure in ventilating his opinions and provoking unpleasant discussions.”³¹

His fellow boarders were drawn to Lincoln. The journalist Nathan Sargent, who served (appropriately enough) as sergeant-at-arms of the U.S. House, recalled that the Illinois Whig was “genial and liked,” “fond of fun and humor,” and “ever ready to match another’s story by one of his own.”³² Representative James Pollock of Pennsylvania found Lincoln “a genial & pleasant companion -- full of good humor, ready wit and with an unlimited fund of anecdote, which he would relate with a zest and manner that never failed to bring down the ‘Mess’, and restore harmony & smiles, when the peace of our little community was threatened by a too earnest or heated controversy on some of the exciting questions of the hour.”³³

Pollock, a Puritanical “old fogey” Whig who in 1854 was elected governor of Pennsylvania as the candidate of the nativist Know Nothing party, angrily participated in one of those controversies which Giddings described: at a breakfast in January 1849, after Pollock had criticized a bill concerning the admission to the Union of California and New Mexico, “it kicked up a row such as we never had at our boarding house. He denounced me as an agitator, and that all I desired was to keep up an excitement. I replied that I was

³¹ Samuel C. Busey, Personal Reminiscences and Recollections of Forty-Six Years’ Membership in the Medical Society of the District of Columbia, and Residence in This City (Washington: Dornan, 1895), 26. Among Lincoln’s messmates were four other Pennsylvania Congressmen: James Pollock, John Blanchard, John Strohm, and A. R. McIlvaine. Also staying at Mrs. Sprigg’s were two more Representatives (Patrick W. Tompkins of Mississippi and Elisha Embree of Indiana), the family of Duff Green, Nathan Sargent (a journalist who used the pen name Oliver Oldschool), Samuel Busey (a young doctor), and Edmund French. Ibid.; Charles O. Paullin, “Abraham Lincoln in Congress, 1847-49,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 14 (1921): 85-86.

³² Nathan Sargent, Public Men and Events in the United States from the Commencement of Mr. Monroe’s Administration in 1817 to the Close of Mr. Fillmore’s Administration in 1853 (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1875), 2: 331.

³³ James Pollock, “Lincoln & Douglas,” undated manuscript, Lincoln Papers, Brown University.

unwilling to have my motives impugned by a miserable Doughface who had not mind enough to form an opinion nor courage enough to avow it. He sprang from the table as he sat opposite and marched around to where I was. I was however on my feet and he cooled down.”³⁴

Samuel C. Busey, a young medical student who took his meals at Mrs. Sprigg’s, recalled that when such a heated debate on slavery occurred at the table, Lincoln “would interrupt it by interposing some anecdote, thus diverting it into a hearty and general laugh, and so completely disarrange the tenor of the discussion that the parties engaged would either separate in good humor or continue conversation free from discord. This amicable disposition made him very popular with the household.” Lincoln “was so discreet in giving expression to his convictions on the slavery question as to avoid giving offense to anybody, and was so conciliatory as to create the impression, even among the pro-slavery advocates, that he did not wish to introduce or discuss subjects that would provoke a controversy.” Busey admired Lincoln “for his simple and unostentatious manners, kind-heartedness, and amusing jokes, anecdotes, and witticisms.” When Lincoln was “about to tell an anecdote during a meal,” he would “lay down his knife and fork, place his elbows upon the table, rest his face between his hands, and begin with the words ‘that reminds me,’ and proceed. Everybody prepared for the explosions sure to follow.”³⁵

Mrs. Sprigg’s boarding house was located near a bowling alley, which Lincoln patronized. Lincoln was “very fond of bowling” and often joined messmates or other Congressmen. Though “a very awkward bowler,” he nevertheless “played the game with

³⁴ Giddings diary, 18 January 1849, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus.

³⁵ Busey, Reminiscences, 28, 25.

great zest and spirit, solely for exercise and amusement, and greatly to the enjoyment and entertainment of the other players and bystanders by his witticisms and funny illustrations.” He took victory and defeat “with like good nature and humor, and left the alley at the conclusion of the game without a sorrow or disappointment.” Whenever his presence in the alley was known, “there would assemble numbers of people to witness the fun which was anticipated by those who knew of his fund of anecdotes and jokes.” In the alley, “surrounded by a crowd of eager listeners, he indulged with great freedom in the sport of narrative, some of which were very broad.” He tried to make it appear that his humor was impromptu and “always told the anecdotes and jokes as if he wished to convey the impression that he had heard them from some one; but they appeared very many times as if they had been made for the immediate occasion.”³⁶

Lincoln’s humor won him friends in the press gallery as well as at the boardinghouse and bowling alley.³⁷ Around Christmas of 1847, he began to frequent the small post office of the House of Representatives, where members often gathered to swap yarns. After “modestly standing at the door for several days,” he was ‘reminded’ of a story, and by New Year’s he was recognized as the champion story-teller of the Capitol.” He sat near the fireplace, “tilted back in his chair, with his long legs reaching over to the chimney jamb. He never told a story twice, but appeared to have an endless repertoire of them, always ready, like the successive changes in a magazine gun, and always pertinently adapted to some passing event.” Newspaper correspondents, bored by congressional

³⁶ Busey, Reminiscences, 27.

³⁷ See Benjamin P. Thomas, “Lincoln’s Humor: An Analysis,” in Thomas, “Lincoln’s Humor” and Other Essays, ed. Michael Burlingame (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 3-16.

pomposity, found it “refreshing” to “hear this bright specimen of Western genius tell his inimitable stories, especially his reminiscences of the Black Hawk War.”³⁸

Congressmen also admired Lincoln’s stories. In Washington he expanded his repertoire “with a great Many New Storys,” some of them “Very dirty.”³⁹ Representative William M. Cocke of Tennessee remembered that whenever he “saw a knot of Congressmen together laughing I knew that they were surrounding Lincoln and listening to his filthy stories.”⁴⁰ Congressman Moses Hampton of Pennsylvania recalled two such off-color tales, one involving an “old Virginian stropping his razor on a certain member of a young negro’s body” and the other about “the old woman[’]s fish” which “get[s] larger, the more it is handled.”⁴¹ Lincoln told similar off-color stories when on the circuit.⁴²

Colleagues in the House admired Lincoln’s character and personality as well as his humor. Charles H. Brainard, a Washington-based lithographic publisher who saw Lincoln often during his Congressional term, recalled that soon after he took his seat in the House, the lanky Illinoisan “became a great favorite with the members and officers of that body,” for “his pleasant and expressive face, his mild and musical voice, which was

³⁸ Ben: Perely Poore in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Review, 1888), 217-18.

³⁹ Abner Y. Ellis to William H. Herndon Moro, Illinois, 6 December 1866, Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements about Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 500.

⁴⁰ Congressman Cocke was a cousin of David Rankin Barbee’s mother. Barbee recalled him uttering these words. Barbee to Stephen I. Gilchrist, Washington, n.d., copy, William H. Townsend Papers, University of Kentucky.

⁴¹ Hampton to Lincoln, Pittsburgh, 30 March 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Hampton also recalled with pleasure a “cocktail story” that Lincoln had told. Hampton to Lincoln, Pittsburgh, 23 May 1860, ibid.

⁴² Joseph Fifer’s remarks, recalled by Carl Sandburg, undated memo, Sandburg Papers, University of Illinois.

ever attuned to kindness, and a rich fund of wit and humor, which found vent in anecdotes, illustrated his conversation, and gave force and point to his public speeches, drew unto him all sorts of men, irrespective of party.”⁴³ In May 1848, a Washington correspondent reported that “no member of whom I have any knowledge, possesses in a higher degree the respect and confidence of the House” than Lincoln.⁴⁴ A few months later, another Washington-based journalist called Lincoln a “universal favorite here – an entirely self-made man, and of singular and striking personal appearance.”⁴⁵ Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia recollected that Lincoln was “warm-hearted,” “magnanimous,” “generous,” and “abounded in anecdotes; he illustrated everything that he was talking or speaking about by an anecdote; his anecdotes were always exceedingly apt and pointed, and socially he always kept his company in a roar of laughter.”⁴⁶ William L. Goggin of Virginia deemed Lincoln “a man of a high order of talent,” such that “when he spoke no man was listened to by those who were in that House as visitors with more apparent

⁴³ Charles Henry Brainard, “Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln,” Youth’s Companion, December 1880, 435-36. In 1860, Brainard (1817-85), a lithographic publisher then based in Boston, sent the Boston artist Thomas M. Johnston to Springfield to do a portrait of Lincoln. R. Gerald McMurtry, “Beardless Portraits of Abraham Lincoln Painted from Life” (pamphlet; Fort Wayne, Indiana: Allen County-Fort Wayne Historical Society, 1962), 14-25; Rufus Rockwell Wilson, Lincoln in Portraiture (New York: Press of the Pioneers, 1935), 103-4. Brainard wrote Biographical Sketches of US Senators (1852); published a weekly periodical called “Brainard & Co.’s Illustrated Literary Express” in the 1840s; edited “Brainard’s Portrait Gallery of Distinguished Americans” (1855); published a bird’s-eye view of Medford, Massachusetts in 1880; and wrote a biography of John Howard Payne (1885), the author of “Home Sweet Home.” Abigail Brainard, The Genealogy of the Brainerd-Brainard Family in America, 1649-1908 (Hartford: Case, Lockwood, & Brainard, 1908).

⁴⁴ Letter by J. A., Washington, 30 May, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 22 June 1848.

⁴⁵ Washington correspondence by X, 13 December, New York Tribune, 15 December 1848.

⁴⁶ Remarks by Stephens in 1878, quoted in Myrta Lockett Avery, ed., Recollections of Alexander H. Stephens (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1910), 61; statement by Stephens dated Washington, 1882, in The Lincoln Memorial: Album-Immortelles, ed. Osborn H. Oldroyd (New York: G. W. Carleton, 1883), 241. While they served together in Congress, Stephens recollected, “I was as intimate with him as with any other man of that Congress except perhaps . . . [Robert] Toombs.” Stephens, Recollections, 61.

satisfaction.”⁴⁷ The Boston Brahmin who presided over the House as its speaker, Robert C. Winthrop, “liked him personally, finding him shrewd and kindly, with an air of reserved force.”⁴⁸ Many years later, Winthrop recalled “vividly the impressions I then formed, both as to his ability and his amiability. We were old Whigs together, and agreed entirely upon all questions of public interest. I could not always concur in the policy of the party which made him President, but I never lost my personal regard for him. For shrewdness, sagacity and keen, practical sense, he has had no superior in our day and generation.”⁴⁹ Lincoln recollected that another Massachusetts congressman, the renowned educational reformer and antislavery militant Horace Mann, “was very kind to me.” In 1865, Lincoln told Mann’s sister-in-law that “it was something to me at that time to have him so – for he was a distinguished man in his way – and I was nobody.”⁵⁰

Representative Amos Tuck of New Hampshire reported that in Congress, Lincoln was thought of “as an agreeable specimen of frontier character,” an “awkward, genial ‘good fellow’” who “bore all the signs of scanty preparation for influential position” and “was not regarded as a man of mark.” Tuck believed Lincoln never imagined “taking high position in the country.”⁵¹ Joshua R. Giddings came to know and admire Lincoln at Mrs. Sprigg’s.⁵² Another member of the Thirtieth Congress declared after learning of

Lincoln’s 1860 nomination: “Personally I am greatly pleased, for there is no man in the

⁴⁷ William L. Goggin, quoted in the New York Tribune, 4 September 1860. See also Findley, Crucible of Congress, 166-67.

⁴⁸ Robert C. Winthrop, Jr., A Memoir of Robert C. Winthrop (Boston: Little, Brown, 1897), 81.

⁴⁹ Oldroyd, ed., Lincoln Memorial, 165.

⁵⁰ Elizabeth P. Peabody to Horace Mann, Jr., n.p., [mid-February 1865], in Arlin Turner, ed., “Elizabeth Peabody Visits Lincoln, February 1865,” New England Quarterly 48 (1975): 119.

⁵¹ Amos Tuck, Autobiographical Memoir of Amos Tuck (n.p.: n.p., 1902), 83.

⁵² Elihu B. Washburne to Lincoln, [Washington], 26 December 1854, 20 January 1855, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Giddings to R. V. Marsh, Jefferson, Ohio, 19 November 1860, copy, Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus.

United States whom I should rather see in the Presidential Chair.”⁵³ At that same time, Truman Smith of Connecticut, a leader of the Whigs in the House, said of Congressman Lincoln: “I saw him constantly, both in the House and in the Whig Central Committee, of which we were both members. I formed a very high estimate of his character. I found him a man of a high order of intellect, of unspotted integrity, and of very superior abilities.”⁵⁴ A New York Representative, Horace Greeley, editor of the influential New York Tribune, remembered Lincoln as a “genial,” “quiet,” “good-natured,” and “cheerful” man who was “more generally liked and esteemed” by his Whig colleagues than any other Representative.⁵⁵ Among those that Lincoln especially liked was North Carolina Congressman Daniel M. Barringer, with whom he shared a desk and many meals.⁵⁶

The lithographer Charles H. Brainard reported that whenever the Illinois Whig “addressed the House, he commanded the individual attention of all present. If his speeches sometimes lacked rhetorical grace and finish, they had directness and precision, and never failed to carry conviction to every candid mind, while his sallies of wit and humor, and his quick repartee whenever he was interrupted by questions from his political opponents, would be followed by peals of laughter from all parts of the hall.”⁵⁷

Unlike her husband, Mary Lincoln enjoyed little popularity. By April 1848, she had returned to her father’s home in Lexington.⁵⁸ She may have been lonely, for there

⁵³ Julius Rockwell to Lucy F. Rockwell, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 19 May 1860, typescript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

⁵⁴ Speech of Truman Smith in New Haven, New York Tribune, 1 June 1860.

⁵⁵ Horace Greeley, “Greeley’s Estimate of Lincoln,” written ca. 1868, Century Magazine 42 (July 1891): 374; Horace Greeley, Recollections of a Busy Life (New York: J. B. Ford, 1869), 226.

⁵⁶ Septima Maria Collis, A Woman’s War Record, 1861-1865 (New York: Putnam’s, 1889), 65-66.

⁵⁷ Brainard, “Reminiscences of Lincoln,” 435-36.

⁵⁸ It is not clear when Mary Lincoln left Washington. She was still in the capital on February 28, when Massachusetts Congressman Julius Rockwell called on her and her husband. Julius Rockwell to Lucy

were few congressional wives with whom to socialize. (In 1845, only 72 of the 221 members of the House were accompanied by family members.)⁵⁹ At the boarding house, Mary Lincoln “was so retiring that she was rarely seen except at meals.”⁶⁰ Some boarders at Mrs. Sprigg’s, like those in the Globe Tavern five years earlier, found her disagreeable.⁶¹ On April 16, 1848, Lincoln wrote her saying that all the guests at Mrs. Sprigg’s “or rather, all with whom you were on decided good terms – send their love to you. The others say nothing.” Lincoln had mixed feelings about his wife’s absence. “In this troublesome world of ours,” he told her, “we are never quite satisfied. When you were here, I thought you hindered me some in attending to business; but now, having nothing but business – no variety – it has grown exceedingly tasteless to me. I hate to sit down and direct documents, and I hate to stay in this room by myself.”⁶² (Other congressional spouses may have envied Mary Lincoln her departure. One observed: “I do not believe that Washington is very pleasant to any of the Member’s wives. I have conversed with several whom I have met and all seem tired of it and wish to go home.”)⁶³ Such loneliness afflicted other congressmen, including Joshua Giddings, who complained to his spouse in June 1848: “last Sunday I was home with wife children & friends[;] now

Walker Rockwell, Washington, 28 February 1848, transcript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

⁵⁹ Green, Washington, 1:155.

⁶⁰ Busey, Reminiscences, 28.

⁶¹ One of those who did not like Mary Lincoln was evidently the wife of Congressman Patrick Tompkins. In 1860, Joshua Giddings urged Lincoln to convey his “kind remembrance to Mrs Lincoln. I recollect her with pleasure. I presume she will rem[em]ber the morning when [Congressmen] Dickey and McIlvaine myself and others attend her to the [train] cars and there took our leave of her as she started for home, leaving you in our care. We have all forgotten Mrs Tompkins long since.” Giddings to Lincoln, Jefferson, Ohio, 2 July 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶² Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln, Washington 16 April 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:465.

⁶³ Findley, A. Lincoln: The Crucible of Congress, 92.

here [I am] solitary and alone in the midst of so many thousands surrounded with heated walls and almost burning pavements. I am homesick.”⁶⁴ In 1854, Richard Yates, representing Lincoln’s district, lamented to his wife: “You speak of being lonely but I do assure you that you cannot feel near as lonely as I do. Sometimes a feeling of loneliness comes over me which is nearly insupportable. The days are weeks and the weeks months.”⁶⁵ Yates said he felt lonelier in Washington “than I would in the woods.”⁶⁶

LIFE OF A FRESHMAN REPRESENTATIVE

The routine work that Lincoln disliked also bothered other congressmen. In 1844, John J. Hardin told his law partner: “Having a seat in Congress is not the thing it is cracked up to be.” He found “very little about life in Washington desirable. There is a vast deal of . . . drudgery to do, in reading & writing letters on business which no lawyer would attend to, & which would not pay him if he did. Still they must be answered. The Hours of eating here destroy all business habits, & the Hours of the House destroy a man’s health.”⁶⁷ Another Illinois Representative, who served in the 1830s and 1840s, recalled that “the labor of a member of Congress is hard and no thanks for it – you . . . must write to the offices, and send the letters you receive. I hired hacks and wore out

⁶⁴ Giddings to Laura Waters Giddings, Washington, 18 June 1848, Giddings Papers, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus. Giddings had voiced similar complaints in eight years earlier. Giddings to Laura Waters Giddings, Washington, 13 July 1840, *ibid*.

⁶⁵ Yates to Catherine Geers Yates, Washington, 2 January 1854, Richard Yates and Catharine Yates Pickering, Richard Yates: Civil War Governor, ed. John H. Krenkel (Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers, 1966), 90.

⁶⁶ Yates to Catherine Geers Yates, Washington, 4 December 1853, Jack Nortrup, “A Western Whig in Washington,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 64 (1971): 434.

⁶⁷ John J. Hardin to [David Allen Smith], Washington, 12 January 1844, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

shoe leather, in attending the claims of the Black Hawk soldiers. . . . I never labored more in my life at school, or other wise, than I did in Congress.”⁶⁸ Representatives usually spent their mornings answering correspondence, visiting government offices on behalf of constituents, attending committee meetings, and conning newspapers. House sessions customarily ran from noon till early evening, at which time caucuses were often held.⁶⁹ Committee work could be tedious, as Isaac Holmes of South Carolina noted when he remarked that the Commerce Committee spent two-thirds of its time “with the consideration of such subjects as bounties on codfish, while the vastly more important subjects were greatly neglected.”⁷⁰ Lincoln was appointed to the Committees on Expenditures in the War Department and on Post Offices and Post Roads. The chairman of the latter said that “no man on that Committee worked more industriously” than did Lincoln.⁷¹

As a lowly freshman, Lincoln occupied “one of the most undesirable seats in the hall” at the back of the House chamber in what was known as the “Cherokee Strip,” on the Whig side of the aisle.⁷² Even those in more desirable seats – like former president John Quincy Adams – had difficulty hearing and making themselves heard.⁷³ According to a journalist, the “habit of paying no attention to a member, while speaking, has been

⁶⁸ John Reynolds to Lyman Trumbull, Belleville, Illinois, 25 April 1856, Lyman Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress. Reynolds served in the U.S. House from 1834 to 1837 and from 1839 to 1843.

⁶⁹ Robert W. Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 126.

⁷⁰ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st session, 17 (9 December 1847).

⁷¹ William L. Goggin of Virginia, quoted in the New York Tribune, 4 September 1860. See also Findley, Crucible of Congress, 166-67.

⁷² Elihu B. Washburne in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 17.

⁷³ Henry G. Wheeler, History of Congress: Biographical and Political: Comprising Memoirs of Members of the Congress of the United States, Drawn from Authentic Sources; Embracing the Prominent Events of Their Lives, and Their Connection with the Political History of the Times (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1848), 1:9-12.

contracted, in great degree, from the fact that of its being impossible to hear a man distinctly, owing to the peculiar construction of the Hall,” whose sixty-foot-high domed ceiling, modeled on the Pantheon at Rome, created an echo.⁷⁴ To be audible, a member was “required to exert all the power of his voice; every organ was called into exercise, or he could not be heard.”⁷⁵ Frequently reporters for the Congressional Globe, unable to make out what was said on the floor, noted that the remarks of an honorable gentlemen were inaudible.⁷⁶ In 1844, John J. Hardin complained: “Of all the places to speak or to try & do any business, the Hall of the House is the worst I ever saw. I would prefer speaking in a pig pen with 500 hogs squealing . . . or talk to a mob when a fight is going on, or endeavor to speak to a set of men at a muster when the studs are exhibiting – than to try to fix the attention of the House. Not one man in fifty can make himself heard on acc[oun]t of the construction of the Hall, & no one but J Q Adams is even listened to by the House, unless there is a quarrel going on or the prospect of a row is brewing. Last week the scenes in the House would have disgraced the meanest western grocery. Bullying & Billingsgate are the only order of the day.”⁷⁷ (Rows did occur on the House floor, including one on March 9 that Lincoln may have witnessed. After being accused of lying, a Georgia Representative stuck a Tennessean several times. According to one of their colleagues, the “Desk in front of them was knocked over & the house was [thrown]

⁷⁴ Washington dispatch by William G. Brownlow, n.d., in the Jonesborough, Tennessee, Whig, n.d., copied in the Indiana Weekly State Journal (Indianapolis), 9 April 1848; MacKay, Western World, 1:173; William Henry Milburn, Ten Years of Preacher-Life: Chapters from an Autobiography (London: Sampson Low, 1859), 92; Watterston, New Guide to Washington, 24-25.

⁷⁵ James Pollock in the Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 44 (18 December 1847).

⁷⁶ On 13 January 1848, the Globe reporter noted that Congressman Houston “was scarcely audible at the reporter’s desk” and later that day his remarks were “not distinctly heard by the reporter.” Ibid., 169, 170. Cf. similar remarks, ibid., 200 (19 January 1848).

⁷⁷ John J. Hardin to [David Allen Smith], Washington, 23 January 1844, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

into a state of confusion. As soon as order was restored they apologized to the House and also to each other shook hands and called themselves friends again.”⁷⁸ There were numerous precedents for this contretemps. In 1836, a Virginia Representative and a colleague from North Carolina “called each other ‘damned rascal’ & ‘damned Scoundrel,’ & came very near having a personal collision pistol in hand!” Five years later the same Virginian and a different Tarheel exchanged epithets like “liar,” “mean, contemptible puppy,” and “miserable wretch” before throwing punches. In 1838, a pair of Tennessee Representatives engaged in a fist fight after insulting each other, and a Congressman from Kentucky killed a Maine Representative in a duel.)⁷⁹

If acoustics in the House were poor, the ninety-five-foot-long chamber was, as Charles Dickens noted, “elegant to look at,” a “beautiful and spacious hall, of semicircular shape, supported by handsome pillars.” Dickens reported that though the hall was “handsomely carpeted,” the “state to which these carpets are reduced by the universal disregard of the spittoon with which every honourable [i.e., Representative] is accommodated, and the extraordinary improvements on the pattern which are squirted and dabbled upon it in every direction, do not admit of being described.”⁸⁰ Statues of Liberty and History, as well as full-length portraits of Washington and Lafayette, decorated the chamber. Crimson drapery festooned the spaces between the twenty-six massive marble columns.⁸¹ Light was provided by an unreliable gas system, which one of Lincoln’s colleagues described disapprovingly: “our gas has just gone out for the second

⁷⁸ Artemas Hale diary, entry for 9 March 1848, Hale Papers, Library of Congress.

⁷⁹ French, Witness to the Young Republic, ed. Cole and McDonough, 64 (entry for 10 April 1846), 86 (entry for 3 June 1838), 124-25 (entry for 13 September 1841), 75 (entry for 28 February 1838).

⁸⁰ Dickens, American Notes, 156, 161.

⁸¹ Watterston, New Guide to Washington, 25-27.

time, giving us a very bright stink but the darkest possible light.”⁸² That Representative also found the capitol bewildering: “a series of blind, gloomy and crooked labyrinths, through which a stranger threads his devious way with difficulty.”⁸³

The spouse of a congressman thought that on the floor of the House there was “too little room for the number of occupants.”⁸⁴ The Representatives’ desks made the lower chamber “a great business room, a place [for members] to write letters to their constituents, to draw bills of exchange, to settle accounts, and to do business.”⁸⁵ Congressmen were often “so busy writing, folding letters and documents to their constituents, etc., that the speakers were annoyed and little attended to, while business was greatly impeded.” Adding to what a British observer called the “unceasing hubbub and concatenation of all conceivable sounds, which rise and swell from the body of the House” was the clapping of members’ hands (“like popguns going off”) as they summoned ubiquitous page boys to deliver messages or to fetch water, envelopes, and newspapers.⁸⁶ A Representative’s wife complained that the “confusion and noise of the House of Representatives is wearying . . . ; I never saw a district school dismissed at noon so rude and noisy, . . . like a hundred swarms of bees.”⁸⁷ Echoing her was a Kentuckian who reported in 1849 that the House “is but a continued scene of dissension, distraction, disorder, and uproar. No speech is listened to while the floor is occupied – the honorable

⁸² Horace Greeley to O. A. Bowe, Washington, 28 February 1849, Greeley Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸³ Horace Greeley, Washington correspondence, 12 December, New York Tribune, 15 December 1843.

⁸⁴ Letter by Mrs. Heredia Horsford, [ca. December 1847?] in Findley, Crucible of Congress, 97.

⁸⁵ Congressman James Thompson of Pennsylvania, Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 46 (18 December 1847).

⁸⁶ MacKay, Western World, 1:290; Hugo Reid, Sketches in North America, with Some Account of Congress and the Slavery Question (London: Green, Longman & Roberts, 1861), 82, 85-87.

⁸⁷ Letter by Mrs. Heredia Horsford, [ca. December 1847?] in Findley, Crucible of Congress, 97.

members are skipping to and fro, laughing, talking, whispering, cursing one another, slapping their hands together, rapping on the desk for the messenger boys, &c., – altogether making a bedlam that outlives the pit of a theatre or tap room. It is impossible to hear a speech in the galleries.”⁸⁸ From the House gallery, Horace Greeley noted, a visitor could “look down on the noisy Bedlam in action below him – somebody speaking and nobody listening, but a buzz of conversation, the trotting of boys, the walking about of Members, the writing and folding of letters, calls to order, cries of question, calls for Yeas and Nays, &c. give him large opportunities for headache, meagre ones for edification.”⁸⁹

To many Representatives, their colleagues’ inattention made little difference, for their remarks were designed for home consumption.⁹⁰ In 1847, James Pollock observed on the floor of the House that the “speeches made here were not intended to operate upon the House, but upon the country.”⁹¹ Truman Smith explained that the House “to a great degree – whatever it might have formerly possessed – lost its character of a deliberative assembly. . . . not one out of five hundred speeches there, produced any very great effect on the action of that body. . . . all great measures of policy were carried, not by the force of debate, but by consultation among themselves in private, as to the character of the measure and its various provisions.”⁹² Those addresses were often inconsequential, as Congressman Samuel Lahm of Ohio protested in 1848. For more than seven months,

⁸⁸ Washington correspondence, n.d., Maysville, Kentucky, Eagle, n.d., copied in the Indiana State Journal (Indianapolis), weekly ed., 30 April 1849.

⁸⁹ Horace Greeley, Washington correspondence, 12 December, New York Tribune, 15 December 1843.

⁹⁰ Milburn, Ten Years of Preacher-Life, 92-93.

⁹¹ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st session, 44 (18 December 1847).

⁹² Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st session, 43 (18 December 1847).

Lahm said, he had been “compelled to listen to discussions” that “were exceedingly uninteresting, and very frequently were not pertinent to the question before the House.”⁹³ Horace Greeley, who served in the Thirtieth Congress, bemoaned his colleagues’ misuse of time: “Of all the hours devoted by the House to its public deliberations at least one-half are utterly and many of them wilfully wasted by Members who . . . deem legislation generally a curse, and consider that the less there is done of it the better for the country.”⁹⁴ In February 1849, he predicted: “We are going to do nothing this session, and a great deal of it.”⁹⁵ Greeley recommended changes in the way Congress conducted its business, but because he sat only in the second session of the Thirtieth Congress, he had little chance of seeing them adopted. In January 1849, a Massachusetts Congressman observed that “Greeley will be in a world of trouble to get all his reforms through before the time [of adjournment in March] comes round. He will have great abuses still to lament over.”⁹⁶

Tedium often prevailed in the House. Whenever a dull speaker took the floor, “a forest of newspapers” appeared because members would not “waste their time listening to his prosing.”⁹⁷ John J. Hardin described the lower chamber as “the most stupid place generally I was ever in,” for “two thirds of the time of the House is occupied in

⁹³ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st session, 926 (12 July 1848).

⁹⁴ “Work in Congress,” New York Tribune, 5 December 1848. A Massachusetts Congressman lodged a similar complaint. Horace Mann to Mary Mann, Washington, 21 July 1848, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁹⁵ Greeley to Schuyler Colfax, Washington, 16 February 1849, Greeley Papers, New York Public Library.

⁹⁶ Julius Rockwell to Lucy F. Rockwell, Washington, 16 January 1849, typescript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

⁹⁷ Reid, Sketches in North America, 87.

discussing questions of order.”⁹⁸ Lincoln’s immediate predecessor, Edward D. Baker, lamented that the “House is dull and so are many of its members.”⁹⁹ An Ohio senator complained that members of Congress “never do anything as they should,” for many of them “are very much like children.”¹⁰⁰ A freshman Representative from Ohio deplored the “desultory debates which arise in the House without any previous motion and which cannot be restrained until the speakers have satisfied themselves by discharging a certain amount of bile which often bespatters friends as well as foes.”¹⁰¹ Near the beginning of the Thirtieth Congress, Representative Truman Smith of Connecticut denounced a “most frivolous, most contemptible discussion” of nearly two days on a minor procedural point.¹⁰² In early February 1848, a Massachusetts Representative wrote his wife: “We have not done much business in Congress yet and there does not appear to be a disposition to do so.”¹⁰³ Seven weeks later, a journalist reported that the “proceedings in both Houses today have been preeminently stupid and uninteresting. I had thought that those of yesterday and the day before were as dull as dull could be; but today has surely shown that there was yet a lower deep.”¹⁰⁴

⁹⁸ John J. Hardin to Eliza Caldwell Browning, Washington, 26 December 1843, Orville H. Browning Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁹⁹ Baker to an unidentified legal client, 9 December 1845, quoted in Gayle Anderson Braden, “The Public Career of Edward Dickinson Baker” (Ph.D. dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 1960), 100.

¹⁰⁰ Benjamin Wade to his wife, Washington, 15 March 1852, Wade Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰¹ Daniel Duncan to John McLean, Washington, 10 April 1848, John McLean Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰² Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 127 (7 January 1848). That debate was exceptionally tedious, as Smith remarked: “of all the frivolous questions that had ever been raised in this House, this capped the climax.” Ibid.

¹⁰³ Artemas Hale to his wife, Washington, 6 February 1848, Artemas Hale Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan. Hale said he spent the first few weeks of his congressional career “witnessing the manner in which the business of Congress is transacted – which I am sorry to say, is far less creditable to the country, than I had imagined.” Hale diary, entry for 31 December 1847, Hale Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁰⁴ Washington correspondence by T[homas] M. B[rewer], 29 March, Boston Atlas, 3 April 1848.

Much time was devoted to private bills, which formed “rather a tedious and stupid subject of debate.”¹⁰⁵ The Thirtieth Congress was assiduous in its attention to private claims, although John Quincy Adams had argued in 1832 that there “ought to be no private business before Congress” because a “deliberative assembly is the worst of all tribunals for the administration of justice.” Adams estimated that Congress spent half its time on it and lamented that “there is no common rule of justice for any two of the cases decided.”¹⁰⁶ In 1849, Greeley published a similar lament.¹⁰⁷ Most of the claims that Congress investigated were not acted upon.¹⁰⁸

The Whig leadership in the House lacked distinction, though the octogenarian John Quincy Adams was still serving there. But “Old Man Eloquent,” as he was called, was “pretty much out of the field.” The majority leaders, Samuel Vinton of Ohio (chairman of the Ways and Means Committee) and Truman Smith of Connecticut (de facto national party chairman since 1842) enjoyed a reputation for “sensible and enlarged views” and above-average sagacity. The shrewd, savvy, well-informed Smith, who was to become known as “the Murat” of the 1848 presidential campaign – “the spirit and

¹⁰⁵ Washington correspondence by T[homas] M. B[rewer], 8 March [April], Boston Atlas, 13 April 1848.

¹⁰⁶ Charles Francis Adams, ed., Memoirs of John Quincy Adams, Comprising Portions of His Diary from 1795 to 1848 (12 vols.; Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1874-77) 8:480 (entry for 23 February 1832). Similar complaints continued throughout the antebellum years. Mark W. Summers, The Plundering Generation: Corruption and the Crisis of the Union, 1849-1861 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 161-62.

¹⁰⁷ Greeley complained that “Congress is a very bad tribunal for the settlement of such claims – that they cannot be properly considered here – that they interfere too much with the proper business of legislation – and that a Member with half a dozen claims from his constituents to look after cannot do his duty to the whole people so thoroughly as he otherwise might do.” Washington correspondence by Horace Greeley, 20 January, New York Tribune, 22 January 1849.

¹⁰⁸ A report accompanying a bill to establish a board to settle private claims maintained that the Committee on Claims had “been willing to expend so great an amount of labor in examining claims which never received the action of Congress.” Quoted in a speech delivered on 6 January 1849 by Andrew Johnson, LeRoy P. Graf et al., eds., The Papers of Andrew Johnson (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967-), 1:476.

embodiment of the contest”¹⁰⁹ – lacked oratorical skills and, like the conservative Vinton, was no match for Adams in his prime.¹¹⁰ Nor was Robert C. Winthrop, the mild-mannered, touchy, hyper-dignified Boston Brahmin who served as speaker of the House.¹¹¹ According to Amos Tuck, Winthrop was merely a time-server “so timid that when he had bid a friend good-night he would call him aside and ask him not to say anything about it.”¹¹²

Near the opening of the initial session of the Thirtieth Congress, one Representative predicted that it would “be long, and much of it uninteresting.”¹¹³ In August 1848, the New York Herald observed that throughout the early months of the session, “Washington was extremely dull. For a long time there was nothing to disturb the general ennui which prevailed.”¹¹⁴ The public was distracted by the revolutions then sweeping Europe.¹¹⁵ When the House considered those events, a Representative enlivened things by expressing sympathy for France’s plan to eliminate slavery in her colonies, occasioning a heated debate about the peculiar institution.¹¹⁶

¹⁰⁹ 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), 771; Thomas Dowling to Caleb B. Smith, Terre Haute, Indiana, 21 February 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress. Dowling added: “Like Napoleon’s gifted marshal, he was everywhere, and that ‘white plume’ of his, as it nodded on every battle-field, proved the cause and the signal of success.”

¹¹⁰ Washington correspondence, 10 January, New York Journal of Commerce, 12 January 1848; Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 236-37, 557.

¹¹¹ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 642.

¹¹² Tuck, Autobiographical Memoir, 83-84.

¹¹³ Andrew Johnson to Blackston McDannel, Washington, 24 March 1848, in Graf et al., eds., Papers of Johnson, 1:417.

¹¹⁴ New York Herald, 15 August 1848.

¹¹⁵ Baltimore American, 20 April 1848.

¹¹⁶ Joshua R. Giddings, History of the Rebellion: Its Authors and Causes (New York: Follet, Foster, 1864), 279-80. Lincoln voted with Giddings and other antislavery militants to suspend the rules to allow resolutions concerning France (with a distinct anti-slavery flavor) to be introduced. House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 648 (3 April 1848). The motion carried 120-51.

