Chapter Five

"We Must Fight the Devil With Fire":

Slasher-Gaff Politico in Springfield (1837-1841)

Gloom afflicted Lincoln as he launched his new career in the "straggling" and "irregular village" of Springfield (population 1300).[1] In the 1830s, "its houses were mostly frame and poorly constructed," its "streets and most of its sidewalks were unpaved, and in the spring and fall its normal condition was that of unfathomable mud. Indeed, for many years it was far from being an inviting city."[2] A visitor described it as "a common-place, sprawling sort of town, covering about ten times as much ground as it ought."[3] In 1832, William Cullen Bryant compared Springfield unfavorably to nearby Jacksonville, which he deemed "a horribly ugly village, composed of little shops and dwellings, stuck close together around a dirty square, in the middle of which stands the ugliest of possible brick court-houses." Bad as Jacksonville was, it outshone Springfield, where "the houses are not so good,

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[1] Patrick Shirreff, A Tour through North America; Together with a Comprehensive View of the Canadas and the United States as Adapted for Agricultural Emigration (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1835), 242; James Stuart, Three Years in North America (2 vols.; New York: J. and J. Harper, 1833), 2:224. When Lincoln arrived in Springfield, the town had "nineteen dry goods stores, one wholesale and six retail groceries, four public houses, four drug stores, one book store, two clothing stores, eleven lawyers, eighteen physicians including steam doctors, one foundry for castings, four carding machines, mechanics and trades of various descriptions, and two printing offices." J. M. Peck, A Gazetteer of Illinois (Philadelphia: Grigg & Elliott, 1837), 296. Many of its buildings "are small; and the humble log cabin, the abiding place of some of the first settlers, not unfrequently meets the eye," according to an 1837 sketch of Illinois. H. L. Ellsworth, Illinois in 1837: A Sketch (Philadelphia: S. Augustus Mitchell, 1837), 129. For an overview of Springfield in Lincoln's time, see Paul M. Angle, "Here I Have Lived": A History of Lincoln's Springfield (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1935) and Kenneth J. Winkle, The Young Eagle: The Rise of Abraham Lincoln (Dallas: Taylor, 2001), 172-315.

[2] John Moses, Illinois, Historical and Statistical (2 vols.; Chicago: Fergus, 1889), 1:431-32.

[3] Springfield correspondence, 21 June, Utica, New York, Herald, 27 June, copied in the New York Tribune, 9 July 1860.

a considerable proportion of them being log cabins, and the whole town having an appearance of dirt and discomfort."[4] Other New Yorkers declared that Springfield lacked "that clean fresh look" characteristic of eastern villages, and complained that "it had the dirtiest and dustiest streets I ever saw and on the whole was a very unattractive, sickly, unenterprising town."[5]

The city's mud was notorious. When wet, the black loam of central Illinois became "prairie gumbo."[6] In 1842, a local newspaper observed that residents "have to waid through the mud knee deep, in passing from the square to almost any part of the city."[7] A New York woman reported that people could not "know the definition of 'Mud' until they come to Springfield. I think scrapers and mats must be fast selling articles here."[8] The family of Elizabeth Capps, who called Springfield "a low, muddy place where it was a common thing for carriages and horses to mire in the mud around the public square," left the city for Mt. Pulaski because the latter enjoyed a "high and dry location."[9] Mud rendered the sidewalks,

[4] William Cullen Bryant to his wife, Jacksonville, Illinois, 12 and 19 June 1832, in William Cullen Bryant, Prose Writings (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), 2:13-14.

[5] Mary Hedges Hubbard to her sisters, Springfield, 28 September 1857, in Kenneth Scott, ed., "A New York Girl Plays Cards with Mr. Lincoln: Life in Springfield, Illinois, a Century Ago," New-York Historical Society Quarterly 41 (1957): 73; excerpts from an unpublished autobiography by William Henry, brother of Anson G. Henry, enclosed in Harry S. Douglas to Carl Sandburg, Arcade, New York, 12 February 1955, Abraham Lincoln Association reference files, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[6] In 1855 a journalist complained about Springfield mud three inches deep. Springfield correspondence, n.d., St. Louis Missouri Republican, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 9 January 1855. In Massachusetts, a newspaper referred to the Illinois capital as a "little city of right angles and prairie mud." Springfield correspondence by W., 3 February, Springfield (Massachusetts) Republican, 12 February 1861.

[7] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 9 December 1842.

[8] Miriam Morrison Worthington, ed., "Diary of Anna R. Morrison, Wife of Isaac L. Morrison," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 7 (1914): 43 (entry for 13 December 1840).

[9] Elizabeth Lushbaugh Capps, "Early Recollections of Abraham Lincoln," Abraham Lincoln Association reference files, "Reminiscences" folder, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

such as they were, impassable.[10] The streets were even worse; in foul weather they "approached the condition of a quagmire with dangerous sink-holes where the boatmen's phrase 'no bottom' furnished the only description."[11] Not until 1870 was the town square paved, finally making its thoroughfares passable for wagon teams in winter.[12]

Garbage and refuse as well as mud rendered the streets repellant, for an "absence of civic pride made them the dumping ground of the community rubbish so that the gutters were filled with manure, discarded clothing and all kinds of trash, threatening the public health with their noxious effluvium." Roaming livestock compounded matters. Throughout the ante-bellum period, the "problem of the hog nuisance and of the running at large of cows came up time and again and most frequently the owners of the stock succeeded in having full freedom given to their property to wander through the streets of the city at will."[13] After wallowing in mud, hogs "had the unpleasant habit of going about and rubbing off . . . dirt and filth against whitewashed fences and painted house corners."[14]

Adding to the street stench was the aroma produced by summer heat "operating upon the privies, sink holes, stables, and other receptacles of filth," causing "them to send up an abundance of pestilential effluvia."[15] The numerous ponds around town, which "furnished frog and mosquitoe music for the inhabitants" and were always "loathsome to the eye,"

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[10] "Mentor" in the Sangamo Journal, 1 April 1847. A visitor decried the absence of "a single good sidewalk" or "even a public lamp to light a street." Rockford Forum, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 4 March 1853.

[11] Clinton L. Conkling, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 13 February 1919.

[12] Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 28 February 1931, section 3, p. 3.

[13] Clinton L. Conkling, Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 13 February 1919.

[14] Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 8 August 1857.

[15] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 2 August 1839.

became "sickening to the smell" in hot weather.[16] Also noisome was the market house, a "miserable abortion" deemed "contemptible to the eye and contemptible in itself," swarming with green-back flies.[17]

The town's other structures were also unimpressive. In 1853, a newspaper in northern Illinois said that "Springfield presents neither a pleasant or cheerful appearance, nor does it give any demonstrations of great enterprise, either public or private. There does not appear to be much taste or neatness in the arrangements of things, either of a private or public character, especially of a public, judging from streets, alleys, side-walks, &c. Most of the buildings for business purposes were small and poorly arranged and constructed as cheaply as possible."[18] The capitol, fronted by "old dilapidated buildings," was considered "an eye sore to the city."[19] Its interior was, in the opinion of a visitor, "the most shabby, forlorn, dirty, dilapidated specimen of a public edifice which we have ever seen."[20] The "small and badly kept" hotels were too few in number, and those that did exist were considered inadequate.[21] A correspondent for a Quincy newspaper reported from Springfield that the "public houses here are but shabby affairs, the only particular in which they have the least appearance of corresponding with the good hotels of our country, is in their bills."[22] The

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[16] George R. Weber, "Good-Bye," Old Settlers Telephone (Springfield), n.d., clipping, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne; "Mentor" in the Sangamo Journal, 1 April 1847.