SPEECHES

Much as Lincoln enjoyed the popularity which his humor and personality won him, he aspired to do more than merely ingratiate himself with his colleagues, a slight majority of whom were Whigs.¹¹⁷ Lincoln was also in the occupational majority: three quarters of the representatives were lawyers.¹¹⁸

On December 13, 1847, Lincoln told his law partner: “As you are all so anxious for me to distinguish myself, I have concluded to do so, before long.”¹¹⁹ He hoped to accomplish this goal with a memorable speech, for speechmaking was vitally important for new members, and their maiden efforts were listened to attentively.¹²⁰ As one journalist noted, a “young Representative is anxious to show to the world in general, and to his constituents in particular, that he is somebody; but who will take note of his existence unless he make a speech? To make one set speech, at least, is therefore the great idea of his Congressional life.” He therefore “prepares himself in time – the preparation may even commence before he leaves the little village where he has so often

¹¹⁷ Whigs controlled the lower chamber by a margin of 117 to 108, though two antislavery Whigs, Joshua R. Giddings and John G. Palfrey of Massachusetts, and an antislavery Democrat, Amos Tuck of New Hampshire, acted independently. According to Illinois Congressman John Wentworth, the House contained 117 Whigs, including Lewis C. Levin of Philadelphia, a founder of the Native American Party, and John M. Holley of New York, whose poor health forced him to miss the opening of Congress. Washington correspondence, 13 December, Chicago Daily Democrat, 25 December 1847. The Washington correspondent of the New York Journal of Commerce declared that there were three Whig parties in the House: the trio of abolitionists (Giddings, Palfrey, and Tuck), the regular Whigs, and half a dozen Southern ultras. Chicago Daily Democrat, 4 January 1848.

¹¹⁸ Sixteen percent of the members were businessmen, seven percent farmers. Findley, Crucible of Congress, 111.

¹¹⁹ Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 13 December 1847, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:420.

¹²⁰ Horace Mann to his wife, [Washington, June 1848], Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

been looked up to as an oracle. The rhetoric is all provided – fragments of poetry stuck in here and there – quotations all marked.” He then yearns for an opportunity “to make a spectacle of himself for one brief hour,” preferably early in the session, to “show his constituents that he is ever on hand, prompt in attention to their great interests.”¹²¹

Lincoln decided to make his mark with a speech on the Mexican War, which many Whig members condemned.¹²²

(Lincoln’s brief, rather legalistic initial speech, given on January 5, dealt with a government mail contract.¹²³ It was not a conspicuous success. Congressman Joseph Root of Ohio said of it: “This whole matter was treated by the gentleman from Illinois precisely as if the House were sitting as a court of equity, having before them the railroad company, the Post Office Department, and such of the good people of the United State as were interested in the expedition of this mail; and he seemed to consider that the only question was, what is right between the parties?”¹²⁴ As a Democratic journalist put it, Lincoln “betrayed a feeling and an opinion which is but too prevalent among new members of Congress.” Such newcomers had, as private citizens, been baffled by the ways of Congress and had assumed “that if they were only in that body they would say

¹²¹ The National Era (Washington), 3 February 1848. House rules adopted in the early 1840s permitted speeches of no more than an hour’s length. Often members would write out their speeches, inserting into the Congressional Globe not only the words uttered on the floor but also the words they had intended to deliver but were unable to because of time constraints. Remarks of Congressman James Pollock of Pennsylvania, Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st session, 44 (18 December 1847).

¹²² See remarks by Alexander Stephens, Richard W. Thompson, John Minor Botts, Charles Hudson, Andrew Stewart, John W. Jones, Amos Tuck, and James Dixon. Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 61-62 (21 December 1847), 93-95 (3 January 1848), 141-42 (11 January 1848), 190-93 (18 January 1848), 197-200 (19 January 1848), 227-30 (24 January 1848), 258-60 (27 January 1848).

¹²³ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 107-9.

¹²⁴ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 109 (5 January 1848).

this, or do that, and then it would be settled.”¹²⁵ He was interrupted at the beginning of his remarks and admonished that he must not reveal in debate what had taken place in committee deliberations. Later, the committee chairman also alluded to his trespassing on the rules of the House.)¹²⁶

The Whig party, which had been critical of the Mexican War since it began in May 1846, intended to make President James K. Polk’s conduct of the hostilities a centerpiece of the presidential campaign. Those plans were scotched by the peace treaty which arrived in Washington in February 1848 and won senate ratification the following month.¹²⁷

On December 22, 1847, Lincoln introduced a series of resolutions asking Polk to supply information about the commencement of the war. In his annual message earlier that month, the president had insisted that the conflict began as a result of Mexican soldiers “invading the territory of the State of Texas, striking the first blow, and shedding the blood of our citizens on our own soil.”¹²⁸ In eight legalistic interrogatories, which became known as “spot resolutions,” Lincoln clearly intimated that the spot where blood was first spilled was not on American soil and that in the spring of 1846 Polk had dispatched troops to Mexico in order to provoke an attack. Lincoln was particularly graphic in inquiring if “the People of that settlement [where the blood was shed] did, or did not, flee from the approach of the United States Army, leaving unprotected their

¹²⁵ Washington correspondence by “Sigma,” 8 January, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 21 January 1848.

¹²⁶ Remarks of William L. Goggin of Virginia, Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 119 (6 January 1848).

¹²⁷ John H. Schroeder, Mr. Polk’s War: American Opposition and Dissent, 1846-1848 (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973).

¹²⁸ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st session, Appendix, 1 (7 December 1847).

homes and their growing crops, before the blood was shed.”¹²⁹ Polk ignored these interrogatories.¹³⁰

Lincoln ran a risk in taking this stance, for as his colleague James Dixon of Connecticut said in making a similar indictment of Polk: “I am fully aware that I am treading on dangerous ground. I know full well, that if a man says he does not believe the region on this side of the Rio Grande is American soil, he will instantly be denounced as a traitor.”¹³¹ This bold gesture by Illinois’s lone Whig Representative prompted a Baltimore journalist to remark that Lincoln’s questions “stick to the spot in Mexico, where the first blood of the war was shed, with all the tightness that characterized the fabled shirt of the fabled Nessus! Evidently there is music in that very tall Mr. Lincoln.”¹³² Back in Illinois, Whig journals also applauded Lincoln’s resolutions as “direct to the point” and “based on facts which cannot be successfully controverted.”¹³³

Democratic newspapers were less enthusiastic, sneering at Lincoln’s “pathetic lamentation over the fate of those Mexicans who had to ‘flee from the approach of the United States Army, leaving unprotected their homes and their growing crops,’” a statement which strongly contrasted with “his cold indifference in regard to our own slaughtered citizens.”¹³⁴ The Illinois Globe of Charleston claimed that Lincoln’s spot resolutions “show conclusively, that the littleness of the pettifoging lawyer has not been

¹²⁹ Resolutions, 22 December 1847, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:420-22.

¹³⁰ In his voluminous diaries, Polk never mentioned Lincoln.

¹³¹ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st session, 229 (24 January 1848).

¹³² Washington correspondence by “Potomac,” 22 December 1847, Baltimore Patriot, n.d., copied in the Chicago Journal, 6 January 1848.

¹³³ Rockford Forum, 19 January 1848; Quincy Whig, n.d, copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 14 January 1848.

¹³⁴ Belleville Times, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 14 January 1848.

merged into the greatness of the statesman.”¹³⁵ Lincoln’s indirect attack on Polk reminded the editor of the Ottawa Free Trader of the sneaking, cowardly tactics of a “hen-roost robbing coon.”¹³⁶ Charles Lanphier, editor of the Illinois State Register, told a Democratic congressman: “Our long legged friend from the 7th dist. has very properly damned himself ‘by resolution.’ . . . He may well exclaim ‘out damned spot,’ for Cain’s mark is on him. Give him hell.”¹³⁷ Lanphier’s newspaper declared that Lincoln’s resolutions encouraged “moral traitors” to hope that they could “make a respectable fight against the defenders of the country’s honor.”¹³⁸ The Chicago Times claimed that Lincoln “made himself ridiculous and odious . . . in giving aid and comfort to the Mexican enemy.”¹³⁹

On January 3, 1848, Lincoln provoked further Democratic criticism by voting for Representative George Ashmun’s amendment asserting that the Mexican War had been “unnecessarily and unconstitutionally begun by the President.”¹⁴⁰ Pointing out that 1000 young men from Illinois’ Seventh District were fighting in Mexico, the Springfield Register asked rhetorically: “What will these gallant heroes say when they learn that their representative has declared in the national councils that the cause in which they suffered

¹³⁵ Illinois Globe (Charleston), n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 14 January 1848.

¹³⁶ Free Trader (Ottawa), n.d., copied in the Belleville Advocate, 2 February 1848.

¹³⁷ C. H. Lanphier to John A. McClernand, Springfield, 16 January 1848, McClernand Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹³⁸ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 14 January 1848.

¹³⁹ Chicago Times, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 26 June 1858.

¹⁴⁰ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 95 (3 January 1848). The amendment carried by a vote of 85-81; the senate defeated the resolution thus amended.

and braved everything, was ‘unconstitutional,’ ‘unnecessary,’ and consequently infamous and wicked?’”¹⁴¹

In an address nine days later, Lincoln made explicit what had been implicit in his spot resolutions. He would have remained quiet, he said, if Polk had not stated in his self-righteous annual message that the Mexican government was solely responsible for provoking the war. Moreover, the president had asserted that Congress endorsed his interpretation of the war’s origin by voting to supply troops in the field. Lincoln, who always voted for such supplies, could not let these pronouncements go unchallenged. In addition, Lincoln said, he was moved to speak out because earlier in the session, Illinois Congressman William A. Richardson had introduced resolutions endorsing Polk’s distorted version of history.¹⁴²

Like some other Whigs, Lincoln challenged that version.¹⁴³ Maintaining that the president’s discussion of the issue in his recent message was “from beginning to end, the sheerest deception,” he denied Polk’s assumption that either the Nueces River or the Rio Grande formed the southern boundary of Texas; in the opinion of Lincoln, that boundary was located in the “stupendous deserts” between the two rivers.¹⁴⁴ After systematically reviewing Polk’s address, he declared that he found it “incomprehensible” that “any man, with an honest purpose only, of proving the truth, could ever have thought, of

¹⁴¹ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 21 January 1848.

¹⁴² Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 59 (20 December 1847).

¹⁴³ Among others, John Minor Botts of Virginia and John Van Dyke of New Jersey denounced the war and the way in which it was provoked. Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 61-62 (21 December 1847).

¹⁴⁴ Lincoln to Horace Greeley, Washington, 27 June 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:493-94. Congressman J. Dixon Roman of Maryland, and the Chairman of the House Committee on Foreign Relations, Charles J. Ingersoll of Pennsylvania, shared Lincoln’s opinion. Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 216-17 (25 January 1848).

introducing” such flimsy evidence to support his argument. Lincoln made a strong case, for the Rio Grande had not been widely regarded as the southern boundary of Texas, and therefore the territory between it and the Nueces, 150 miles to the north, was at best disputed land, if not actually Mexico’s. Before 1846, this basic fact had been acknowledged by such leaders as Andrew Jackson, John Quincy Adams, John C. Calhoun, and Thomas Hart Benton.¹⁴⁵

Lincoln urged Polk to respond to the interrogatories he had earlier propounded: “Let him answer with facts, and not with arguments. Let him remember he sits where Washington sat, and so remembering, let him answer, as Washington would answer.” If the president could “show that the soil was ours, where the first blood of the war was shed – that it was not within an inhabited country, or, if within such, that the inhabitants had submitted themselves to the civil authority of Texas, or of the United States, . . . then I am with him for his justification.” But if Polk could not prove his case, “then I shall be fully convinced, of what I more than suspect already, that he is deeply conscious of being in the wrong – that he feels the blood of this war, like the blood of Abel, is crying to Heaven against him.” Lincoln maintained that the chief executive had deliberately provoked a war while “trusting to escape scrutiny, by fixing the public gaze upon the exceeding brightness of military glory – that serpent’s eye, that charms to destroy.” Lincoln then shifted his focus from the origin of the war to the current situation, which saw American forces controlling much of Mexico. Should the U.S. seize all of that country’s territory? Any of it? Should the war be continued? Having “plunged into” war, Polk, according to Lincoln, “has swept on and on, still, disappointed in his calculation of

¹⁴⁵ Schroeder, Mr. Polk’s War, 11-12. See also Frederick Merk, The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1834-1849 (New York: Knopf, 1966), 133-50.

the ease with which Mexico might be subdued, he now finds himself, he knows not where.” The president’s discussion of the war in his annual message, Lincoln said, resembled “the half insane mumbling of a fever-dream.” In describing the various rationales for the war and the different peace terms that might be acceptable, Polk showed that his “mind, tasked beyond it’s power, is running hither and thither, like some tortured creature, on a burning surface, finding no position, on which it can settle down, and be at ease.” The president, in sum, “is a bewildered, confounded, and miserably perplexed man.”

In treating the history of Texas, Lincoln uttered words that would return to haunt him thirteen years later when Southern states left the Union: “Any people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the right to rise up, and shake off the existing government, and for a new one that suits them better. This is a most valuable, – a most sacred right – a right, which we hope and believe, is to liberate the world. Nor is this right confined to cases in which the whole people of an existing government, may choose to exercise it. Any portion of such people that can, may revolutionize, and make their own, of so much of the territory as they inhabit. More than this, a majority of any portion of such people may revolutionize, putting down a minority, intermingled with, or near about them, who may oppose their movement.”¹⁴⁶ In this rather gratuitous passage, Lincoln may have been trying to curry favor with Southern Whigs resentful of Northern congressmen, like John Quincy Adams, who had denied the legitimacy of the Texas revolution of 1835-36. Lincoln was cooperating with several Southern Whig

¹⁴⁶ Speech of 12 January 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:431-42. For a discussion of Lincoln’s views about revolution in general, see Thomas J. Pressly, “Bullets and Ballots: Lincoln and the ‘Right of Revolution,’” American Historical Review 67 (1962): 647-62. For an example of how the Democrats taunted Lincoln during the Civil War by quoting these remarks, see “President Lincoln in Favor of Secession,” New York Daily News, 21 May 1861.

congressmen in an attempt to help Zachary Taylor of Louisiana win their party's presidential nomination.¹⁴⁷

In describing this address, William Schouler, a Massachusetts Whig leader, reported that the “tall, raw-boned, thin and spare” Lincoln “speaks with rapidity and uses a good deal of gesture, some of which is quite new and original. He was listened to, however, with great attention, and made a sound, sensible and manly speech.”¹⁴⁸ A fellow member of the Illinois delegation, Democrat John A. McClernand, recalled that Lincoln “was earnest and spoke with greater rapidity than I ever had heard him speak before. I attributed it to the fact that he had only an hour allotted to him and wanted to say as much as possible in that time. His deficiency in gesticulation was fully made up by the deep earnestness of his manner.”¹⁴⁹ Just before delivering his remarks, Lincoln confided to Whig Congressman Richard W. Thompson of Indiana that he was nervous. “It was not surprising that he felt this way,” Thompson explained, “considering the forum upon which he was for the first time appearing, where those who have gained reputation are few, compared with the multitude who have lost it. The occasion was an embarrassing one to him, and was made more so by the fact that he was gazed at by so many eyes, and watched by adversaries who would have rejoiced at his failure. He was not even

¹⁴⁷ I am indebted to Michael Holt for suggesting this interpretation to me.

¹⁴⁸ Washington correspondence by W. S., 12 January, Boston Atlas, 15 January 1848.

¹⁴⁹ Chicago Tribune, 12 February 1900. Congressman James Thompson of Pennsylvania noted that the one-hour rule put each member “in an unpleasant dilemma. He meditates what he intends saying; to accomplish it he urges [rushes?] with all speed and under steam pressure so as to be heard; the iron hand of the clock moves steadily on, and its iron heart beats regardless of many an imploring look to delay but for a moment. But it heeds him not; and when about to utter something that would convince the judgment and astonish the world, down comes the Speaker's hammer in its midst, and the contemplated light is forever extinguished – lost to the world.” Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 47 (18 December 1847). The one-hour rule had been adopted a few years earlier because House members grew impatient with long speeches. South Carolina Congressman Isaac Edward Holmes proposed the limitation, based on the Athenian rule regarding a one-hour Klypsdyra. Holmes to Francis Lieber, Charleston, 17 June 1853, Lieber Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California; Wheeler, History of Congress, 1:173-83.

personally known to all the members. His appearance was not attractive.”¹⁵⁰ Describing some brief remarks “of no general interest” that he had delivered a week before his address on the Mexican War, Lincoln told Herndon: “I find speaking here and elsewhere about the same thing. I was about as badly scared, and no worse, as I am when I speak in court.”¹⁵¹ (In 1856, Lincoln told Henry C. Whitney: “When I have to speak, I always feel nervous till I get well into it. . . . I hide it as well as I can.”)¹⁵² While reminiscing about this speech, Lincoln said that “he felt like the boy whose teacher asked him why he didn’t spell better. The boy replied: ‘Cause I hain’t just got the hang of the school house. But I’ll get on better later.’”¹⁵³

According to Congressman Thompson, Lincoln scored a success: “There were probably some who anticipated that he would not rise above the common Congressional level, if, indeed he would accomplish so much. But if there were any who indulged in this illusion, it did not take him long to dispel it. . . . I heard no other criticism of his speech than what came from himself – for, unlike many I have known, he placed a modest estimate upon his own abilities. His friends were satisfied – more than that, they were delighted.”¹⁵⁴ The Baltimore American deemed it “a very able speech.”¹⁵⁵ An Illinois

¹⁵⁰ R. W. Thompson, “Abraham Lincoln,” undated manuscript, 15, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁵¹ Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 8 January 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:430.

¹⁵² Henry Clay Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (1892; Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1940), 60.

¹⁵³ Reminiscences of Samuel Lowry, in Horace Lowry to Ida Tarbell, n.d., Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. Lowry was a farmer in Frederick, Illinois, who supported Lincoln politically.

¹⁵⁴ Thompson, “Abraham Lincoln,” undated manuscript, 16-17, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁵⁵ Washington correspondence, 12 January, Baltimore American, 13 January 1848.

Whig newspaper reported that the address “is spoken of as an able effort, and at once places him in the front rank of the best speakers in the House.”¹⁵⁶

Lincoln’s opponents were less pleased. As he had doubtless anticipated, Democrats – including colleagues in the House – took exception to his arguments.¹⁵⁷ Representative John Jameson of Missouri expressed astonishment that the congressman from a district that had sent into battle such heroes as John J. Hardin, Edward D. Baker, and James Shields could “get up here and declare that this war is unconstitutional and unjust, and thereby put so many of his brave constituents in the wrong, having them fighting in such a war as he has described, killing innocent Mexicans, and thus committing moral if not legal murder.” Lincoln, Jameson speculated, must be responding to pressure from “the party screw.”¹⁵⁸ John L. Robinson of Indiana called Lincoln a hypocrite for supporting the presidential candidacy of General Zachary Taylor while denouncing Polk for starting the war (even though, according to Robinson, Taylor was more responsible for the outbreak of hostilities than was the president). The Hoosier congressman also scolded Lincoln for not informing his constituents during the 1846 election campaign that he regarded the war as “unnecessary and unconstitutional.”¹⁵⁹ Willard P. Hall of Missouri denounced congressional war critics (not mentioning Lincoln specifically): “Who does not know that the speeches of honorable members of Congress have been published in Mexican newspapers, and read at the head of Mexican armies, to incite them to attack our troops? Who does not know that the people of Mexico have read

¹⁵⁶ Quincy Whig, 2 February 1848.

¹⁵⁷ Because Lincoln had attacked Van Buren in 1840 for his apparent opposition to the war of 1812, he may well have anticipated that he too would be attacked on similar grounds in 1848. Lincoln Lore, no. 1668 (February 1977), 1-2.

¹⁵⁸ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 246 (18 January 1848).

¹⁵⁹ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 192-96 (18 January 1848).

and thought over these productions until they believe there is a Mexican party in this country, and Mexican Representatives on this floor?”¹⁶⁰ Howell Cobb of Georgia, who maintained that Corpus Christie was the spot where the war began, taunted Lincoln and other Whigs: “You are stickling about the commencement of this war; tell me how it was that you sat quietly, without opening your mouths in complaint, and allowed the army of the United States to plant themselves on the western border of the Nueces, thus commencing the war, as you now claim?”¹⁶¹ A New York Evening Post correspondent dismissively remarked that Lincoln sang the “usual burden of whig songs” in “various keys.”¹⁶²

More heated criticism came from Illinois Democrats. In Sangamon County they condemned Lincoln as one who “has lent himself to the schemes of . . . apologists and defenders of Mexico, and revilers of their own country.”¹⁶³ A mass meeting in Clark County denounced Lincoln for his resolutions “against his own country” and urged that they “be long remembered by his constituents.”¹⁶⁴ In Morgan County, a similar gathering condemned Lincoln as the “Benedict Arnold of our district” who would “be known here only as the Rancharo Spotty of one term.”¹⁶⁵

Democratic newspapers echoed these charges. Of the Whig war critics, the New Orleans Delta said: “If they had Mexican muskets on their shoulders, they could not

¹⁶⁰ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 108 (19 January 1848).

¹⁶¹ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 289 (2 February 1848).

¹⁶² Washington correspondence by Oliver, 12 January, New York Evening Post (weekly ed.), 20 January 1848.

¹⁶³ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 14 April 1848.

¹⁶⁴ Marshall Illinoisian, n.d., reporting a meeting held on 29 January 1848, copied in the Ottawa Free Trader, 23 July 1858; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 18 February 1848, 14 July 1858, 3 October 1860.

¹⁶⁵ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 10 March 1848.

assist the Mexicans as much, or do us as much harm, as they have done by their speeches.”¹⁶⁶ The Springfield Register called those Whigs “craven-hearted traitors” who put the interests of their party above those of the country.¹⁶⁷ The Register also sneered that Lincoln, who “at every turn, contributed his mite to embarrass the action of the government in the conduct of the war,” never missed “an opportunity to tarnish our national flag.”¹⁶⁸ The Peoria Democratic Press asserted that Lincoln’s “traitorous course in Congress has brought down upon him the merited curses of his constituents.”¹⁶⁹ The Belleville Advocate declared that Lincoln, a “zealous partisan” and “base reviler” of the U.S. and its troops, had “arrayed himself on the side of Mexico. He is against his country in her struggle with a foreign and unprincipled government.”¹⁷⁰ “Spotty” Lincoln, who “displayed the treason of an Arnold,” would “pass unnoticed save in the execration that his treason will bring upon his name,” claimed the Peoria Free Press.¹⁷¹

Lincoln was doubtless unsurprised by Democratic criticism; he may have been nonplussed, however, when William Herndon, a strong Whig, challenged his partner’s support of the Ashmun amendment and his denunciation of Polk.¹⁷² In response, Lincoln emphatically declared: “I will stake my life, that if you had been in my place, you would have voted just as I did [on the Ashmun amendment].” Rhetorically he asked: “Would you have voted what you felt you knew to be a lie? I know you would not. Would you

¹⁶⁶ New Orleans Delta, n.d., quoted in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 16 July 1858.

¹⁶⁷ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 14 January 1848.

¹⁶⁸ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 14 August 1850, 21 July 1848.

¹⁶⁹ Peoria Democratic Press, 28 June 1848.

¹⁷⁰ Belleville Advocate, 6 January 1848, 14 June 1849.

¹⁷¹ Peoria Free Press, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 26 May 1848.

¹⁷² William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik, Herndon’s Lincoln, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (1889; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 175-77.

have gone out of the House – skulked the vote? I expect not.” William A. Richardson’s resolutions made “the direct question of the justice of the war; so that no man can be silent if he would. You are compelled to speak; and your only alternative is to tell the truth or tell a lie. I can not doubt which you would do.”¹⁷³ To Usher F. Linder, Lincoln stressed the point even more forcefully, arguing that congressional Whigs “are compelled to speak and their only option is whether they will, when they do speak, tell the truth, or tell a foul, villainous, and bloody falsehood.”¹⁷⁴

Herndon’s contention, as Lincoln paraphrased it, was “that if it shall become necessary, to repel invasion, the President may, without violation of the Constitution, cross the line, and invade the territory of another country; and that whether such necessity exists in any given case, the President is to be the sole judge.” After denying the relevance of such an argument to the case against Polk, Lincoln declared: “Allow the President to invade a neighboring nation, whenever he shall deem it necessary to repel an invasion, and you allow him to do so, whenever he may choose to say he deems it necessary for such purpose – and you allow him to make war at pleasure. Study to see if you can fix any limit to his power in this respect, after you have given him so much as you propose.” Lincoln cited a hypothetical case: “If, to-day, he should choose to say he thinks it necessary to invade Canada, to prevent the British from invading us, how could you stop him? You may say to him, ‘I see no probability of the British invading us’ but he will say to you ‘be silent; I see it, if you don’t.’” Lincoln contended that Herndon’s interpretation differed from that of the Founding Fathers: “The provision of the Constitution giving the war-making power to Congress, was dictated, as I understand it,

¹⁷³ Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 1 February 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:448.

¹⁷⁴ Lincoln to Linder, Washington, 22 March 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:457.

by the following reasons. Kings had always been involving and impoverishing their people in wars, pretending generally, if not always, that the good of the people was the object.” But the framers of the Constitution believed that such an abuse of power was “the most oppressive of all Kingly oppressions” and they therefore made sure that “no one man should hold the power of bringing this oppression upon us.” But Herndon’s “view destroyed the whole matter, and places our President where kings have always stood.”¹⁷⁵

To an Illinois Baptist minister who defended Polk’s conduct in bringing on the war, Lincoln stressed that the U.S. army, by proceeding to the Rio Grande at the president’s order before the outbreak of hostilities, had “marched into a peaceful Mexican settlement, and frightened its inhabitants away from their homes and their growing crops.” If those actions seemed inconsequential to the clergyman, Lincoln asked, “Would you venture to so consider them, had they been committed by any nation on earth, against the humblest of our people? I know you would not. Then I ask, is the precept ‘Whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them’ obsolete? – of no force? – of no application?”¹⁷⁶

As these letters suggest, Lincoln was truly outraged by Polk’s conduct. The main arguments of his speech echoed those he had heard Clay espouse in November 1847, arguments made by many other Whigs.¹⁷⁷ The Chicago Journal sarcastically exclaimed:

¹⁷⁵ Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 15 February 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:451-52. Lincoln may well have heard a similar analogy on January 13, when Jacob Collamer of Vermont asked: “Suppose that the President should now say that, in his discretion, the war should be carried into Great Britain, was it possible that Congress had no voice or control in the matter, but must vote him the men and money to do so?” Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 170.

¹⁷⁶ Lincoln to John M. Peck, Washington, 21 May 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:473.

¹⁷⁷ Charles Roll, Colonel Dick Thompson: The Persistent Whig (Indianapolis: Indiana Historical Bureau, 1948), 94-95; Frederick Merk, “Dissent in the Mexican War,” in Samuel Eliot Morrison, Frederick Merk,

“Oh! Most righteous war! An American army in the midst of the 19th century, robbing a weak and defenceless nation of her territory to subsist upon.”¹⁷⁸ Lincoln shared the Journal’s indignation and excoriated Polk not only for partisan reasons (though the speech was to some extent a characteristically Lincolnian attack on Democrats, replete with personal ridicule) but also to express his anger at what he perceived to be gross unfairness.¹⁷⁹ Herndon, who warned Lincoln that he was committing political suicide by criticizing the way in which the war was provoked, later said that “his sense of justice and his courage made him speak . . . as to the War with Mexico.”¹⁸⁰ The Polk administration had, in Lincoln’s view, played the bully, and, like many Northerners, he hated bullies.¹⁸¹ (John Hay noted that Lincoln as president would “not be bullied -- even by his friends.” During the Civil War, when told that a delegation would not be seated by the House and senate, Lincoln exclaimed: “Then I am to be bullied by Congress am I? I’ll

and Frank Friedel, Dissent in Three American Wars (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1970), 35-63; Hal W. Bochin, “Caleb B. Smith’s Opposition to the Mexican War,” Indiana Magazine of History 69 (1973): 95-111; B. H. Gilley, “Tennessee Whigs and the Mexican War,” Tennessee Historical Quarterly 40 (1981): 46-67; Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 310-11.

¹⁷⁸ Chicago Journal, n.d., quoted in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 6 November 1846.

¹⁷⁹ William Lee Miller, while acknowledging that Lincoln’s speech had “an extravagant personal tone and insistent narrowness” and represented “too speculative and too personal an attack,” rightly concludes that it was an amalgam of partisanship and moral principle. William Lee Miller, Lincoln’s Virtues: An Ethical Biography (New York: Knopf, 2002), 169, 170, 179-83.

¹⁸⁰ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 11 February 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. See also Miller, Lincoln’s Virtues, 177-79; Ramon Eduardo Ruiz, “A Commentary on Morality: Lincoln, Justin H. Smith, and the Mexican War,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 69 (1976): 26-34. Mark E. Neely, Jr., emphasized more heavily Lincoln’s political motives. Neely, “Lincoln and the Mexican War: An Argument by Analogy,” Civil War History 24 (1978): 5-24, and “Lincoln and Partisanship: What Lincoln Learned from James K. Polk,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 74 (1981): 199-216. Donald Riddle asserted that Lincoln was “actuated only by political motives.” Riddle, Congressman Abraham Lincoln (Urbana, University of Illinois Press, 1957), 69.

¹⁸¹ On the North’s attitude toward bullying Southerners, see William E. Gienapp, “The Caning of Charles Sumner and the Rise of the Republican Party,” Civil War History 25 (1979): 218-45.

be d——d if I will.”)¹⁸² The passion behind Lincoln’s invective was striking, for it was among the bitterest anti-war speeches delivered in the House up to that time.¹⁸³

Six months after denouncing Polk, Lincoln again turned his attention to the origins of the Mexican War. In the midst of a humorous speech ridiculing the Democratic presidential nominee, he suddenly abandoned his satirical tone and indignantly rebuked House Democrats: “The marching an army into the midst of a peaceful Mexican settlement, frightening the inhabitants away, leaving their growing crops, and other property to destruction, to you may appear a perfectly amiable, peaceful, unprovoking procedure; but it does not appear so to us. So to call such an act, to us appears no other than a naked, impudent absurdity.”¹⁸⁴ The passion in these sentences, so different from the rest of the speech, illustrates the depth of Lincoln’s anger.

In addition, Lincoln may have denounced Polk because he came to realize that the war might expand the realm of slavery. Most Northwesterners who opposed the war did so because of their antislavery convictions.¹⁸⁵ One historian speculated that “underneath the whole pile of political froth, Lincoln had a deep, underlying motive in displaying hostility to the Mexican war and that motive was his desire to thwart the expansion of slavery. He had not felt the bearing the war had upon slavery when he was back in

¹⁸² Helen Nicolay, Lincoln’s Secretary: A Biography of John G. Nicolay (New York: Longmans, Green, 1949), 83; John P. Usher, interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Washington, 8 October 1878, Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John G. Nicolay’s Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 67; Usher, in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 93.

¹⁸³ Norman E. Tutorow, Texas Annexation and the Mexican War: A Political Study of the Old Northwest (Palo Alto, California: Chadwick House, 1978), 196.

¹⁸⁴ Speech of 27 July 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:514.

¹⁸⁵ Tutorow, Texas Annexation and the Mexican War, 208-9.

Springfield; but in Washington it loomed large to him and gave him quite a different perspective.”¹⁸⁶

Herndon erroneously alleged that misgivings about Lincoln’s antiwar stand were widespread among Illinois Whigs.¹⁸⁷ It is true that Caleb Birchall, a Springfield bookseller who in 1842 had been a member of the executive committee of the Henry Clay Club, asserted that Lincoln, by giving an anti-war speech, “rendered himself very unpopular.”¹⁸⁸ But virtually all criticism of Lincoln’s “spot resolutions” and his subsequent speech came from Democrats, not Whigs.¹⁸⁹ No Whig journal criticized his stand on the war, and the party named him to serve as an assistant presidential elector in 1848. Despite his pledge to step down after one term, some Whigs favored his renomination. In April 1848, Allen Ford of the Lacon Illinois Gazette editorialized that Lincoln “has ably and faithfully discharged his duties; and if he has at no time intimated a willingness or desire to retire at the expiration of the term for which he was elected, we are not sure but that the interests of the district would be quite as well promoted by his re-nomination and reelection for another term.”¹⁹⁰ Lincoln was not averse, as he told Herndon: “It is very pleasant to learn from you that there are some who desire that I should be reelected. I most heartily thank them for their kind partiality; and I can say . . . that personally I would not object to a reelection. . . . I made the declaration that I would

¹⁸⁶ Frank L. Owsley to Albert J. Beveridge, Nashville, Tennessee, 14 April 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

¹⁸⁷ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 176.

¹⁸⁸ Birchall to Thomas Ewing, Springfield, 6 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

¹⁸⁹ See Gabor S. Boritt, “A Question of Political Suicide? Lincoln’s Opposition to the Mexican War,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 67 (1974): 79-100.

¹⁹⁰ Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 15 April 1848.

not be a candidate again, more from a wish . . . to keep peace among our friends, and to keep the district from going to the enemy, than for any cause personal to myself. . . . If it should so happen that nobody else wishes to be elected I could not refuse the people the right of sending me again.”¹⁹¹ (There was no disgrace in serving only one term. In the 1840s and 1850s, the average length of service for a U.S. Representative was three years.)¹⁹²

But Stephen T. Logan did want to run, and the Whig nominating convention chose him. Some delegates faulted Lincoln’s efforts to secure them patronage. The distribution of offices played a vitally important role for political parties throughout the nation.¹⁹³ Samuel C. Parks said that just before the Whig convention met, he – with Lincoln’s full knowledge – “canvassed the members of the convention and was compelled to report that, with the exception of himself and a certain other delegate from Christian county, he found no one who was favorable to Lincoln’s re-nomination.” Parks added “that the reason given him by the delegates why they did not favor the re-nomination of Lincoln was not so much Lincoln’s attitude on the Mexican War question nor his prior promise not to seek re-election but rather to his failure to secure any substantial political patronage for the ‘faithful’ of his party in the district. The convention was very largely composed of politicians, who had hungered for ‘the loaves and fishes’ but had not received them. And this was the basis of the charge that Lincoln was ‘deficient in good management.’”¹⁹⁴ This objection was not entirely reasonable, for the

¹⁹¹ Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 8 January 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:430-31.

¹⁹² Allan G. Bogue, The Congressman’s Civil War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 27.

¹⁹³ On the importance of patronage for Whigs, see Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, passim.

¹⁹⁴ Lawrence B. Stringer, unpublished biography of Lincoln, written ca. 1927, 157, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

Democrats controlled the White House, and Lincoln therefore could exercise little influence in patronage decisions. Years later, as president, Lincoln remarked to an importunate Democratic Representative: “That reminds me of my own experience as an old Whig member of Congress. I was always in the opposition, and I had no troubles of this kind at all. It was the easiest thing imaginable to be an opposition member – no running to the Departments and the White House.”¹⁹⁵

####

In August 1848, Stephen T. Logan lost to his Democratic opponent, Major Thomas L. Harris, a hero of the Mexican War, by less than one percentage point (49.8% to 49.1% -- 7,201 votes to 7,095). It was, as David Davis lamented, “a terrible blow to the Whigs everywhere in the State.”¹⁹⁶ Some Democratic observers, along with Herndon, saw in Logan’s defeat a repudiation of Lincoln’s anti-war stance.¹⁹⁷ Logan himself attributed it in part to “Lincoln’s unpopularity.”¹⁹⁸

Lincoln did not concur in that judgment. He told William Schouler that “a good many Whigs, without good cause, as I think, were unwilling to go for Logan, and some of them so wrote me before the election. On the other hand Harris was a Major of the war,

¹⁹⁵ “A Day at the White House,” Baltimore American and Commercial Advertiser, 23 March 1865.

¹⁹⁶ David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Bloomington, 7 December 1848, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁹⁷ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 11 August 1848; Riddle, Congressman Lincoln, 122-27; Findley, Crucible of Congress, 214-19; Boritt, “A Question of Political Suicide?” 79-100; Mark E. Neely, Jr., “Did Lincoln Cause Logan’s Defeat?” Lincoln Lore no. 1660 (June 1976), 1-4. Albert J. Beveridge said flatly, “Logan was beaten because and sol[el]y because of Lincoln’s war record in Congress.” Beveridge to Nathaniel Wright Stephenson, n.p., 30 May 1925, copy, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. In planning his campaign, Thomas L. Harris said: “Logan ought to be attacked in every vulnerable point – His whole career criticized severely. His identity with the Mexican party shown and let a tempest of fury for political sins ‘Beat upon his naked soul/ in one eternal storm.’” Harris to Charles Lanphier, Petersburg, 5 April 1848, Lanphier Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

¹⁹⁸ Logan, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 468.

and fought at Cerro Gordo, where several Whigs of the district fought with him.”¹⁹⁹

Complicating matters was the Liberty party candidate, who won 166 votes (1% of the total), most of which would probably have gone to Logan if there had been a two-man race.²⁰⁰ Moreover, Logan and other Whigs were guilty of complacency. Logan “told his friends at and around Delevan that his Election was sure – That they need not go to the polls.”²⁰¹ The Illinois State Journal blamed Logan’s defeat in part on “the inactivity of the whigs” and also on “deceptions practiced upon the Germans.”²⁰² (The latter charge referred to a German-language handbill circulated by the Democrats alleging that Logan was a nativist bigot.)