[17] Unidentified source quoted in Benjamin P. Thomas, "Lincoln's Humor" and Other Essays, ed. Michael Burlingame (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002), 173-74.

[18] Rockford Forum, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 4 March 1853.

[19] Waukegan Democrat, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 30 October 1855; Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 18 July 1855.

[20] Letter by "Chicago," Springfield, 7 October, Chicago Daily Times, 12 October 1858.

[21] St. Louis Intelligencer, n.d, copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 August 1854. "We need more hotels," Springfield's Democratic newspaper observed in 1854.

Illinois State Register (Springfield), 5 January 1854.

[22] Springfield correspondence by "Spy in Springfield," 2 January, Quincy Whig, 18 January 1840.

city's "miserable hotel accommodations" did "much to prejudice the minds of visitors against it."[23] In addition to the hotels, a St. Louisan complained about Springfield's livery stables, which he considered "scarce and charges high," and its stores, which were "meagre and insignificant in their supplies."[24] The town's concert hall was so dirty and shabby that Adalina Patti refused to sing there once she had taken the stage and beheld its appearance.[25]

Visitors called the city "dull," "inactive," "wanting in public spirit and enterprise," and found "little in and about Springfield to interest or amuse a stranger."[26] Sessions of the legislature provided some diversion, but when the lawmakers departed, "Springfield returned to its uniform dullness."[27] An Ohio journalist referred to the capital's "wonted dullness" and complained that while he had visited "many a distressing place," Springfield was "the most distressing of all."[28] On Christmas 1850, Orville H. Browning lamented: "No festivities of any kind in this dull Town."[29]

Springfield's citizens as well as its buildings failed to please visitors. Hezekiah Morse Wead, a delegate to the 1847 constitutional convention meeting in the city, called it "a cold dull cheerless place." Wead lamented that during the convention's three-month duration, "no kindness or hospitality or friendship has been extended to these delegates by any of the

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[23] Waukegan Democrat, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 30 October 1855.

[24] St. Louis Intelligencer, n.d, copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 August 1854.

[25] Caroline Owsley Brown, "Springfield Society before the Civil War," in [Edwards Brown, Jr.], Rewarding Years Recalled (Springfield: privately published, 1973), 42.

[26] Dispatch by "Traveler," Springfield, 6 December, Chicago Times, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 15 December 1856; John Lewis Peyton, Over the Alleghenies and Across the Prairies: Personal Recollections of the Far West, One and Twenty Years Ago (London: Simpkin, Marshall, 1869), 300.

[27] Mary V. Stuart in 1855, quoted in Winkle, The Young Eagle, 280.

[28] Springfield correspondence, 26 November, Cincinnati Commercial, n.d., copied in the Missouri Democrat (St. Louis), 4 December 1860.

[29] Theodore Calvin Pease and James G. Randall, eds., The Diary of Orville Hickman Browning (2 vols.; Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1925-33), 1:32.

citizens" save Ninian W. Edwards. "Even the ordinary kindness & civilities of life have not been extended by the citizens, but on the contrary they have observed in cold & distant deportment seeking no acquaintances, and paying no attention to those who for three months have been residents in their city. Such is western life in the capital of Illinois."[30] John Hay called Springfield "a city combining the meanness of the North with the barbarism of the South." Shakespeare's Dogberry, Hay quipped, "ought to have been an Illinoisan."[31] A Briton deplored "the manners of the bulk of the people" in Springfield: "The nasty habit of chewing tobacco, and spitting, not only gives them a dirty look, but makes them disagreeable companions. They eat so fast, and are so silent, and run off so soon when they have finished their meals, that really eating in this country is more like the feeding of a parcel of brutes than men."[32] A resident of the town bemoaned its daily "scenes of riot and drunkenness."[33] Brawling was especially common at election time; in 1839, at least fifteen fights broke out while the polls were open.[34]

Lincoln enjoyed telling a story that he had heard from his friend Jesse K. Dubois, the Illinois state auditor. In that capacity, Dubois was once asked by an "itinerant quack preacher" for permission to use the Hall of Representatives for a religious lecture.

When Dubois inquired, "What's it about?" the minister replied, "The second coming of Christ."

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[30] Hezekiah Morse Wead diary, 31 August 1847, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[31] John Hay to Nora Perry, Springfield, 20 May 1859, John Hay Papers, Brown University.

[32] James Caird, Prairie Farming in America, with Notes by the Way on Canada and the United States (New York: D. Appleton, 1859), 65.

[33] Letter by "L," Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 3 November 1855.

[34] Milton H. Wash to Charles Lanphier, Springfield, 6 May 1839, Lanphier Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

"Nonsense," retorted the Auditor. "If Christ had been to Springfield once, and got away, he'd be damned clear of coming again."[35]

SETTLING DOWN IN SPRINGFIELD

A few weeks after moving from New Salem to the new capital-designate, Lincoln confided to a friend that "living in Springfield is rather a dull business after all, at least it is so to me. I am quite as lonesome here as [I] ever was anywhere in my life." He felt embarrassed about his relative poverty. Calling the town a "busy wilderness," he noted that there was "a great deal of flourishing about in carriages here," a form of transportation that he could not afford because of his debts.[36]

Those obligations weighed heavily on Lincoln's mind. William Butler recalled that as he, Lincoln, and two others rode to Springfield from Vandalia after the close of the legislative session in March 1837, they "stopped over night down here at Henderson's Point, and all slept on the floor. We were tired, and the rest slept pretty well." Butler noticed, however, "that Lincoln was uneasy, turning over and thinking, and studying, so much so that he kept me awake."

Finally Butler asked: "Lincoln what is the matter with you?"

"Well," came the reply, "I will tell you. All the rest of you have something to look forward to, and all are glad to get home, and will have something to do when you get there.

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[35] John Hay to Charles G. Halpine, Washington, 22 November 1863, Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln's Side: John Hay's Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2000), 68. For another version of this story, see Moses, Illinois, 1:432.

[36] Lincoln to Mary Owens, Springfield, 7 May 1837, Roy P. Basler et al., eds., Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (8 vols. plus index; New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 1:78-79.

But it isn't so with me. I am going home, Butler, without a thing in the world. I have drawn all my pay I got at Vandalia, and have spent it all. I am in debt – . . . and I have nothing to pay the debt with, and no way to make any money. I don[']t know what to do."

As Butler told an interviewer, he came to Lincoln's assistance: "when we got to Springfield I went and sold his horse without saying anything to him." Butler paid off his debts and took Lincoln's saddlebags to his home, where his wife washed the clothes they contained. When Lincoln learned that Butler had disposed of his horse, he "was greatly astonished. 'What in the world did you do that for?' he asked."

Lincoln, Butler added, "then went back to get his saddlebags, and they told him they had been taken down to my house. So he came down and asked where they were. I said to him 'I have had them brought down here, and have had your clothes taken out and washed. Now I want you to come down here, and board here and make my house your home.'"

According to Butler, Lincoln "was always careless about his clothes. In all the time he stayed at my house, he never bought a hat or a pair of socks, or a coat. Whenever he needed them, my wife went out and bought them for him, and put them in the drawer where he would find them. When I told him that he couldn't have his clothes, that they were in the wash, he seemed very much mortified. He said he had to go down home to New Salem. I told him that he might take my horse and ride him down there. I also told him that there were his saddlebags, and that there was a clean shirt in them. He took the saddlebags and went and got the horse, and rode down to New Salem, and stayed there about a week. Then he came back and put up the horse."[37]

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[37] William Butler, interview with John G. Nicolay, [June 1875], Michael Burlingame, ed., An Oral History of Abraham Lincoln: John's G. Nicolay's Interviews and Essays (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1996), 22-23. Butler said this took place in 1839, but clearly he meant 1837. After the spring of 1841, Lincoln may have roomed as well as boarded with the Butlers. Carl Sandburg and Paul M. Angle, Mary Lincoln: Wife

Lincoln took his meals, without charge, at Butler's home for the next five years.[38] Butler may have been prompted by Ninian W. Edwards, who "had been sufficiently interested in the young lawyer [Lincoln] to go to his friend William Butler, the owner of one of the largest homes, and persuade him to take Lincoln to board, representing him as a fine, industrious young man, pitifully poor, who, if he were helped a little for a few years, was sure to succeed."[39] Butler was probably grateful to Lincoln for his recent successful effort to have Springfield named the state's capital.[40]

Equally generous assistance was proffered by the Kentucky-born merchant Joshua F. Speed, who became Lincoln's closest friend.[41] Speed remembered that Lincoln rode "into town on a borrowed horse, with no earthly goods but a pair of saddle-bags, two or three law books, and some clothing which he had in his saddle-bags. He took an office, and engaged from the only cabinet-maker then in the village, a single bedstead." Lincoln then asked Speed, who was a silent partner in the general merchandise store James Bell & Company, "what the furniture for a single bedstead would be." When the young businessman, nearly five years Lincoln's junior, calculated that mattress, blankets, pillow, sheets, and coverlid would cost $17, Lincoln replied: "It is probably cheap enough: but I want to say that, cheap

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and Widow (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932), 54; William J. Butler, grandson of William Butler, in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 28 February 1937.

[38] William J. Butler, grandson of William Butler, in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 28 February 1937; William H. Herndon to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 15 and 16 January 1886, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

[39] Octavia Roberts, "Our Townsman: Pictures of Lincoln as a Friend and Neighbor," Collier's, 12 February 1909, 17.

[40] William Dodd Chenery, article in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 1937, clipping collection, Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne, Indiana.

[41] On Speed, see David Herbert Donald, "We Are Lincoln Men": Abraham Lincoln and His Friends (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 29-64; Charles B. Strozier, Lincoln's Quest for Union: Public and Private Meanings (New York: Basic Books, 1982), 42-49; Robert Lee Kincaid, Joshua Fry Speed, 1814-1882: Abraham Lincoln's Most Intimate Friend (Harrogate, Tennessee: Lincoln Memorial University, 1943); Susan Krause, "Abraham Lincoln and Joshua Speed, Attorney and Client," Illinois Historical Journal 89 (1996): 35-50; and Gary Lee Williams, "James and Joshua Speed: Lincoln's Kentucky Friends," (Ph.D. dissertation, Duke University, 1971).

as it is, I have not the money to pay. But if you will credit me until Christmas, and my experiment here as a lawyer is a success, I will pay you then. If I fail in that I will probably never be able to pay you back at all." (Beginning lawyers did not always prosper on the Illinois frontier. One Jacksonville attorney reported in 1835: "Out of the long list of Lawyers that come to this country and settle, there is not one out of an hundred who does one half business enough to pay his expenses the first year nor enough to pay his expenses for three of the first years.")[42]

Speed recalled that the "tone of his voice was so melancholy that I felt for him. I looked up at him, and I thought . . . I never saw so gloomy and melancholy a face."

"The contraction of so small a debt seems to affect you so deeply," Speed remarked, "I think I can suggest a plan by which you will be able to attain your end, without incurring any debt. I have a very large room, and a very large double-bed in it; which you are perfectly welcome to share with me if you choose." He explained that "my partner and I have been sleeping in the same bed for some time. He is gone now, and if you wish, you can take his place."

After inspecting the room above the store, Lincoln, "with a face beaming with pleasure," said: "Well, Speed, I'm moved."[43] Between 1837 and 1841, Lincoln bunked with Speed in the room above the store, where Speed's clerks, William H. Herndon and Charles

[42] Stephen A. Douglas to Julius N. Granger, Jacksonville, 9 May 1835, Robert W. Johannsen, ed., The Letters of Stephen A. Douglas (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 15.

[43] Speed's recollections, 1882, Osborn H. Oldroyd, The Lincoln Memorial: Album Immortelles (New York: G. W. Carlton, 1883), 145-46; Joshua Speed, Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln and Notes of a Visit to California: Two Lectures (Louisville: John P. Morton, 1884), 21-22; statement Speed made "some years" before his death in 1882, quoted in a Washington letter, n.d., to the Louisville Courier-Journal, copied in the Bloomington Pantagraph, 17 January 1884.

R. Hurst, also slept.[44] There was no partition and hence no privacy for those four men sharing the upstairs room.[45] Such sleeping arrangements were common in frontier Illinois.[46]

NEOPHYTE LAWYER

The generosity that Speed and Butler extended to Lincoln was matched by John Todd Stuart, his law partner. On September 9, 1836, the justices of the Illinois Supreme Court licensed the young attorney to practice throughout the state. Seven months later he moved to Springfield, where in April the firm of Stuart and Lincoln was formally established in a small, second-floor office on Hoffman's Row, a block of buildings facing the town square. Its meager furniture consisted of "a small dirty bed – one buffalo robe – a chair and a bench."[47] (Stuart's partner during the previous four years, Henry E. Dummer, had moved to another town.)

Most of Stuart and Lincoln's business involved debts in one form or another, though the two men also dealt with various matters in the criminal, common law, and chancery

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[44] "Lincoln, Speed, Hurst & I slept in the same room for a year or so." Herndon to John E. Remsburg, Springfield, 10 September 1887, copy, privately printed by H. E. Barker of Springfield, 1917. Cf. Paul M. Angle, ed., Herndon's Life of Lincoln: The History and Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln as Originally Written by William H. Herndon and Jesse W. Weik (Cleveland: World, 1942), 150. Born in Philadelphia, Hurst (1811-81) settled in Springfield in 1834. After working for Speed a few years, he bought the store in 1841 and held it until 1877. Speed had been a silent partner in the firm of James Bell & Company, which on 9 March 1836 was granted a license to do business. Minutes of the Sangamon County Commissioners, 9 March 1836, vol. D, p. 190, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. I am grateful to Wayne C. Temple for this reference.

[45] Herndon interview, Cincinnati Commercial, 25 July 1867.

[46] John Mack Faragher, Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Frontier (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 153-54. The hypothesis that Speed and Lincoln were homosexual lovers is highly dubious. See Donald, "We Are Lincoln Men", 35-39, and Michael Burlingame, "Afterword," in C. A. Tripp, The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln (New York: Free Press, 2005).

[47] James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, 3 May 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 251.

branches of the law.[48] Many of the cases were of small importance, challenging Lincoln to "to decipher who was the owner of a litter of pigs," or to determine "which party was to blame for the loss of a flock of sheep, by foot rot; or whether some irascible spirit was justified in avowing that his enemy had committed perjury."[49] Lincoln and Stuart did not confine their practice to Springfield, where they could not have earned enough to make ends meet. Like most of their colleagues, they rode the First Judicial Circuit, encompassing ten counties. In 1839, when Sangamon County was included in the newly created Eighth Judicial Circuit, Lincoln traveled its nine counties but did the bulk of the firm's work in Sangamon, Tazewell, Logan, and McLean Counties.