The greatest problem the Whigs faced was Logan’s personality, for (as Herndon put it) he “lacked the elements of a successful politician.”²⁰³ The “suavity and affability so needful in winning popularity with the masses were wanting in his character, and he was too frank and unbending to be always popular with either the people or the politicians.”²⁰⁴ In fact, the electorate regarded the Whig candidate as “a cold – avaricious and little mean man.”²⁰⁵ This unfortunate reputation was enhanced by Logan’s response

¹⁹⁹ Lincoln to Schouler, Washington, 28 August 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:518-19. Harris counted on the votes of Mexican War veterans. In April 1848, he told a Springfield editor: “I want to go over your county – particularly lick creek – Company D. was a favorite of mine and I believe I will not lose (against Logan) three men in the Company – and I want to set them all at work too.” Harris to Charles Lanphier, Petersburg, 5 April 1848, Lanphier Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²⁰⁰ Erastus Wright was the Free Soil candidate whose supporters denied the winner, Harris, a majority. In November, 80% of the Free Soil vote in Springfield came from the Whig ranks. Kenneth J. Winkle, “The Second Party System in Lincoln’s Springfield,” Civil War History 44 (1998): 267-84.

²⁰¹ David Davis, interview with Herndon, 20 September 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 348.

²⁰² Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 24 September 1850.

²⁰³ Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Lincoln, 167.

²⁰⁴ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 19 July 1880.

²⁰⁵ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 11 February 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Herndon called Logan “little and unpopular.” Herndon to Weik, Springfield, 15 January 1886, ibid.

to a Democratic charge that he had paid only 50¢ to help finance the return of a soldier's body from Mexico; indignantly the wealthy Logan protested that he had contributed \$3.²⁰⁶ Such tightfistedness made some Whigs consider Logan "too selfish" and "cold & parsimonious."²⁰⁷ In addition, Logan was intellectually arrogant and domineering. Hezekiah Morse Wead, a fellow delegate to the 1847 Illinois constitutional convention, noted that Logan "is above all other men proud of his abilities & he gratifies that pride by the constant exercise of his powers. . . . Submission to his opinions is in his opinion, a duty due from other men, and that submission he intends to exact." Logan "is what might safely be called a 'smart' man, but he is very far from being a great one," Wead concluded.²⁰⁸

Major Harris believed that in 1848 there had been a strong Whig sentiment in the district, but that Logan, who "raised no enthusiasm and no sympathy," failed to capitalize on it.²⁰⁹ Harris's victory, James Shields exulted, was all the sweeter because it was "so unexpected and so extraordinary."²¹⁰ A Whig candidate more politically astute and personally appealing than Logan probably would have won. In November, the Whig presidential nominee, Zachary Taylor, outpolled his Democratic opponent by 1481 votes in the seventh district.

²⁰⁶ Riddle, Congressman Lincoln, 119.

²⁰⁷ P. Menard to Lincoln, Tremont, 4 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Herndon to Weik, Springfield, 15 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

²⁰⁸ Hezekiah Morse Wead diary, 15 July 1847, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²⁰⁹ Thomas Harris to Charles Lanphier, Washington, 12 August 1850, Lanphier Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²¹⁰ James Shields to Augustus C. French, Quincy, 13 August 1848, French Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

Two years later, when his party suffered a setback nationally, the handsome, energetic, likable, hard-working Whig Congressional candidate, Richard Yates, successfully challenged Harris, winning by a margin of 754 ballots, capturing 53% of the vote.²¹¹ The charming, impulsive Yates was far more prepossessing than Logan.²¹² A fellow Representative called Yates “the best-looking” member of the 1842 General Assembly, distinguished by “a tall graceful figure, a very full round face, ruddy complexion, a fine mouth and well-rounded chin.” He had “a sincerity about him and an enthusiasm which was very attractive.”²¹³ Others portrayed him as an “Apollo in form and figure,” “splendid looking,” “erect, easy and graceful in form with mild brown eyes, long wavy brown hair and always dressed in the height of fashion,” a man “eminently social and a little too convivial,” with a voice “that rang like a bugle call” and manners “as attractive as those of a woman bent on conquest.”²¹⁴ John Hay reported that “Yates is the people’s darling. They like his pleasant voice and his genial eyes as much as they do

²¹¹ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 556-97. The total vote was 7,008 for Yates and 6,254 for Harris. 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), 128. In the Seventh Congressional District in 1848, Taylor received 8168 votes, Cass 6687, and Van Buren 712. Yates condemned Harris’s support of the Compromise of 1850 while calling for the repeal of the Fugitive Slave Act and the abolition of slavery in Washington. Harris complained that his defeat in 1850 “is virtually a condemnation of the compromise [of 1850] by the people of this district – Abolitionism in henceforth to reign.” Thomas Harris to Charles Lanphier, Petersburg, 6 November 1850, Lanphier Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. The Illinois State Register attributed Yates’s victory to a successful effort on the part of the Whigs to fuse with the abolitionists. Register, 12 November 1850.

²¹² Clark E. Carr, The Illini: A Story of the Prairies (8th ed.; Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1912), 175.

²¹³ Thomas J. McCormick, ed., Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1896 (2 vols.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1909), 1:480.

²¹⁴ Clark E. Carr, Thomas S. Ridgway, and John Moses, quoted in Yates and Pickering, Richard Yates, ed. Krenkel, 50, 51; Usher F. Linder, Reminiscences of the Early Bench and Bar of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Legal News, 1879), 228; Dr. James Miner, “Abraham Lincoln: Personal Reminiscences of the Martyr-Emancipator as He Appeared in the Memorable Campaign of 1854 and in His Subsequent Career,” undated typescript, reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

his honor and his eloquence.”²¹⁵ Yates’s effective campaign style was described vividly by a fellow Whig leader, Nathan Morse Knapp: “Yates would tie the star-spangled banner over his opponent’s head, cork up his a[sshole] with a newspaper copy of the Declaration of Independence, make a fourth of July speech in his ears, and leave before he could get discombobulated enough to see the track upon which the gallant Dick had departed!”²¹⁶ Democrats complained that his addresses were “of the Fourth of July order, appealing to the friends, ‘the noble friends’ of his boyhood – pointing to the imaginary stars and stripes of his visions, reminding us of Bunker Hill, Concord and Lexington . . . and generally letting off at the crowd a series of sentimental fire works.”²¹⁷

In 1855, when Logan ran for a seat on the Illinois State Supreme Court, he was “worse beaten than any other man ever was since elections were invented,” Lincoln

²¹⁵ Springfield correspondence by Ecarte (John Hay), 20 November, Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 22 November 1860.

²¹⁶ Nathan M. Knapp to Ozias M. Hatch, Winchester, Illinois, 3 September [1859], Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Yates was an assiduous campaigner who systematically enlisted the aid of friends. In 1852, after he had won reelection, he told Jesse W. Fell that “there are in my estimation from 500 to 1000 votes to be materially effected in every District by the personal efforts of the Candidate. His friends can do much. They can do every thing but their action will always be affected by the efforts of the candidate. When I came home no well informed friend hoped for my success, but I knew I could be elected, if I could make them believe it. I wrote a letter & had 150 copies of it drawn off which I sent to as many whigs known & unknown to me – in ten days I went through each County in the District, had a little night meeting in each . . . and at the end of that time I commenced speaking at the various county seats on a run, and in twenty days the whole whig columns from center to circumference were moving in solid phalanx and shouting victory all along the line. Calhoun was cowed – his friends alarmed – Judge Douglas & Shields & Gregg & Harris &c. were brought to the rescue – lying handbills and malignant falsehoods were brought in requisition, but in vain.” Yates to Fell, Jacksonville, 17 November 1852, Fell Papers, Library of Congress. In 1852, Yates beat John Calhoun, 10,105 (51%) to 9,675 (49%). His winning margin was reduced (from 53% in 1850) in part because the state legislature had redrawn the boundaries of the district, replacing six northern counties which tended to vote Whig (Logan, Marshall, Mason, Putnam, Tazewell, Woodford) with six southern counties that tended to vote Democratic (Christian, Greene, Jersey, Macoupin, Montgomery, Shelby). In 1850, Yates carried the six counties that were later removed from the district by 112 votes. In that same year, the six added counties went for Harris by a margin of 1898 votes. In 1854, when Yates lost to Harris by 200 votes, the Democrat’s margin of victory in the six counties that had been added was 1,026. N. M. Knapp said those counties “were settled by the illiterate poor from the slave states who have no other idea of the dignity of human nature than to be able to own niggers, and no sterner orthodoxy than to distrust & hate an ‘abolitionist.’” Knapp to Lyman Trumbull, Winchester, Illinois, 22 January 1861, Trumbull Papers, Library of Congress.

²¹⁷ Illinois State Register (Springfield), n.d., quoted in Jack Nortrup, “Richard Yates: Civil War Governor of Illinois” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1960), 126.

remarked.²¹⁸ (Logan lost 31,535 to 21,932 – 59% to 41% – to the little-known Onias C. Skinner of Quincy. The following year, when asked if he had run for that post, he ruefully replied: “No; I hardly walked.”)²¹⁹ The previous year, Lincoln had run for the General Assembly and won the largest number of votes cast for any legislative candidate in Sangamon County. If he had truly lost popularity because of his Mexican War stand, he doubtless would not have been so popular in 1854.²²⁰

Other Whigs in Illinois fared badly in the August 1848 elections. The party saw its share of the state House of Representatives decline from 33% to 31%, and Whig congressional nominees received 30,000 fewer votes than their Democratic opponents. In neighboring Missouri and Indiana, Whig candidates met with similarly discouraging results.²²¹

####

Joshua Giddings called the first session of the Thirtieth Congress “the President-making session,” and so it was.²²² Both houses devoted so much attention to the subject that one journalist sniffed: “The time will come when the people will send men to Congress to do the business of the people – leaving to the people the liberty of making their Presidents.”²²³ As soon as Lincoln arrived in Washington in December 1847, he was accosted by “the great Kentucky Kingmaker,” Senator John J. Crittenden, champion of

²¹⁸ Lincoln to Henry C. Whitney, Springfield, 7 June 1855, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:313.

²¹⁹ Shelby M. Cullom, Fifty Years of Public Service: Personal Recollections of Shelby M. Cullom, Senior United States Senator from Illinois (Chicago: McClurg, 1911), 39; “Election Returns, 1850-1862,” p. 130, manuscript, Illinois State Archives, Springfield. I am grateful to Wayne C. Temple for this information.

²²⁰ [Mark Neely, Jr.], “Lincoln and the Vice-Presidency,” Lincoln Lore, no. 1567 (September 1968), 2.

²²¹ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 354-55.

²²² Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, appendix, 382 (28 February 1848). In 1844, the first session of the 28th Congress was similarly described. Johannsen, Douglas, 127.

²²³ Washington correspondence, 22 June, New York Journal of Commerce, 24 June 1848.

Zachary Taylor's candidacy. The influential Democratic leader Duff Green, a boarder at Mrs. Sprigg's, told Lincoln that Taylor would have the support not only of Whigs but also of Calhounites like himself.²²⁴ (Green's nephew was Ninian W. Edwards, husband of Mary Lincoln's sister Elizabeth.)²²⁵ Lincoln was in accord with these veteran politicians. Fearing realistically that his "beau ideal of a statesman" – the septuagenarian Henry Clay, a three-time loser in presidential contests – was unelectable, Lincoln had already decided to support Taylor, a hero of the Mexican War. The traditional Whig issues – banks, tariffs, and internal improvements – had lost their popular appeal, as had Clay, who after his defeat in 1844 forswore another presidential race.²²⁶ But he changed his mind and came to Washington in January 1848 to enlist support for yet another White House bid. A speech he gave in January impressed many, including a congressman who said: "Mr. Clay speaks more charmingly than any other man – his voice is like the breaking of eggs into good wine – his power over a great audience is unequalled, and the enthusiasm of the people at the sound of his voice is like the shout of the morning stars."²²⁷

But the Sage of Ashland's eloquence proved futile. As early as the spring of 1847, after Taylor's electrifying victory at Buena Vista over Santa Anna's much larger army – following on the heels of Old Rough and Ready's earlier triumphs at Palo Alto, Resaca

²²⁴ [Lincoln to Simeon Francis], Washington, n.d., Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 6 January 1848; Lincoln to Richard Yates, Washington, 10 December 1847, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:419; Albert D. Kirwan, John J. Crittenden: The Struggle for the Union (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1962), 253. Crittenden was one of Taylor's most influential and ardent backers. Joseph G. Rayback, Free Soil: The Election of 1848 (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1970), 34-37. Duff Green edited The Times Extra, a weekly campaign newspaper that debuted in January 1848. National Intelligencer, 6 January 1848.

²²⁵ Duff Green, Facts and Suggestions (New York: Richardson, 1866), 225.

²²⁶ The economic upturn of 1847-48 forced Whigs to scrap plans to emphasize such issues in the 1848 campaign. In the fall of 1847, Clay, who insisted that he would run only if unanimously chosen by the Whigs, launched yet another bid for the presidency. Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 269, 275-282.

²²⁷ Julius Rockwell to Lucy F. Rockwell, Washington, 19 January 1848, typescript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

de la Palma, and Monterrey – Whig leaders had realized that the modest, unassuming, successful general was their most electable standard-bearer, a kind of modern-day Cincinnatus-cum-George-Washington.²²⁸ A Whig Representative from Georgia declared: “We go for success. The people have shown, in all cases, their partiality for military men whenever they have been placed before them. All the civil merits of waggon bills and mill boys cannot give the eclat of a single victory on the battlefield.”²²⁹ In June 1847, Representative George Ashmun of Massachusetts observed that the “Taylor fever has been spreading far & wide” and predicted that attempts to stem it would fail.²³⁰ The following January, another Bay State congressman lamented that the “Republic is turning into a military democracy. Our candidates, unless the war spirit is soon checked, will be taken from the Generals in the field.”²³¹ Not all Massachusetts Whigs were upset by the prospect of a Taylor nomination. A Roxbury resident thought that “this fighting and voting every four years and getting beat is not what it is cracked up to be” and urged the party to “Nominate the man who will beat, that is the one. If Taylor is the man, put him through.”²³²

Some Illinois Whigs had caught the Taylor fever in the spring of 1848, among them voters in Tazewell and Lee counties and the editors of both the Galena Gazette and

²²⁸ Rayback, Free Soil, 34-55; Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 263, 271.

²²⁹ Thomas Butler King to Winfield Scott, 15 February 1845, draft, King Papers, quoted in Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 262.

²³⁰ George Ashmun to Daniel Webster, Springfield, Massachusetts, 14 June 1847, Charles M. Wiltse et al., eds., The Papers of Daniel Webster, Correspondence (7 vols.; Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1974-86), 6:235-36.

²³¹ Julius Rockwell to William P. Walker, Washington, 7 January 1848, typescript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

²³² Thomas Brewer to William Schouler, Roxbury, Massachusetts, 7 January 1848, Schouler Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. See also same to same, May [no day of the month indicated] 1848, ibid.

the Jacksonville Morgan Journal.²³³ In March, Silas Noble of Dixon announced that he was “for any Whig we can beat the Loco’s with. I would rather beat them with Henry [Clay] than any other man but if we cannot beat them with him let us try Old Rough & Ready.”²³⁴ John J. Hardin acknowledged that “Clay has more devoted friends than any other man in the nation; but owing to the prominent & decided part he has taken on all subjects for 40 years past, he has an amount of personal opposition accumulated against him, which (although wholly unjust) makes it very easy to excite prejudice against him.”²³⁵

On August 30, 1847, Whig party leaders attending a state constitutional convention gathered at the Springfield home of Ninian W. Edwards to discuss the presidential election.²³⁶ According to one delegate, James W. Singleton, Lincoln explained that the purpose of the meeting was to choose “some other man than Henry Clay as the standard bearer of the Whig party.” Lincoln put forward Taylor’s name and urged “the necessity of immediate action,” for “if the Whigs did not take Taylor for their candidate,” then “the Democrats would!” (As late as March 1848, Democrats still contemplated drafting the apolitical general.) Lincoln reportedly asserted that “the Whig party had fought long enough for principle, and should change its motto to success!” After resolutions were adopted “in accordance with the views expressed by Mr. Lincoln,” Singleton and Charles Constable “immediately left the house.” Lincoln, said Singleton,

²³³ Sangamo Journal (Springfield), 15, 29 April 1847.

²³⁴ Silas Noble to E. B. Washburne, Dixon, Illinois, 13 March 1848, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

²³⁵ Hardin to Joseph Gillespie, Washington, 7 December 1844, Gillespie Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. See also E. D. Baker to H. E. Dummer, Springfield, 25 December 1847, Baker Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

²³⁶ Illinois State Register (Springfield), 3 September 1847; Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 2 September 1847.

“even went so far as to try to prevent me from taking a seat in the Philadelphia Convention [of the national Whig party], and urged me to surrender my seat to Dr. [Elias] Zabriskie – Zabriskie then being a citizen of New Jersey, and not Illinois, because Zabriskie was for Taylor, and I was for Henry Clay, for the Presidency.”²³⁷

The leader among Lincoln’s pro-Taylor allies in Congress – the tiny, frail, sickly, brilliant Alexander H. Stephens of Georgia – was eager to nominate the slaveholding general in order to protect Southern interests, which seemed ominously threatened by the introduction of the 1846 Wilmot Proviso prohibiting slavery in all the territory acquired from Mexico.²³⁸ (It passed the House but failed in the senate.) Stephens recalled later, “I knew Mr. Lincoln well and intimately.” As “ardent supporters” of the Hero of Buena Vista, they formed the first Congressional Taylor Club, dominated by Southerners. Calling themselves “the Young Indians,” they “organized the Taylor movement throughout the country” by corresponding with Whigs in all regions.²³⁹ Stephens admired

²³⁷ Kirwan, Crittenden, 216; speech by Singleton in Jacksonville in 1858, Jacksonville correspondence, 20 September, Quincy Herald, 24 September 1858. See also the Semi-Weekly Axis (Petersburg, Illinois), 30 May 1860; Stephen A. Douglas’s speech in Alton, 15 October 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:320; Lincoln to the Taylor Committee, Washington, 9 February 1848, ibid., 1:449; speech by Lincoln at Rushville in October 1848, cited in the Rushville Times, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register, 22 June 1860. Perhaps because of these statements, Lincoln in 1861 referred to Singleton as “a miracle of meanness.” Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger, eds., Inside Lincoln’s White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 19 (entry for 7 May 1861). A lawyer, businessman, and railroad builder, Singleton had been a Whig leader in Quincy. On Singleton, see Matthew Page Andrews, “Abraham Lincoln’s Envoy of Peace,” 20-page typescript, dated 1927, J. W. Singleton Papers, box 23, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, Virginia.

²³⁸ Rayback, Free Soil, 37-38. In fact, the Taylor boom in 1847 was designed in part to help Whig candidates for Congress in the South, where many elections for the House were held belatedly compared to the Northern states, where most such elections took place in 1846. The newly elected Congress would not convene until December 1847. Brian G. Walton, “The Elections to the Thirtieth Congress and the Presidential Candidacy of Zachary Taylor,” Journal of Southern History 35 (1969): 186-202.

²³⁹ Oldroyd, Lincoln Memorial, 241. The original members of the club, which was established in December 1847, were William Ballard Preston, John C. Pendleton, and Thomas S. Flournoy of Virginia, along with Stephens and Robert Toombs of Georgia. Later additions included E. C. Campbell of Florida, Henry W. Hilliard of Alabama, and Truman Smith of Connecticut. Avary, ed., Recollections of Stephens, 21-22; Rayback, Free Soil, 38; John Y. Simon, “Lincoln and Truman Smith,” in Charles M. Hubbard et al., eds., The Many Faces of Lincoln: Selected Articles from The Lincoln Herald (Mahomet, Illinois: Mayhaven,

Lincoln, who, he recollected, “was careful as to his manners, awkward in his speech, but was possessed of a very strong, clear and vigorous mind.” Lincoln “always attracted and riveted attention of the House when he spoke,” for “his manner of speech as well as his thought was original.” Lincoln “had no model. He was a man of strong convictions, and was what [Thomas] Carlyle would have called an earnest man.”²⁴⁰ In turn, Lincoln thought highly of the charming, kind, fiercely individualistic Stephens; according to Joseph Gillespie, of “all men in the South (of those who differed from him on the slavery question . . .) Mr Stephens of Georgia was his favorite.”²⁴¹ On February 2, 1848, Lincoln reported to Herndon that the Georgia Representative, “a slim, pale-faced, consumptive man, with a voice like [Stephen T.] Logan’s has just concluded the very best speech, of an hour’s length, I ever heard. My old, withered, dry eyes, are full of tears yet.”²⁴² (In that speech, Stephens declared that “the principle of waging war against a neighboring people to compel them to sell their country, is not only dishonorable, but disgraceful and infamous.”)²⁴³

In December and January, Lincoln worked behind the scenes with Stephens and other Young Indians to promote Taylor’s candidacy. On February 9, he publicly declared that he, like many other Whig leaders in Illinois, was “decidedly in favor General Taylor

1997), 198-206; Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 285-90. Flourney was a critic of slavery who ascribed the Old Dominion’s economic backwardness to the peculiar institution. In 1855, he became the rabidly anti-Catholic gubernatorial candidate of the Know-Nothing party. Craig M. Simpson, A Good Southerner: The Life of Henry A. Wise of Virginia (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985), 109-10.

²⁴⁰ Oldroyd, Lincoln Memorial, 241.

²⁴¹ Gillespie to Herndon, Edwardsville, Illinois, 31 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 186. Gillespie added, “I have frequently heard him speak in very respectful terms of Stephens.”

²⁴² Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 2 February 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:448.

²⁴³ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 163 (2 February 1848).

as the Whig candidate for the next Presidency.”²⁴⁴ He supported Old Rough and Ready “because I am satisfied we can elect him, that he would give us a whig administration, and that we can not elect any other whig.” With Taylor heading the party ticket, Lincoln predicted that the Whigs would gain one more House seat in Illinois and probably win the state’s electoral votes.²⁴⁵ To an Illinoisan who feared that Clay supporters could not be induced to back Taylor, Lincoln explained that he sided with Taylor “not because I think he would make a better president than Clay, but because I think he would make a better one than [Democrats like] Polk, or [Lewis] Cass, or [James] Buchanan, or any such creatures, one of whom is sure to be elected, if he is not.”²⁴⁶ Clay, Lincoln believed, had “no chance at all.” Even if the Kentucky statesman managed to gain New York, which he had narrowly lost in 1844, he would in 1848 fail to carry Tennessee as well as the new states of Florida, Texas, Iowa, and Wisconsin.²⁴⁷ The colorless, chilly Supreme Court Justice John McLean (who “thinks of nothing but the Presidency by day and dreams of nothing else by night”) was “not ‘a winning card’” in Lincoln’s opinion.²⁴⁸

Some Whigs objected to Taylor because his views on public affairs were unknown.²⁴⁹ In late January, congressional Whigs decisively rejected the Young Indians’

²⁴⁴ Lincoln to the Taylor Committee, Washington, 9 February 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:449.

²⁴⁵ Lincoln to Thomas Flounoy, Washington, 17 February 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:452.

²⁴⁶ Lincoln to Jesse Lynch, Washington, 10 April 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:463.

²⁴⁷ Lincoln to Archibald Williams, Washington, 30 April 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:468.

²⁴⁸ John Quincy Adams’ paraphrase of remarks by John W. Taylor, Adams, Memoirs, ed. Charles Francis Adams, 8:537 (entry for 14 March 1833); Lincoln to Silas Noble, Washington, 25 May 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:474. On the weakness of McLean’s candidacy, see Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 261-2, and Rayback, Free Soil, 1-3, 6-10, 45, 159-62.

²⁴⁹ Rayback, Free Soil, 153; Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 273-74.

attempt to secure an endorsement for Taylor.²⁵⁰ At the same time, Taylor issued public letters in which he refused to be trammelled by any party's principles or nomination. Such statements injured the general's standing among Whigs. Particularly damaging was an April letter by Taylor published in the Richmond Whig in which he reaffirmed his status as a no-party candidate. Caleb B. Smith reported that 75% of northern Whig congressmen thought "that Genl. Taylor cannot be run with the least prospect of success in the North, if he shall adhere to his present position of declining to give his opinions. The idea of running him as a 'No Party candidate' is out of the question."²⁵¹ According to a Massachusetts journalist, Senator Willie Mangum of North Carolina "and that class are coming to the conclusion that old Zack is not a reliable Whig, that there [is] too much talk in him about no partyism and that the Whig party cannot consent to humble itself by taking him up while he holds back in this way."²⁵²

To meet these objections, Lincoln proposed that Taylor announce his intention to endorse a national bank if Congress were to pass a bill establishing one; recommend a higher protective tariff; pledge not to abuse his veto power; and seek to acquire no territory from Mexico "so far South, as to enlarge and agrivate the distracting question of slavery."²⁵³ Other Young Indians offered similar advice.²⁵⁴ In April, Taylor responded by issuing a statement identifying himself as a Whig, denouncing wars of conquest, and

²⁵⁰ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 289-90.

²⁵¹ Caleb B. Smith to Allen Hamilton, 15 February 1848, Hamilton Papers, quoted in Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 273.

²⁵² Thomas M. Brewer to William Schouler, Washington, 28 March 1848, Schouler Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Brewer was right about Mangum. See Mangum to William Graham, Washington, 23 January 1848, Henry Thomas Shanks, ed., The Papers of Willie Person Mangum (5 vols.; Raleigh, N.C.: State Department of Archives and History, 1956), 5:92-96

²⁵³ Fragment: What General Taylor Ought to Say, [March?] 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:454.

²⁵⁴ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 308.

declaring his willingness to sign Whig economic measures into law if passed by Congress.²⁵⁵

When Usher F. Linder expressed concern that Whig criticism of the Mexican war might injure Taylor's chances, Lincoln denied that he had opposed the war per se, for he – unlike some congressional war critics – consistently voted supplies for the troops. His “condemnation of Polk” did not amount to “opposing the war.” To Linder's contention that criticism of the president “strips Taylor and Scott of more than half their laurels,” Lincoln replied that more than forty congressmen backed Taylor and all had voted for the Ashmun amendment. Linder had asked, “have we as a party, ever gained any thing, by falling in company with abolitionists?” Lincoln pointed to the election of 1840, when abolitionists joined forces with the Whigs to elect Harrison. Moreover, Lincoln argued, critics of Polk were not necessarily abolitionists; in fact, thirty-seven Whig Representatives from slave states had voted for the Ashmun amendment.²⁵⁶

Linder's observation about abolitionists was curious, for radical opponents of slavery displayed little enthusiasm for Taylor. In 1847, Joshua R. Giddings declared that the Whigs “who have got up this movement in favor of Gen. Taylor, knowing him to be in favor of extending slavery, are men of desperate political fortunes, who have become anxious to share in the spoils of office; they are men who would sell their party, their country and their God for an ephemeral success, or to enable them to bask in the sunshine of executive favor.”²⁵⁷ (But in suggesting a call for a convention to form a third party, Giddings recommended soft-pedaling the slavery issue. “I would say nothing about

²⁵⁵ Taylor to John S. Allison, 22 April 1848, in Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 310.

²⁵⁶ Lincoln to Linder, Washington, 22 March 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:457-5.

²⁵⁷ Giddings, speech before the New Hampshire House of Representatives, 26 June 1847, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 12 August 1847.

abolition or antislavery as these terms frighten many people,” he told Salmon P. Chase.)²⁵⁸ Another Ohio congressman acidly remarked of Taylor’s candidacy: “To kill women and children and hurry men unprepared to eternity because they refuse to give us their land now free in order that we may cover it with slaves, are certainly high qualifications, for the highest office in the gift of a free nation of professing christians.”²⁵⁹ Taylor’s ownership of a Louisiana plantation worked by scores of slaves hardly endeared him to critics of the peculiar institution like Horace Greeley, who insisted that Whigs “cannot, with any decency, support Gen. Taylor. His no-party letters; his well understood hostility to the Wilmot Proviso; his unqualified devotion to slavery; his destitution of qualifications and principles, place him ‘at an immeasurable distance’ from the Presidency. . . . If we nominate Taylor, we may elect him, but we destroy the Whig party. The off-set to Abolitionism will ruin us.”²⁶⁰

Most Whigs, however, agreed not with Greeley but with former Congressman Edward McGaughey of Indiana, who believed that their party “must have the aid of gunpowder – the fortress of Locofoism can not be taken without it.”²⁶¹ In June, the Whig national convention assembled at Philadelphia, with Lincoln in attendance, and chose Taylor to run against the bland Michigan Senator Lewis Cass, whom the Democrats had nominated the previous month. The Whigs’ failure to adopt a platform led one disillusioned editor to satirize the party’s principles in verse:

Sound the hewgag, strike the tonjon

²⁵⁸ Giddings to Chase, Washington, 16 March 1848, Chase Papers, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²⁵⁹ Columbus Delano to Joshua R. Giddings, 25 May 1847, quoted in Schroeder, Mr. Polk’s War, 135.

²⁶⁰ Greeley to Schuyler Colfax, New York, 3 April 1848, Greeley Papers, New York Public Library.

²⁶¹ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 317.

Beat the Fuzguzzy, wake the gonquong

Let the loud Hosanna ring

Bum tum fuzzelgum dingo bim.²⁶²

A Pennsylvania Whig declared that instead of a formal platform, all the party needed to do was quote Taylor's famous battlefield order: "A little more grape, Captain Bragg."²⁶³

Though many northern Whigs were outraged by the nomination of a slaveholder who had never been a true supporter of the party or its principles, Lincoln wrote on June 12 that such disaffected elements "are fast falling in" and predicted that "we shall have a most overwhelming, glorious, triumph." He took heart from the fact that "all the odds and ends are with us – Barnburners [Free Soil Democrats in New York], Native Americans, [John] Tyler men, disappointed office seeking locofocos, and the Lord knows what." He gloated that "Taylor's nomination takes the locos on the blind side. It turns the war thunder against them. The war is now to them, the gallows of Haman, which they built for us, and on which they are doomed to be hanged themselves."²⁶⁴ Even Horace Greeley ultimately supported Taylor in order to defeat "that pot-bellied, mutton-headed, cucumber Cass!"²⁶⁵

En route back to Washington from Philadelphia, Lincoln and other Whig delegates stopped in Wilmington, Delaware, where Lincoln on June 10 attacked Polk's "high-handed and despotic exercise of the veto power, and the utter disregard of the will

²⁶² Detroit Free Press, 11 July 1848, quoted in Rayback, Free Soil, 204.

²⁶³ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 329.

²⁶⁴ Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 12 June 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:476-77.

²⁶⁵ Greeley to Colfax, 15 September 1848, copy, Allan Nevins Papers, Columbia University; Rayback, Free Soil, 257.

of the people,” and impugned his motives for provoking war with Mexico.²⁶⁶ (Lincoln, like many other Whigs, believed that Polk started the war with Mexico to distract public attention from his failure to gain all of the Oregon Territory from Great Britain despite his belligerent campaign rhetoric about “fifty-four forty or fight.”)²⁶⁷

Ten days later, Lincoln on the floor of the House denounced Polk’s veto of an internal improvements bill and Cass’s hostility to federal support for such legislation.²⁶⁸ (Although that subject had been debated early in the session, Lincoln may have refrained from speaking on traditional Whig economic policies until Taylor, whose views on those matters were sketchy, was safely nominated. He also probably realized that with the earlier ratification of a treaty ending the Mexican War, criticism of the administration’s conduct in provoking that conflict would no longer yield political dividends.) Citing the record of Congress in the mid-1820s, Lincoln maintained that appropriations for roads, canals, railroads, and other such projects would not be extravagant, despite Polk’s fears. He suggested that Congress pay for them as it went along, without borrowing; each year Senators and Representatives should appropriate what could be spared from current expenses to fund the improvements. Those funds should be divvied up based on statistical

²⁶⁶ Speech of 10 June 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:475-76.

²⁶⁷ Autobiography written for John Locke Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:66. In the 1844 campaign, Polk had called for the annexation of the entire Oregon territory. But in June 1846, he submitted to the senate a treaty which divided the territory more or less equally between the U.S. and Great Britain, much to the chagrin of Northern and Western Democrats, who were thereby estranged from the administration. David M. Potter, The Impending Crisis, 1848-1861 (completed and edited by Don E. Fehrenbacher; New York: Harper & Row, 1976), 25-26. Albert Taylor Bledsoe analyzed Polk’s motives thus: “Foiled by Great Britain in his determination to seize the whole of Oregon, he resolved to take satisfaction out of Mexico; just as Ajax in the play, who, having been defeated in a contest with Ulysses, gave vent to his frantic disappointment by slaughtering a whole flock of sheep. He plunged the nation into a most profitless and desolating war, in order to illustrate his own little name, and to reflect lustre on his contemptible administration of the government.” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 9 December 1847.

²⁶⁸ In 1847, Congress passed a bill appropriating \$600,000 for river and harbor improvements. Polk vetoed it and issued a message on 15 December 1847, justifying his action.

evidence to determine which proposed improvements would be most beneficial. In rebutting the president's argument that internal improvement projects benefited some areas more than others, and thus were bound to produce "an obnoxious inequality," Lincoln pointed out that the "true rule, in determining to embrace, or reject any thing, is not whether it have any evil in it; but whether it have more of evil, than of good. There are few things wholly evil, or wholly good. Almost every thing, especially of governmental policy, is an inseparable compound of the two; so that our best judgment of the preponderance between them is continually demanded." If this were the case, he said, a logical question arises: "Why, as to improvements, magnify the evil, and stoutly refuse to see any good in them?" Lincoln quoted Chancellor Kent to help refute Polk's constitutional objections to federally-funded internal improvements. Responding to the president's suggestion that supporters of internal improvements should amend the constitution, Lincoln urged caution: "As a general rule, I think, we would [do] much better [to] let it alone. No slight occasion should tempt us to touch it. Better not take the first step, which may lead to a habit of altering it. Better, rather, habituate ourselves to think of it, as unalterable. It can scarcely be made better than it is. New provisions would introduce new difficulties, and thus create, and increase appetite for still further change." Piously he paid tribute to the framers: "The men who made it, have done their work, and have passed away. Who shall improve, on what they did?" Lincoln concluded that Polk's objections, though not without merit, were insufficient to justify his veto.²⁶⁹

²⁶⁹ Speech in the House of Representatives, 20 June 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:480-90.

A New York Tribune correspondent called it “a very sensible speech,” showing that Lincoln not only “understood the subject” but also “succeeded in making the House understand it.”²⁷⁰

On July 27, Lincoln spoke on the House floor once again, addressing the presidential question. His speech, “full to overflowing of his characteristic humor,” was “listened to with intense interest by the occupants of the floor and galleries of the Hall of Representatives.” His remarks had been “hastily written out on sheets of foolscap paper” and placed on his desk. They were prompted by Representative Beverley Clarke of Kentucky, who had criticized Taylor’s pledge to use the veto power sparingly.²⁷¹ Lincoln praised the general’s willingness to defer to Congress, for that accorded with the “principle of allowing the people to do as they please with their own business.” He admitted that he did not know if Taylor would join him in supporting the Wilmot Proviso. (Lincoln voted for the proviso or its equivalent at least five times during his congressional term.)²⁷² As “a Western free state man, with a constituency I believe to be, and with personal feelings I know to be, against the extension of slavery,” Lincoln hoped and trusted that Taylor would sign a bill containing the controversial proviso. (He was right about his constituency; in 1849 the Illinois General Assembly voted to instruct the state’s representatives in Congress to support measures excluding slavery from the territory gained from Mexico.)²⁷³ Lincoln may have learned that in May, Taylor had

²⁷⁰ Washington correspondence, 20 June, New York Tribune, 22 June 1848.

²⁷¹ Brainard, “Reminiscences of Lincoln,” 435-36.

²⁷² When in 1854 he claimed that he had voted at least forty times for the Proviso, he was indulging in campaign hyperbole. Albert J. Beveridge, Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1858 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1928), 2:183.

²⁷³ “Illinois Anti-Slavery Resolution,” The Liberator (Boston), 9 February 1849.

privately given assurances that he would not veto Wilmot's proviso.²⁷⁴ Since Cass would definitely support slavery expansion and veto the proviso, it was better to vote for a candidate who might not. Moreover, under a Cass administration, the country would probably embark on "a course of policy, leading to new wars, new acquisitions of territory and still further extensions of slavery."