Tyro though he was, Lincoln handled much of the business of the firm, for politics monopolized Stuart's attention; when defeated in 1836 for Congress, Stuart renewed his quest for that seat immediately after the day he lost. Lincoln got off to a bad start when Stuart sent him to represent John W. Baddeley, a blunt, English-born merchant of McLean County. When the haughty, aristocratic Baddeley beheld the unprepossessing young attorney, he promptly dismissed him and hired James A. McDougall in his stead.[50]

Lincoln's first law case, Hawthorn v. Wooldridge, which began in 1836, involved a farmer charged with trespass and breach of contract.[51] David Woolridge, Lincoln's client, allegedly "assaulted, struck, beat, bruised and knocked down" James Hawthorn, "plucked,

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[48] Of the 700+ cases they handled, two-thirds involved debt. John A. Lupton, "A. Lincoln, Esquire: The Evolution of a Lawyer," in Allen D. Spiegel, A. Lincoln, Esquire: A Shrewd, Sophisticated Lawyer in His Time (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2002), 23; "The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: A Statistical Portrait," in Martha L. Benner and Cullom Davis et al., eds., The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln: Complete Documentary Edition, DVD-ROM (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2000), hereafter cited as LPAL.

[49] Henry C. Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (1892; Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1940), 62-63.

[50] Whitney, Life on the Circuit, ed. Angle, 56-57. Whitney's source for this story was Stuart.

[51] Jesse W. Weik, "Lincoln as a Lawyer, with an Account of His First Case," Century Magazine 68 (June 1904): 279-89.

pulled and tore divers quantities of hair" from his head, "with a stick and with his fists gave . . . a great many violent blows and strokes on and about his head, face, back, shoulders, legs, and divers other parts of his body and . . . with great force and violence, struck, shook, pulled, and knocked him . . . down upon the ground, and. . . violently kicked" Hawthorn, "struck him . . . a great many other blows and strokes," "violently thrust his . . . thumbs" into his eyes, "and gouged him . . . to his great pain, distress and injury."[52] The case, involving three separate actions, was argued before a jury, which awarded Hawthorn damages of $36 and costs. The other two actions were settled out of court, with Hawthorn paying the costs of one and Woolridge the other. No record indicates how the settlement was reached, but Lincoln may well have urged the parties to compromise.[53] Years later, he advised lawyers to "discourage litigation" and to "persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often a real loser – in fees, expenses, and waste of time. As a peacemaker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man."[54] Most Whig lawyers shared this view.[55] In his first case Lincoln might have served as such a peacemaker, a role he had often played in his youth. Dennis Hanks recalled, "I've seen him walk into a crowd of jawin' rowdies, and tell some droll yarn, and bust them all up. It was the

[52] Complaint of plaintiff in the suit of Hawthorn v. Woolridge, 1 July 1836, LPAL, case file # 03504.

[53] Woolridge v. Hawthorn, and Hawthorn v. Woolridge, case files # 03505 and 03506, LPAL. Frederick Trevor Hill noted that "Costs were imposed on his client by the order of discontinuance in one of the three actions, and against his opponent's clients in another, while in the third the costs were divided, -- all of which was evidently part of the compromise by which the whole litigation was settled; but none of the cases was ever tried." Hill, Lincoln the Lawyer (New York: Century, 1906), 82n.

[54] Fragment: Notes of a Law Lecture, [1 July 1850?], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 2:81. (A German proverb captures Lincoln's sentiment succinctly: "A meager making up is better than a fat law suit." Etzard Duis, The Good Old Times on McLean County, Illinois (Bloomington: Leader, 1874), 333.

[55] Mark E. Steiner, An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2006), 159.

same when he was a lawyer; all eyes, whenever he riz were on him; there was a suthin' peculiarsome about him."[56]

Lincoln and Stuart usually charged $5 to $10 for their services, dividing those modest fees equally. The only large sum they received was $500 for a sensational murder trial in 1838. The case arose when Henry Truett, former register of the Galena land office, cold-bloodedly shot and killed a political opponent, Jacob Early, a doctor and Methodist minister who had criticized Early's appointment to the land office post. Truett hired Lincoln, Stuart, Stephen T. Logan, Edward D. Baker, and Cyrus Edwards to defend him; the prosecution team included Stephen A. Douglas. Lincoln and his colleagues, faced with overwhelming evidence of their client's guilt, lamely argued that when Truett pulled a gun on Early, the latter had picked up a chair and was therefore armed when he was shot by Truett, who was merely acting in self-defense. (Witnesses testified that the victim was obviously using the chair as a shield, not a weapon.) Though only in practice for a year, Lincoln was chosen to deliver the closing speech to the jury. No record exists of Lincoln's words; Logan praised his "short but strong and sensible speech," and Milton Hay recalled that despite "his rawness, awkwardness and uncultivated manner," Lincoln "was expected to make a strong speech in the case, and that expectation was not disappointed."[57] It must have been quite strong, for the jury, amazingly, delivered a verdict of not guilty. That doubtless bolstered Lincoln's self-confidence.[58]

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[56] Robert McIntyre, "Lincoln's Friend," Charleston, Illinois, Courier, n.d., Paris Illinois, Gazette, n.d., Chicago Tribune, 30 May 1885.

[57] Stephen T. Logan, interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 39; Milton Hay, interview with Nicolay, Springfield, 4 July 1875, ibid., 29.

[58] People v. Truett (1838), LPAL, case file # 04327; John J. Duff, A. Lincoln: Prairie Lawyer (New York: Rinehart, 1960), 51-60; Willard L. King, "The Case that Made Lincoln." Lincoln Herald 83 (1981): 786-90; Harry E. Pratt, "Abraham Lincoln's First Murder Trial," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 37 (1944): 242-49.

If Lincoln had acted as a peacemaker in the Wooldridge case, he played the opposite role in the summer and fall of 1837, waging a vituperative public campaign against attorney James Adams, a "pompous fellow" who "wore ruffled shirts" and enjoyed an unsavory reputation as a lawyer.[59] The controversy involved both law and politics. Adams was seeking to retain his place as probate justice of the peace, an office for which Lincoln's close friend, Dr. Anson G. Henry, was running.[60] Since 1825, Adams had served in that post, having been chosen by the legislature. Lincoln believed that Adams had planted a story in the Illinois Republican, Springfield's Democratic newspaper, charging that Dr. Henry, as a reward for writing press attacks on Democrats, had won appointment as commissioner to oversee construction of the new state capitol. According to the Republican, Henry, "a desperate, reckless adventurer," was "unqualified" and had vastly overpaid a mechanic for demolishing the court house to make way for the capitol. The Republican predicted that Henry would overpay contractors for the new building.[61] A blistering rebuttal signed "Springfield" (probably by Henry) denounced the "filthy and reckless" attacks in the Republican, whose editors, including Stephen A. Douglas, were "aliens in feeling from the community in which they live." Douglas, who had recently moved from Jacksonville to serve as register of the

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[59] Usher F. Linder, Reminiscences of the Early Bench and Bar of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Legal News Company, 1879), 90-91; William Jayne to Jesse W. Weik, Springfield, 13 November 1907, in Jesse W. Weik, The Real Lincoln: A Portrait, ed. Michael Burlingame (1922; Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 360.

[60] Henry, a leading Illinois Whig, was an especially intimate friend of Lincoln's. See Harry E. Pratt, "Dr. Anson G. Henry, Lincoln's Physician and Friend," Lincoln Herald, vol. 45, no. 3, 3-17 (October 1943) and no. 4, 31-40 (December 1943), and Wayne C. Temple, "Dr. Anson G. Henry, Personal Physician to the Lincolns" (pamphlet; Racine, Wisconsin: Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, 1988).

[61] Illinois Republican, n.d., copied in the Sangamo Journal, 17 June 1837. The contractor, Reuben Radford, had submitted the lowest bid for the job. A committee of Springfield citizens investigating the Republican's charges concluded that they were unfounded. "The State House," Sangamo Journal, 8 July 1837. In fact, Henry performed his duties as commissioner carelessly and was dismissed by the legislature in 1841. Pratt, "Anson G. Henry," Lincoln Herald, 45 (1943): 7-8; Wayne C. Temple and Sunderine W. Temple, Illinois's Fifth Capitol: The House that Lincoln Built and Caused to Be Rebuilt (1837-1865) (Springfield: Phillips Brothers, 1988), 46-48.

Springfield land office and to write for the Republican, "must expect to meet that indignant reprobation which is due to every man who, living in the midst of any community, endeavors to betray it, or sacrifice its prosperity."[62]

The newspaper insults led to violence. George Weber recalled that "Henry and many of his friends, believing Douglas to be the author of the offensive articles, determined to demand the name of the author, by calling on the editor." On June 26, 1837, they armed themselves with canes and pistols and confronted Weber, supposing him to be "a meek man." Douglas, who had come to the office to sound a warning, was sitting there when the committee arrived. The "demand was made with threats and a flourish of the cane, when the meek man of the press planted his fist in the face of the chairman of the committee, informing him at the same time that he was responsible for everything that appeared in his paper." The committee withdrew. When Douglas wrote "a highly colored description" of the fracas, Henry's allies resolved "to destroy the printing establishment of the Illinois Republican." The next evening, when the editor and his staff were out for dinner, a mob led by the inebriated sheriff of Springfield, Garret Elkin, broke down the door and set about wrecking the establishment. Weber and his three brothers, assisted by Jacob M. Early, "flung the mob-crats from the building in short order." The following day, a mob attacked editor Weber and his brother John on the street. Sheriff Elkin assaulted Weber "from behind, with a

[62] Undated letter by "Springfield," Sangamo Journal, 10 June 1837. George Weber, editor of the Republican, said Anson G. Henry "was an able political writer and contributed largely to the columns of the Sangamo Journal both politically and otherwise. Hence the newspaper fights of that early day between the Journal and the Republican were mainly between [Stephen A.] Douglas and Doctor Henry, as the champion writers of the political parties." Isaac Millar Short, Abraham Lincoln, Early Days in Illinois: Reminiscences of Different Persons Who Became Eminent in American History (Kansas City, Missouri: Simpson Publishing Company, 1927), 34. Weber's recollections originally appeared in a Springfield newspaper in 1871. History of Sangamon County, Illinois (Chicago: Interstate Publishing, 1881), 224. Weber said that Douglas "wrote considerably for the columns of the Illinois Republican, which appeared both as editorial and communication. The paper in political circles, was regarded as the organ of young Douglas." Weber's reminiscences quoted in Short, Early Days in Illinois, 33; Robert W. Johannsen, Stephen A. Douglas (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973), 58.

loaded whip-stalk, and felled him to the ground; the other brother of these two was attacked by one, a Doctor [Elias H.] Merryman . . . , with a great flourish of his arms and fists. This brother was not a pugilist nor used to the ways of pugilism; but squaring himself very much as a ram or a billy-goat gets ready for a fray, he came head first at his assailant, butted him in the stomach, and knocked him down, after which he proceeded to give him a good drubbing." Jacob Weber came along at that moment and "whipped out his pocket-knife, and plunged it into the back of the sheriff who, fainting, fell covered with blood, and was carried home." When tried for the stabbing, Jacob was successfully defended by Douglas.[63]

Lincoln wielded a pen rather than other weapons when he joined in this fracas. He and Stuart had been retained as counsel by Mary Anderson and her son Richard, heirs of the recently deceased Joseph Anderson, who had once employed Adams as an attorney.[64] The estate included two parcels of land, one of which was occupied by Adams, who claimed that Anderson had given it to him. Anderson's widow sued, believing that Adams had obtained title fraudulently.[65] Lincoln's investigation of land records understandably convinced him that Adams had forged documents.[66] In six letters to the Sangamo Journal, published in June and July and signed "Sampson's Ghost", Lincoln accused Adams of fraud, forgery, and toryism.[67] ("Sampson" was Andrew Sampson, who had leased land to James Adams with the

[63] Short, Early Days in Illinois, 35-37; John Richard Weber, "An Episode of Journalism in 1840," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 23 (1930): 503-10; Johannsen, Douglas, 90.

[64] Thomas F. Schwartz, "The Lincoln Handbill of 1837: A Rare Document's History," Illinois Historical Journal 79 (1986): 267-74.

[65] Wright et al. v. Anderson, (1837-43), LPAL, case file # 03870.

[66] To pay a debt, Anderson had allegedly assigned the property to Adams in May, 1827, but the document was signed not with Anderson's signature, which he could write, but with an X standing for "Joseph Anderson, his mark." Moreover, the date "1827" on the assignment had originally read "1837" and was altered. The appearance of the document led some observers to conclude that it had been written very recently, not a decade earlier. Lincoln's handbill dated 5 August 1837, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:89-93.

[67] Dated 14 June 1837, the first of six letters appeared in the Journal on June 17. The others followed on June 24, July 8, 15, 22, and 29. Several Lincoln students, including Logan Hay, believed the Sampson's Ghost letters

understanding that Adams would pay the taxes and that Sampson might reclaim the land by compensating Adams for any improvements he made to the property. Adams eventually claimed that he owned the lot in question, though clearly it belonged to Sampson. In the public letters, Lincoln conflated Sampson and Anderson.)[68] Though the toryism charge was inaccurate -- Adams had served in the American army during the War of 1812 -- Lincoln maintained a generally moderate tone in the Sampson's Ghost letters.

But he skinned Adams in an unsigned burlesque entitled "A Ghost! A Ghost!" which began with a slightly garbled quotation from one of his favorite plays, Hamlet:

"Art thou some spirit or goblin damn'd–

Bringst with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell?"

The "author" of this article is clearly meant to be James Adams, who relates how he had been drinking one night, had fallen off his horse, and was sleeping contentedly on the ground until accosted by a ghost (obviously representing Anderson), who declared in an Irish brogue, which Lincoln employed in jokes and even in formal speeches:[69]

"The rest of the dead is disturbed by the wickedness of the living. I loved my wife and children, and left them my little all. But it is taken away from them – and how can I rest in my grave in pace?"

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were Lincoln's handiwork. See Abraham Lincoln Association Papers Delivered . . . on February 12, 1937 (Springfield: Abraham Lincoln Association, 1938), 19-21. Concurring were Albert J. Beveridge, Rufus Rockwell Wilson, and the editors of Lincoln Day by Day. Roy P. Basler, however, believed that there was insufficient evidence to establish Lincoln's authorship, and did not include them in his edition of Lincoln's Collected Works.

[68] William L. Patton to Albert J. Beveridge, Springfield, 30 March 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

[69] Lincoln often told jokes about the Irish. See Paul M. Zall, ed., Abe Lincoln Laughing: Humorous Anecdotes from Original Sources by and about Abraham Lincoln (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), 13-14, 15, 47, 51, 56, 73, 82, 92, 103, 109, 113-14, 145, 153.

The ghost offered an autobiographical sketch: "I was born in ould Ireland – swate Ireland; – I kem over to Ameriky – to this blessed land. My wife and little ones came with me here – I bought a few acres – left it in the care of a friend – went farther and died."

When Adams (called "Stranger" in the article) responds, "And what of that? Most men die sometime or other," the ghost accusingly says: "I left my land in the hands of a friend and that friend – Oh! be jiminys! what shall I say? My very grave cannot contain me. – My spirit wanders about seeking rest and finding none. My acres are in the hands of my friend – signed, sealed and delivered!"