Employing his "crushing power of sarcasm and ridicule" (as he usually did on the stump – and this was in effect a stump speech),²⁷⁵ Lincoln poked fun at Congressman Alfred Iverson of Georgia, who a day earlier had delivered a "scathing and withering" speech after which, Lincoln said, "I was struck blind, and found myself feeling with my fingers for an assurance of my continued physical existence. A little of the bone was left, and I gradually revived." Responding to Iverson's claim that the Whigs had "deserted all our principles, and taken shelter under Gen: Taylor's military coat-tail," Lincoln accused the Democrats of having used "the ample military coat tail" of Andrew Jackson: "Like a horde of hungry ticks you have stuck to the tail of the Hermitage lion to the end of his life; and you are still sticking to it, and drawing a loathsome sustenance from it, after he is dead. A fellow once advertised that he had made a discovery by which he could make a new man out of an old one, and have enough of the stuff left to make a little yellow dog. Just such a discovery has Gen: Jackson's popularity been to you. You have not only twice made President of him out of it, but you have had enough of the stuff left to make Presidents of several comparatively small men since; and it is your chief reliance now to make still another." He then lampooned Cass's military record, comparing it wryly to his own experience in the Black Hawk War.

²⁷⁴ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 344-45.

²⁷⁵ Isaac N. Arnold, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Chicago: McClurg, 1884), 49.

Lincoln scornfully summarized Cass's waffling course on the Wilmot Proviso: "When the question was raised in 1846, he was in a blustering hurry to take ground for it. He sought to be in advance, and to avoid the uninteresting position of a mere follower; but soon he began to see glimpses of the great democratic ox-gad waving in his face, and to hear, indistinctly, a voice saying 'Back' 'Back sir' 'Back a little'. He shakes his head, and bats his eyes, and blunders back." Lincoln also belittled Cass's government financial accounts, which allegedly showed that the Michigander "not only did the labor of several men at the same time; but that he often did it at several places, many hundreds of miles apart, at the same time." He went on to ridicule Cass's "wonderful eating capacities," which enabled him to consume "ten rations a day in Michigan, ten rations a day here in Washington, and near five dollars worth a day on the road between the two places!" Everyone, Lincoln remarked, has "heard of the animal standing in doubt between two stacks of hay, and starving to death. The like of that would never happen to Gen: Cass; place the stacks a thousand miles apart, he would stand stock still midway between them, and eat the both at once; and the green grass along the line would be apt to suffer some too at the same time."²⁷⁶

After excoriating Polk's conduct in bringing on the Mexican War, Lincoln alluded to the divisions within the New York Democratic party, which reminded him of what "a drunken fellow once said when he heard the reading of an indictment for hog-stealing: The clerk read on till he got to, and through the words 'did steal, take, and carry away, ten boars, ten sows, ten shoats, and ten pigs' at which he exclaimed, 'Well, by golly, that

²⁷⁶ As a member of the Committee on Expenditures of the War Department, Lincoln had access to Cass's expense vouchers. On August 14, he asked leave to introduce legislation authorizing the publication of a record of extra compensation paid to both Cass and Taylor. The House rejected his request. Findley, Crucible of Congress, 166-67.

is the most equally divided gang of hogs, I ever did hear of.’” Lincoln concluded by remarking, “If there is any other gang of hogs more equally divided than the democrats of New-York are about this time, I have not heard of it.”²⁷⁷

A reporter noted that Lincoln’s “manner was so good-natured, and his style so peculiar, that he kept the House in a continuous roar of merriment, for the last half hour of his speech. He would commence a point in his speech far up one of the aisles and keep on talking, gesticulating and walking, until he would find himself at the end of a paragraph, down in the centre of the area in front of the clerk’s desk. He would then go back, take another head and walk down again. And so on, through his capital speech.”²⁷⁸ Whig newspapers called Lincoln’s speech “excellent and humorous” and praised him as “a very able, acute, uncouth, honest upright man, and a tremendous wag withal!”²⁷⁹ (He was, in fact, the leading Whig wag in Congress.) He “received hearty congratulations at the close, many Democrats joining the Whigs in their complimentary comments.” A member from Ohio, when asked by an Eastern Representative, “how did you like the lanky Illinoisan’s speech? Very able, wasn’t it?” replied: “the speech was pretty good, but I hope he won’t charge mileage on his travels while delivering it.”²⁸⁰ (Months later Horace Greeley criticized many members of Congress, including Lincoln, for padding their travel expense accounts.)²⁸¹ Senator Hannibal Hamlin of Maine, while observing

²⁷⁷ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:431-42.

²⁷⁸ Baltimore American, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 13 August 1848. See similar accounts in Brainard, “Reminiscences of Lincoln,” 435-36; Ben: Perely Poore, in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 220; Tuck, Autobiographical Memoir, 84.

²⁷⁹ Washington correspondence by “Independent,” 27 July, Philadelphia North American and U.S. Gazette, 29 July 1848; Baltimore American, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 13 August 1848;

²⁸⁰ Ben: Perley Poore in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 221. Lincoln’s peripatetic delivery was not entirely uncommon. See Reid, Sketches in North America, 88.

Lincoln deliver this speech, asked who he was. “Abe Lincoln, the best story teller in the House,” came the reply.²⁸²

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After Congress adjourned on August 14, Lincoln remained for nearly a month in Washington, helping the Whig Executive Committee of Congress organize the national campaign.²⁸³ He corresponded with several party leaders, who reported encouraging news, and he sent out thousands of copies of speeches by himself and other Whigs.²⁸⁴ Like a benign mentor, he urged young Whigs in Sangamon County to take an active role in the campaign and not passively look for instructions from their elders. “You must not wait to be brought forward by the older men,” he told William Herndon. “For instance do you suppose that I should ever have got into notice if I had waited to be hunted up and pushed forward by older men. You young men get together and form a Rough & Ready club, and have regular meetings and speeches.” When Herndon complained that the older Whigs were discriminating against the younger ones, Lincoln responded with paternal wisdom, urging him not to wallow in jealousy, suspicion, or a feeling of victimhood:

²⁸¹ Congressional travel was reimbursed at forty cents per mile. Lincoln claimed that on his two round trips from Springfield to Washington, he traveled 3252 miles on each trip, and was thus to be reimbursed \$2601. Greeley pointed out that this was about twice the actual mileage that Lincoln would have covered if he had taken the post roads. But the law stipulated that members of Congress were to submit bills based on their using “the most usual” route. Lincoln’s claim was very close to what his predecessor, Edward D. Baker, had submitted. Findley, Crucible of Congress, 160-61; Riddle, Congressman Lincoln, 145-46.

²⁸² Hannibal Hamlin quoted by his grandson, Charles E. Hamlin, in Charles E. Hamlin, “Lincoln, the Man of Method,” undated manuscript, Hamlin Family Papers, University of Maine.

²⁸³ Beveridge, Lincoln, 2:152.

²⁸⁴ Lincoln to Thaddeus Stevens, Washington, 3 September 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:1; Lincoln to William Schouler, Washington, 28 August 1848, ibid., 1:518; speech at Worcester, 12 September 1848, ibid., 2:4; Thaddeus Stevens to Lincoln, Lancaster, [Pennsylvania], 7 September 1848, Beverly Wilson Palmer, ed., The Selected Papers of Thaddeus Stevens (2 vols.; Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1997), 1:102-3; John Bell to Lincoln, Nashville, [Tennessee], 17 September 1848, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. He mailed 7080 copies of his own speeches and 5560 copies of speeches by others. Account book of George Saile Gideon, Library of Congress. Other members of Congress bought 4600 copies of Lincoln’s speeches delivered during the first session.

“The way for a young man to rise, is to improve himself every way he can, never suspecting that any body wishes to hinder him. Allow me to assure you, that suspicion and jealousy never did help any man in any situation. There may sometimes be ungenerous attempts to keep a young man down; and they will succeed too, if he allows his mind to be diverted from its true channel to brood over the attempted injury. Cast about, and see if this feeling has not injured every person you have ever known to fall into it.”²⁸⁵

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During the presidential campaign, Lincoln as usual stumped for the Whig standard-bearer. In late August and early September he spoke in Washington and nearby Maryland.²⁸⁶ Later in September, he spent eleven days in Massachusetts.²⁸⁷ Remarking on Lincoln’s appearance in New England, the Chicago Democrat sneered: “Who would have thought it that Massachusetts would ever become so doubtful that it would be necessary to send to Illinois for aid? Well, Illinois has no use for her Whigs.”²⁸⁸ In fact,

²⁸⁵ Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 22 June and 10 July 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:491, 497.

²⁸⁶ Earl W. Wiley, “Lincoln Spoke in Rockville,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 29 (1936): 178-80. Evidently he had also intended to speak in Pennsylvania, but that plan fell through. Thaddeus Stevens, who addressed a Whig rally in Bucks County on August 17, told Lincoln the following month: “The people were much disappointed in not seeing you at Bucks county.” Stevens to Lincoln, Lancaster, 7 September 1848, Palmer, ed., Papers of Thaddeus Stevens, 1:103.

²⁸⁷ William Hanna, Abraham Among the Yankees: Abraham Lincoln’s 1848 Visit to Massachusetts (Taunton, Massachusetts: The Old Colony Historical Society, 1983); James Schouler, “Abraham Lincoln at Tremont Temple in 1848,” Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings 42 (January 1909): 70-84; Reinhard H. Luthin, “Abraham Lincoln and the Massachusetts Whigs in 1848,” New England Quarterly 14 (1941): 619-32.

²⁸⁸ Chicago Weekly Democrat, 26 September 1848.

because Lincoln believed that “it is not very probable [that] Illinois will go for Taylor,” he felt free to spend time in New England rather than returning home.²⁸⁹

Disenchantment with Taylor ran especially deep in Massachusetts, where Joshua Giddings had spoken that summer to large and enthusiastic crowds and where Whig defections in November might prove serious.²⁹⁰ One young Bay State Whig bitterly complained that Southerners “have trampled on the rights and just claims of the North sufficiently long and have fairly shit upon all our Northern statesmen and are now trying to rub it in.”²⁹¹ So-called “Conscience Whigs” like Charles Sumner, Henry Wilson, Charles Allen, and Anson Burlingame denounced Taylor and his “Cotton Whig” allies.²⁹² Henry Wilson, who in 1847 had said that the “free state Whigs must dictate the policy of the Party or the Party had better be defeated and broken up,” stormed out of the Whig national convention, declaring: “I will go home; and, so help me God, I will do all I can to defeat” Taylor.²⁹³ At that convention, which Horace Greeley called the “slaughterhouse of Whig principles,” Conscience Whig Charles Allen announced that the party “is here and this day dissolved.”²⁹⁴ In August, Sumner, Wilson, Allen and other opponents of slavery met at Buffalo, where they formed the Free Soil party, selected as

²⁸⁹ Lincoln to Junius Hall, Washington, 3 September 1848, Roy P. Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1973), 12.

²⁹⁰ H. Battelle to Artemas Hale, Boston, 12 April 1848, Fall River, 20, 27 July 1848, Artemas Hale Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan; Solberg, “Giddings,” 301-4.

²⁹¹ William H. Howe to Roger Sherman Baldwin, Jr., 25 July 1848, quoted in Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 333.

²⁹² The course of the Conscience Whigs is described in Kinley J. Brauer, Cotton versus Conscience: Massachusetts Whig Politics and Southwestern Expansion, 1843-1848 (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1967), 229-45, and Frank Otto Gattell, “‘Conscience and Judgment’: The Bolt of the Massachusetts Conscience Whigs,” The Historian 21 (1958): 18-45.

²⁹³ Wilson to Joshua R. Giddings, 6 February 1847, Giddings Papers, quoted in Luthin, “Abraham Lincoln and the Massachusetts Whigs in 1848,” 623; Henry Wilson, History of the Rise and Fall of the Slave Power in America (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1872), 2:136.

²⁹⁴ Wilson, Rise and Fall of the Slave Power, 2:136.

their presidential candidate Martin Van Buren (who in November would win 14% of the Northern popular ballots but no electoral votes), adopted a vigorous antislavery platform, and chose as their motto “Free Soil, Free Speech, Free Labor, and Free Men.”²⁹⁵ (To some Boston Whigs these bolters seemed like “a set of Chinese bonzes, in gowns and pigtails, attempting to introduce the idolatrous worship of Foh-Even.”)²⁹⁶ In Massachusetts, the new party’s gubernatorial candidate predicted that Van Buren would siphon off 25,000 votes from Taylor.²⁹⁷ Though they had no expectation that Van Buren could win, some Free Soilers hoped that his candidacy would throw the election into the House of Representatives.²⁹⁸ Just as Joshua Giddings had four years earlier campaigned to convince anti-slavery Whigs not to vote for the Liberty Party’s presidential candidate, so Lincoln sought to persuade anti-slavery Whigs not to support the Free Soil Party’s presidential candidate.²⁹⁹ Giddings had stumped Massachusetts against Taylor in the summer.

The Whigs of Massachusetts wanted outside speakers. In August, William C. Plunkett told Representative Julius Rockwell: “It is believed that if Thos. Corwin could come into our county and address a public meeting much good might grow out of it. . . . I think the Whig & Locos would like to hear him. . . . Free Soil is the cry here [in the town of Adams] among Barnburners & dissatisfied Whigs. Mr. Corwin’s sentiments would

²⁹⁵ Rayback, Free Soil, 218-30.

²⁹⁶ “The Free Soil Whigs of Massachusetts,” New York Evening Post (weekly ed.), 19 October 1848.

²⁹⁷ Stephen C. Phillips in Frank Otto Gattell, John Gorham Palfrey and the New England Conscience (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963), 175. Congressman George Ashmun of Springfield, Massachusetts, reportedly estimated that only 2,000 votes would be diverted from Taylor by the state’s bolters. John G. Palfrey to Charles F. Adams, Washington, 13 June 1848, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁹⁸ Joshua R. Giddings to Charles Francis Adams, Washington, 17 June 1848, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

²⁹⁹ On Giddings’ effort in 1844, see Solberg, “Giddings,” 229-33.

gibe in with these views & as he is straight on the Whig line, his influence would be felt.”³⁰⁰ But Corwin was busy campaigning in Ohio.³⁰¹ Lincoln may have been invited in lieu of Corwin, who had made a celebrated anti-war speech in the senate. Like Corwin, Lincoln was hostile to slavery, a good Whig, and noted for criticizing Polk’s war policy. Lincoln’s attack on the president had won the approval of some Massachusetts Whigs, including Solomon Lincoln of Hingham, who in March told his congressman: “Our attention has been arrested in this quarter of the country by the able speech of Hon. Mr. Lincoln of Illinois.” It was, he added, “a source of gratification to those bearing his name to know that the old stock has not degenerated by being transplanted. On the contrary it exhibits fresh vigor in the fertile soil of the West.”³⁰²

On September 13, the Massachusetts state Whig convention was to take place in Worcester, and there Lincoln headed, evidently at the request of his friend, Congressman Charles Hudson.³⁰³ On September 11, he arrived and was sought out by Alexander H. Bullock, chairman of the Whig City Committee. After explaining the political situation in detail, Bullock asked Lincoln to speak the next night. (The scheduled Whig orator had backed out at the last moment.) The Illinoisan agreed, suggesting that a tariff speech

³⁰⁰ Plunkett to Rockwell, Adams, 4 August 1848, typescript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts.

³⁰¹ Stephen Graham Carroll, “Thomas Corwin and the Agonies of the Whig Party” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Colorado, 1970), 37-38.

³⁰² Solomon Lincoln to Artemas Hale, Hingham, 2 March 1848, photostatic copy, Lincoln Miscellaneous Collection, University of Chicago.

³⁰³ Arthur P. Rugg, “Abraham Lincoln in Worcester,” address delivered in Worcester, 7 December 1909 (pamphlet; Worcester: Belisle, 1914), 3-4; Charles Hudson to Lincoln, Lexington, 13 November 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. According to Edward L. Pierce, Robert C. Winthrop thought Hudson “may have arranged” for Lincoln’s trip. Pierce to Jesse W. Weik, Milton, Massachusetts, 27 October 1889, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 681. See also the reminiscences of Robert Rantoul, Massachusetts Historical Society Proceedings 42 (January 1909): 86. Hudson feared that many of his constituents would not support Taylor. John G. Palfrey to Charles Francis Adams, Washington, 30 May 1848, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

might be suitable. Bullock urged him to address the Whig cause in general “with much discretion” so as not to offend potential Free Soilers.³⁰⁴

Taking this advice, Lincoln repeated the congressional stump speech he had delivered in July, to which he appended a special plea to antislavery Whigs. Some of them found Van Buren suspect because of his tendency to accommodate slaveholders, his reputation as a clever political operator, and his espousal of negative government.³⁰⁵ Like other Whig campaigners, Lincoln argued that a vote for Van Buren was in effect a vote for Cass. For opponents of slavery to “unite with those [Democrats] who annexed the new territory to prevent the extension of slavery in that territory” seemed to Lincoln “to be in the highest degree absurd and ridiculous.” He criticized purists who intended to “do their duty and leave the consequences to God” and chastised the delegates to the Buffalo Free Soil convention for their silence about the Mexican War.³⁰⁶ The Free Soil platform, he said, “embraces a few general declarations in regard to other topics [than slavery], but they are so general” that they called to mind “the pantaloons offered at auction by a

³⁰⁴ Alexander H. Bullock, “Abraham Lincoln,” eulogy delivered 1 June 1865 (pamphlet; Worcester: Charles Hamilton, 1865), 12; Chandler Bullock, “Episodes in Early Worcester Politics,” Worcester Telegram, 12 May 1929. The Free Soil movement was especially strong in Worcester, where Charles Allen, who had bolted over Taylor’s nomination, threatened to unseat Charles Hudson, Whig Congressman from Westminster, to whom Taylor offered the Interior Department portfolio in 1849. Rugg, “Lincoln in Worcester,” 2-4; Hudson to Artemas Hale, Westminster, 12 November 1848, Washington, 17 March 1849, Artemas Hale Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

³⁰⁵ In July, Nathan Appleton of Massachusetts told Julius Rockwell: “From all I can hear I think the prospect for the election of Taylor holds good . . . the malcontents in this state are not increasing – they will be obliged to go for Van Buren, which will greatly stagger the Inde[pendent] Whigs – probably all but the regular abolitionists.” Appleton to Rockwell, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 12 July 1848, typescript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts. Some Conscience Whigs, like John G. Palfrey, could not bring themselves to support the former president, who (in Palfrey’s words) “had done more than any other man to corrupt the public virtue of this country.” John G. Palfrey to Charles F. Adams, Washington, 20 July 1848, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. Independent Whigs in Ohio would have supported “Hale, McLane, or almost any new man, whose character had not been rendered odious to Whigs,” but they could not bring themselves to support Van Buren. Columbus Delano to Artemas Hale, Mt. Vernon, Ohio, 23 September 1848 [misfiled 23 April], Artemas Hale Papers, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan.

³⁰⁶ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:1-5.

Yankee pedlar,” who described them as “large enough for any man and small enough for any boy.” He also asserted that Taylor would be a better Whig president than Clay, for “Taylor’s ground and the Whig ground is that the people ought to do as they please in regard to all questions of domestic policy,” whereas Clay “was and is always ready to give his opinions and preferences, and thus would present motives for others to prostitute themselves to gain favor with him, if in power.” The Whig failure to adopt a platform, Lincoln argued, was “preferable and far more useful to the great majority of the country than the variegated and impracticable ‘platforms’ that it had become the fashion . . . to adopt.”³⁰⁷

Lincoln made little impression at first. “When he was announced, his tall, angular, bent form, and his manifest awkwardness and low tone of voice, promised nothing interesting.” But soon the crowd warmed to him, for his “style and manner of speaking were novelties in the East. He repeated anecdotes, told stories admirable in humor and in point, interspersed with bursts of true eloquence, which constantly brought down the house. His sarcasm of Cass, Van Buren and the Democratic party was inimitable, and whenever he attempted to stop, the shouts of ‘Go on! go on!’ were deafening.”³⁰⁸ A journalist reported that Lincoln “spoke in a clear and cool, and very eloquent manner, for an hour and a half, carrying the audience with him in his able arguments and brilliant illustrations – and interrupted by warm and frequent applause.”³⁰⁹ The Boston Atlas called his address “one of the best speeches ever heard in Worcester” and claimed that it had caused “several Whigs who had gone off on the ‘Free Soil’ sizzle” to return to the

³⁰⁷ Springfield, Massachusetts, Republican, 14 September 1848.

³⁰⁸ Henry J. Gardner, statement for Edward L. Pierce, [February-May 1890], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 699.

³⁰⁹ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:1-2.

party fold.³¹⁰ Edward Lilly Pierce, who heard Lincoln in Worcester, recollected that the Illinoisan “was greatly liked,” for his style was “new to our people – and there was a general call for him as a speaker.”³¹¹

As he was leaving Worcester, Lincoln made brief remarks at the depot which offended some Free Soilers. “Referring to the antislavery men, he said they were better treated in Massachusetts than in the West, and turning to William S. Lincoln, of Worcester, on the platform, who had lived in Illinois, he remarked that in that state they had recently killed one of them.” Because Free Soilers thought this reference to Elijah P. Lovejoy rather callous, he did not repeat it subsequently as he traversed the Bay State.³¹²

Lincoln accepted invitations from Whig organizers in Boston, Taunton, New Bedford, Dedham, Dorchester, Cambridge, Chelsea, and Lowell. In New Bedford, a Quaker diarist thought that Lincoln’s speech “was pretty sound” but “not tasteful,” and a local Whig paper said it was “enlivened by frequent flashes of genuine racy western wit.”³¹³ In Boston, Lincoln compared Van Buren “to a man having a gun which went off at both ends – that he would kill the object in view, and those who supported him, at the same time.”³¹⁴ In Lowell, where his address “was frequently interrupted by bursts of warm applause,” a resident testified that Lincoln “pointed his arguments with amusing illustrations, and funny stories, which he seemed to enjoy as he told them, for he joined in

³¹⁰ [William Schouler], Worcester correspondence, 13 September, Boston Atlas, 13 September 1848; Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:1-5.

³¹¹ Pierce to Herndon, [ca. 15 October 1889], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 680.

³¹² Rugg, “Lincoln in Worcester,” 9-10. According to Edward Lillie Pierce, Lincoln “gave offence by saying ‘I have heard you have abolitionists here. We have a few in Illinois, and we shot one the other day.’” Pierce to Herndon, [ca. 15 October 1889], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 680.

³¹³ Zephaniah W. Pease, ed., The Diary of Samuel Rodman: A New Bedford Chronicle of Thirty-seven Years, 1821-1859 (New Bedford: Reynolds, 1927), 287 (entry for 15 September 1848); New Bedford Mercury, n.d., copied in the Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 5 June 1860.

³¹⁴ Boston Herald, 16 September 1848.

a comical way in the laugh they occasioned, shaking his sides, which peculiar manner seemed to add to the good humor of the audience; with a voice of more than average compass, clear and penetrating, pronouncing many of his words in a manner not usual to New England.”³¹⁵ In Cambridge, he reportedly gave a “plain, direct, and to the point, powerful, and convincing” speech.³¹⁶

George Harris Monroe, a young journalist who accompanied Lincoln from Boston to Dedham, recalled that as they rode along, the silent, “reticent,” and “uneasy” Illinois congressman “was as sober a man in point of expression as ever I saw.” Once arrived, “he appeared one not at ease in this atmosphere.” At the hotel where he was staying, Lincoln “seemed even less at home.” He “was introduced to several people, but he had next to nothing to say to any of them. Some doubt was expressed as to what kind of speaker had been secured.” When he approached the place where he would deliver his address, “it wasn’t much better. It was a small hall and only about half full.” Before this meager crowd, Lincoln began in “an indifferent manner” which quickly changed as he rolled up his sleeves, loosened his tie, and soon “magnetized the audience completely, holding it “as by the power of fascination.” His “manner was quaint, his humor showed through his speech constantly; his points were made with irresistible pungency.” His “style was the most familiar and off-hand possible. His eyes lighted up and changed the whole expression of his countenance. He began to bubble out with humor.” The “chief charm in the address” was “the homely way he made his points. There was no attempt at eloquence or finish of style.” The speech, Monroe concluded, “was not a great one, but it

³¹⁵ Boston Daily Advertiser, 20 September 1848; Samuel P. Hadley, “Recollections of Lincoln in Lowell in 1848,” The Abraham Lincoln Centennial (Lowell: Lowell Historical Society, 1909), in Hanna, Abraham Among the Yankees, 54.

³¹⁶ Cambridge correspondence, 21 September, Boston Atlas, 22 September 1848.

was a marvel of cleverness.”³¹⁷ Another journalist in Dedham reported that Lincoln concentrated on Van Buren and said “very little against Cass except he was worth a million and a half dollars.”³¹⁸

In Taunton, the “Lone Star of Illinois,” as Lincoln was called, began his address leaning against a wall and “talking in the plainest manner, and in the most indifferent tone.” Gradually he began “fixing his footing,” “getting command of his limbs,” “loosening his tongue,” and “firing up his thoughts.” When he “got entire possession of himself and his audience,” he unleashed a barrage of “argument and anecdote, wit and wisdom, hymns and prophecies, platforms and syllogisms,” which flew out to his audience “like wild game before the fierce hunter of the prairie.”³¹⁹

Free Soil editors were less enthusiastic. One in Taunton said Lincoln “was far inferior as a reasoner to others who hold the same views, but then he was more unscrupulous, more facetious, and with his sneers he mixed up a good deal of humor. His awkward gesticulations, the ludicrous management of his voice, and the comical expression of his countenance, all conspired to make his hearers laugh at the mere anticipation of the joke before it appeared.” The editor criticized Lincoln’s “recklessness and audacity” in misrepresenting the Free Soilers’ case. Lincoln had quoted a Lowell Free Soiler who sarcastically summarized the Whig argument: “General Taylor is a slaveholder, therefore we go for him to prevent the extension of slavery.” A more

³¹⁷ Letter by “Templeton” [George Harris Monroe], Boston Highlands, 22 April, Boston Sunday Herald, 26 April 1885; “Lincoln in Massachusetts,” unidentified newspaper article by Monroe, clipping collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

³¹⁸ Norfolk Democrat, 22 September 1848, in Hanna, Abraham Among the Yankees, 64; Robert Barton, “Lincoln Visited Dedham Just 100 Years Ago,” typescript, Barton Papers, University of Illinois.

³¹⁹ Tuck, Autobiographical Memoir, 83; Taunton Old Colony Republican, 23 September 1848, quoted in Sheldon H. Harris, “Abraham Lincoln Stumps a Yankee Audience,” New England Quarterly 38 (1965): 230.

appropriate syllogism, Lincoln countered, would be: “Gen. Taylor is a slaveholder, but he will do more to prevent the extension of slavery than any other man whom it is possible to elect.” He then summed up the Free Soil argument in yet another syllogism: “We can’t go for Gen. Taylor because he is not a Whig. Van Buren is not a whig; therefore we go for him.” Lincoln criticized Van Buren for favoring the Mexican War and Texas annexation, though in fact the former president had opposed both.³²⁰ A Free Soil editor in Boston ridiculed Lincoln’s defense of the Whigs’ vagueness on issues: “This distinguished sucker went against all political platforms, and thus consoled the whigs for the loss of theirs. He told them that the whig party always went against executive influence, (which, for a party always out of power is not very wonderful,) and it would be inconsistent with this if their candidate should seek to influence them by expressing his opinions.”³²¹

In Boston, the Whig press lauded his “powerful and convincing speech, which was applauded to the echo.”³²² There Lincoln shared the platform with New York Senator William Henry Seward, who declared that “all Whigs agree – that Slavery shall not be extended into any Territory now free – and they are doubtless willing to go one step further – that it shall be abolished where it now exists under the immediate protection of the General Government [i.e., in Washington, D.C.]”³²³ Lincoln followed with what Seward later described as “a rambling story-telling speech, putting the audience in good

³²⁰ “Abraham Lincoln at Union Hall,” Taunton Bristol County Democrat, 29 September 1848.

³²¹ Boston Chronotype, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 13 October 1848. The editor was Elizur Wright.

³²² Boston Atlas, 23 September 1848.

³²³ Boston Journal, n.d., copied in the New York Tribune, 25 September 1848.

humor, but avoiding any extended discussion of the slavery question.”³²⁴ The following day, Lincoln “with a thoughtful air” told Seward: “I have been thinking about what you said in your speech. I reckon you are right. We have got to deal with this slavery question, and got to give much more attention to it hereafter than we have been doing.”³²⁵ In 1860, Lincoln reminisced with the *New Yorker*: “Twelve years ago you told me that this cause would be successful, and ever since I have believed that it would be.”³²⁶

(Seward was not the only U.S. senator whose antislavery speeches impressed Lincoln. One day in the capitol he listened intently to Hannibal Hamlin of Maine denouncing human bondage; the Illinois Representative nodded enthusiastically whenever the Pine State Senator “made a good point against slavery.”³²⁷ When they met as president-elect and vice-president-elect in 1860, Lincoln told Hamlin: “I have just been recalling the time when, in ’48, I went to the Senate to hear you speak. Your subject was not new, but the ideas were sound. You were talking about slavery, and I now take occasion to thank you for so well expressing what were my own sentiments at that time.”)³²⁸

Edward Lilly Pierce, an antislavery radical, asserted with some justice that during Lincoln’s Massachusetts campaign swing, he “did not rise at any time above partisanship, and he gave no sign of the great future which awaited him as a political antagonist, a

³²⁴ Francis B. Carpenter, “A Day with Governor Seward at Auburn,” July 1870, Seward Papers, University of Rochester.

³²⁵ Frederick W. Seward, Seward at Washington as Senator and Secretary of State: A Memoir of His Life, with Selections from His Letters, 1846-1872 (2 vols.; New York: Derby and Miller, 1891), 1:80.

³²⁶ Chicago correspondence, 1 October, *New York Herald*, 2 October 1860.

³²⁷ Charles Eugene Hamlin, The Life and Times of Hannibal Hamlin (Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1899), 194, 367.

³²⁸ Hamlin told this to C. J. Prescott. Reminiscences of C. J. Prescott, “Hamlin” folder, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. Hamlin spoke out against slavery on 22 July 1848. Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 1145-48.

master of language, and a leader of men.” But, Pierce noted, “the Whig case, as put in that campaign, was chiefly one of personalities, and was limited to the qualities and career of Taylor as a soldier, and to ridicule of his opponent, General Cass. Mr. Lincoln, like the other Whig speakers, labored to prove that Taylor was a Whig.”³²⁹

In late September, while returning to Illinois, Lincoln stopped in Albany to visit Thurlow Weed, an influential Whig journalist and political operative who served as Seward’s alter ego. Weed introduced him to the Whig vice-presidential candidate, Millard Fillmore.³³⁰ Then, as he sailed from Buffalo to Chicago, Lincoln observed a steamboat aground on a Detroit river sandbar.³³¹ The sight inspired him to devise plans for a boat equipped with an apparatus like water wings, allowing it to float over such obstacles. After the November elections, he worked on his idea, for which he obtained a patent.³³²

Lincoln spent the latter part of October “canvassing quite fully” his district in Illinois, where he once more urged Free Soilers to vote for Taylor.³³³ In Lacon on November 1, he “scored with the most scathing language, that ‘consistency’ of the Abolitionists, which, while they professed great horror at the proposed extension of slave territory, they [had in 1844] aided in the election of Mr. Polk; for which, and its

³²⁹ Pierce, statement for Herndon, [1887?], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 691.

³³⁰ Thurlow Weed, Autobiography, ed. Harriet A. Weed (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1883), 602-3.

³³¹ On Lincoln’s return trip to Illinois, see Wayne C. Temple, Lincoln’s Connections with the Illinois & Michigan Canal, His Return from Congress in 1848, and His Invention (Springfield: Illinois Bell, 1986), 32-53.

³³² Ibid., 57-72.

³³³ Autobiography written for John L. Scripps, [ca. June 1860], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 4:67. He also spoke in Chicago and Peoria en route home. Ibid., 2:11; Peoria Democratic Press, 11 October 1848.

disastrous consequences, they were responsible, as they held the balance of power.”³³⁴

Lincoln allegedly defended Taylor’s purported egotism, “saying that in order to do what Taylor had done a man had to be somewhat egotistical.” He further addressed the charge that Taylor was humpbacked: “whether his back is crooked or straight, his friends will overlook it, and his enemies will say it is so anyhow.”³³⁵

On election day, Taylor made such a strong showing in the lower South and Pennsylvania that he was able to defeat Cass (who lost New York thanks to the defection of antislavery Democrats to Van Buren) by a margin of 45% to 42% in the popular vote (1,360,967 to 1,222,342) and 163 to 127 in the electoral college. Taylor carried Massachusetts with 61,070 votes to Van Buren’s 38,058 and Cass’s 35,281. The Hero of Buena Vista also won the Seventh District of Illinois by a majority of 1481, but lost statewide to Cass, 45% to 42% (56,915 to 52,853), even though he received 7,009 more ballots than Clay had in 1844 and 18,550 more votes than Whigs had garnered in congressional contests the previous August.³³⁶ Taylor captured nearly 60% of the vote in Springfield.³³⁷ The Illinois State Journal blamed Old Rough and Ready’s defeat in Illinois on John Wentworth, the anti-slavery Democratic Congressman from Chicago: “If John Wentworth had opposed Cass in the North, Taylor would most unquestionably have

³³⁴ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:14. He also spoke in Jacksonville, Beardstown, Metamora, Magnolia, Hennepin, Lacon, and Petersburg. Illinois State Register (Springfield), 3 November 1848; Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:11-13; Earl Schenck Miers et al., eds., Lincoln Day by Day: A Chronology, 1809-1865 (3 vols.; Washington: Lincoln Sesquicentennial Commission, 1960), 1:322-23.

³³⁵ Joseph Fifer, interview with Carl Sandburg, 1923, memo, Carl Sandburg Papers, University of Illinois.

³³⁶ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 373. In all the Seventh District counties that Lincoln campaigned in, save Putnam, Taylor did better in November than Logan had done in August. See Neely, “Did Lincoln Cause Logan’s Defeat?” 1-4.

³³⁷ For an analysis of the 1848 election results in Springfield, see Winkle, “Second Party System in Lincoln’s Springfield.”

carried the State.”³³⁸ The 15,701 voters who supported Van Buren (13% of the state total) were concentrated in northern Illinois, where Wentworth exercised great influence.

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The following month Lincoln returned to Washington for the brief second session of the Thirtieth Congress, which was to expire in March 1849.³³⁹ Vice-president George M. Dallas prophetically anticipated that slavery “will agitate the whole of this session.”³⁴⁰ Both major parties, sobered by the electoral showing of the Free Soilers, hoped to neutralize those upstarts somehow. The slavery debates in both session helped increase Lincoln’s awareness of the issue. As Massachusetts Senator Henry Wilson recalled, “the subject of slavery in the abstract was a topic of frequent discussion in the XXXth Congress. Its sinfulness, its wrongs, its deleterious influences, its power over the government and the people, were perhaps more fully discussed in that than in any previous Congress.”³⁴¹ In fact, slavery was by far the most frequently discussed topic in that Congress.³⁴² Lincoln paid special attention to the subject, as he had told William Henry Seward he would.

³³⁸ Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 6 December 1848.

³³⁹ Wayne C. Temple, “Lincoln’s Route to Washington from Springfield in 1848,” unpublished paper in the author’s possession.

³⁴⁰ Dallas, diary entry for 13 December 1848, quoted in Roy F. Nichols, ed., “The Mystery of the Dallas Papers, II,” Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 73 (1949): 485-86.

³⁴¹ Wilson, Rise and Fall of the Slave Power, 2:190-91.

³⁴² The index to the Congressional Globe for the 30th Congress indicates that slavery was discussed in 244 speeches and sets of remarks; government finances and appropriations in 160; the 1848 French Revolution in 52; the War with Mexico in 49; and internal improvements and the veto of the harbor bill in 24. In calculating the number of times slavery was discussed, the following topics listed in the index were counted: slaves, slavery, slave trade, District of Columbia (slavery and the slave trade in, riot in Washington, the abducted slaves in Washington), territorial bills (for Oregon, New Mexico, and California), and the claims of Antonio Pacheco. The indices for both sessions and for the appendices as well as the regular reports of debates were consulted. There is some overlap between the appendix and regular reports, so the figures cited reflect the relative frequency rather than the precise number of times with which various subjects were discussed on the floor of the House.

During the previous session, he had done little about it other than voting with antislavery bloc.³⁴³ He may have avoided speaking on the slavery issue then for fear of endangering party unity in a presidential election year. He was hardly alone in his reticence, for, as Joshua R. Giddings observed, “It was the habit of northern men to shrink from the investigation of any subject in which the peculiar institution was involved; they did not like to approach it.”³⁴⁴ As the leading antislavery member of Congress, Giddings helped shape Lincoln’s views. A fellow representative from Illinois, Orlando B. Ficklin, recalled that Lincoln “was thrown in a mess [rooming house] with Joshua R. Giddings. In this company his views crystallized, and when he came out from such association he was fixed in his views on emancipation.”³⁴⁵ On December 21, 1847, Lincoln had supported Giddings’s motion to refer an antislavery petition from District of Columbia residents to the Judiciary Committee. It was a divisive vote; Congressman John Wentworth reported that “I have never known a reference of a petition to cause such an excitement before.”³⁴⁶ The motion to table was defeated 98-97, with Speaker Winthrop casting a tie-breaking vote.³⁴⁷ A week later, Lincoln voted for a similar motion by Caleb

³⁴³ During the first session of the Thirtieth Congress, on twenty-four roll call votes dealing with slavery and related issues, Lincoln voted with antislavery militants like Giddings, Amos Tuck, and John G. Palfrey twenty times. Throughout the Thirtieth Congress, Lincoln voted regularly with the pro-Northern bloc when the House considered the question of slavery expansion into the territories. Joel H. Silbey, “The Slavery-Extension Controversy and Illinois Congressmen, 1846-50,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 58 (1965): 382.