Adams: "But, perhaps, this transfer was legal."

Ghost: "By the hill of Hoath, 'tis a lie!"

Adams: "Unless all the proceedings are regular, no transfer can stand, as you well know."

Ghost: "Jiminy's gracious! 'Tis signed with a cross, and I could write my name as well as any can! Oh jiminys! jiminys!"

Adams: "Rather curious, I confess. But did you not make the assignment?"

The ghost, his face radiating "anger, indignation, vengeance," erupted: "Stranger! You lie! How could I assign a judgment before it was obtained? Be Jimininy Christ it is not so!"[70]

Two weeks later, just before the election, the Sangamo Journal ran another story (probably by Lincoln) ridiculing Adams: "The recent noise and excitement made about the

[70] Sangamo Journal, 15 July 1837. I agree with Rufus Rockwell Wilson's identification of this as Lincoln's handiwork. Rufus Rockwell Wilson, ed., Uncollected Works of Abraham Lincoln (2 vols.; Elmira, N.Y.: Primavera Press, 1947), 1:174-76. Only someone intimately familiar with the facts of the case could have written it, and Lincoln's co-counsel (Stuart, Logan, and Baker) were not noted for skinning their political opponents in anonymous and pseudonymous dialect satires like Lincoln's "Rebecca" letter of 1842. Well before moving to Illinois, Lincoln had established a reputation as a gifted mimic.

wounds and bruises received by Gen. Adams, reminds me of an adventure which happened to me while travelling to this county many years ago. Not far from this place I met a sucker late in the evening returning to his home. 'Good evening friend,' said I. 'How far is it to Springfield?' 'Well, I guess its about five miles.' 'Are you just from there?' 'Well, I am,' and said I, 'What's the news there?' 'Well, there's nothing of any account but a sad accident that happened the other day:– you don't know Gineral Adams? – Well, the Gineral went to stoop down to pick some blackberries and John Taylor's calf gave him a butt right –' 'You don't say so, – and did the Gineral die?' 'No, by G..., but the calf did!'"[71]

The same day that this story appeared, Lincoln issued an anonymous handbill reviewing the complicated details of the law suit and once again accusing Adams of forgery.[72] (When queried, the editor of the Sangamo Journal, Simeon Francis, revealed Lincoln's authorship of the handbill.)[73] Lincoln's charge seems justified, based on the evidence he marshaled cogently, if intemperately, and also on Adams's record of ethical obtuseness. (In 1818, at the age of twenty-five, Adams had been indicted for forging and backdating a deed in New York. Rather than standing trial, he jumped bail and fled the state, leaving behind his wife and young daughter. In 1832, he unsuccessfully defended an impoverished man accused of murder and had fleeced his family of their few worldly goods.[74] In 1838, attempting to discredit a petition drive calling for the division of Sangamon

[71] Sangamo Journal, 5 August 1837. Rufus Rockwell Wilson includes this in his Uncollected Works of Lincoln, 1:180, and Paul M. Angle attributes it to Lincoln. Angle, "Here I Have Lived", 69-70.

[72] Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:89-93.

[73] Simeon Francis, open letter to the people of Sangamon County, 7 August, Sangamo Journal, 19 August 1837.

[74] A judge named Blodgett told Usher F. Linder the following story about Adams: "When [Ben] Mills was at Kaskaskia, there was a lawyer there whom they called General Adams. . . . He had a client who had been indicted for murder, and Adams, to secure his fee, took a mortgage upon everything the fellow had in the world, even down to his household and kitchen furniture. His client was convicted and sentenced to be hung some thirty days thereafter, and between the sentence and execution, Adams foreclosed his mortgage and sold the property, not leaving the wife and children of the criminal a bed to sleep on, or a pot in which to cook their

County, Adams obtained a blank copy of the petition and forged the names of free blacks.[75]

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dinner. His client was hung and his body handed over to the lawyers to attend, and amongst the rest came General Adams and Ben. Mills. They had their galvanic battery, and placed one of the poles . . . to his spinal column while his body was still warm and let on the electric current. Immediately the corpse began to wink and his face to draw itself into most horrid contortions, when Adams, laying his hand upon Mills' shoulder, said, in a very slow and solemn voice:

"'This is a very sorrowful sight.'

"'Yes,' said Ben., 'it must be very sorrowful to a lawyer to see his client skinned the second time.'

"General Adams sneaked off and left the doctors to finish their experiment." Linder, Reminiscences, 90-91. This may have been the case of Nathaniel Van Noy, who in 1826 was hanged for murdering his wife. Allegedly a Dr. Filleo had invented a device for restoring to life a person in good health who had just died and wished to try it out on Van Noy, who signed the necessary papers before his hanging. History of Sangamon County, Illinois (Chicago: Inter-State, 1881), 524; John Clark Harris, "Speech on 'The True Abe Lincoln Trail,' from New Salem to Springfield," typescript, Lincoln Long Nine Museum, Athens, Illinois.

Judge John Dean Caton told a variation on this story: "In the year 1832 there lived in the bottoms of the Sangamon river a middle-aged, rough and savage man, whose disposition was quarrelsome, whose habits were intemperate, and whose means of livelihood were suspicious. In fact, his reputation was bad. He lived in a small log cabin with a truck patch near by, which was grown up to weeds more than to vegetables, and he had a small field of corn surrounded by a slash fence, which was badly cultivated by his wife and children – of whom there were several – about as rough as himself. The children grew up wild and unkempt. He had an old wagon, a plow, one cow and several young cattle growing up, and a small drove of hogs which ran in the bottoms and lived on mast. A few chickens scratched around the old log stable and a couple of hounds completed the inventory of the effects owned by the settler, if we add to it the inevitable long barreled rifle, by means of which most of the meat was supplied. This hopeful voter when in his cups in Springfield, picked a quarrel with a peaceable citizen and killed his man. He was indicted for the murder, and employed Gen. Adams, an old lawyer, who had not professedly quit practice, though most of his practice had quit him. But he was still smart enough to look out for the main chance, so he drew up a bill of sale covering every possible thing about the prisoner's place, except the wife and children, which was duly executed, and a few days before the trial he sent some men up, who brought away every movable thing which they could find – except the old bed and table, which were not worth bringing – the cow and the calves, the horse, the wagon and the plow, the hogs and chicks. As the poor woman stood in the cabin door with her little brood of children gathered around her and saw everything driven away but the hounds, it is said that she actually shed tears; accustomed as she was to hardship and privation she now felt a desolation which she had never known before, and perhaps for the first time, a sigh of grief escaped her.

"Well, the trial came off and his counsel did the very best he could for his client. He pictured in eloquent terms to the jury, the wife and children mournfully bowed down in prayer for the deliverance of the husband and father, whose destinies were now placed in their hands. It was for them to say whether he should return a free man to gladden his humble home with his presence once more, or whether it should ever remain as one of desolation, without support, and without hope.

"The general's eloquence was of no avail; perhaps the jury had heard of the manner in which the general had collected his fee, which must have tended to pluck the feathers from the sympathetic expressions poured forth in the counsel's effort." Caton, Early Bench and Bar of Illinois (Chicago: Chicago Legal News Company, 1893), 55-58.

[75] Statement of Thomas H. Chord, 19 December 1838, Miscellaneous petitions, 1838-39 General Assembly, Illinois State Archives, Springfield. Chord said that in December 1838, he was hired by John Taylor to obtain signatures for a petition to divide Sangamon County. While carrying out that task, Adams approached him and urged him to obtain signatures on a remonstrance against the proposal to divide the county. Adams would then forge the names of free blacks to the remonstrances, submit the documents to John Calhoun, who would publicly charge the remonstrators with fraud. Thereupon the whites who had already signed the remonstrances would be so indignant that they would sign a petition for the division of the county.

At Springfield, he engaged in dubious land transactions which Elijah Iles, one of the city's founding fathers and most influential leaders, publicly denounced.[76] Adams accused attorney Stephen T. Logan of slander, eventually dropping the charge and paying all court costs.[77] In 1841, he so alienated his fellow Masons in Springfield that their lodge almost dissolved. Two years later, Adams committed bigamy; at that same time, he ran for office in Hancock County though he was still a resident of Sangamon.)[78]

Lincoln's assaults backfired, for Adams won the August election handily, receiving 1025 votes to Henry's 792. Though Lincoln had built a strong case, the public evidently considered his tactics unfair and regarded Adams as a victim of persecution. The Democrats protested that Adams, "an infirm old man," had been "wantonly slandered," "bitterly persecuted," and "deeply calumniated."[79] The Sangamo Journal acknowledged that if "a community can be made to believe, that an individual is persecuted, it is natural for them to sustain him."[80]

Lincoln would not let go of the matter, even after the election. On September 6, he published a detailed rejoinder to the defense Adams had published in the Illinois Republican that day. In this document, Lincoln sneered at Adams's misunderstanding of a situation that "the greatest dunce could not but understand." To an argument of Adams's, Lincoln scornfully replied, "Is common sense to be abused with such sophistry?" To Adams's assertion that Lincoln's testimony conflicted with that of the official recorder of deeds

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[76] Elijah Isles, letter of 3 October, Sangamo Journal, 7 October 1837.

[77] Statement by Logan, 21 October, Sangamo Journal, 28 October 1837.

[78] Kent L. Walgren, "James Adams, Early Springfield Mormon and Freemason," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 75 (1982): 121-36.

[79] Illinois State Register (Vandalia), 29 September 1837, 25 May 1838.

[80] Van Meter, Always My Friend, 64.

(Benjamin Talbott), Lincoln retorted: "Any man who is not wilfully blind can see at a blush, that there is no discrepancy between Talbott and myself." He called an affidavit by Adams's son-in-law-to-be "most foolish," and deemed Adams a "fool." Lincoln concluded that one of the witnesses cited by Adams "must be some black or mulatto boy" because he had observed an important event while in the kitchen of Adams's house. He termed Adams's assertions of fact "false as hell."[81] On October 7, the Sangamo Journal ran a letter by "An Old Settler" (probably Lincoln) accusing Adams of fraud in yet another land transaction. He sententiously declared that Adams "may wince, and screw as other men of the same character usually do, under the lash of Justice and the power of Truth, still he shall not escape."[82]

Eleven days later, Lincoln deplored the general's "rascality" and called his defense "foolish," "ludicrous," and "contradictory."[83] Once again, Lincoln had the better argument, but his snide, contemptuous tone undermined his effectiveness. (The case languished, neither dismissed nor pursued, until the death of Adams in 1843, whereupon the court abated the suit. Anderson's heirs never did receive the land.)

In 1838, an anonymous piece in the Sangamo Journal (probably by Lincoln) once again attacked Adams: "Who is so blind that cannot see the finer marks of forgery in the last [issue of the] Republican? Do we not see evident marks of meanness? But is it surprising that one who has been guilty of defrauding the widow and the orphan – one who has been guilty of repeated acts of baseness – should stop at anything? Is it surprising that he should be guilty of libeling the citizens of Sangamon? . . . He stands the living evidence that man is

[81] First Reply to James Adams, 6 September 1837, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:95-100.

[82] "An Old Settler - No. 1," Sangamo Journal, 7 October 1837.

[83] Second Reply to James Adams, 18 October 1837, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:101-6.

corrupt by nature."[84] When Adams responded to the charges of forgery that had been brought against him in New York, the Sangamo Journal published a rejoinder, probably by Lincoln, alleging that Adams distorted the facts and that he had left New York owing debts still unpaid.[85]

Adams was not Lincoln's only target in the 1837 political campaign. On July 1, a special legislative election was held to choose a replacement for Daniel Stone, who had resigned his seat in the General Assembly to accept a judgeship. The Whig candidate, Lincoln's close friend Edward D. Baker, ran against Lincoln's former boss, surveyor John Calhoun. On election eve, an anonymous screed, probably by Lincoln, appeared in the Sangamo Journal denouncing Calhoun and other members of Springfield's Democratic "junto," among them John Taylor and the owners of the Illinois Republican. Taylor and Calhoun, it was alleged, were "traitors" to Sangamon County and Springfield because the previous winter they had lobbied to have the county divided up and to have the paper town of Illiopolis chosen as the new state capital. Their motives were purportedly selfish: "Money and power are their souls idolatry, and to gain these they would sacrifice principles, friends and country!" They and their associates owned land in Illiopolis and in villages, including Petersburg, which they hoped would become the seats of new counties created from Sangamon. They were making common cause with the spokesmen for Vandalia, who wished to repeal the law designating Springfield as the new state capital.[86]

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[84] Sangamo Journal, 12 May 1838.

[85] Sangamo Journal, 26 May 1838. The author claimed that he had received from an attorney for one of Adams's creditors two promissory notes given by Adams shortly before he was indicted for forgery and fled Oswego. Citing the statute of limitations, Adams refused to pay. Sangamo Journal, 2 June 1838.

[86] Sangamo Journal, 1 July 1837.

In the pages of the Sangamo Journal, a satirist (probably Lincoln) ridiculed William Walters, co-editor of the Illinois State Register, as a "broken down hack" who was only good at persuading people "to father any dirty affair, such as slanderous anonymous publications." The author added sarcastically: "My bowels yearn when I think of the degradation he has undergone, the promises he has violated and the conscience he has seared in the blessed cause of Van Buren democracy."[87]

Another letter from the same pen alluded to the split within the Democratic ranks between the old Jacksonians and new converts who were seizing control of the party. In that letter, the author has John Calhoun lament: "How unfortunate it is that men, for the sake of fleeting honor, of the hopes of reward, should sacrifice the principles that they sucked in with their mother's milk – friends with whom they have sustained the true principles of the republic, shoulder to shoulder and hand to hand, and to contend for views and doctrines, at war with reason, and against the dearest interests of their country." Calhoun, ostensibly bitter at his defeat for office in 1834, is made to say: "I thought . . . that I would go to work like an honest man and no longer attempt to obtain a living by locating towns [as county surveyor]."[88]

SPECIAL LEGISLATIVE SESSION

In July 1837, as the combative Lincoln waged a newspaper war against James Adams, Governor Joseph Duncan summoned the legislature to Vandalia for a special session

[87] Unsigned letter purportedly by a Democratic politician (doubtless meant to be John Calhoun) to Reuben Whitney, Springfield, 3 May 1837, Sangamo Journal, 13 May 1837.

[88] Unsigned letter purportedly by a Democratic politician (doubtless John Calhoun) to [Reuben Whitney?], Springfield, 1 June, Sangamo Journal, 3 June 1837.

to address the consequences of the financial panic which had struck that spring, drying up the market for Illinois bonds. Moreover, the state bank was in danger of losing its charter, a development which might delay construction of the Illinois and Michigan canal.[89] In response to this crisis, Duncan recommended that the legislature scrap the internal improvement scheme it had passed earlier that year.