³⁴⁴ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 101 (4 January 1848).

³⁴⁵ Interview with Ficklin, The Classmate: A Paper for Young People (Cincinnati), 6 February 1926. Ficklin’s reminiscences originally appeared in the Charleston, Illinois, Plaindealer in 1878. Joseph C. Ficklin to Albert J. Beveridge, Chicago, 23 March 1926, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

³⁴⁶ Washington correspondence, 22 December 1847, Chicago Daily Democrat, 4 January 1848. The Congressional Globe merely reported: “After some conversation, the question was put to lay the petition on the table.” Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 60 (21 December 1847).

³⁴⁷ House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 139-40 (21 December 1847).

B. Smith of Indiana.³⁴⁸ Two days thereafter, he opposed tabling a petition “praying that the public lands may be appropriated in aid of the extinction of slavery.”³⁴⁹

In January 1848, at the boarding house where Lincoln and Giddings messed, slave traders seized a black waiter and, “in the presence of his wife, gagged him, placed him in irons, and, with loaded pistols, forced him into one of the slave prisons” of Washington. The unfortunate victim had been buying his freedom for \$300, all but approximately \$60 of which he had paid by the time he was abducted.³⁵⁰ In response, Giddings called for an investigation of the matter and for the repeal of slave trading in the District, a resolution which Lincoln supported. Lincoln opposed tabling Giddings’ motion that a committee investigate the incident at Mrs. Sprigg’s as well as slave trading in Washington and the propriety of moving the capital to another city.³⁵¹ The following month, Lincoln opposed tabling a resolution nearly identical to the Wilmot Proviso.³⁵²

During the summer of 1848, the debate over slavery in the territories grew intense, posing the greatest threat to national unity since the South Carolina nullification crisis of 1832-33.³⁵³ In late June, John Wentworth told a friend: “we are just now in an

³⁴⁸ House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 161 (28 December 1847). The motion to table carried, 86-70.

³⁴⁹ Lincoln voted with the 87-70 minority against tabling a petition calling for this measure. House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 167-68 (30 December 1847).

³⁵⁰ Giddings in the Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 179 (17 January 1848).

³⁵¹ Lincoln voted with the 87-85 majority to defeat a motion to table Giddings’s resolution calling for an inquiry into the episode. After Giddings modified his motion slightly, it was tabled by a vote of 94-88, with Giddings and Lincoln voting in opposition. House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 250-53 (17 January 1848); John G. Palfrey to Charles Francis Adams, Washington, 17 January 1848, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁵² Introduced by Harvey Putnam of New York, it was tabled by a vote of 105 to 93. House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 453-54 (28 February 1848). John Gorham Palfrey called this vote a “very bad business.” He “could not see any reason to hope that this vote does not represent the [range?] of the House on the main question.” Palfrey to Charles Sumner, Washington, 28 February 1848, Palfrey Family Papers, Houghton Library, Harvard University.

³⁵³ Potter, Impending Crisis, 73.

awful state of excitement. A dissolution of the Union is threatened on every side. . . . Here is the battle ground; & it appears that, what is to be done for free principles, must be done within a few weeks. Some kind of a compromise will pass the Senate. Then comes the House, where a desperate fight will be made.”³⁵⁴ As Wentworth predicted, a compromise was proposed in the Senate by John M. Clayton of Delaware, who urged the establishment of territorial governments in Oregon, California and New Mexico; while retaining the antislavery statutes passed by the unofficial provisional government of Oregon, Clayton’s bill would have kept the legislatures of the other two territories from adopting laws relating to slavery, thus leaving the question to the Southern-dominated U.S. Supreme Court.³⁵⁵ Clayton and many other Southern Whigs had hoped thereby to avoid a direct vote on the controversial Wilmot Proviso. Southern Whigs in the lower chamber viewed the Clayton Compromise as a threat to the presidential hopes of Taylor.³⁵⁶ Northern Whigs suspected that this legislation might facilitate the expansion of slavery; they also feared that it might help support Texas’s claim on much of New Mexico, thus increasing substantially the area of a slave state.³⁵⁷ Antislavery militants denounced the compromise as a sell-out to the South.³⁵⁸ “The fate of millions & millions is to be voted upon,” observed Massachusetts Representative Horace Mann, a Conscience

³⁵⁴ Wentworth to Edmund S. Kimberly, 26 June 1848, quoted in Don E. Fehrenbacher, Chicago Giant: A Biography of “Long John” Wentworth (Madison, Wisconsin: American History Research Center, 1957), 79.

³⁵⁵ House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1124-25 (28 July 1848). The bill provided that slaves entering those territories could bring suit in federal court to determine the legality of slavery there.

³⁵⁶ William J. Cooper, The South and the Politics of Slavery, 1828-1856 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1978), 265.

³⁵⁷ Mark J. Stegmaier, Texas, New Mexico, and the Compromise of 1850: Boundary Dispute & Sectional Crisis (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1996), 30-31.

³⁵⁸ “The Compromise,” The Anti-Slavery Standard (New York), 27 July 1848; Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 335-37.

Whig. As the House was polled, the customary bedlam in the chamber died down, and “it was still as a church. Every man wanted to know how every other man voted.”³⁵⁹ By a margin of 112-97, the House tabled Clayton’s bill, thus killing it. Then the lower chamber passed a bill of its own, establishing a territorial government for Oregon with the proviso that Thomas Jefferson’s antislavery Northwest Ordinance of 1787 should be applied there. Lincoln supported the measure, which passed 128-71.³⁶⁰ A week later, Lincoln joined the House majority in rejecting President Polk’s recommendation to extend the 1820 Missouri Compromise line to the west coast, widely regarded as a measure favorable to slavery expansion because most of the Mexican Cession lay south of that line.³⁶¹

By the time Congress adjourned in mid-August, Oregon had finally become a territory, one without slavery. The attempt to fasten the peculiar institution on California and New Mexico had been thwarted and they remained unorganized. A journalist called these developments “the only signal defeat the slave power has ever experienced under this government,” and an antislavery Congressman exulted over the “great triumph,” which he considered “one of the most glorious things that has happened this century.”³⁶² On only three occasions during the long first session of the Thirtieth Congress did Lincoln vote against Giddings and other antislavery militants. In April 1848, he sided

³⁵⁹ Horace Mann to Mary Mann, Washington, 18 and 29 July 1848, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁶⁰ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1027 (2 August 1848); House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1153-56 (2 August 1848).

³⁶¹ Potter, Impending Crisis, 69-73; Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1062 (11 August 1848). The measure lost 121-82.

³⁶² Washington correspondence by [John] B[rown], 13 August, New York Evening Post (weekly ed.), 24 August 1848; Horace Mann to Mary Mann, Washington, 11 and 13 August 1848, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

with a 130-42 majority in tabling John G. Palfrey's resolutions calling for an investigation of riots following the attempt of many Washington slaves to escape. Twenty other Northern Whigs, among them five from New England, joined Lincoln; thirty-six, including twelve from New England, supported the resolution.³⁶³ An antislavery Congressman from Massachusetts explained that "we were all glad that the subject of Mr. Palfrey's resolutions had their quietus" because "if the matter had been sent to a committee, it would have been found, that there was really no sufficient cause, for the interference of the House, on the grounds he presented. It would seem, therefore, like a failure on our side & a triumph on theirs. But, as the whole matter of those resolutions was laid on the table, it was a kind of drawn game, -- the opponents [i.e., pro-slavery forces], indeed, having an advantage, but not such an advantage as they would otherwise have gained."³⁶⁴

The following month, Lincoln was the only Northern Whig opposing Amos Tuck's motion to suspend the rules to permit the introduction of a resolution directing relevant committees to report a bill outlawing slavery and the slave trade in Washington. The motion lost by a 90-54 margin.³⁶⁵ Lincoln's vote is hard to understand, for he was no friend of either slavery or the slave trade in the capital, as his actions during the second session of the Thirtieth Congress would show dramatically. During the July and August

³⁶³ House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 720-21 (25 April 1848).

³⁶⁴ Horace Mann to his wife, Washington, 1 May 1848, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society. The main argument against the motion was that it was based on threats made by the mob against Joshua Giddings when he visited Daniel Drayton and Edward Sayers, who were accused of helping the runaway slaves, in jail. Opponents of the resolution argued plausibly that Congressional privilege, upon which the motion rested, applied only to acts and words of Representatives in the House itself, or while on official business outside the capitol. Giddings's visit to the District jail did not constitute such privileged conduct, opponents argued. See remarks by Democratic Congressman William W. Wick of Indiana, Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 665-66 (25 April 1848).

³⁶⁵ House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 839-41 (29 May 1848).

debates over slavery in the territories, Lincoln voted with the Giddings bloc on thirteen of fourteen roll calls.³⁶⁶ He broke with them to join the 104-69 majority favoring the suspension of the rules to permit consideration of a joint resolution declaring it expedient to establish civil government in New Mexico, Oregon, and California. Nine other Northern Whigs voted to suspend the rules, including Joseph Root, a witty, sharp-tongued, militant opponent of slavery from the Western Reserve of Ohio “known to the whole country as Greeley’s trump and Giddings’s right bower.”³⁶⁷ Lincoln also differed with the Giddings-Palfrey-Tuck-Mann forces (known as “Ultraists”) on the presidential question; he favored Taylor, while they supported John McLean.³⁶⁸

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Though doing little about the peculiar institution in 1848, other than voting with the antislavery forces, Lincoln that year expanded his knowledge of slavery through first-hand observation, as he had done in Kentucky the previous autumn. In the late 1840s, Washington was a predominantly Southern town with what John Randolph of Virginia called “a depot for a systematic slave market – an assemblage of prisons where the unfortunate beings, reluctant, no doubt, to be torn from their connexions, and the affections of their lives, [are] incarcerated and chained down, and thence driven in fetters like beasts, to be paid for like cattle.”³⁶⁹ In 1854, with obvious distaste Lincoln spoke

³⁶⁶ House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1103 (24 July 1848); 1112-16 (26 July 1848); 1124-25 (28 July 1848); 1152-55 (2 August 1848); 1243-45 (11 August 1848).

³⁶⁷ House Journal, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 1139 (31 July 1848); Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 572; Quincy (Illinois) Herald, 13 October 1854.

³⁶⁸ Robert C. Winthrop to John H. Clifford, Washington, 14 December 1847, Winthrop Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society; John G. Palfrey to Charles Francis Adams, Washington, 12 April 1848, Adams Papers, ibid.

³⁶⁹ Walter C. Clephane, “The Local Aspect of Slavery in the District of Columbia,” Records of the Columbia Historical Society 3 (1899): 235-41; Frederick W. Seward, Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman and Diplomat, 1830-1915 (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1916), 69; Constance McLaughlin

about Washington's slave pens: "in view from the windows of the capitol, a sort of negro-livery stable, where droves of negroes were collected, temporarily kept, and finally taken to Southern markets, precisely like droves of horses, had been openly maintained for fifty years."³⁷⁰ Lincoln was alluding to "the famous Georgia Pen,"³⁷¹ also known as Robey's Pen, which an observer called a "a wretched hovel, 'right against' the Capitol," encircled "by a wooden paling fourteen or fifteen feet in height," where "all colors, except white . . . both sexes, and all ages, are confined, exposed indiscriminately to all the contamination which may be expected in such society and under such seclusion."³⁷² A Washington correspondent in 1849 reported that the "negro pens in this city, from one of which the banner of freedom floats on Independence Day, are extremely offensive to every body but those who traffic in bones, flesh, sinews, and blood."³⁷³ That same year, another journalist observed four dozen slave women and children, brought to the District from Maryland aboard a train, hustled "with all dispatch into hacks, and shuffled into the pen belonging to the dealer," who would sell them to the lower South.³⁷⁴ On the floor of the House, Joshua Giddings decried the existence of "the slave pen in view of this

Green, The Secret City: A History of Race Relations in the Nation's Capital (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1967), 35-54; John Randolph, quoted in Don E. Fehrenbacher, The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery, ed. Ward M. McAfee (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 67.

³⁷⁰ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:253.

³⁷¹ In 1854, Lincoln referred to "the famous Georgia Pen, in Washington, where negroes were bought and sold within sight of the National Capitol, began to grow offensive in the nostrils of all good men, Southerners as well as Northerners." Speech in Bloomington, 26 September 1854, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:237-38.

³⁷² E. S. Abdy, Journal of a Residence and Tour of the United States of North America, from April, 1833, to October, 1834 (3 vols.; London: John Murray, 1835), 2: 96-97. On Washington Robey and other slave traders in the District of Columbia, see Frederic Bancroft, Slave-Trading in the Old South (Baltimore: Furst, 1931), 45-66.

³⁷³ Washington correspondence, 25 January, New York Herald, 28 January 1849. See Green, Washington, 1:178-79.

³⁷⁴ "The Slave Pens in the District of Columbia," New York Evening Post (weekly ed.), 3 May 1849.

Capitol, in which there was more sighing, and weeping, and groaning, and more human suffering than imagination could paint.”³⁷⁵

In April 1848, over seventy slaves in the District of Columbia boldly tried to escape aboard the schooner Pearl, which had been chartered by an abolitionist sympathizer, Daniel Drayton. Betrayed by a black man, the fugitives, after traveling 140 miles, were overtaken, imprisoned, promptly sold, and removed further south.³⁷⁶ The capital was “in a most unparalleled state of excitement” as hundreds of incensed whites marched on the office of the antislavery newspaper, The National Era, demanding that its editor, Gamaliel Bailey, leave the District. When Bailey refused, the mob began to stone the building, but the police, assisted by leading citizens who feared that the capital might be moved to another city, restored order before significant damage was done or blood was shed.³⁷⁷ When Joshua Giddings went to the District jail to assure Drayton and Sayers that they would receive legal counsel, a mob threatened the Congressman’s life.³⁷⁸

Doubtless this episode reminded Lincoln and many others of the fatal attack on Elijah Lovejoy’s newspaper office in Alton, Illinois, a decade earlier. In the House, Giddings

³⁷⁵ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 102 (4 January 1848).

³⁷⁶ See Josephine F. Pacheco, The Pearl: A Failed Slave Escape on the Potomac (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Stanley Harrold, “Pearl Affair: The Washington Riot of 1848,” Records of the Columbia Historical Society 50 (1980): 140-58; Stanley Harrold, Subversives: Antislavery Community in Washington, D.C., 1828-1865 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2003), 116-45; Clephane, “Local Aspect of Slavery,” 247-49; [Richard Hildreth], Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, for Four Years and Four Months a Prisoner (for Charity’s Sake) in Washington Jail, Including a Narrative of the Voyage and Capture of the Schooner Pearl (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1855); Samuel Gridley Howe, Slavery at Washington: Narrative of the Heroic Adventures of Drayton, an American Trader, in “The Pearl” (London: Ward, 1848). Drayton and the skipper of the Pearl, Edward Sayers, were convicted of larceny and spent more than four years in jail.

³⁷⁷ Washington correspondence, 19 April, Baltimore Sun, 29 April 1848; “The Events of the Week,” The National Era (Washington), 27 April 1848; Washington correspondence, 28 December 1848, New York Evening Post (weekly ed.), 4 January 1849.

³⁷⁸ Statement by Giddings, Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 664 (21 April 1848); Giddings, History of the Rebellion, 272-79.

and John G. Palfrey introduced resolutions of inquiry, which touched off a debate marked by “violent gesticulations,” “vociferation,” and an “angry tone” full of “menace.”³⁷⁹ An antislavery Congressman reported that “we have had threats, insults, the invocation of mob-rule & lynch law, &, indeed, all the whole Southern armory has been exhausted upon us. Their orators . . . begin as tho’ they were calling up a herd of slaves from a distant cotton-field” and “gesticulate, as tho’ they had the lash in hand, & were cutting into the flesh, before & behind.”³⁸⁰ One such southerner, Andrew Johnson, who in 1865 would become Lincoln’s vice-president, tauntingly asked Palfrey if he wanted his daughter to marry a black man.³⁸¹ In the upper chamber, Henry S. Foote of Mississippi invited New Hampshire Senator John P. Hale, a leading antislavery spokesman, to visit his state and promised that his constituents, with the assistance of their senator, would lynch him from “one of the tallest trees of the forest.”³⁸²

Lincoln had been a silent observer of these episodes and debates, which forced him to think about the peculiar institution more seriously than he had done since 1837, when he condemned slavery as “based on injustice and bad policy.” He would act on this new consciousness in the second session of the Thirtieth Congress.

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Early in that session, Palfrey of Massachusetts, one of the handful of antislavery militants in the House, asked leave to submit a bill abolishing slavery in Washington,

³⁷⁹ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 649-73 (20-25 April 1848); Horace Mann to his wife, Washington, 21 April 1848, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁸⁰ Horace Mann to Samuel Gridley Howe, Washington, 22 April 1848, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁸¹ Graf, ed., Papers of Andrew Johnson, 1:418-20 (15 April 1848).

³⁸² Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st session, appendix, 502 (20 April 1848).

D.C.³⁸³ Because it contained no provision for compensating owners, Lincoln voted against Palfrey's measure, one of only six Northern Whigs to do so.³⁸⁴ That same day he voted twice to support Joseph Root's motion instructing the Committee on Territories to propose legislation excluding slavery from California and New Mexico.³⁸⁵ (A motion to table lost 106-80; the resolution then passed 108-80. Palfrey called the latter vote "very encouraging.")³⁸⁶ On December 18, Lincoln again voted in favor of Root's measure. That day Giddings introduced legislation to allow District residents, including blacks, to express their opinion on abolishing the peculiar institution; it was tabled by a vote of 106-79, with Lincoln and nine other Northern Whigs siding with the majority.³⁸⁷ A Whig journalist complained that Giddings, Palfrey, and their allies "come nearly every day with a number of sixpenny propositions, which have had the effect to exasperate and madden the Southern members."³⁸⁸

On December 21, when Daniel Gott of New York submitted a resolution calling for the abolition of the slave trade in the District, Lincoln, for unclear reasons, joined three other Northern Whigs in an unsuccessful bid to table it.³⁸⁹ Giddings said that such a

³⁸³ Giddings said Palfrey "knows nothing about politicks, but is exceedingly interesting on morals, religion and science." Gattell, Palfrey, 152.

³⁸⁴ Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 158; House Journal, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 97 (13 December 1848); Giddings, History of the Rebellion, 284-85. Palfrey's request, made on 13 December 1848, was denied by a vote of 82-70.

³⁸⁵ House Journal, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 98-99 (13 December 1848); Giddings, History of the Rebellion, 293-94.

³⁸⁶ Palfrey to Charles Francis Adams, Washington, 13 December 1848, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

³⁸⁷ House Journal, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 106 (18 December 1848); Giddings, History of the Rebellion, 285.

³⁸⁸ William Schouler, Washington correspondence, 26 December, Boston Atlas, 29 December 1848.

³⁸⁹ The motion to table lost 85-81. House Journal, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 132 (21 December 1848).

vote was “regarded as a direct support of the slave trade.”³⁹⁰ Like some other Whigs, Lincoln thought the resolution’s preamble – which stated that slave trading in the District was “contrary to natural justice” and “notoriously a reproach to our country throughout Christendom and a serious hindrance to the progress of republican liberty among the nations of the earth” – was too abrasive.³⁹¹ Resolutions like Gott’s had been offered many times, but without such a controversial preamble, which Whig Congressman Caleb B. Smith, an opponent of slavery, criticized for its tendency to “inflame or excite the people of the South” and “hold them up to the odium of the country.”³⁹² Lincoln probably agreed with Smith’s contention that the Gott resolution was “a most unfortunate step. We should proceed to correct the evil of the slave trade here [in Washington] by temperate and practical measures, and not by adopting resolutions filled with fierce denunciations of the institution of slavery. They can do no good. They goad the South to madness and will prevent any legislation calculated to remedy the existing evils. . . . The great object for which the North should now strive is to prevent the extension of slavery. Men of the South were gradually making up their minds to submit to the Wilmot proviso. At such a time it is madness to excite them to frenzy by these wholesale denunciations of slavery in general terms. Every effort of this kind is lessening the chance to pass the Wilmot proviso.”³⁹³ Horace Greeley, who wrote the preamble and persuaded Gott to adopt it,

³⁹⁰ Joshua Giddings to Charles Sumner, Washington, 22 December 1848, Sumner Papers, Harvard University; Giddings, History of the Rebellion, 286-88.

³⁹¹ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 1046n4; House Journal, 30th Congress, 2nd session, 132 (21 December 1848); Josiah G. Holland, The Life of Abraham Lincoln (Springfield, Mass.: Gurdon Bill, 1866), 120; Greeley, “Greeley’s Estimate of Lincoln,” 373.

³⁹² Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix, 214 (10 January 1849).

³⁹³ Smith to Thomas B. Stevenson, Washington, 14 January 1849, Stevenson Papers, Cincinnati Historical Society.

insisted that there “would have been the same clamor had the resolution been offered without it.”³⁹⁴

Perhaps Lincoln opposed Gott’s resolution not only because he objected to the inflammatory preamble but also because he himself was preparing a stronger measure. Later that day, he sided with the 98-87 minority (including two other Northern Whigs) against its adoption, a vote which occurred “amid great excitement,” for it represented the first Congressional action limiting domestic slave trading.³⁹⁵ This dramatic gesture struck fear into the hearts of Southern Senators and Representatives, who warned that their region might withdraw from the Union if the Free States “did not recant and recede.”³⁹⁶ Senators John C. Calhoun of South Carolina and Henry Foote of Mississippi (the would-be lyncher of Senator Hale) organized a caucus of Southern members of Congress to respond to what they considered northern acts threatening their section with “degradation.”³⁹⁷ A Boston journalist observed that scoffers at Southern truculence “have no idea of the deep, and hidden, and giant-like under-current of emotion that is flowing through the hearts of many Southrons.”³⁹⁸ Representatives from the below the Mason-

³⁹⁴ Greeley to Schuyler Colfax, Washington, 2 and 24 January 1849, Greeley Papers, New York Public Library.

³⁹⁵ House Journal, 30th Congress, 2nd session, 134 (21 December 1848); Washington correspondence, 21 December, New York Tribune, 23 December 1848.

³⁹⁶ “Sectional Demonstrations,” New York Tribune, 22 January 1849; “Address of the Southern Delegates in Congress, to Their Constituents,” Reports and Public Letters of John C. Calhoun, ed. Richard K. Cralle (New York: Appleton, 1859), 285-313.

³⁹⁷ Under the leadership of Calhoun, many Southern members of Congress, dismayed by the passage of the Gott resolution, the next day began caucusing to determine how to respond to this alarming development. Potter, Impending Crisis, 83-86. They had been alarmed not only by the Gott resolution but also by Caleb B. Smith’s bill, introduced on 28 July 1848, to organize California as a free territory. Charles M. Wiltse, John C. Calhoun (3 vols.; Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1944-51), 3:377-78.

³⁹⁸ Washington correspondence, 26 January, Boston Atlas, 29 January 1849. Cf. “The Southern Organization – The Meaning of It,” and “The Southern Members of Congress and the Slave Trade – A Remarkable Somerset,” The National Era (Washington), 4 January 1849. The legislatures of Virginia, Florida, Missouri, and large public meetings in South Carolina and Mississippi, and Democratic

Dixon line had been complaining during the debates on slavery that they felt “wounded and offended at the style of language so often indulged in by gentlemen on this floor, who treat the question as men of a single idea, denouncing the institution and those who live in its midst.”³⁹⁹ Intimidated by the prospect of disunion, the House on January 10 voted (with Lincoln and fifteen other Northern Whigs in the 119-81 majority) to reconsider the Gott resolution, thus effectively consigning it “to the tomb of the Capulets.”⁴⁰⁰ The antislavery Radical George W. Julian observed that unlike “several of his Northern brethren” (among them Caleb B. Smith and Truman Smith), Lincoln “showed no disposition to dodge the question, but placed himself squarely on the side of the South.”⁴⁰¹ These votes on Gott’s resolution caused Horace Greeley to term Lincoln “one of the very mildest type of Wilmot Proviso Whigs from the free States” and Julian to deem him “a moderate Wilmot Proviso man” whose “anti-slavery education had scarcely begun.”⁴⁰²

But in fact Lincoln’s antislavery education was well advanced, as he demonstrated the very day that he voted to reconsider the Gott resolution: he announced he would offer a substitute for that measure, a bill more advanced than the New Yorker’s resolution, calling for the abolition of slavery itself – not just slave trading – in the District of Columbia. (Twelve years earlier, as a state legislator, he had unsuccessfully

conventions in Alabama and Georgia indicated their approval of Calhoun’s position. Potter, Impending Crisis, 88-89.

³⁹⁹ Remarks of Robert M. McLane of Maryland, Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 202 (19 January 1848).

⁴⁰⁰ House Journal, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 230 (10 January 1849); Representative Nathan K. Hall of New York, quoted in Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 388.

⁴⁰¹ George W. Julian, The Life of Joshua R. Giddings (Chicago: McClurg, 1892), 261.

⁴⁰² “Greeley’s Estimate of Lincoln,” 374; Julian, Giddings, 261.

tried to help make possible the abolition of slavery in the District.)⁴⁰³ He evidently agreed with William Lloyd Garrison that the “abolition of the slave traffic . . . is impractical while slavery exists. There is no reason why slave-trading should be prohibited if slave-holding is justified and allowed.”⁴⁰⁴ Lincoln proposed that, starting in 1850, all children born to slave mothers in the District were to be free; that their mothers’ owners would be responsible for supporting and educating those children; that the children in return “would owe reasonable service, as apprentices, to such owners . . . until they respectively arrive at the age of ____ years when they shall be entirely free;” that if owners emancipated slaves in the District, Congress would compensate them at full market value (to be determined by a board consisting of the president and his secretaries of state and the treasury); that fugitive slaves reaching the District would be extradited by municipal authorities. (Lincoln was evidently trying to mollify those who feared that abolition “would render Washington intolerable as a residence, by converting it into a receptacle for runaway negroes.”)⁴⁰⁵ The bill was to take effect only if a majority of the voters of the District approved it. Lincoln announced “that he was authorized to say, that among fifteen of the leading citizens of the District of Columbia to whom this proposition had been submitted, there was not one but who approved of the adoption of such a measure.”⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ He then proposed to amend a motion affirming that Congress had no right to abolish slavery in the nation’s capital; the amendment called for the insertion of the following language: “unless the people of said District petition for the same.” Paul Simon, Lincoln’s Preparation for Greatness: The Illinois Legislative Years (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1965), 132; Miers, ed., Lincoln Day by Day, 1:65 (entry for January 20). In 1839 he voted to table a resolution declaring that Congress should not abolish slavery in the District of Columbia or the territories, or prohibit the interstate slave trade. Ibid., 1:104 (entry for February 2).

⁴⁰⁴ The Liberator (Boston), 9 February 1849.

⁴⁰⁵ Washington correspondence by “Ion,” 2 February, Baltimore Sun, 3 February 1849.

⁴⁰⁶ Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:20-22.

When colleagues shouted out, “Who are they?” “Give us their names!” Lincoln did not reply. Two were Joseph Gales, co-editor of the National Intelligencer, and his partner William S. Seaton, the mayor of Washington.⁴⁰⁷ A day earlier, Joshua Giddings and Lincoln had called on Seaton. Years later Lincoln told an interviewer: “I visited [the] Mayor, Seaton, and others whom I thought best acquainted with the sentiment of the people, to ascertain if a bill such as I proposed would be endorsed by them Being informed that it would meet with their hearty approbation I gave notice in Congress that I should introduce a bill. Subsequently I learned that many leading southern members of Congress, had been to see the Mayor and the others who favored my bill and had drawn them over to their way of thinking. Finding that I was abandoned by my former backers and having little personal influence, I dropped the matter knowing it was useless to prosecute the business at that time.”⁴⁰⁸ (Between 1805 and 1862, Congress voted on no proposals to abolish slavery in Washington.)⁴⁰⁹

As president, Lincoln would introduce a scheme for gradual, compensated, emancipation, with a provision offering federal assistance to freed slaves wishing to leave the country; no such clause appeared in his 1849 plan. A plan for colonization might have rendered his statute more palatable to whites. One Washington correspondent believed that if a gradual, compensated emancipation bill were accompanied by “a law prohibiting

⁴⁰⁷ Scripps, Life of Lincoln, ed. Basler and Dunlap, 101; Alfred G. Harris, “Lincoln and the Question of Slavery in the District of Columbia,” Lincoln Herald 51 (1949): 17-21. The other signers may have included those who affixed their signatures to the petition introduced by Giddings on 21 December 1847, calling for the abolition of the slave trade in Washington (William Flaherty, William Blanchard, George Savage, J. C. Greer, B. Milburn, C. S. Fowler, T. M. Milburn, Charles C. Moore, Joseph Scholfield, Columbus McLeod, William Greer, John T. Whitaker, James Handley, Martin Buell, J. F. Callan, H. Taylor, Thomas P. Vial, and Thomas Fitnam.) Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st session, 60 (21 December 1847).

⁴⁰⁸ James Quay Howard’s notes of an interview with Lincoln, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁰⁹ Fehrenbacher, Slaveholding Republic, 66.

free blacks from settling here, every [white] man in the district will hold up both hands in favor of the measure. A more lazy, dirty, impudent set of rascals never breathed than the free blacks who infest Washington.”⁴¹⁰

Some Southerners condemned Lincoln as an abolitionist.⁴¹¹ At the opposite end of the political spectrum, the antislavery purist Wendell Phillips regarded Lincoln’s proposal to end slavery in the District as “one of the poorest and most confused specimens of pro-slavery compromise.”⁴¹² Joshua Giddings, however, praised Lincoln’s bill, which he had helped compose. On January 8, 1849, the Ohio antislavery militant recorded in his diary: “Mr. [John] Dickey of P[ennsylvania] and Mr. Lincoln of Illinois were busy preparing resolutions to abolish slavery in the D C this morning. I had a conversation with them and advised them to draw up a bill for that purpose and push it through. They hesitated and finally accepted my proposition. . . . Mr. Lincoln called on me this evening and read his bill and asked my opinion which I freely gave.” Three days later, Giddings confided to his diary that “our whole mess remained in the dining-room after tea, and conversed upon the subject of Mr. Lincoln’s bill to abolish slavery. It was approved by all; I believe it as good a bill as we could get at this time, and am willing to pay for slaves in order to save them from the Southern market.”⁴¹³

Giddings’s judgment was echoed by The National Era, whose abolitionist editor, Gamaliel Bailey, said two weeks before Lincoln announced his plan: “we should like to see a bill [emancipating slaves in the capital] prepared, submitting the question to the

⁴¹⁰ Washington correspondence, 2 February, New York Herald, 6 February 1849.

⁴¹¹ “Another Abolition Appointment by Taylor,” [Vicksburg?] Sentinel, copied in the Yazoo Democrat (Yazoo City, Mississippi), 10 October 1849.

⁴¹² The Liberator (Boston), 13 July 1860.

⁴¹³ Giddings diary, 8 and 11 January 1849, Ohio Historical Society, Columbus.

[legally] qualified [i.e., adult white male] voters of the District, with the distinct information that a liberal appropriation would be made to aid in the act of emancipation. Such a bill, we doubt not, would pass Congress, and we have just as little doubt as to the decision of the citizens of this District under it.” A measure of that sort “would be giving to thousands of citizens, unrepresented in any legislative body, an opportunity to do a high act of justice, with some grace; and would also result in the emancipation, not transfer, of the victims of Slavery. Pass an act of abolition, without such provision as we have suggested, and before it could take effect, almost every slave in the District would be sold to the South.”⁴¹⁴

While some abolitionists objected to compensating slaveholders, others (including Elihu Burritt, Gerrit Smith, and Abel Stevens) did not.⁴¹⁵ In Washington the leading abolitionists and most active conductors on the local underground railroad – William L. Chaplin and Jacob Bigelow – originally opposed compensation but eventually endorsed it. In 1848, Chaplin called upon antislavery forces to spurn “all that class of cute philosophers, who raise doubt about buying people out of bondage” and to “reject the dogma, that money is lost which is paid for slaves. Every dollar thus paid is a most effective sermon to the conscience of the guilty.” Five years later, Bigelow wrote that “On the subject of paying for slaves, to secure their freedom, I acknowledge that I once theorised against it; but was, long ago very summarily cured of my theory, when I came to practice upon it.”⁴¹⁶ Some leading antislavery politicians, among them William Henry

⁴¹⁴ National Era (Washington), 28 December 1848.

⁴¹⁵ Betty L. Fladeland, “Compensated Emancipation: A Rejected Alternative,” Journal of Southern History 42 (1976): 169-86.

⁴¹⁶ Albany Patriot, 22 March and 24 May 1848, and Anti-Slavery Reporter, 1 May 1853, quoted in Harrold, Subversives, 102-3.

Seward and Salmon P. Chase, also supported compensation for Washington slave-owners.⁴¹⁷ (Like Lincoln, Seward favored compensated emancipation in the District of Columbia only if a majority of voters there approved it.)⁴¹⁸

Horace Greeley decried Lincoln's provision to require the electorate of the District vote on emancipation: "it seemed to me much like submitting to a vote of the inmates of a penitentiary a proposition to double the length of their respective terms of imprisonment."⁴¹⁹ In fact, many citizens of the District had long opposed slavery and slave trading in their midst.⁴²⁰ In 1828, nearly 600 Washingtonians had petitioned Congress to abolish slavery there.⁴²¹ Moreover, as the Baltimore Sun pointed out, because Congress controlled the District, and since no Senators or Representatives were elected by its residents, it would be unjust to deny the voters there a say in the matter; the electorate of a state (or its representatives) had to be consulted if slavery were to be abolished within its borders. Congress might technically have the power to abolish slavery in the District without such a referendum, but it would be unwise to do so, said the Sun, citing Shakespeare: "it is well to have a giant's strength, but tyrannous to use it like a giant. We submit, however, that to abolish slavery in the District without the consent of a majority of the white population would be a wanton exercise of that absolutism with which Congress has been vested in its legislative relation to the people of

⁴¹⁷ Chase to John Greenleaf Whittier, Columbus, 23 November 1860, John Niven et al., eds., The Salmon P. Chase Papers (5 vols.; Kent: Kent State University Press, 1993-98), 3:36; Chase to John Jay, Columbus, 16 January 1861, Jay Family Papers, Columbia University.

⁴¹⁸ George E. Baker, ed., The Works of William H. Seward (5 vols.; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1884), 1:67.

⁴¹⁹ "Greeley's Estimate of Lincoln," 374. See also Robert W. Johannsen, Lincoln, the South, and Slavery: The Political Dimension (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 17.

⁴²⁰ Clephane, "Local Aspect of Slavery," 243.

⁴²¹ House Document 140, Serial Set # 274, 9 February 1835.*

the District. . . . For our part, we believe it would be greatly conducive to the peace of the nation on this subject, if slavery was abolished there by their own consent and free will.”⁴²² The Georgetown Advocate, a pro-Taylor journal, predicted that “if the public would make provision to purchase out the slaves now held in the District, compensating the owners of them therefor, we do not suppose that the slaveholders of the District would have any serious objection thereto.”⁴²³ A Congressman in late 1847 reported that there was evidently “a very large party in the District favorable to the gradual abolition of slavery in the District, and a small party in favor of the immediate abolition. A majority of Congress is disposed to leave this matter to the voters of the District.”⁴²⁴ In 1854, Lincoln himself said that six years earlier “I heard no one express a doubt that a system of gradual emancipation, with compensation to owners, would meet the approbation of a large majority of the white people of the District.”⁴²⁵ In 1850, Illinois Congressman and future governor William Bissell, referring to the possible abolition of slavery in Washington, reported from the capital that “it is well understood here that if the question was submitted to the people of the District a large majority would vote in favour of it.”⁴²⁶ When Lincoln announced that he planned to offer such a bill, a correspondent for the pro-Taylor Boston Atlas, reported that it was “believed that there is a large majority of the House in favor of some such proposition” and “that the sooner some step of the kind is

⁴²² Baltimore Sun, n.d., copied in The National Era (Washington), 4 January 1849.

⁴²³ Georgetown Advocate, 30 December 1848.

⁴²⁴ [John Wentworth], Washington correspondence, 22 December 1847, Chicago Daily Democrat, 4 January 1848.

⁴²⁵ Speech at Peoria, 16 October 1854, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:260.

⁴²⁶ William Bissell to Joseph Gillespie, Washington, 19 April 1850, Joseph Gillespie Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. All this evidence casts doubt on Charles M. Wiltse’s contention that “Lincoln’s bill was in fact an evasion, for no one could believe after the excitement of April 1848 [when the Pearl incident occurred] that the white male inhabitants of the District would accept such a measure.” Wiltse, Calhoun, 3:54n14.

taken, the better it will be for the peace and union of the country.” It was universally agreed that “whatever action may be had in the premises, compensation must follow. This may be the ground of compromise that will continue. We must take men and the laws as they are, not as one would have them, and regulate our legislation on those principles of justice and expediency, which so marked and honored the national councils of our fathers.”⁴²⁷ A New York Herald reporter who opposed slavery declared that it would be “dishonorable in the extreme” to “free at once all slaves, without compensating their owners.”⁴²⁸ House Speaker Robert C. Winthrop believed that “compensation must go hand in hand with emancipation. It is this view which takes away the idea of selfishness from Northern philanthropy. If we admit that we are to unite with the South in bearing the burdens & defraying the cost of Abolition, we make it a matter of joint interest in regard to which our voices may fairly be heard.” The only way to persuade slave owners to accept emancipation would be to offer compensation, he argued. “Those who oppose such a course, however philanthropic they may be in theory, are practically riveting the bonds which they desire to break.”⁴²⁹

In framing his bill, Lincoln may have been influenced by Great Britain’s abolition of West Indian slavery in 1834. Parliament had appropriated £20,000,000 to compensate the owners of 800,000 liberated bondsmen.⁴³⁰ Similarly, Congress during the Revolutionary War had offered to compensate slave owners whose bondsmen served in

⁴²⁷ Washington correspondence by “Athenian,” 10 January, Boston Atlas, 15 January 1849.

⁴²⁸ Washington correspondence, 2 February, New York Herald, 6 February 1849.

⁴²⁹ Winthrop to John H. Clifford, Washington, 20 January 1849, and to his son Robert, Washington, 18 February 1849, Winthrop Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴³⁰ William A. Green, British Slave Emancipation: The Sugar Colonies and the Great Experiment, 1830-1865 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976), 99-127.

the army and thus gained their freedom.⁴³¹ Lincoln might also have considered the example set by Pennsylvania, whose legislature abolished slavery gradually, liberating children born to slave mothers after a specified date once those children had attained their majority. New Jersey and New York had followed Pennsylvania's lead.⁴³²

In 1860, Wendell Phillips triggered a lively debate by denouncing Lincoln as “the slave hound of Illinois” because his 1849 emancipation bill included a fugitive slave clause.⁴³³ In a public letter to Phillips, Joshua Giddings defended Lincoln: “his conversing with the people of the District, the preparation of his bill, the avowal of his intention to present it, were important.” Such actions placed him among “those who were laboring in the cause of humanity. He avowed his intention to strike down slavery and the slave trade in the District; to strike from our statute book the act by which freemen were transformed into slaves; to speak, and act, and vote for the right,” and “cast aside the shackles of party, and took his stand upon principle.” Chiding Phillips, Giddings added: “You speak of that act with great severity of condemnation. I view it as one of high moral excellence, marking the heroism of the man. He was the only member among the Whigs proper [as opposed to the handful of antislavery Whigs] of that session, who broke the silence on the subject of those crimes.”⁴³⁴

⁴³¹ Fehrenbacher, Slaveholding Republic, 19-20.

⁴³² Arthur Zilversmit, The First Emancipation: The Abolition of Slavery in the North (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), 124-37, 175-99. Rhode Island and Connecticut also abolished slavery gradually.

⁴³³ The Liberator (Boston), 30 June 1860. Later he said “I never charged A.L. with insincerity [or] hypocrisy or that sort of thing – Said that, heedlessly for party ends – to conciliate &c. &c. he volunteered to extend that odious fraud.” Phillips added, “I think now exactly as I did then – A.L. had merits but he had spots & large ones on his disk.” Phillips to Herndon, n.p., n.d., Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 704.

⁴³⁴ Giddings to Phillips, Jefferson, Ohio, 30 July 1860, Ashtabula, Ohio, Sentinel, n.d., copied in The Liberator (Boston), 24 August 1860. See Phillips's reply, The Liberator (Boston), 24 August 1860. In a letter to John Gorham Palfrey in 1858, Giddings said that before 1849, there were only eleven members of the Congress to whom he was “much attached.” He does not name the eleven, but Lincoln might well have

Sydney Howard Gay, managing editor of the New York Tribune and a militant opponent of slavery, also challenged his old friend Phillips.⁴³⁵ In August, 1860, William Herndon, probably speaking for Lincoln, told Gay: “Your reply to Wendell Phillips’s article in the Liberator was correct.” Gay, Herndon said, was “familiar – too familiar – with legislative business not to know that . . . no one man can possibly get his own ideas put into any statute – any law, or any Constitution.” Passing bills involved “concession – compromise.” When “Lincoln was in Congress this State of affairs Existed: he was then a strong Anti-Slavery man and is now the same. This I know, though he wishes and will act under the Constitution: he is radical in heart, but in action he must Conform to Law & Constitution as Construed in good old times.” Thus, Herndon, a conspicuous admirer of Phillips, concluded: “Lincoln, in reference to the Bill about which Mr. Phillips wrote his articles, was actuated by Anti-Slavery sentiments alone In doing this he had to consult his friends’ feelings and ideas or he could do nothing; and so his bill was drawn up with a reference to all the aforesaid Conditions – conflicting sentiments & ideas.” Lincoln “wanted the slave trade in the District of Columbia cut up by the roots and slavery gradually abolished.”⁴³⁶

Echoing Herndon, a New York Tribune correspondent in the fall of 1849 described Lincoln as “conspicuous in the last Congress – especially during the last session, when he attempted to frame and put through a bill for the gradual Abolition of Slavery in the

been one of them. Giddings to Palfrey, Jefferson, Ohio, 27 September 1858, Palfrey Family Papers, Harvard University.

⁴³⁵ “A New Misrepresentation,” New York Tribune, 4 July 1860, and “Phillips versus Lincoln,” ibid., 18 July 1860. Phillips replied in The Liberator (Boston), 13 and 27 July 1860.

⁴³⁶ Herndon to Sydney Howard Gay, Springfield, 10 August 1860, Gay Papers, Columbia University. On Herndon’s admiration for Phillips, see Herndon to Theodore Parker, Springfield, 15 December 1859, Herndon-Parker Papers, University of Iowa.

District of Columbia. He is a strong but judicious enemy to Slavery, and his efforts are usually very practical, if not always successful.”⁴³⁷ Eleven years later, Joshua Giddings declared that while he and Lincoln were in Congress “they became intimately acquainted – boarding at the same house, and sitting opposite each other at meals; that he thought he knew the heart of Abraham Lincoln as well as any living man, and speaking from that knowledge, he believed that every beat of ‘honest Abe’s’ heart was a throb of sincerity and truth – in a word, that he is that noblest work of God – an honest man. He believed Lincoln’s loyalty to republican principles, and to the cause of freedom and humanity, was unquestionable and beyond suspicion.”⁴³⁸

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Throughout the winter of 1848-49, antislavery forces battled various schemes to finesse the Wilmot Proviso.⁴³⁹ When Whig Congressman William B. Preston of Virginia, following the lead of Illinois Senator Stephen A. Douglas, proposed the admission of the Mexican Cession as a single state, calling this expedient “the only door” through which a compromise acceptable to both North and South could pass, Northern Whigs balked,

⁴³⁷ Washington correspondence by C. B. A., 20 September 1849, New York Tribune, 22 September 1849. C. B. A. added that Lincoln “is a man of sound judgment, good, though not brilliant mind, and capable, mentally and physically, of great endurance.”

⁴³⁸ Speech of 22 May 1860 at Oberlin, Ohio, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 28 May 1860. A biographer of Giddings noted that even though “Giddings’ radicalism far surpassed that of Lincoln in 1858, and even more so by 1860, he became a staunch supporter of Lincoln. Even after the convention of 1860, and the evident vote-trading and politicking that preceded the nomination, Giddings repeatedly expressed his confidence in the honesty and sincerity of Lincoln’s antislavery convictions.” Solberg, “Giddings,” 475.

⁴³⁹ Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 388-90; Preston King to Charles Sumner, Ogdensburg, N.Y., 3 December 1848, Sumner Papers, Harvard University. In January, John G. Palfrey reported that antislavery Congressmen believed “that they have done all in the way of positive action which can be done to advantage this session, & that their further part is but to resist the adversary in such forms as he may assume.” Palfrey to Charles Francis Adams, Washington, 29 January 1849, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

demanding that the Wilmot Proviso be applied to that territory.⁴⁴⁰ An attempt to omit it was defeated, cheering antislavery Congressmen like Horace Mann, who exclaimed “Glorious!!”⁴⁴¹ On February 27, the House killed Preston’s bill.⁴⁴²

Another attempt to circumvent the Wilmot Proviso was made late in the session when Wisconsin Senator Isaac P. Walker proposed to abrogate the laws of Mexico, including statutes dealing with slavery, in the Mexican Cession and allow the president to frame appropriate rules for that territory. Though it passed the Senate, it died by a vote of 114-100 in the House. The next day (the final one of the session), another attempt was made to railroad the measure through, provoking such a heated debate that fisticuffs broke out in both houses, during which “blood flowed freely.” A Congressman reported that some colleagues “were fiercely exasperated & had the north been as ferocious as the south, or the whigs as violent as the Democrats, it is probable there would have been a general melée.”⁴⁴³ More vividly a Kentuckian described the mayhem in the lower chamber: “Imagine 230 tom cats fastened in a room, from which escape is impossible, with tin cans tied to their tails – raging and screaming, and fighting, and flying about from 6 P.M. to 6 A.M., twelve hours – and you will have some idea of the last jubilee in the House. About ten o’clock, [Richard K]. Meade of Virginia, and Giddings of Ohio, had a fight – Meade drunk. About 3 A.M., Sunday morning, [Jacob] Thompson of Mississippi, and [Orlando

⁴⁴⁰ William J. Cooper, Jr., “‘The Only Door’: The Territorial Issue, the Preston Bill, and the Southern Whigs,” in Michael F. Holt et al., eds., A Master’s Due: Essays in Honor of David Herbert Donald (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1985), 59-86.

⁴⁴¹ Horace Mann to Charles Sumner, Washington, 27 February 1849, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴⁴² The crucial vote was on an amendment to include the Wilmot Proviso in a bill designed to circumvent that proviso. That amendment carried 91-87. No roll call was recorded on this key vote. Cooper, “‘The Only Door,’” 84.

⁴⁴³ Horace Mann to his wife, Washington, 4 March 1849, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

B.] Ficklin of Illinois, had a knock down – both drunk. Many members were drunk, as I was assured by one of their own body – as eyes and ears informed me.”⁴⁴⁴ Observed an Alabamian: “The whole matter . . . was disgraceful to the Congress of the United States.”⁴⁴⁵

A relieved Giddings observed that “we weathered the most dangerous point on the last night of the late session. Our barque will now glide along I think in smooth water.”⁴⁴⁶ Thus California and New Mexico remained unorganized as Taylor was inaugurated, which suited the antislavery forces, who felt that the “best thing that can be done in regard to the territories, this session, is to do nothing.”⁴⁴⁷ Giddings thought the March 3 vote “a fatal blow to the institution [of slavery], from which it never recovered. And its downfall may be dated from that eventful night.”⁴⁴⁸

That winter Congressmen also wrangled over the claim of the heirs of Antonio Pacheco, who sought compensation for a slave who had been taken away from him twelve years earlier. The Army had seized Pacheco’s bondsman Lewis to serve in the Seminole wars; when the Indians captured Lewis, he was considered by the military to have gone over to the enemy. Hence at the end of the conflict he was sent west with his captors. In debating this claim, Giddings and his allies insisted that humans could not be

⁴⁴⁴ Washington correspondence, n.d., Maysville, Kentucky, Eagle, n.d., copied in the Indiana State Journal (Indianapolis), weekly ed., 30 April 1849. Cf. Giddings, History of the Rebellion, 298, and Giddings’ diary, 3-4 March 1849, Ohio Historical Society.

⁴⁴⁵ Robert T. Scott to Reuben Chapman, 5 March 1849, Chapman Papers, quoted in Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 390.

⁴⁴⁶ Giddings to Charles Sumner, Jefferson, Ohio, 30 March 1849, Sumner Papers, Harvard University.

⁴⁴⁷ Horace Mann to his wife, Washington, 17 February 1849, Horace Mann Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁴⁴⁸ Giddings, History of the Rebellion, 299.

considered property and hence Pacheco's claim should be denied.⁴⁴⁹ Lincoln voted regularly with the Giddings bloc on that claim, which ultimately was not approved.⁴⁵⁰

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In the wake of Taylor's victory, aggressive Whigs besieged Lincoln and other members of Congress, clamoring for "a lick at the spoon" (i.e., U.S. government jobs, including diplomats, customs collectors, postmasters, judges, attorneys, marshals, census takers, clerks, and land office registers and receivers.)⁴⁵¹ As one of his constituents noted, Lincoln was "harast to deth by applicants for the various offices."⁴⁵² He could, therefore, easily identify with Kentucky Governor John J. Crittenden, who in March reported: "I have never witnessed a greater or more wide-spread cupidity for office. It has absolutely sickened me."⁴⁵³ House Speaker Winthrop similarly lamented that the "solicitations, personal or by letter, by a thousand seekers of minor offices have begun to make my life a burden to me."⁴⁵⁴ Daniel Lord lamented that "the greediness after office has become a national disgrace" and "has resulted in filling the offices of the general government with men who in every respect injure and disgrace the country."⁴⁵⁵ Lincoln may well have

⁴⁴⁹ Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix, 123-30 172-78; 187; 238-44, 302-3 (28 December 1848; 6, 8, 12, 19 January 1849); Giddings, History of the Rebellion, 288-91; Fehrenbacher, Slaveholding Republic, 8-11. The bill to pay Pacheco was defeated by a vote of 90-89. A motion to reconsider was successful, and the second time around the bill passed 105-95. It was, however, never implemented, for the Senate did not consider it.

⁴⁵⁰ House Journal, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, 167, 207, 242-43, 276-78. During the first session of the Thirtieth Congress, Representatives had argued at length over a similar bill to compensate an owner whose slave had been carried off by the British in 1814. Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 784-85 (19 May 1848), and Appendix, 540-44 (13 May 1848); Giddings, History of the Rebellion, 281-82. When the bill to compensate the claimant finally passed the House, the ayes and nays were not recorded.

⁴⁵¹ Kirwan, Crittenden, 248.

⁴⁵² Peter Menard to Lincoln, Tremont, 4 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵³ Crittenden to John M. Clayton, Frankfort, 13 March 1849, Clayton Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁵⁴ Letter to an unidentified correspondent, 21 December 1848, Winthrop, Memoir of Winthrop, 89.

⁴⁵⁵ Daniel Lord to John M. Clayton, New York, 30 March 1849, Clayton Papers, Library of Congress.

exclaimed “amen!” when a constituent said, “you must find it irksome and troublesome attending to the numerous calls for office in our State,” and he doubtless would have endorsed the sentiment expressed by David Davis, who in 1853 declared: “If men would use half the industry & energy, in any other calling, that they do, in running down an office, they would get rich.”⁴⁵⁶

Lincoln conscientiously tended to the requests of office seekers, just as he had dutifully answered constituents’ mail and regularly voted on the floor of the House.⁴⁵⁷ (He missed but one quorum call and only 13 of 456 roll calls during his term).⁴⁵⁸ But as a lame-duck freshman, he wielded little influence. “Not one man recommended by me has yet been appointed to any thing, little or big, except a few who had no opposition,” he lamented in May 1849.⁴⁵⁹ Many Illinois Whigs were indignant at the shabby treatment he received.⁴⁶⁰ Although he later would say during his presidency that “he did not regard it as just to the public to pay the debts of personal friendship with offices that belonged to the people,” Lincoln tried to procure jobs for some close personal and political friends, including Anson G. Henry, Jesse K. Dubois, and Simeon Francis.⁴⁶¹ He managed to win Henry an Indian agency appointment and to get Dubois the post of receiver of public monies in Palestine, Illinois, but was less fortunate in his repeated attempts to secure a

⁴⁵⁶ Philo H. Thompson to Lincoln, Pekin, 23 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; David Davis to [William P. Walker], Bloomington, Illinois, 14 March 1853, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁵⁷ Findley, Crucible of Congress, 172-79.

⁴⁵⁸ Most of the votes he missed were on minor procedural matters. His 97% participation rate in roll calls compares favorably with the 74% average of the Thirtieth Congress. Findley, Crucible of Congress, 168-71.

⁴⁵⁹ Lincoln to George W. Rives, Springfield, 7 May 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:46.

⁴⁶⁰ Anson S. Miller to Anson G. Henry, Rockford, 8 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁶¹ Angle, ed., Herndon’s Lincoln, 100.

position for Francis, who wanted to move to Oregon.⁴⁶² For his brother-in-law, Dr. William Wallace, he obtained the pension agency in Springfield, causing a defeated rival to complain that “Mrs Lincoln said to some one the other day – that she was now so happy – that she had got Mr. L. to give the Pension Agency to the Doctor & now all of their family difficulties was made up – so you see I was offered up as a sacrifice – a sort of burnt offering – to heal family broils.”⁴⁶³

George W. Rives, a Whig activist in Paris, Illinois, who sought a government job in Minnesota, was turned down by Lincoln because Anson Henry had applied for a job in that same territory.⁴⁶⁴ Later, when told that Rives had openly abused him, Lincoln grew irritated. In December 1849, when Rives once again asked for a recommendation, Lincoln answered with some asperity that his “feelings were wounded” by allegations that Rives had criticized him: “On receiving your last letter, the question occurred whether you were attempting to use me, at the same time you would injure me, or whether you might not have been misrepresented to me. If the former, I ought not to answer you; if the latter I ought, and so I have remained in suspense.” Magnanimously, Lincoln sent Rives an endorsement.⁴⁶⁵ (In the 1850s, Rives became an enthusiastic supporter of Lincoln, whom he called “one of the best men God ever made.”)⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶² Lincoln to John M. Clayton, Springfield, 21 August, 16 and 27 September, and to Thomas Ewing, 27 September and 17 November 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:61, 64, 65, 67. After Francis failed to win the post, he reported to a U.S. Senator that both he and Lincoln “were bitterly disappointed.” Simeon Francis to John Davis, Appointment Papers, Territory of Oregon, 1849-1907, Records of the Interior Department, RG 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁴⁶³ Orville [Paddock?] to his sister, Springfield, 12 June 1849, Paddock Family Papers, Missouri Historical Society. According to this letter, Dr. Wallace had been refusing to speak to Lincoln.

⁴⁶⁴ Lincoln was unable to win Henry a post in Minnesota. Caleb B. Smith to Lincoln, Washington, 3 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁶⁵ Lincoln to Rives, Springfield, 7 May, 15 December 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:46, 69. According to Rives, Henry had spread false rumors that Rives was disparaging Lincoln behind his back. When he learned of this alleged calumny, Rives confronted Henry and demanded a retraction. Henry

Lincoln failed to win appointments for many constituents in part because of his characteristic diffidence, a grave handicap for combatants in patronage struggles. In February, 1849, a would-be Indiana postmaster observed that “a modest man stands no chance now a days, either with the ladies, or as a successful applicant for the smiles of Government.”⁴⁶⁷ Lincoln couched his recommendations in a self-effacing manner, declaring that incumbents were able men who had opposed the Whigs, and merely suggesting the names of replacements if vacancies should occur.⁴⁶⁸ When endorsing one James T. B. Stapp, he lauded him as “better qualified” than other applicants but added that “a large majority of the Whigs of the District” preferred someone else.⁴⁶⁹ Some Whigs were unhappy with Lincoln’s patronage choices. Dr. Richard F. Barrett, a Kentucky-born physician with whom Lincoln had served on the Illinois Whig Central Committee in 1840, talked with many Springfield party faithful who “all agree that men older in service and of more weight and strength of character could have been selected

denied the charge but did go to Lincoln with Rives and exonerated him. Rives did not use Lincoln’s letter of recommendation but eventually, with the help of Lincoln, won the appointment for his brother-in-law, John Stratton. “A Test of Friendship,” in Memoirs of Abraham Lincoln in Edgar County (Paris: Edgar County Historical Society, 1925), 12-13.

⁴⁶⁶ Rives to O. M. Hatch, Paris, Illinois, 10 November 1858, Hatch Papers, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield. See Rives to Lincoln, Paris, 15 and 22 May, 4 June, and 15 November 1858, 2 August 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁶⁷ William H. Chandler to Elisha Embree, Evansville, Indiana, 3 February 1849, Embree Papers, Manuscripts Department, Indiana Division, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

⁴⁶⁸ John Hay observed that Lincoln’s recommendations “are probably unique of their kind. . . . He nowhere asks for the removal of an incumbent; he never claims a place as subject to his disposition; in fact, he makes no personal claim whatever; he simply advises the Government, in case a vacancy occurs, who, in his opinion, is the best man to fill it. . . . The candor, the fairness and moderation, together with the respect for the public service which these recommendations display, are all the more remarkable when we reflect that there was as yet no sign of a public conscience upon the subject [of civil service reform]. The patronage of the Government was scrambled for, as a matter of course.” John G. Nicolay and John Hay, Abraham Lincoln: A History (10 vols.; New York: Century, 1890), 1:292-93.

⁴⁶⁹ Lincoln to Thomas Ewing, Springfield, 3 June 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:52.

for office.”⁴⁷⁰ Among the most controversial appointees recommended by Lincoln was

Turner R. King, “a kind of worthless man” in William Herndon’s estimation.⁴⁷¹ Dr. Barrett, scandalized by King’s appointment, told Thomas Ewing: “I think Mr. Lincoln has been imposed upon by King, and his friends.” Barrett claimed that King, whom he had known for years, “was once a shoe maker, and was then much more deserving than now.” Presently “he is a free drinker, card player, bankrupt, and loafer, and for months and years has done little or nothing for an honest livelyhood.” King was therefore “wholly undeserving the patronage of the Government.”⁴⁷² William Butler, who aspired for the same post King wanted, lodged similar complaints. Lincoln had endorsed King on the recommendation of Philo H. Thompson of Pekin.⁴⁷³ In April he informed Thompson that a “tirade is still kept up against me here [in Springfield] for recommending” King and urged Thompson to gather 200-300 signatures on a petition favoring King.⁴⁷⁴ In response, Thompson assured Lincoln that King was a “warm active whig” and sent a petition stating that while “King may sometimes drink spirits, or throw a Card for amusement,” he was not “an Abolitionist, a Drunkard and a Gambler” in “any true sense.”⁴⁷⁵ After receiving this document, Lincoln informed Ewing that there was “no

⁴⁷⁰ Barrett to Thomas Ewing, Springfield, 6 May 1849, copy, Ewing Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁷¹ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 15 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Thomas Ewing, Springfield, 7 April and 10 May 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:40-41, 46-47.

⁴⁷² Barrett to Ewing, Springfield, 6 May 1849, copy, Ewing Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁷³ Philo H. Thompson to Lincoln, Pekin, 19 April 1849, Lincoln papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁷⁴ Lincoln to Thompson, Springfield, 25 April 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:44.

⁴⁷⁵ Copy of a petition signed by P. H. Thompson and 138 others, Pekin, 1 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Thompson said “King has been charged before this with being an abolitionist. The charge is a false one. Ever since he has been here he has been a warm active whig. What he may have been before his removal to Tazewell I know not. He had a brother here awhile in business with him who was an avowed and open abolitionist, but T. R King always opposed him while here in conversation and by his votes. That King occasionally takes a glass of something stronger than water I have no doubt but that he is a drunkard is also false. That King plays occasionally a game of eucere, whist & poker I have no doubt,

mistake about King's being a good man" and charged his friend William Butler with acting "in bad faith" by launching a "totally outrageous assault" on King.⁴⁷⁶

Lincoln's conduct in this case is a mystery. According to Herndon, he favored King over his old friend Butler because "King lived in a northern county [Tazewell]" which "Lincoln wanted and King could carry" in Congressional elections. Since Butler lived in Sangamon County, he "couldn't be of any use" to Lincoln in the northern part of the District. (King's brother Franklin, who had influence with the more militant antislavery forces, was in business with him.) Butler, angry because Lincoln helped King beat him out for the post of register of the Springfield land office, "opposed Lincoln in all his aspirations for office from 1847 till about 1858," Herndon recalled.⁴⁷⁷

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Thanks in part to William Butler's enmity, Lincoln failed most conspicuously when he sought a place for himself. At first, he had not planned to ask for an office, because, as he explained to Joshua Speed, "there is nothing about me which would authorize me to think of a first class office; and a second class one would not compensate

never playing any of those games myself I have never been in the way of knowing to what extent he plays." Thompson to Lincoln, Pekin, 23 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁷⁶ Lincoln to Thomas Ewing, Springfield, 10 May 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:46-47. Benjamin F. James told Lincoln that "King is much annoyed at the reports circulated about him in Springfield and denies the truth of them most strongly." James to Lincoln, [Tremont], 29 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. In May a resident of Pekin wrote Lincoln saying: "Understanding that the enemies of T R King (of our place) have circulated reports calculating to reproach the character of said King to wit that he was a gambler tipler and immoral that he had been indicted at our courts for keeping a gambling house &c. Now the first of these charges are incorrect having been acquainted with Mr King for some five years I know him to be a man of good habits both moral and temperate. The last charge arose from this circumstance Being myself at that time on the Grand Jury; a strict search being made to find out the offenders who kept gameing houses; some person through some ill will against Mr King in this matter alledged that some few persons (friends no doubt of Mr Kings) called at his room one evening and that they played cards for corn and said witness believed that the corn was redeemed with money; the Grand Jury accordingly found a bill; but the whole thing looked so malicious it being in his own private room the court took no notice of it." David Mark to Lincoln, Pekin, 2 May 1849, ibid.

⁴⁷⁷ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 15 and 16 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

me for being snarled at by others who want it for themselves.” He could, he said, “have the Genl. Land office almost by common consent,” but he did not wish to antagonize other Illinoisans who sought that post, which paid \$3000 a year.⁴⁷⁸ (The governor of Illinois earned \$1000 annually and an Illinois supreme court justice \$1200.)

The General Land Office was considered one of “the largest and most arduous” of government bureaus, whose commissioner “personally supervises nearly the whole of the immense work performed” by several dozen clerks. Already in 1849 “one of the most important departments,” the significance of the office was “rapidly increasing.” A journalist noted that when “our new territorial acquisition shall have been surveyed and thrown into market, the duties of the office will be still greater.”⁴⁷⁹ Illinois residents thought their state was entitled to that commissionership, for Ohio had controlled it for a decade, then Indiana for eight years, and Illinois (in the persons of James Shields and Richard M. Young) had done so for merely five years; it was only fair that a Sucker should be commissioner for a few more years, after which another western state should get it.⁴⁸⁰

⁴⁷⁸ Lincoln to Speed, Washington, 20 February 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:28-29. According to Nathaniel G. Wilcox, “there was a general expression among the Whig members of Congress with whom Mr. Lincoln served, that he should be commissioner of the General Land Office, but he would not consent to have his name mentioned in that connection, and a paper which had been drawn up, and signed by several Whigs from Ills. recommending him for that office, was torn up and destroyed on his refusing the use of his name.” Wilcox’s 1866 statement for Joseph H. Barrett, Lincoln Miscellaneous Collection, University of Chicago. Wilcox reported that Orville H. Browning and Archibald Williams also declined suggestions that they seek the commissionership.

⁴⁷⁹ Washington correspondence, 25 January, New York Herald, 27 January 1849.

⁴⁸⁰ Sidney Breese to Zachary Taylor, Carlyle, Illinois, 10 April 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

At first, Lincoln backed Cyrus Edwards, who in November had been recommended by three Whigs, including his old friend Joseph Gillespie.⁴⁸¹ In early 1849, William Thomas and Nathaniel Pope encouraged Lincoln to support him.⁴⁸² When the governor and the legislature of Kentucky also endorsed Edwards, who appealed for Lincoln's help in February, Lincoln agreed to press his candidacy.⁴⁸³ (Some Whigs, however, were unenthusiastic. Benjamin F. James told Lincoln "it is certainly due to this state . . . [that] the active Whigs should be thought of before those who like Edwards are shorn of their energy and strength.")⁴⁸⁴

While Lincoln threw his weight behind Edwards, the only other Whig Congressman from Illinois, Edward D. Baker, who had moved to Galena in 1848 and promptly won election to the House, supported Col. James L. D. (Don) Morrison, a Whig state senator from St. Clair County and Mexican War veteran who was known as "one of the most formidable demagogues in the State" with "the bearing of an egotist and aristocrat."⁴⁸⁵ Resentful of

⁴⁸¹ Gillespie et al. to Lincoln, 23 November 1848, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁴⁸² W. Thomas to Lincoln, Springfield, 27 January 1849, and Nathaniel Pope to Lincoln, Springfield, 3 February 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. In February, Gillespie told Lincoln that so few Illinois legislators had signed a petition on behalf of Edwards because of the carelessness of someone who was supposed to circulate it and did not. In the meantime, many members had affixed their signatures to petitions for Sweet who would have signed one for Edwards if they had been asked.

⁴⁸³ On February 15, Edwards received Lincoln's letter expressing his willingness to help him. Cyrus Edwards to Justin Butterfield, Illinois, Woodlawn, Illinois, 11 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁴⁸⁴ Benjamin F. James to Lincoln, [Tremont], 29 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁸⁵ Baker to Thomas Ewing, Galena, 14 May 1849, and Morrison to Zachary Taylor, Belleville, 13 April 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Koerner, Memoirs, 1:489-90; John F. Snyder, "Col. Don Morrison," 14, unpublished biographical sketch, Snyder Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Edwards claimed that Baker opposed his candidacy because at the funeral of John J. Hardin, Edwards's address was more warmly received than that of the

Baker's pushiness – as were many others – Elihu B. Washburne of Galena, who probably would have won that district's Congressional seat if Baker had not intervened, opposed Morrison and backed Martin P. Sweet.⁴⁸⁶ Joining Washburne were influential Whigs like S. Lisle Smith and Justin Butterfield of Chicago. Thus a three-way contest developed, pitting Edwards, Morrison, and Sweet against one another.

Morrison's opponents charged that he would face a conflict of interest if he became commissioner, for he had purchased some ancient French claims to land near Peoria that would be extremely lucrative if sustained.⁴⁸⁷ His ethical sense was so feeble that when he predicted to Governor John Reynolds that he would be rich some day, the Old Ranger replied: "I guess you will be, Don, if you can manage to keep out of the penitentiary that long."⁴⁸⁸

As events unfolded, Lincoln feared that a candidate from some other state might win the commissionership. In February, he told Joshua Speed that former Congressman

jealous Baker, who was vain about his oratorical skills. Cyrus Edwards to Justin Butterfield, Woodlawn, Illinois, 11 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. Duff Green believed that Baker wished to supplant Cyrus Edwards as the leading Illinois Whig and thus tried to block his appointment by using unfair tactics, including having Morrison solicit endorsements while Edwards abstained in the belief that both he and Baker would do so. Duff Green to [Zachary Taylor?], Washington, 27 April 1849, ibid.

⁴⁸⁶ E. B. Washburne to Thomas Ewing, Galena, 28 May 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Robert J. Cross to Washburne, Roscoe, Illinois, 22 May 1848, and Thomas Drummond to E. B. Washburne, Galena, 11 February 1849, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress. In February a St. Louis journalist asserted that Cyrus Edwards, Martin Sweet, and Don Morrison were candidates for the commissionership. Springfield correspondence, n.d., St. Louis New Era, n.d., quoted in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 5 February 1849.

⁴⁸⁷ Charles Balance to William M. Meredith, Peoria, 7 March 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. An article in the St. Louis New Era alleged that Morrison speculated heavily in land and would be in a conflict of interest situation as commissioner of the General Land Office. Springfield correspondence, n.d., St. Louis New Era, n.d., quoted in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 5 February 1849.

⁴⁸⁸ Snyder, "Morrison," 24.

Edward W. McCaughery of Indiana was lobbying for the job “and being personally known, he will be hard to beat by any one who is not.”⁴⁸⁹ (That was precisely Cyrus Edwards’s problem. According to David Davis, “Mr. Edwards is unknown at Washington, & will not get it.”)⁴⁹⁰ Also in the hunt were aspirants from Alabama, Iowa, Florida, and Mississippi.⁴⁹¹ Anticipating that one of these interlopers might be successful, Lincoln and Baker agreed to support either Edwards or Morrison, who were to decide between them which one would drop out of the running.⁴⁹² (Sweet had earlier withdrawn his candidacy.) On April 19, Lincoln told Edwards: “what I can do for you I shall do, but I can do nothing till all negotiation between you and Don is at an end, because of my pledge to Baker. Still they know at the Department I am for you.”⁴⁹³

Lincoln was not alone in his fears; on April 6, Anson G. Henry and four other Illinois Whig leaders appealed to him to seek the commissionership himself, lest an out-of-stater win it.⁴⁹⁴ Illinois Whigs had already lost the chief justiceship of the Minnesota

⁴⁸⁹ Lincoln to Speed, Washington, 20 February 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:29.

⁴⁹⁰ David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Mt. Pulaski, Illinois, 24 April 1849, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁴⁹¹ Josiah M. Lucas to Lincoln, Washington, 12 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Lucas, who had been publisher of the Jacksonville Illinoisian, was fired in 1853 because of his Whig background and because he was, nevertheless, a friend of Stephen A. Douglas. Lucas to Douglas, Washington, 2 July 1853, Douglas Papers, University of Chicago.

⁴⁹² Baker and Lincoln to Thomas Ewing, Washington, 11 March 1849, The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Second Supplement, 1848-1865, ed. Roy P. Basler and Christian O. Basler (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1990), 15; Cyrus Edwards to Justin Butterfield, Woodlawn, Illinois, 11 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. Cf. Lincoln to William M. Meredith, Washington, 9 March 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:32.

⁴⁹³ Lincoln’s letter is quoted in Cyrus Edwards to Justin Butterfield, Woodlawn, Illinois, 11 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁴⁹⁴ A. G. Henry, W. B. Warren, William Pope, John Todd Stuart, and Simeon Francis to Lincoln, Springfield, 6 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Territory by failing to unite on a candidate.⁴⁹⁵ Apparently Lincoln had been thinking about applying even before Cyrus Edwards asked his help. Weeks earlier, David Davis had urged him to “take the Land Office.”⁴⁹⁶ On his birthday, Lincoln replied: “I do not much doubt that I could take the Land-office if I would. It also would make me more money than I can otherwise make. Still, when I remember that taking the office would be a final surrender of the law [practice], and that every man in the state, who wants it himself, would be snarling at me about it, I shrink from it.”⁴⁹⁷ Lincoln told Justin

⁴⁹⁵ St. Louis New Era, n.d., copied in the Quincy, Illinois, Whig, 15 May 1849.

⁴⁹⁶ Davis to Lincoln, Bloomington, 21 February 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. On January 24 Davis had written Lincoln a letter, now lost, apparently urging the same action. See Lincoln to Davis, Washington, 12 February 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement, 14. Davis lobbied Congressmen to help win Lincoln the commissionership. On April 24, he told Massachusetts Congressman Julius Rockwell: “Judge Young, the present Commissioner of the Land Office, has resigned – the resignation to take effect the 30th of June next. This probably is not known & will not get into the papers but it is nevertheless true. There are I have no doubt hosts of applicants from this & other States. I want the office saved to this State, and want our friend Lincoln to have it. Lincoln would unquestionably have endeavoured to procure the appointment for himself last winter, but, Mr Cyrus Edwards of this State had got Lincoln to say that he would not interfere with his getting it, and so he came off & nothing was done. Mr. Edwards is unknown at Washington, & will not get it.

“Mr. Lincoln, if the appointment is tendered to him without any agency of his own, will take it. Lincoln is as worthy as any man, & I sincerely hope he may get the appointment.

“You would greatly oblige me if you would immediately, on receipt of this, address a letter to Mr. Ewing, the Secretary of the Home Department, soliciting the appointment of Mr. Lincoln, and get all of your late colleagues in Congress to unite in such recommendation, and then send the same as promptly to Mr. Ewing.

“I take it for granted that the appointment will be given to the Western States, hence, this letter to you.

“I know you wd prefer Lincoln to any man, that might be appointed in Kentucky, Tennessee, or Alabama.

“This State would prefer having the Land Office to any other Bureau at Washington. Besides, the incumbent now is from Illinois, & the Whigs wd hate it if the office should go elsewhere.

“It wd be a sad stroke on the Whigs – Lincoln’s appointment wd satisfy everybody.

“Please, without the least delay, get such influence at work as you can in Mass. & see that the proper papers are sent to Mr. Ewing.

“There is no time to be lost.” David Davis to Julius Rockwell, Mt. Pulaski, Illinois, 24 April 1849, Davis Papers, Illinois State Historical Society, Springfield.

⁴⁹⁷ Lincoln to Davis, Washington, 12 February 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement, 14.

Butterfield “that he did not want the office of Commissioner of the land office and would not consent to be a candidate, that he was a young man and could not afford to abandon his profession for a temporary appointment.”⁴⁹⁸ Denying that Lincoln’s legal career would suffer if he were to accept the commissionership, Davis advised his tall friend that he would make little money at the bar unless he moved to a large city.⁴⁹⁹

Financial concerns may have been weighing on Lincoln’s mind. While stumping Maryland in September 1848, his fellow campaigner William Pickney Whyte played a trick on him at their hotel. As Whyte later recalled, in the morning “I arose first and assuming a woe begone tone I said, Abe, you should see your horse.” Lincoln sprang from bed exclaiming in alarm, “My Lord, he isn’t dead is he?” In fact, his mount was perfectly healthy; Lincoln had panicked, Whyte explained, because he “was very poor.”⁵⁰⁰

On April 7, Lincoln, who had returned to Springfield a week earlier, cautiously replied to Anson G. Henry and the other Whig chieftains, saying that “if the office can be secured to Illinois by my consent to accept it, and not otherwise, I give that consent.” He insisted that he “must not only be chaste but above suspicion.” If offered the job, “I must be permitted to say ‘Give it to Mr. Edwards, or, if so agreed by them, to Col. Morrison, and I decline it; if not, I accept.’” He added that “if at any time, previous to an appointment being made, I shall learn that Mr. Edwards & Col. Morrison have agreed, I

⁴⁹⁸ Butterfield to Caleb B. Smith, Chicago, 28 May 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress.

⁴⁹⁹ Davis to Lincoln, Bloomington, 21 February 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Davis assured him that it was “a mistake that you would necessarily finally surrender the Law – Sh[oul]d a change of administration take place, I know you well enough to know that you could readily go back to the Law, and get in the Circuit & in the Supreme Court as good a practice as you want.”

⁵⁰⁰ Whyte told this story to Allen C. Clark. Clark, Abraham Lincoln in the National Capital (Washington: W. F. Roberts, 1925), 6. Whyte was a Baltimore lawyer and a member of the Maryland House of Delegates. He served as governor of Maryland (1872-74) and Senator from Maryland (1875-81).

shall at once carry out my stipulation with Col. Baker.”⁵⁰¹ Edwards replied that he did not wish to burden his friends or to play the role of dog-in-the-manger and wanted Lincoln to feel “entirely untrammelled” to do what he thought best in order to defeat Baker’s candidate, whoever that might be.⁵⁰²

A few days later yet another candidate entered the race, Justin Butterfield, a Chicago attorney known as “a very able lawyer” and “a man of rare wit and humor.”⁵⁰³ Lincoln enjoyed telling how Butterfield “was asked at the beginning of the Mexican War if he were not opposed to it; he said ‘no, I opposed one War [the War of 1812]. That was enough for me. I am now perpetually in favor of war, pestilence and famine.”⁵⁰⁴ John Dean Caton recalled that Butterfield’s “wit was generally of an unfortunate kind, for it usually partook of caustic sarcasm, which left a rankling fester in the feelings of its object, and to indulge in this vicious habit he sometimes could not resist the temptation to even endanger a cause.”⁵⁰⁵ Isaac N. Arnold noted that though he was effective in trying cases on appeal, Butterfield “lacked the tact and skill to be equally successful before a

⁵⁰¹ Lincoln to William B. Warren and others, Springfield, 7 April 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:41. Lincoln told Edwards about this letter and explained that “I was for you, and . . . if it [the commissionership] was offered to me, I should decline it in your favor, and would only accept it on their refusal to give it to you. This letter they have sent to the Department, and I suppose it is the strongest recommendation I could possibly give you, so far as producing effect is concerned.” Quoted in Cyrus Edwards to Justin Butterfield, Woodlawn, Illinois, 11 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁰² Cyrus Edwards to Justin Butterfield, Woodlawn, Illinois, 11 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁰³ Comments by Joseph Gillespie on the verso of Butterfield to Gillespie, Washington, 25 October 1849, Gillespie Papers, Chicago History Museum; Linder, Reminiscences, 87.

⁵⁰⁴ Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Hay Diary, 73 (entry for 13 August 1863).

⁵⁰⁵ Caton added that “Butterfield was undoubtedly a very able lawyer, and would often illustrate an idea by a comparison, with great force, which, however, was frequently more apt than convincing.” John Dean Caton, Early Bench and Bar of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Legal News, 1893), 114-15.

jury.”⁵⁰⁶ In 1839 he came near fighting a duel with William L. D. Ewing.⁵⁰⁷ A native of New Hampshire, the fifty-nine-year-old Butterfield had practiced law in New York before moving to Illinois. In 1841, President John Tyler named him U.S. district attorney in Chicago, a post he held until 1844.⁵⁰⁸ In 1849, he initially lobbied the Taylor administration for the job of treasury department solicitor.⁵⁰⁹

By April, with his chances for that slot fading, Butterfield shifted his attention to the commissionership of the General Land Office. On April 12, Josiah M. Lucas, an Illinois Whig journalist serving as a clerk in that agency and a long-time friend of Lincoln, alerted him that “Butterfield is trying his best for the place, although not here in person, he is operating through friends,” among them Interior Secretary Thomas Ewing, Congressman Truman Smith, and Senator Daniel Webster.⁵¹⁰ In May, the outgoing commissioner of the General Land Office, Richard M. Young (whom Butterfield denounced as “the most treacherous whining sniveling creature that ever existed”) had reported similar developments to Lincoln: “lay modesty aside and strike for yourself – From what I can learn J[ustin] B[utterfield] of C[hicago] – contrary to what he said to me when you was here, and after having lost the Solicitorship of the Treasury, is now playing a strong game for the Land office- Some think he will succeed – now cant you prevent,

⁵⁰⁶ Isaac N. Arnold, “Recollections of the Early Chicago and Illinois Bar,” Chicago Bar Association Lectures, no. 22 (Chicago: Fergus, 1882), 13.

⁵⁰⁷ Springfield correspondence by “Spy in Springfield,” 2 January, Quincy Whig, 18 January 1840.

⁵⁰⁸ Elwin L. Page, “Lincoln Was a Good Loser,” typescript dated 1955, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee; Elizabeth Sawyer to Jesse W. Weik, Chicago, 12 October 1888, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 712.

⁵⁰⁹ Butterfield to Caleb B. Smith, Chicago, 9 April 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress; Josiah M. Lucas to Lincoln, Washington, 15 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵¹⁰ Lucas to Lincoln, Washington, 12 and 15 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Lucas had worked with John J. Hardin editing the Jacksonville Illinoisan. In 1860 he wrote that he had been Lincoln’s neighbor since 1836 and “knew him intimately.” Lucas to O. M. Hatch, Washington, 12 August 1860, Hatch Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

by urging the claims of one A. Lincoln – who I am sure would be more acceptable here than any Whig in Illinois? What say you – Whatever you do, it will be well for it to be done quickly – and I am very sure that you can succeed better with this man Lincoln, than any person else.”⁵¹¹ On May 13, William H. Henderson made a similar appeal from Washington: “you should come on here without delay” for “your success would be better secured by your presence. It is said that the President is for you, & perhaps a majority of the Cabinet, and that Mr. Ewing is warmly in favour of Friend Butterfield of Chicago. If you wish to be Commissioner I am satisfied you should come to Washington without delay[.] I want you to have it in preference to any one else, and this is the Genl. feeling of the Clerks, but there is here a big powerful N. York, & Yankee influence, which is too formadable I think to be managed unless you come on.” Five days later Henderson was more importunate: “Your friends require your immediate presence[.] delay is fatal.”⁵¹² Butterfield complained that “Lincoln appears to think that he has an absolute right to the support of all the members of the Cabinet who served with him in Congress [i.e., Postmaster General Jacob Collamer and Navy Secretary William B. Preston]. A sentiment of this kind will not go down with the People, who will never subscribe to the doctrine that one election to Congress confers a right to a continual claim to future offices.” He also argued that he deserved the commissionership because four of Illinois’ seven delegates to the 1848 Whig national convention favored his candidacy; because “an overwhelming Majority of the Whigs of the Northern part of the State which contains the only Whig congressional district in the State and is entitled as a matter of right and

⁵¹¹ Butterfield to Caleb B. Smith, Lasalle, Illinois, 5 June 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress; Richard M. Young to Lincoln, Washington, 7 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵¹² Henderson to Lincoln, Washington, 13 and 18 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

Justice to this office (the middle and Southern portions of the State having monopolized all other offices) is for me;” and because “I speak from the record when I say that my qualifications for the office are paramount to Mr Lincoln.”⁵¹³ Butterfield accused Lincoln’s friends of conducting “a foul plot to defeat me by falsehood fraud and misrepresentation.”⁵¹⁴ He was particularly suspicious of Edward D. Baker, whose opposition had “its origin in personal malice and hostility because I ridiculed his attempts to force himself upon the President for a Cabinet appointment.”⁵¹⁵

Like some other Whigs, Lincoln thought Butterfield unworthy of a patronage reward, for the previous year he had supported Clay for the presidency and during the electoral campaign had done little for the party.⁵¹⁶ Anson G. Henry, who declared that Butterfield’s appointment would be “a great outrage upon the working men of the party,” asked rhetorically: “Who ever heard of Butterfield as a Whig untill the fight was over[?]”⁵¹⁷ Thomas Mather predicted that Butterfield’s appointment “would be odious in the extreme” to most Illinois Whigs.⁵¹⁸ Calling Butterfield “my personal friend” who was “qualified to do the duties of the office,” Lincoln nevertheless said that “of the quite one

⁵¹³ Butterfield to Caleb B. Smith, Lasalle, 5 June 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵¹⁴ Butterfield to Caleb B. Smith, Chicago, [1?] June 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress. On June 13, James W. Singleton offered to protect Butterfield “against an infamous plot.” Singleton to Butterfield, Mt. Sterling, Illinois, 13 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁵¹⁵ Butterfield to Caleb B. Smith, Chicago, 28 May 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵¹⁶ Simeon Francis to Zachary Taylor, Springfield, 30 May 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁵¹⁷ Henry to Lincoln, Springfield, 12 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Henry to David Davis, Springfield, 2 June 1849, Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. Cf. William T. Page to James Brooks, Mt. Carmel, Illinois, 11 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵¹⁸ Thomas Mather to William Mather, Springfield, 19 May 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

hundred Illinoisans, equally qualified, I do not know one with less claims to it.” Heatedly he declared that “it would mortify me deeply if Gen. Taylor’s administration shall trample all my wishes in the dust.”⁵¹⁹ To Secretary of the Navy William B. Preston, Lincoln also complained of Butterfield’s unworthiness: “In 1840 we fought a fierce and laborious battle in Illinois, many of us spending almost the entire year in the contest. The general victory came, and with it, the appointment of a set of drones, including this same Butterfield, who had never spent a dollar or lifted a finger in the fight.” Eight years later Butterfield was similarly inactive in the campaign. “Yet, when the election is secured, he is the first man on hand for the best office that our state lays any claim to. Shall this thing be?” Employing imagery that he would later use when denouncing slavery, Lincoln predicted that Illinois “whigs will throw down their arms, and fight no more, if the fruit of their labor is thus disposed of.”⁵²⁰ Lincoln, who hated to see some people enjoy the fruits of others’ labor, urged Duff Green to use his influence to defeat Butterfield by supporting Morrison, Edwards, or himself.⁵²¹ He implored Joseph Gillespie to write to Crittenden or Taylor.⁵²² To Indiana Congressmen Elisha Embree and Richard W. Thompson he predicted that the appointment of Butterfield would be “an egregious political blunder” and solicited them to lobby Taylor; both responded positively.⁵²³ Because the president granted cabinet members control over appointments in their departments, and since Secretary of the Interior Thomas Ewing insisted on Butterfield,

⁵¹⁹ Lincoln to Lucas, Springfield, 25 April 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2: 43-44.

⁵²⁰ Lincoln to Preston, Springfield, 16 May 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:49.

⁵²¹ Lincoln to Green, Springfield, 18 May 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:49-50.

⁵²² Lincoln to Gillespie, Springfield, 19 May 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:50.

⁵²³ Lincoln to Embree, Springfield, 25 May 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:51; Lincoln to Thomas Ewing, Springfield, 9 July 1849, Basler and Basler, eds., Collected Works of Lincoln, Second Supplement, 3-4.

Lincoln's chances appeared remote.⁵²⁴ Just as the final decision was about to be made, Anson G. Henry prevailed on Taylor to postpone the matter for three weeks. "I told him Butterfields appointment would ruin us in Ills.," Henry confided to a friend. Secretary William B. Preston informed Henry that "Lincoln is the only man in Illinois that can beat Butterfield, but that he can do it if he comes on, & his friends back him up."⁵²⁵

Lucas urged Lincoln to press his claims in the capital: "Things are moved here by personal importunity. . . . you possess an influence here."⁵²⁶ According to Lucas, Taylor and Postmaster General Jacob Collamer preferred Lincoln to Butterfield.⁵²⁷ "Pocket your modesty, as the preacher did his religion," Lucas counseled.⁵²⁸ (Lincoln received similar advice from William H. Henderson: "let me who has suffered so much from modesty – urge upon you as an old friend for this one time to lay it bye, and paddle your own boat.")⁵²⁹ On May 21, Lucas spoke with Taylor, who "expressed great partiality for Lincoln" and was "astonished" to learn from letters Lucas showed him that Butterfield was not the choice of most Illinois Whigs. According to Lucas, the president had been misled by three "rascals": Ewing, Caleb B. Smith, and Truman Smith. Taylor said he would postpone his decision until he heard more from the people of the Prairie State.⁵³⁰

⁵²⁴ A journalist told Josiah Lucas on May 10 that "Ewing insists upon Butterfield – and that he is his man." Josiah M. Lucas to Lincoln, Washington, 10 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵²⁵ A. G. Henry to Joseph Gillespie, Springfield, 2 June 1849, Joseph Gillespie Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield; Henry to David Davis, Springfield, 2 June 1849, Davis Papers, ibid.

⁵²⁶ Josiah M. Lucas to Lincoln, Washington, 15 April 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵²⁷ Josiah M. Lucas to Lincoln, Washington, 7 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. On Collamer's support for Lincoln's candidacy, see Richard M. Young to Lincoln, Washington, 7 May 1849, ibid.

⁵²⁸ Josiah M. Lucas to Lincoln, Washington, 10 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵²⁹ William H. Henderson to Lincoln, Washington, 11 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵³⁰ Josiah M. Lucas to Benjamin Edwards and Anson G. Henry, Washington, 22 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

(Caleb B. Smith, a shrewd and well-connected patronage broker, championed the candidacy of Butterfield because Butterfield's friends S. Lisle Smith and Charles L. Wilson of Chicago had vigorously promoted the Indiana Congressman's unsuccessful bid for a cabinet post.)⁵³¹ A week later, however, Duff Green's son reported to Lincoln, immediately after calling on Taylor, that the president "declined to depart from the rule he has established, to wit, to read no letters and listen to no explanations on the subject of appointments unless presented to him through the Secretaries of the respective departments. He requested me to file your letter with the secretary of the Interior, but as you desire it to be confidential I do not think proper to do so, without hearing further from you." Green added that the "understanding in the Land Office among the Clerks here, is that the appointment of Butterfield has been determined on, and that it is to take effect on the 1st June."⁵³²

In response to this news, Lincoln implored Illinois friends as well as colleagues in the House to write on his behalf.⁵³³ Friendly newspaper editors like Allen Ford of the Lacon Illinois Gazette endorsed his candidacy. "It is beyond all doubt the almost

⁵³¹ Thomas, "Smith," 111-14.

⁵³² Ben E. Green to Lincoln, Washington, 29 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵³³ Lincoln to Julius Rockwell, Springfield, 5 June 1849, transcript, Rockwell Papers, Lenox Public Library, Lenox, Massachusetts; Lincoln to Nathaniel Pope, Springfield, 8 June 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:53-54; A. L. Knapp and C. H. Knapp to Lincoln, Jerseyville, Illinois, 5 June 1849; Robert Boal to Lincoln, Lacon, 7 June 1849; Charles H. Constable to Lincoln, Mt. Carmel, 10 June 1849; William T. Page to Lincoln, Mt. Carmel, 11 June 1849; Robert C. Schenck to Lincoln, n.p., 11 June 1849;

John H. Morrison to Lincoln, 11 June 1849; E. F. Ryan to Lincoln, Lawrenceville, Illinois, 11 June 1849; James M. McLean to Lincoln, Lawrenceville, 11 June 1849; George W. Stipp to Lincoln, Bloomington, 11 June 1849; Edwin B. Webb to Lincoln, Carmi, 11 June 1849; Jesse K. Dubois to Lincoln, n.p., 11 June 1849; Isaac Shelby to Lincoln, Nashville, Illinois, 13 June 1849; Nathan K. Hall to Lincoln, Buffalo, Illinois, 13 June 1849; Richard W. Thompson to Lincoln, Indianapolis, 14 June 1849; David Davis to Lincoln, Taylorville, 6 June and Bloomington, 14 June 1849; E. O. Smith to Lincoln, 16 June 1849; James Pollock to Lincoln, Milton, Pennsylvania, 18 June 1849; Abraham R. McIlvaine to Lincoln, Brandy's Manor, Pennsylvania, 18 June 1849; Chester Butler to Lincoln, Wilkes Barre, Pennsylvania, 18 June 1849; Julius A. Rockwell to Lincoln, Pittsfield, Massachusetts, 18 June 1849; Alexander Evans to Lincoln, Elkton, Maryland, 23 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

unanimous desire of the friends of the administration in this state” that Lincoln should win the commissionership, Ford asserted.⁵³⁴

Casting a wider net, Butterfield won endorsements from the legislatures of Iowa, Michigan, and Wisconsin; from many bar associations; and from northern Illinois, his home base. He also sought support from downstate, especially in Springfield, where he circulated two petitions.⁵³⁵ On June 6, Butterfield wrote Caleb B. Smith from the Illinois capital that “I found Mr Lincoln’s boasted ‘overwhelming majority’ like Falstaffs men ‘in Buckram,’ they have vanished into thin air. So far from his being the choice of a Majority of the Whigs, I find the leading Whigs here are opposed to him, and in my favor, and as conclusive evidence of that fact the Whigs of this city without any solicitation on my part tendered me the enclosed petition signed by the clerk of the circuit court, clerk of the county court, Judge of Probate and Sheriff of the county, being all the Whig county officers elected by the People, and also signed by the leading Whigs of the county. They offered to provide for me in addition the petition of a Majority of all the Whig voters in the county if I desired it.”⁵³⁶ The other petition contained the signatures of twenty-eight “Whig mechanics of the City of Springfield” who declared that they were “dissatisfied with the course of Abraham Lincoln as a member of Congress” and supported Butterfield for commissioner of the general land office.⁵³⁷

⁵³⁴ Illinois Gazette (Lacon), 9 June 1849.

⁵³⁵ Butterfield arrived in Springfield in the first week of June and left on June 10. James M. Davis to Lincoln, Springfield, 10 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵³⁶ Butterfield to Caleb B. Smith, Springfield, 6 June 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress; petition dated 6 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. Among the nineteen signers of this document were Benjamin Talbott, Noah Matheny, William Butler, Charles Arnold, and Moses Bledsoe.

⁵³⁷ Undated petition, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

It is hard to know what to make of these petitions. Anson G. Henry alleged that nearly all the signatures on one of them had been obtained under false pretenses. “I have yet to see the first man who does not regret having signed it,” he told Lincoln on June 11.⁵³⁸ (Butterfield reported that Stephen T. Logan and Lincoln were asking those who had signed this petition “in the most pathetic manner to retract, but I am informed they have all refused with the exception of one or two against whom they prevailed by threats and menaces.”)⁵³⁹ It had been circulated by the disappointed office seeker, William Butler.⁵⁴⁰ Another disgruntled place hunter, Caleb Birchall, who resented Lincoln’s support of a rival aspirant for the Springfield postmastership, helped circulate the second petition.⁵⁴¹

More may have been at work than the disaffection of unsuccessful office seekers. Herndon recalled that “Lincoln was not at all times the popular man in Sangamon County” because “he was not a social man, not being ‘hail fellow well met,’” and also because “he was a man of his own ideas – had the courage of his convictions and the valor of their expression.” Often “abstracted and absent minded,” Lincoln would pass friends on the street without greeting them. Herndon believed that “this was taken for coldness – dignity – pride” by some people who “misjudged and disliked” him for his

⁵³⁸ Anson G. Henry to Lincoln, Springfield, 11 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵³⁹ Butterfield to J. J. Brown, Springfield, 7 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁴⁰ Anson G. Henry to Lincoln, Springfield, 11 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴¹ Caleb Birchall to Thomas Ewing, Springfield, 6 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. Lincoln supported his old friend from New Salem days, Abner Y. Ellis, for the Springfield postmastership, which Birchall coveted.

seeming aloofness.⁵⁴² Envy may also have poisoned the minds of some Springfield luminaries. “Lincoln outstript his contemporaries & companions and they feel a terrible jealousy against the man who overheaded – outstript them,” according to Herndon.⁵⁴³ Moreover, he was not a joiner; his name did not appear on the membership rolls of the Masons, the militia, the churches, or other community groups.⁵⁴⁴

Lincoln’s petition campaign aroused the ire of Butterfield, who claimed that those petitions were being signed by farmers ignorant of their content. “What these petitions contain no one knows,” Butterfield told a friend on June 7, “but you know that 99 out of 100 will sign such petitions without even reading them or caring what they contain – how much reliance is to be placed on such petitions?” Any “attempt to obtain an office by virtue of petitions thus circulated,” he wrote, “is as ridiculous as it is undignified, and the Cabinet will know how to appreciate them. I have circulated petitions only among professional men and leading and intelligent whigs who are presumed to know something about the nature of the office and the qualifications requisite to fill it.”⁵⁴⁵ Butterfield also complained that friends of Lincoln had evidently told cabinet members that Butterfield

⁵⁴² Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 11 February 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴³ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 8 and 15 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. Cf. Weik to Albert J. Beveridge, Larchmont, New York, 4 February 1926, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴⁴ See Allen C. Guelzo, “Come-Outers and Community Men: Abraham Lincoln and the Idea of Community in Nineteenth-Century America,” Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 21 (2000): 1-29.

⁵⁴⁵ Butterfield to J. J. Brown, Springfield, 7 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

had suffered a stroke which injured his mind.⁵⁴⁶ To counteract this charge, Butterfield obtained statements from physicians, a druggist, and Chicago's mayor.⁵⁴⁷

Butterfield believed that Lincoln was plotting to cheat him out of the commissionership by circulating petitions and taking them to Washington "on the very eve of the appointment and obtain the appointment by a coup de main, before I should have any opportunity to expose the misrepresentations contained in his petitions."⁵⁴⁸ So thinking, Butterfield proposed to Lincoln that neither of them travel to the capital.⁵⁴⁹ Lincoln demurred, telling Butterfield's emissary "that if he were at liberty to consult his own feelings, he would cheerfully accede to your proposition, and remain at home, but he had so far committed himself to his friends that he could not now accede to it."⁵⁵⁰ And so in the second week of June, both Lincoln and Butterfield hastened to Washington. En route, Lincoln chatted with a good-natured Kentucky gentleman who offered him plug of tobacco, a cigar, and a glass of brandy. Lincoln politely declined each, explaining that he did not chew, smoke, or drink. The Kentuckian, who had become fond of Lincoln, said: "See here, my jolly companion, I have gone through the world a great deal and have had much experience with men and women of all classes, and in all climes, and I have noticed one thing." When Lincoln eagerly asked what that observation might be, the

⁵⁴⁶ Butterfield to Caleb B. Smith, Chicago, 9 April 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁴⁷ Butterfield to Ewing, Chicago, 6 April 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁴⁸ Butterfield to J. J. Brown, Springfield, 7 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁴⁹ Butterfield to Lincoln, Springfield, 9 June 1849, copy, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁵⁰ Levi Davis to Butterfield, Springfield, 9 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

Kentuckian replied: “those who have no vices have d___d few virtues.” Lincoln laughed heartily and enjoyed repeating the story.⁵⁵¹

As he passed through Indiana, Lincoln was patronized by two sophisticated fellow passengers, Thomas A. Nelson and Abram Hammond, who regarded him as “a queer, odd-looking fellow,” clad “in a well-worn and ill-fitting suit of bombazine, without vest or cravat, and a twenty-five-cent palm hat on the back of his head.” Thinking him “a good subject for merriment,” they “perpetrated several jokes” which Lincoln took “all with the utmost innocence and good-nature, and joined in the laugh, although at his own expense.” In the course of conversation, they mentioned a comet “that was then agitating the scientific world,” in which Lincoln “took the deepest interest,” making “many startling suggestions” and asking several questions, to which Nelson and his companion replied “with words of learned length and thundering sound. After an astounding display of wordy pyrotechnics the dazed and bewildered stranger asked: ‘What is going to be the upshot of this comet business?’” Nelson said that he “was inclined to the opinion that the world would follow the darned thing off!” Years later, as president, Lincoln encountered Nelson and exclaimed: “Hello, Nelson! do you think, after all, the world is going to follow the darned thing off?”⁵⁵²

⁵⁵¹ William H. Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 8 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress. For other versions of this story, see the New York Evening Post, 17 February 1864; Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, eds., Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 139; Joseph A. Wall, History of Jefferson County, Illinois (Indianapolis: Bowen, 1909), 178. Tobacco-chewing made train travel in the South especially disagreeable. One British visitor complained that the “constant spitting which takes place from the moment the passengers take their seats, is carried on to so formidable an extent, that scarcely five minutes elapse before the floor is absolutely moist with it. . . . It too frequently happens, also, that the seats, the sides of the car, the window hangings, . . . and sometimes the windows themselves, are stained with this pestiferous decoction.” MacKay, Western World, 1:150, 151.

⁵⁵² Terre Haute Express, undated clipping enclosed in Thomas H. Nelson to Jesse W. Weik, Terre Haute, 16 September 1887, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 641-42.

At the capital, Lincoln was met by Nathaniel G. Wilcox, who informed him that Taylor planned to name Butterfield “chiefly on the grounds of his locality in the north part of the State.” In Wilcox’s room, Lincoln wrote an appeal to the president, arguing that both he and Butterfield were equally qualified and that “if it appears that I am preferred by the Whigs of Illinois,” he should be appointed, for that state deserved recognition and that other Midwestern states already had received their fair share of patronage. He further maintained that central Illinois had been neglected in the allotment of offices; the marshal, Benjamin Bond, came from the south (Clinton County) and the district attorney, Archibald Williams, from the west (Quincy) – both from towns over a hundred miles from Springfield. Plaintively he appealed to Taylor: “I am from the center. Is the center nothing? – that center which alone has given you a Whig representative? On the score of locality, I admit the claim of the North is no worse, and I deny that it is any better than that of the center.”⁵⁵³ Wilcox recalled that Lincoln “was very anxious to succeed in his application.”⁵⁵⁴

Butterfield offered a different geographical argument, claiming that Chicago in particular and northern Illinois in general deserved special consideration. To David Hunter he wrote on June 4: “the South and Middle Sections of the State have monopolized all the important offices, such as the United States District Judge, District Attorney and Marshall, while the Northern part of the State which contains the only whig Congressional District in the State has had nothing; now you know that there is more intelligence and enterprise, more Whigs and more of the materials for making Whigs in

⁵⁵³ Nathaniel G. Wilcox to Lincoln, Frederick, Illinois, 6 June 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; memorandum to Taylor, [15?] June 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:54.

⁵⁵⁴ Wilcox’s 1866 statement for Joseph H. Barrett, Lincoln Miscellaneous Collection, University of Chicago.

the North part of the State than there is in all the rest of the State besides – it contains . . . the only Whig Congressional District; and Chicago containing now (about) 20,000 inhabitants (more than twice the size of any other town in the State) gave at the Congressional election last fall a large whig majority in favor of Mr. [Jonathan Y.] Scammon the Whig candidate.”⁵⁵⁵ Supporters of Butterfield made the same argument.

In early June, Nathaniel G. Wilcox and Josiah M. Lucas called on Taylor to plead Lincoln’s case, arguing that he was the choice of three-fourths of the people of Illinois (“as against Butterfield, forty-nine fiftieths”), that he “was a western man” who “emigrated to Illinois when but a youth – he has grown up with her, and is loved by her people – a self made man, and now stands at the head of the bar in his state.” When they implored Taylor to postpone the decision until Lincoln could get to Washington, the president replied, “I will put off making the appointment until Mr. Lincoln arrives. At the same time I will tell you that I think Mr. Butterfield will be appointed.”

Wilcox rejoined: “I doubt not Mr. President that you wish to make that appointment which will be satisfactory to the largest number of your friends in our state.”

“Yes,” said Taylor, “I should like to make a popular appointment!”

Wilcox remarked, “I believe I am safe in saying that a very large proportion of your friends in Illinois would decidedly prefer the appointment of Mr. Lincoln to that of Mr. Butterfield.”

Taylor “said that he ‘could not but believe that Mr. B[utterfield] was a highly respectable man’ judging from the testimonials he Mr. B ‘has presented to him.’”

⁵⁵⁵ Butterfield to Hunter, Chicago, 4 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

Wilcox praised Butterfield as a lawyer and a gentleman, but insisted that “as a popular man and a politician we consider Abraham Lincoln head and shoulders above any of us in Illinois.”

The president replied somewhat heatedly: “I had always intended to give the Commission of the General Land Office to Illinois. I have already given two appointments to that State – the Marshal to the Southern part, and the District Attorney to the center; and I think that the commission should go [to the] North.”⁵⁵⁶

Whigs in northern Illinois also pointed out that the two previous commissioners of the general land office had been from central part of their state.⁵⁵⁷ These arguments helped Butterfield to win the contest on June 21, much to the delight of the Chicago Journal, which praised the appointment as “a tribute alike to the Northern portion of our own State, and to her devoted Whigs.”⁵⁵⁸

Lincoln was in the middle of dinner when the bad news arrived. He “ate but a mouthful or two, dropped his knife and fork, and went up to his room, threw himself on the bed, and commenced telling stories & trying to sing &c to console himself under his

⁵⁵⁶ Lucas to Zachary Taylor, Washington, 6 June 1849, Department of Archives and Manuscripts, Louisiana State University, copy of typescript, Small Manuscript Collections, Library of Congress; Nathaniel G. Wilcox to Lincoln, Frederick, Illinois, 6 June 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress; Wilcox’s 1866 statement for Joseph H. Barrett, Lincoln Miscellaneous Collection, University of Chicago; Lincoln and the Land Office,” memo by William E. Barton, Barton Papers, box 6, folder 94, University of Chicago; Nathaniel G. Wilcox to Lincoln, Frederick, Illinois, 6 June 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Wilcox, from Schuyler County, had run unsuccessfully for lieutenant governor in 1846 and for Congress in 1847. In 1849, with the help of an endorsement from Lincoln, he became register of the Stillwater, Minnesota, land office. Lincoln to Thomas Ewing, Washington, 19 June 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:55; Lincoln’s endorsement in favor of Wilcox on E. D. Baker’s letter to Wilcox, Washington, 14 March 1849, N. G. Wilcox Papers, Political History Collection, accession no. 229403, National Museum of American History, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁵⁷ George W. Meeker to Butterfield, Springfield, 9 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁵⁸ Chicago Journal, 12 June 1849.

defeat.”⁵⁵⁹ He then lay down in a fit of depression.⁵⁶⁰ He later declared: “I hardly ever felt so bad at any failure in my life.”⁵⁶¹ The following day, when Lincoln called on Ewing to retrieve his papers, the secretary told him that if he had applied for the commissionership when the administration first came to power, instead of maintaining his “devotion to Mr. Edwards,” he would have won it. To placate Edwards, Lincoln asked the secretary to give him a letter stating those facts. Ewing did so, but Edwards was not mollified.⁵⁶² Believing that Lincoln had acted in bad faith, Edwards terminated their friendship.⁵⁶³

To Edwards’s confidant and protégé Joseph Gillespie, Lincoln lamented: “The better part of one’s life consists of his friendships; and, of these, mine with Mr. Edwards was one of the most cherished.” He claimed that he had “not been false to it.” At any time before June 2, he was ready to step aside for Edwards; only after that date, when he was reliably informed that he and Butterfield were the sole Illinoisans in the running, did he decide “to be an applicant, unconditionally.”⁵⁶⁴ Lincoln believed that Edwards had withdrawn from the contest by June 2.⁵⁶⁵ (Lincoln’s attempt to repair his damaged

⁵⁵⁹ Wilcox told this to Joseph H. Barrett, who recorded the reminiscence in 1866. Memo by Wilcox, Lincoln Miscellaneous Collection, University of Chicago.

⁵⁶⁰ Thomas Ewing, “Lincoln and the General Land Office, 1849,” Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 25 (October 1932): 152-53. Ewing’s source was a gentleman named Coffee from Lancaster, Ohio, with whom Lincoln stayed when visiting Washington in June 1849. Coffee was evidently an employee of the Interior Department. See Lincoln to Ewing, 3 July 1849, Basler and Basler, eds., Collected Works of Lincoln, Second Supplement, 3.*CHECK FEDERAL REGISTER

⁵⁶¹ Browne, Every-Day Life of Lincoln, 2nd ed., 107.

⁵⁶² Lincoln to Ewing, Washington, 22 June 1849, Basler and Basler, eds., Collected Works of Lincoln, Second Supplement, 2-3; Nathaniel G. Wilcox’s 1866 statement for Joseph H. Barrett, Lincoln Miscellaneous Collection, University of Chicago. Cf. Barrett, Lincoln and His Presidency, 1:108.

⁵⁶³ Cyrus Edwards to Justin Butterfield, Woodlawn, Illinois, 11 June 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁵⁶⁴ Lincoln to Gillespie, Springfield, 13 July 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:57-59.

⁵⁶⁵ On May 10, Josiah M. Lucas informed Lincoln that a St. Louis journalist had received word that Edwards had withdrawn in Lincoln’s favor. Lucas to Lincoln, Washington, 10 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

relationship with Edwards failed in the short run, even though in 1850 he offered to support Edwards “cheerfully and heartily” to replace Butterfield, who was reportedly about to resign.⁵⁶⁶ Only in 1860 did Edwards agree to “bury the hatchet.”⁵⁶⁷ Edwards’s behavior was not entirely unreasonable, for Lincoln did not behave in this case as he had done when seeking the Congressional nomination. If Lincoln in 1849 had acted as he did in 1843, when he declared that his “honor is out with Baker” and that he would “Suffer my right arm to be cut off before I’d violate it,” he may well have preserved his friendship with Edwards.⁵⁶⁸

Two weeks after his defeat, Lincoln had recovered his good spirits. On July 9, he informed David Davis that “I am less dissatisfied than I should have been, had I known less of the particulars.” With characteristic magnanimity, he added: “I hope my good friends every where will approve the appointment of Mr. B[utterfield] in so far as they can, and be silent when they can not.”⁵⁶⁹ Four days later, he told Gillespie: “I am not greatly disappointed. I wish the office had been so bestowed as to encourage our friends in future contests.”⁵⁷⁰

According to Elihu B. Washburne, who worked on Butterfield’s behalf, Lincoln was defeated in part because some Illinois politicians thought he had become “a mere

⁵⁶⁶ “Mr. Butterfield,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 20 November 1850.

⁵⁶⁷ “For your sake I pledge a word which has never failed that I will bury the hatchet with Lincoln, and be ready to exert all my influence for the promotion of your views, whatever they may be.” Cyrus Edwards to Joseph Gillespie, Woodlawn, Illinois, 4 July 1860, copy, Ida M. Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. In 1858, Edwards allegedly declared “his intention to support the Republican candidates, and although Mr. Lincoln was not his first choice for the Senate, yet, he being the choice of the Republican party for that position, he would support him also.” Alton Courier, 21 October 1858.

⁵⁶⁸ I am grateful to Douglas L. Wilson for calling this argument to my attention.

⁵⁶⁹ Lincoln to David Davis, Springfield, 9 July 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, First Supplement, 16.

⁵⁷⁰ Lincoln to Gillespie, Springfield, 13 July 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:59.

catspaw of Baker” and that Whigs in northern Illinois deserved the commissionership.⁵⁷¹

“The appointment of Lincoln would have been considered a triumph of Baker, and as such would have inspired contempt,” Washburne said.⁵⁷²

Lincoln believed that “nothing but Ewing’s promise saved Butterfield.”⁵⁷³ Ewing, evidently thinking Butterfield more highly qualified than Lincoln, explained that “he anticipated much trouble in land titles – and that as the man [to be named commissioner] was to come from Illinois, that he chooses Butterfield for the reason that he is the most profound lawyer in the State, especially as a Land lawyer.”⁵⁷⁴ Even after Ewing had determined to name Butterfield, Taylor could have overruled his secretary of the interior, as he did in some other cases; but the president chose not to do so.⁵⁷⁵

Lincoln may have attained insufficient status to justify his appointment. In 1850, when Nathaniel G. Wilcox recommended him for the post of secretary of the interior during the cabinet shakeup following the death of Taylor, Democratic Congressman William A. Richardson of Illinois replied that Orville H. Browning “is the only man of your party from our State who could cut any figure here.”⁵⁷⁶ Butterfield had more connections in Washington than did Lincoln, among them Daniel Webster and a justice

⁵⁷¹ E. B. Washburne to Caleb B. Smith, Galena, Illinois, 21 May 1849, copy, Ewing Family Papers, Library of Congress; Russell K. Nelson, “The Early Life and Congressional Career of Elihu B. Washburne” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of North Dakota, 1953), 79-81.

⁵⁷² Washburne to Caleb B. Smith, Galena, Illinois, 17 November 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁷³ Lincoln said this to Nathaniel G. Wilcox. Barrett, Lincoln and His Presidency, 1:108. See also Wilcox to Lincoln, Frederick, Illinois, 6 June 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁷⁴ Josiah M. Lucas to Lincoln, Washington, 10 May 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. Ewing’s language was quoted by the editor of the St. Louis Missouri Republican, A. B. Chambers, who told Lucas about the conversation.

⁵⁷⁵ Taylor insisted on naming Orlando Brown and Ignatius Mudd to offices despite Ewing’s protest. Holman Hamilton, Zachary Taylor: Soldier in the White House (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1951), 204.

⁵⁷⁶ Nathaniel G. Wilcox to Lincoln, Frederick, Illinois, 6 June 1864, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. See also Richard L. Wilson to E. B. Washburne, Chicago, 14 January 1849, Washburne Papers, Library of Congress.

of the Supreme Court, “before whom he had practiced and who, if he were even acquainted with Lincoln, knew but little about him.”⁵⁷⁷

Lincoln was not the only deserving Whig beaten out by a less meritorious competitor. Taylor and his cabinet bungled patronage distribution, awarding places in a slap-dash manner.⁵⁷⁸ The faithful Indiana Whig leader Caleb B. Smith, who had supported Taylor in the campaign, won no office, while a fiercely partisan lame duck Democratic Senator from his state, the bibulous Edward A. Hannegan, was allowed to retain the coveted post of minister to Prussia, which he had obtained at the end of Polk’s term.⁵⁷⁹ Whigs considered that appointment “an outrage that ought not to be submitted to.”⁵⁸⁰ When Leslie Combs, an influential Kentucky editor who had worked hard for Taylor’s election, appealed directly for an office, he was ignored.⁵⁸¹ Ewing allegedly “turned out whigs who were capable and honest, and appointed, in some instances, drunken locofocos; and in other instances, promoted locofocos over the heads of meritorious whigs.”⁵⁸²

⁵⁷⁷ Elizabeth Sawyer to Jesse W. Weik, Chicago, 12 October 1888, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon’s Informants, 712; R. W. Thompson, “Abraham Lincoln,” undated manuscript, 39-40, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁵⁷⁸ Hamilton, Taylor, 415-35; “Changes at Headquarters,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 29 August 1850.

⁵⁷⁹ According to the New York Tribune, Hannegan when appointed “was known to be habitually and grossly intemperate. He had been drunk at Indianapolis while a candidate for reelection to the Senate, drunk all the way to Washington, and fearfully drunk upon and after his arrival – so drunk that he did not take his seat till several days after he was in Washington – and he was drunk a good part of the session thereafter.” An American in Berlin wrote that he was “the most mannerless and utterly vulgar men I ever met.” New York Tribune, 4 February 1850. See also Hamilton, Taylor, 206.

⁵⁸⁰ John D. Defrees to Caleb B. Smith, Louisville, Kentucky, [22?] March 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress.

⁵⁸¹ Kirwan, Crittenden, 248-53.

⁵⁸² Washington correspondence, 2 August, New York Herald, 4 August 1850.

Lincoln's boldness in framing an antislavery bill may have hurt his chances. Years later Joshua Giddings observed that his "party was just coming into power, while he was about to retire to private life, precisely at the time when he could have claimed the highest Executive favor that was due his State." Instead of cautiously avoiding the explosive slavery issue, Lincoln "saw a few members standing aloof from the Democratic and Whig organizations, working by every honorable means to call the attention of the House and country to the crimes of slavery. They were called 'agitators,' and the line of demarcation, which separated them from other members, was well defined." Giddings implied that Lincoln may have hurt his standing with the Taylor administration by aligning himself with such "agitators."⁵⁸³ In fact, many Taylor Whigs were at the time proving to be "two-faced men, trimmers, and doughfaces."⁵⁸⁴ Hoping to win posts in the new administration, they avoided the slavery issue during the second session of the Thirtieth Congress lest they offend the slaveholding president-elect. In late January, John G. Palfrey told Charles Francis Adams: "I see no signs that the territorial question will be brought to an issue. There is a manifest shrinking from it in the powerful quarters."⁵⁸⁵ In December 1848, Gamaliel Bailey scorned cautious Whig Representatives who shied away from the slavery issue: "There be many expectants among Congressmen of comfortable appointments at home or abroad. Why compel these gentlemen to make their mark on obnoxious questions, where to vote nay you would ruin them with their constituents and to vote yea might endanger their standing with the Powers that are to be.

⁵⁸³ Giddings to Wendell Phillips, Jefferson, Ohio, 30 July 1860, Ashtabula Sentinel, n.d., copied in The Liberator (Boston), 24 August 1860.

⁵⁸⁴ "The State of the Question," The National Era (Washington), 25 January 1849.

⁵⁸⁵ John G. Palfrey to Charles Francis Adams, Washington, 20 January 1849, Adams Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

‘Lie low – and keep dark’ is a safe policy. Let there be no agitation. Let the ordinary party issues have free course, and suppress all vexed questions.”⁵⁸⁶ Caleb B. Smith had emphatically opposed slavery in the first session of the Thirtieth Congress but lost his enthusiasm in the second session, evidently for fear that he might jeopardize his chances for a cabinet appointment.⁵⁸⁷ (On January 10, after voting to reconsider the Gott resolution, Smith refused to answer when Giddings asked if he wished slavery in Washington to continue.)⁵⁸⁸

Ewing may have employed underhanded tactics while championing Butterfield. In 1850, a Congressional investigating committee examined the land office commissioner to discover “whether there was not fraud and deception practiced to get Butterfield appointed instead of Abraham Lincoln . . . and whether there were not papers of note in Lincoln’s favor, which were carefully and designedly excluded from the abstract which was made up in the Department of the Interior, and taken to the President for his decision

⁵⁸⁶ The National Era (Washington), 21 December 1848.

⁵⁸⁷ Joshua Giddings to Charles Sumner, Washington, 24 January 1849, Sumner Papers, Harvard University; Horace Greeley to Schuyler Colfax, Washington, 2 January 1849, Greeley Papers, New York Public Library. Giddings said, “Caleb B. Smith and [Richard W. Thompson] have manifested such detestable servility that I think neither will again be elected. I intend if I speak again to place Smith on the shelf. I am told I have the power, if so I will try to exert it.” Giddings to J. Addison Giddings, 23 January 1849, quoted in Bochin, “Smith’s Opposition to the Mexican War,” 113. Many Free Soil newspapers echoed Giddings’s charge about Smith’s desire for a cabinet post. Thomas, “Smith,” 82-83. One historian speculated “that [Richard W.] Thompson, Caleb B. Smith, Lincoln and several other northern Whigs had been much softened toward the South because of the strength of the Whig party in that section as shown by the support of General Taylor. These Whigs naturally wished the coming Whig administration to be a success, and were unwilling to embarrass it as members of Congress. Lincoln, as a ‘lame-duck,’ had an additional reason for performing sanely.” William O. Lynch to Albert J. Beveridge, Bloomington, Indiana, 4 September 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress. Lynch’s conclusion fits the case of Smith and Thompson much better than it does the case of Lincoln, who was willing to raise the slavery question dramatically with his bill to abolish the peculiar institution in the District of Columbia. Smith was hoping to become postmaster general; he instead received the post of Mexican Claims Commissioner. Smith “desperately wanted a cabinet post.” Thomas, “Smith,” 87.

⁵⁸⁸ Thomas, “Smith,” 73-74; Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 2nd Session, Appendix, 214-15 (10 January 1849).

as to which man he would appoint.”⁵⁸⁹ The committee learned that somehow letters endorsing Lincoln had been suppressed. While it could not be proven beyond cavil that Ewing ordered someone to tamper with Lincoln’s file, the suspicion arose that he had done so. In August 1850, the Washington correspondent of the New York Herald reported that there was “much opposition making its appearance here, just now, to the continuance in office of Mr. Commissioner Butterfield. . . . When he was first proposed for the office he now holds, he was represented to be a straight-out whig; but he has proved to be an old Seward setting hen, and no whig at all. . . . Mr. Butterfield will not do at all. So say the whigs here, generally, and also a few who are here from Illinois. The manner in which he received his appointment, by means of the . . . suppression of the brief of the recommendations of his principal competitor, the Hon. Abraham Lincoln, . . . by a clerk in the Interior Department, is much talked of here and commented upon.”⁵⁹⁰ Protests were filed accusing Butterfield of “incapacity” and “inefficiency” as well as “ungentlemanly and uncouth conduct.”⁵⁹¹

There was reason to suspect foul play. On July 8, when Lincoln inspected the sealed file of his endorsements that Ewing had given him two weeks earlier, he was surprised to find missing two of the most important documents, letters from Indiana Congressmen Richard W. Thompson and Elisha Embree. A summary of the letters indicates that Thompson “first recommended Butterfield supposing Lincoln would not accept – prefers Lincoln” and that Embree was “against Butterfield – prefers Lincoln.”

⁵⁸⁹ Washington correspondence, 6 June, New York Herald, 8 June 1850.

⁵⁹⁰ Washington correspondence, 2 August, New York Herald, 4 August 1850.

⁵⁹¹ E. Harriman to Millard Fillmore, Washington, 2 December 1850, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. Harriman included clippings from Illinois newspapers.

Indignantly Lincoln asked Ewing to explain the absence of such key missives, which may have spelled the difference between victory and defeat. He told the secretary: “I relied upon, and valued, them more than any other two letters I had, because of the high standing of the writers, because of their location within the Public Land states, and because they did (what few other members of Congress could) speak of my character and standing at home.” (Lincoln had received copies of the letters by Embree and Thompson.) On June 21, Postmaster General Collamer had told Lincoln “that Mr. B[utterfield] appeared to be better recommended from the Public Land states” than he was. “I felt sure he was mistaken,” Lincoln informed Ewing. “If these letters were not before the cabinet, the judge [Collamer] was nearer right than I supposed. With them, I had the State of Indiana clearly; without them Mr. B. had it. The letter of Mr. Thompson was a recantation from Mr. B. to me; so that without it, I not only lost him, but he stood in full life, recommending Mr. B.”⁵⁹² Although Ewing’s response did not satisfy Lincoln, he decided to make no public comment or criticism.⁵⁹³ In 1850, he said privately that he could have revealed the “piece of villainy” that denied him the commissionership and filled him “with indignation.” But, he added, “my high regard for some of the members of the late cabinet; my great devotion to Gen: Taylor personally; and, above all, my fidelity to the great whig cause, have induced me to be silent.” Much as he would like to “confound the guilty,” he feared that such a public exposure of the story “might also

⁵⁹² A document headed “Applications” listing all letters in support of candidates for the Commissionership of the General Land Office in 1849; Lincoln to Ewing, Springfield, 9 July 1849, Basler and Basler, eds., Collected Works of Lincoln, Second Supplement, 3-4.

⁵⁹³ Lincoln to Ewing, Springfield, 27 July 1849, Basler and Basler, eds., Collected Works of Lincoln, Second Supplement, 4-5; Lincoln to Josiah M. Lucas, Springfield, 17 November 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:67. When Ewing accused Anson G. Henry of alleging that he had deliberately removed endorsements from Lincoln’s file, Henry denied it. Henry to Ewing, Springfield, 24 September 1849, Ewing Papers, Library of Congress.

injure some who are innocent,” “disparage a good cause,” and “reflect no credit upon me.”⁵⁹⁴

Lincoln did, however, criticize Taylor’s passivity. By the summer of 1849, the president was thought to be ruled by the “heptarchy” (i.e., the seven members of his cabinet).⁵⁹⁵ In a letter that foreshadowed his own presidential style of active leadership and which echoed the complaints of other prominent Whigs, Lincoln told Secretary of State Clayton that Taylor appeared to defer excessively to his cabinet in the distribution of patronage. (Lincoln may have been implicitly alluding to Taylor’s acquiescence in Butterfield’s appointment. The president had preferred Lincoln, but felt obliged to let Ewing have his way.) Such conduct, Lincoln warned, “is fixing for the President the unjust and ruinous character of being a mere man of straw.” Recalling that Taylor during the Mexican War had overruled a council of war’s unanimous recommendation against fighting a battle, Lincoln declared that this story, whether true or not, “gives him more popularity than ten thousand submissions.” The public, Lincoln counseled, “must be brought to understand, that they are the President’s appointments. He must occasionally say, or seem to say, ‘by the Eternal,’ ‘I take the responsibility.’ Those phrases were the ‘Samson’s locks’ of Gen. Jackson, and we dare not disregard the lessons of experience.”⁵⁹⁶

In 1850, after Taylor’s untimely death, Lincoln praised his “sober and steady judgment,” his “dogged incapacity to understand that defeat was possible,” his lack of

⁵⁹⁴ Lincoln to John Addison, Springfield, 9 August 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:91-92.

⁵⁹⁵ Hamilton, Taylor, 217; Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 419.

⁵⁹⁶ Lincoln to Clayton, Springfield, 28 July 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:60. Other Whig leaders gave Clayton similar advice. See John J. Crittenden to Clayton, Frankfort, Kentucky, 8 and 20 July 1849, Clayton Papers, Library of Congress.

tyrannical instincts as well as “excitement” and “fear,” his aversion to “sudden and startling quarrels,” his magnanimity, his solicitude for his troops, and “his unostentatious, self-sacrificing, long enduring devotion to his duty.” These qualities were to distinguish Lincoln as president.⁵⁹⁷

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Why Lincoln fought so hard to win the General Land Office commissionership cries out for explanation. Some thought it was rooted in practical economic necessity. A Massachusetts Congressman said that at “the close of Mr. Lincoln’s term in Congress, the Administration of Gen. Taylor was just coming into power. He had lost some of his . . . business because of his being in Congress, and he felt like abandoning the practice of the law. For this reason he wanted Gen. Taylor to appoint him Comer. of the Genl. Land Office.”⁵⁹⁸ His good friend, Representative Richard W. Thompson, with whom he discussed these matters, recalled that Lincoln “apprehended that possibly his practice might not be recovered as speedily as his circumstances demanded – for that was his main reliance for the support of his family – and was, at last, persuaded to apply for the position of Commissioner of the General Land office.”⁵⁹⁹ As the remarks he made to David Davis in February 1849 indicate, Lincoln feared that his law practice had suffered during his sojourn in Washington.

More importantly, perhaps, Lincoln may have had little desire to return to provincial Springfield after consorting with eminent lawyers and politicians in

⁵⁹⁷ Eulogy on Taylor, Chicago, 25 June 1850, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:83-90.

⁵⁹⁸ Unidentified Massachusetts politician (probably John Alley) to Josiah G. Holland, Washington, 8 August 1865, Holland Papers, New York Public Library.

⁵⁹⁹ R. W. Thompson, “Abraham Lincoln,” undated manuscript, 38, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

sophisticated Washington.⁶⁰⁰ A Congressional chaplain of the mid-1840s observed that almost “every man in Congress has made himself noteworthy at home by some gift or accomplishment; he can play the fiddle well, tell a good story, manage a caucus, make an effective speech, indite striking paragraphs, laugh loud and long, listen complaisantly while others talk, talk fluently and copiously himself, or has a pretty and clever wife. These gifts and graces are, of course, brought to the federal capital, and invested in the joint-stock company of social life.”⁶⁰¹ (The best-known of Lincoln’s colleagues was John Quincy Adams, who in February 1848 suffered a stroke on the floor of the House and died shortly thereafter. Lincoln, who may have witnessed the former president’s collapse, was named to a committee charged with arranging the funeral.) Lincoln’s ambition, always strong, had been fortified by his two years in the capital, where “brilliant conversation was the order of the day” and where “the manners and wit of its great men” more than compensated for the cruder aspects of society.⁶⁰² Parties and soirees for 300 to 900 guests were regularly given.⁶⁰³

Little is known about Lincoln’s social life in Washington.⁶⁰⁴ One of the giants of the Senate, Daniel Webster of Massachusetts, “used occasionally to have Mr. Lincoln at

⁶⁰⁰ Lincoln’s White House assistant secretary, John Hay, noted that to “the men who go there [to Washington] from small rural communities in the South and the West, the bustle and stir, the intellectual movement, such as it is, the ordinary subjects of conversation, of such vastly greater importance than anything they have previously known, the daily, even hourly combats on the floor of both houses, the intrigue and the struggle of office-hunting, which engage vast numbers besides the office-seekers, the superior piquancy and interest of the scandal which is talked of at a Congressional boarding-house over that which seasons the dull days at village-taverns – all this gives a savor to life in Washington the memory of which doubles the tedium of the sequestered vale to which the beaten legislator returns after his brief hour of glory is over.” Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 1:294-95.

⁶⁰¹ Milburn, Ten Years of Preacher-Life, 126-27.

⁶⁰² Mrs. John Sherwood, quoted in Thomas, Lincoln, 1847-1853, xvii-xviii.

⁶⁰³ Watterston, New Guide to Washington, 140-41.

⁶⁰⁴ “Congressman Lincoln’s Social Contacts in Washington, D.C.” Lincoln Lore, no. 1524 (February, 1965), 1-3.

one of his pleasant Saturday breakfasts, where the Western Congressman's humorous illustrations of the events of the day, sparkling with spontaneous and unpremeditated wit, would give great delight to 'the solid men of Boston' assembled around the festive board."⁶⁰⁵ (On March 4, 1849, Lincoln told John Cook, son of the deceased U.S. Senator Daniel Cook: "I want you to go with me to the Senate Chamber. I want to introduce you to one of the greatest men of the Nation and a warm personal friend of your father," Daniel Webster.)⁶⁰⁶ One of those "solid men of Boston," House Speaker Robert C. Winthrop, invited Lincoln to at least one dinner party at his home.⁶⁰⁷ His reaction to such hospitality may well have been like his reaction to a dinner given by Governor Levi Lincoln which he attended at Worcester in September, 1848. Thirteen years later, he said: "I had been chosen to Congress then from the wild West, and with hayseed in my hair I went to Massachusetts, the most cultured State in the Union, to take a few lessons in deportment." Lincoln added "that he had always had a high appreciation of the culture and refinement of the people of Worcester; that the dinner at Governor Lincoln's by reason of its elaborate hospitality and social brilliancy was different in kind from any function he had ever attended before. He remarked upon the beauty of the china, the fineness of the silverware and the richness of all the table appointments, and spoke of the company of distinguished and thoroughly educated men whom he met there in the animated, free and intimate conversation inspired by such an accomplished host as

⁶⁰⁵ Ben: Perley Poore, in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 222.

⁶⁰⁶ John Cook's undated reminiscences, Lincoln Centennial Association Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield; Cook's reminiscences, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 8 February 1909. Lincoln had been urged to help Cook obtain an office in the government. Nathaniel Pope to Lincoln_Springfield, 20 February 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶⁰⁷ Winthrop diary, 2 February 1848, Winthrop Family Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society.

Governor Lincoln.”⁶⁰⁸ Lincoln may have observed something like this amid the “boundless entertainment and bewildering ceremony” in Washington.⁶⁰⁹ In any event, he clearly wished to be reelected.⁶¹⁰ Mary Lincoln shared her husband’s desire to remain in the glamorous capital.⁶¹¹

Much as it may have hurt the Lincolns, Butterfield’s appointment also “produced heart-burnings and dissatisfaction” among the “working Whigs” of Illinois.⁶¹² David Davis called it “outrageous” and expressed wonderment “that the voice of Members of Congress from a State is not taken about appointments.”⁶¹³ That summer, the chief justice of the Illinois state supreme court, William Wilson, reported “that there is great indignation on the part of the Whigs of this State at the course pursued in the appointment of Butterfield over Lincoln & that it would take but little to call forth a public expression against Mr Ewing.”⁶¹⁴ In the fall, Usher F. Linder, who thought Butterfield’s appointment “a great outrage upon the Whigs of Illinois,” voiced his sentiments in the Illinois House

⁶⁰⁸ Lincoln allegedly told this to Henry J. Gardner, who became governor of Massachusetts in 1854. Gardner in turn told it to Charles M. Thayer of Worcester. Rugg, “Lincoln in Worcester,” 5-7.

⁶⁰⁹ Clay-Clopton, A Belle of the Fifties, 25.

⁶¹⁰ Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 11 February 1887, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress; Lincoln to Herndon, Washington, 8 January 1848, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:430-31.

⁶¹¹ According to Willis Steell, her brief stay in 1848 gave her a “taste of the excitement, intrigues, extravagance, and dangers of Washington life,” all of which “proved delightful enough to unsettle and unfit her for a narrow existence. She afterward saw Springfield with the critical eye of a worldling, and her dream was of a return to the nation’s capital, clothed with power to reward magnanimously the few who had given her social recognition, and to repay in kind the neglect of others. The horizon of her social observation had widened immensely, and her ambition soared to no less extensive bounds. . . . It was not pleasant to return to the narrow round of life in Springfield; but what she could not gain there from people she sought in books. Never doubting that she would one day return to the capital in a position of greater influence, she prepared herself to sustain it with the materials that lay near by.” Willis Steell, “Mrs. Abraham Lincoln and Her Friends,” Munsey’s Magazine, February 1909, 617.

⁶¹² “Mr. Butterfield,” Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 20 November 1850. See also Quincy Whig, 3 July 1849.

⁶¹³ David Davis to Lincoln, Taylorville, 6 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶¹⁴ Lyman D. Stickney to Elisha Embree, New Harmony, Indiana, 7 September 1849, Embree Papers, Indiana Division, Manuscripts Department, Indiana State Library, Indianapolis.

of Representatives. Ewing was, Linder charged, “universally odious,” a man who “stinks in the nostrils of the nation,” a “lump of ice, an unfeeling, unsympathizing aristocrat, a rough, imperious, uncouth, and unamiable” fellow, “unsuited to wield the immense patronage placed in his hands, from the fact that he was hostile to all that was popular, having no sympathies with the people, and the people no sympathies with him,” a man “who could disregard the almost unanimous wish of the people – the whig people of Illinois, and overlook the claims of such men as Lincoln, Edwards and Morrison, and appoint a man [Butterfield], known as an anti-war federalist of 1812, and one who avails himself of every opportunity to express his contempt of the people, a man who could not, as against any one of his competitors, have obtained one twentieth of the votes of Illinois.”⁶¹⁵

Others shared Linder’s opinion of the arrogant, stubborn, cold, sharp-tongued Ewing, known as “the Logician of the West.”⁶¹⁶ Horace Greeley thought the secretary “overbearing and selfish.”⁶¹⁷ The New York Herald asserted that “Ewing is, in the public opinion, a butcher, and only a butcher – a rapacious, malicious, cold-blooded butcher – a

⁶¹⁵ Linder to Joseph Gillespie, Charleston, Illinois, 14 January 1850, Gillespie Papers, Illinois State Historical Library, Springfield; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 15 November 1849. Curiously, Linder had evidently spoken highly of Butterfield in June, when Lincoln was struggling to win the commissionership. On June 6, Alexander P. Dunbar and William W. Bishop wrote Lincoln saying: “We have this day heard U. F. L. dealing out glowing eulogiums upon your competitor Butterfield and at the same time speaking very contemptuously of your friend Henry of Springfield.” Dunbar and Bishop to Lincoln, Charleston, Illinois, 6 June 1849, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress. To Butterfield, Archibald Williams protested that Linder was “a loathsome drunkard regardless alike of truth and decency” and that “the great body of Mr Lincolns friends endeavored to procure the appointment for him but when you were appointed as they admitted your qualifications and had no opposition to you they cheerfully acquiesced.” Williams to Butterfield, Springfield, 10 December 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland.

⁶¹⁶ Silvia Tammisto Zsoldos, “The Political Career of Thomas Ewing, Sr.” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Delaware, 1977), 1, 7, 18, 20, 43, 134-35, 146.

⁶¹⁷ Horace Greeley to Schuyler Colfax, Baltimore, 17 March 1850, Greeley-Colfax Papers, quoted in Nevins, Ordeal of the Union, 1:230.

party butcher, without remorse, without feeling, without charity, and without respect.”⁶¹⁸

Midwestern Whigs indignantly protested against Ewing’s nepotism, his favoritism for Ohioans, and his inclination to appoint only those who backed his presidential aspirations.⁶¹⁹ Elihu B. Washburne condemned Ewing and the other main advisors to the president: “Genl. Taylor permitted himself to go into the hands of a set of mercenary and unprincipled political scape-goats, who foisted upon him a cabinet with no hold upon the popular feeling of the country and whose selection was an unpardonable outrage upon the Whig sentiments of the nation. . . . Ewing must go out.”⁶²⁰

Some Whigs deplored Linder’s indiscretion, among them Lincoln, who asserted publicly that if he had known that such a speech as Linder’s was to be given, he would have tried to stop it. He also magnanimously praised Butterfield and Ewing, saying of the former that when he became commissioner, “I expected him to be a faithful and able officer, and nothing has since come to my knowledge disappointing that expectation.” Of Ewing he said: “I believe him, too, to be an able and faithful officer.”⁶²¹

Criticism dogged Butterfield until a paralytic stroke forced him to resign in 1852.⁶²² During the struggle over the commissionership, he had submitted affidavits from physicians to prove that he was healthy, but during his tenure he frequently left

⁶¹⁸ New York Herald, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 22 March 1850. Cf. Zsoldos, “Ewing,” 150.

⁶¹⁹ Zsoldos, “Ewing,” 202-5; Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 426.

⁶²⁰ Elihu B. Washburne to Caleb B. Smith, aboard a Mississippi River steamboat, 15 November 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶²¹ Lincoln to the editor of the Chicago Journal, Springfield, 21 November 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:68. To Joseph Gillespie, Linder complained that he had received so much criticism from fellow Whigs that “it seems that my own party are determined to test my devotion to them [Whig principles], by giving me a few [shots?] under the short ribs, which hurt a great deal.” Linder to Gillespie, Charleston, Illinois, 14 January 1850, Gillespie Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

⁶²² Page, “Lincoln Was a Good Loser,” 2.

Washington because of illness.⁶²³ He also engaged in wholesale nepotism. An anonymous, undated memorandum in the Interior Department files titled “A list of the Members of the Family of Mr. Justin Butterfield in the pay of the Administration of the U. States Government” identifies the following government employees: Justin Butterfield Jr. (transcriber, salary \$1300);⁶²⁴ William Butterfield (auditor, salary \$1200); George Butterfield (writing patents, salary \$400); Isaac Butterfield (brother, salary \$1300);⁶²⁵ Alan Pierce (nephew, salary \$1000); Mr. Syne (salary \$1000); Mr. Green (Land Office, salary \$1000); Mr. Ten Eyck (relative, writing patents, salary \$1000);⁶²⁶ Thomas S. Forrest (relative, a son’s brother-in-law, State Department, salary \$1400). The memo denounced Butterfield for removing from a Land Office clerkship William H. Henderson, a former Illinois state legislator friendly to Lincoln, “because he did not . . . defend Mr Justin Butterfield when Mr Linder the Whig leader of the House expressed the indignation of the whole Whig Party of Illinois, against the Administration for the rejection of Such Old Standard Whigs as Cyrus Edwards, Col. J. L. D. Morrison, & Abraham Lincoln.” The memo further criticized Butterfield’s firing of Josiah M. Lucas “because he well knew that Mr Lucas was an influential Whig of Illinois – & was in principle opposed to the rejection of the above named Gentlemen, & was opposed to the

⁶²³ Butterfield to Thomas Ewing, Chicago, 6 April 1849, Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland; Riddle, Congressman Lincoln, 220.

⁶²⁴ The annotation on the memo says “This Son was employed for a Short time, his account says, ‘for transcribing certain papers’ for which he rec[eive]d at one time \$400 – whether any more is difficult to ascertain.” The son died soon after taking up his duties.

⁶²⁵ The annotation on the memo reads “This brother is now in the place of a deceased Son. But he was a clerk in the temporary list at \$1000 previous to the death of the Son.”

⁶²⁶ The annotation on the memo says “Mr Ten Eyck, it is said spoiled about 140 Patents by filling them up erroneously.”

appointment of Mr Butterfield . . . as he Lucas well knew that nearly all the Whigs of the State of Illinois were indignantly insulted by the Said rejections.”⁶²⁷

Perhaps to forestall other attacks on Butterfield’s appointment, the administration tendered Lincoln the secretaryship of the Oregon territory, which he promptly declined, urging that it be given instead to his friend Simeon Francis.⁶²⁸ Soon thereafter, he was offered the more lucrative and prestigious governorship of Oregon (paying \$3000 per year), which tempted him. John Todd Stuart and Lincoln in Bloomington attending Court when a special messenger arrived informing him of the Oregon governorship offer. When Lincoln asked Stuart if he should accept, his former law partner said he “thought it was a good thing: that he could go out there and in all likelihood come back from there as a Senator when the State was admitted.” Lincoln “finally made up his mind that he would accept the place if Mary would consent to go. But Mary would not consent to go out there.” Joshua Speed later told Stuart “that Lincoln wrote to him that if he [Speed] would go along, he would give him any appointment out there which he might be able to control. Lincoln evidently thought that if Speed and Speed’s wife were to go along, it would be an inducement for Mary to change her mind and consent to go. But Speed thought he could not go, and so the matter didn’t come to anything.”⁶²⁹ During her

⁶²⁷ Records of the Department of the Interior, Appointments Division, Central Office Appointment Papers, 1849-1907, box 32, Record Group 48, National Archives, College Park, Maryland. The New York Evening Mirror reported that Lucas, “an able, upright, sober man,” was fired because he had backed Lincoln over Butterfield. Washington correspondence, 28 April, New York Evening Mirror, 1 May 1851.

⁶²⁸ Lincoln to John M. Clayton, Springfield, 21 August, 16 and 27 September 1849, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:61, 64, 65, 67.

⁶²⁹ Stuart, interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 24 June 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 15; Lincoln to Thomas Ewing, Tremont, Ill., 23 September 1849, Basler and Basler, eds., Collected Works of Lincoln, Second Supplement, 5.

Newspapers reported that Lincoln turned down the Oregon governorship because of “objections of his family to remove to that distant country.” Jesse Conrad to Caleb B. Smith, Terre Haute, Indiana, 11 October 1849, Smith Papers, Library of Congress. Mary Edwards Brown, granddaughter of Ninian W.

husband's presidency Mary Lincoln "did not fail to remind him that her advice, when he was wavering, had restrained him from 'throwing himself away' on a distant territorial governorship." She "had had enough of frontier life."⁶³⁰

And so Lincoln returned to Springfield. Shortly after his defeat by Butterfield, while pacing the floor of his room, he suddenly stopped and "looking up to the ceiling in his peculiar manner" told a friend: "I am worth about three Thousand Dollars. I have a little property paid for and owe no debts. It is perhaps well that I did not get this appointment. I will go home and resume my practice at which I can make a living – and perhaps some day the People may have use for me."⁶³¹

Some thought Lincoln's defeat a blessing in disguise. Richard W. Thompson believed that Lincoln's failure to win the commissionership of the General Land Office was "most fortunate both for him and the country." If he had been successful, Thompson speculated, he would have stayed on in Washington, "separated from the people of Illinois," sinking "down into the grooves of a routine office, so that he would never have reached the eminence he afterwards achieved as a lawyer, or have become President of the United

Edwards, spoke of Mary Lincoln's "refusal to consent to his acceptance of the governorship of Oregon." Mary Edwards Brown, interviewed by William E. Barton, Springfield, 21 April 1921, Barton Papers, University of Chicago. Some scholars believe that Lincoln may have rejected the Oregon governorship because "Oregon, with its strongly Democratic population, would have been a poor field of action for an ambitious Whig." Don E. Fehrenbacher, Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), 20. Cf. Riddle, Congressman Lincoln, 234. Lincoln may have turned down the Oregon governorship because he also felt embarrassed to take such a post while friends whom he had recommended for office were rejected. See Anson G. Henry to Thomas Ewing, Springfield, 24 September 1849, Ewing Papers, Library of Congress.

⁶³⁰ Noah Brooks, Abraham Lincoln and the Downfall of American Slavery (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1894), 116. An Oregonian suggested that Mrs. Lincoln "was afraid of Indians." A Mr. Kelly, in "Capital Pageant Review," 12 February 1936, paraphrased in an editorial, "Lincoln and Oregon," Morning Oregonian, 12 February 1936.

⁶³¹ Nathaniel G. Wilcox 1866 statement for Joseph H. Barrett, Lincoln Miscellaneous Collection, University of Chicago; Barrett, Lincoln and His Presidency, 1:108.

States.”⁶³² Similarly, O. B. Ficklin declared, “I am not sorry that Lincoln did not get the office for I think it would have been an injury to him.”⁶³³

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Lincoln’s brief Congressional career, as his colleague Amos Tuck noted, offered him “no opportunity, if he had then had the ability, which I do not think he possessed at that time, of distinguishing himself.”⁶³⁴ Five years would pass before Lincoln again sought public office. During that political hiatus he underwent a painful introspective ordeal from which he emerged a different man. At the age of forty he was an accomplished partisan politician of limited scope; by forty-five, he had somehow transformed himself into the statesman that the world came to revere. Signs of that statesmanship had appeared in his Congressional term (when he denounced the president’s conduct in

⁶³² R. W. Thompson, “Abraham Lincoln,” undated manuscript, 15, R. W. Thompson Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. According to John Hay, Lincoln eventually “recognized the error he had committed” in seeking the commissionership “and congratulated himself upon the happy deliverance he had obtained through no merit of his own. The loss of at least four years of the active pursuit of his profession would have been irreparable.” Moreover, “the singular charm of Washington life to men who have a passion for politics might have kept him there forever.” Hay added that Lincoln “would have filled the place with honor and credit—but at a monstrous expense. . . . He was already a lawyer of skill and reputation; an orator upon whom his party relied to speak for them to the people. An innate love of combat was in his heart; he loved discussion like a medieval schoolman. The air was already tremulous with faint bugle-notes that heralded a conflict of giants on a field of moral significance to which he was fully alive and awake, where he was certain to lead at least his hundreds and his thousands. Yet if Justin Butterfield had not been a more supple, more adroit, and less scrupulous suitor for office than himself, Abraham Lincoln would have sat for four inestimable years at a bureau-desk in the Interior Department, and when the hour of action sounded in Illinois, who would have filled the place which he took as if he had been born for it?” Nicolay and Hay, Lincoln, 1:294.

⁶³³ O. B. Ficklin to David Davis, Washington, 3 February 1852, photocopy, David Davis Papers, Chicago History Museum.

⁶³⁴ Tuck, Autobiographical Memoir, 83-84. Tuck believed that “no man out of the Democratic party, not yielding willing and vigorous support to all the war measures of the administration, could gain the ear of the country or distinguish himself in the House of Representatives.” According to Tuck, one obstacle that antiwar Whigs faced was the coolness of the “timid, time-serving” speaker, Robert C. Winthrop, who sought “to serve the cause of the free States in a manner not to displease the representatives of the Slave power.” Congressman William Wick of Indiana complained that in the twenty-ninth Congress he had been ignored by the Speaker for four weeks though he loudly asked for the floor several times each day. Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 46 (18 December 1847). Lincoln similarly noted, in his first remarks on the House floor, that he had been trying for several days to gain Speaker’s attention in order to obtain permission to speak. Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 107 (5 January 1848).

provoking the Mexican War and when he framed an emancipation bill for the District of Columbia) and during his tenure as an Illinois legislator (when he declared that slavery was based on “injustice and bad policy.”) But only after he had passed through a fiery psychological trial at midlife was he to fulfill the promise foreshadowed in those gestures.⁶³⁵

⁶³⁵ See Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 1-19.