Ignoring this advice, the General Assembly, which met for less than two weeks, turned its attention instead to a bill repealing the capital-removal statute.[90] The measure failed after a heated debate during which its author, William L. D. Ewing, and Lincoln nearly came to blows. Ewing, known as a "politician of ability with much ambition and self-esteem," was a short, muscular, charismatic, violent, impulsive man who had often been indicted (and once convicted) for assault and battery. In 1831, while drunk, he stabbed and badly injured a man who disagreed with him on a minor matter. As receiver of the Vandalia land office, he was found guilty of neglecting his duties. He was also indicted for other misdeeds, among them adultery.[91] In 1840, Ewing quarreled with a legislator from Chicago, Justin Butterfield, and threw a chair at him. When the two men arranged to fight a duel, bloodshed was averted by Butterfield's decision to withdraw.[92] In his contretemps with Lincoln, Ewing "sounded the tocsin of war" by denouncing "the arrogance of Springfield," maintaining that "its presumption in claiming the seat of government – was not to be

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[89] John A. McClernand and Jacob Fry to Joseph Duncan, Jacksonville, 29 May 1837, Sangamo Journal, 25 March 1842.

[90] Harry E. Pratt, "Lincoln in the Legislature" (pamphlet; Madison: Lincoln Fellowship of Wisconsin, 1947), 9-10.

[91] John F. Snyder, Adam W. Snyder and His Period in Illinois History, 1817-1842 (Virginia, Illinois: E. Needham, 1906), 173; Stroble, High on the Okaw's Western Bank, 66, 68, 93, 95. John Moses said of Ewing: "His personal appearance was altogether in his favor, and with agreeable manners, and fair ability as a lawyer, he was quite popular at the capital of the State, where he resided." Moses, Illinois, 1:405.

[92] Thomas J. Nance to Catherine Nance, Springfield, 9 January 1840, in Fern Nance Pond, ed., "Letters of an Illinois Legislator: 1839-1840," Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 5 (1949): 415.

endured," and accusing the Long Nine of log-rolling. Ewing "said many other things cutting and sarcastic."

To respond, the Whigs chose Lincoln, who "retorted upon Ewing with great severity; denouncing his insinuations in imputing corruption to him and his colleagues, and paying back with usury all that Ewing had said, when everybody thought and believed that he was digging his own grave; for it was known that Ewing would not quietly pocket any insinuations that would degrade him personally." Ewing then asked the Sangamon County delegation: "Gentlemen, have you no other champion than this coarse and vulgar fellow to bring into the lists against me? Do you suppose that I will condescend to break a lance with your low and obscure colleague?" Usher F. Linder and other observers "were all very much alarmed for fear there would be a personal conflict between Ewing and Lincoln. It was confidently believed that a challenge must pass between them, but the friends on both sides took it in hand, and it was settled without anything serious growing out of it." (Linder said many years later that "this was the first time that I began to conceive a very high opinion of the talents and personal courage of Abraham Lincoln.")[93] Ewing's bill was referred to a special committee, chaired by Lincoln, who amended it to have Springfield pay the $50,000 it had pledged before work could begin on statehouse. The measure as amended passed the House but died in senate.[94]

Financial issues dominated the brief 1837 session of the General Assembly, which had grown hostile to banks because of the financial panic. As David Davis observed in July: "There are a great many radicals . . . as well as desperate men, a great share of whom by some fortuitous circumstances, are members of the Legislature – and the cry at present –

[93] Linder, Reminiscences, 62-64.

[94] Simon, Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness, 69-73.

from one end of the State to the other – is – down with the Bank." Davis thought that the "grand question seems to be, when any subject of interest is agitated, what political end can be subserved by disposing of it – this way, or that way."[95] Representative Samuel D. Marshall wryly predicted that "the bank will not go down. The leaders of the Van Buren party are too much in debt to it to suffer such a result." The Democrats had made threatening noises because they "only wanted the Whigs to take the responsibility so that they might afterwards abuse the Bank again and charge the legalising of the suspension on the Whigs."[96] In fact, Democrats did rally to support the bank. One of them, John Pearson, reflected the views of many colleagues when he said of that institution: "A thing may have been unwise in its creation & yet afterwards prove detrimental to us in its destruction, as some have reasoned in regard to this Bank. . . . If the sudden repeal or even an opposition to this Bank will injure the works the people have begun, why then it is our duty not to oppose it."[97] With the help of such Democrats, Lincoln and his fellow Whigs thwarted attempts to repeal the 1835 charter of the Bank of Illinois. Under law, if the bank suspended specie payments (redemption of its notes in gold and silver on demand) for more than sixty days, it must disband. The bank did suspend such payments on May 27, 1837, in response to the financial panic. The Whigs managed to persuade the General Assembly to allow the bank to continue its existence temporarily.

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[95] David Davis to William P. Walker, Bloomington, Illinois, 1 July 1837 and 19 January 1840, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[96] Samuel D. Marshall to Henry Eddy, Springfield, 19 December 1839, Eddy Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[97] John Pearson to James W. Stephenson, Joliet, Illinois, 8 January 1838 (misfiled 1834), Stephenson Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. See Rodney O. Davis, "Illinois Legislators and Jacksonian Democracy, 1834-1841" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Iowa, 1966), 151. See ibid., 144-52, for a discussion of the legislature's action on the Bank of Illinois during the special session of July 1837.

POLITICS, 1838-1840

In the following year's election campaign, the county division issue dominated Sangamon County politics, with the Democrats favoring the proposed change and the Whigs opposing it. Writing from "Lost Townships," an author signing himself "Rusticus" (probably Lincoln) attacked the proposal in the Sangamo Journal. On April 15, 1838, Rusticus denounced the editor of Springfield's Illinois Republican for "wanting to destroy the influence of his town and county" by cutting "up his county into a litter of counties." Calling the division plan a scheme of speculators who hoped that county seats would be established on their land, Rusticus said: "I was called on last week, and urged to go for new counties. And what upon earth am I to gain, said I. Why your farm may be made the county seat. It is high and rolling, has a fine view and is in the neighborhood of a large body of timber, and is about in the middle of the proposed new county." Two weeks later, Rusticus called the plan to divide Sangamon County into "pea-patch counties" a plot "to benefit certain speculators who own town lots in Allenton, Pulaski and Petersburg" and "to gratify a few men who want offices."[98] In June, Rusticus inveighed against "dangerous demagogues and speculators" who "have thrown our county into strife and confusion for their own sinister purposes." He declared that every "honest and true patriot ought to oppose cutting our State up into small counties. Taxes are thereby increased, and justice is administered with greater expense. Every man cannot have a county seat at his door; nor ought he to desire it."[99]

In 1838, Lincoln campaigned not only for his own reelection but also for his law partner, John Todd Stuart, who tried once again to win the congressional seat he had sought

[98] Letters of 25 April and 7 May 1838, Sangamo Journal, 26 May 1838.

[99] Sangamo Journal, 16 June 1838.

two years earlier. The hard times, widely blamed on the Democratic administration in Washington, improved Whig chances and caused the public to pay more attention than usual to politics.[100] David Davis of Bloomington recalled that no "canvass, in my time, awakened such interest at the start, and retained it to the last. It seemed in my neighborhood, at least, as if every man, woman and twelve-year-old child were enlisted for the fight. Nothing but politics were subjects of conversation and everybody attended political meetings."[101]

Lincoln attacked Stuart's opponent, Stephen A. Douglas, in letters by "A Conservative," which the Sangamo Journal ran in January and February 1838.[102] (Democrats opposed to President Van Buren's subtreasury scheme referred to themselves as "Conservatives.")[103] In the first missive, Lincoln called Douglas a radical, arguing that ever since the Little Giant had assumed responsibility for the editorials in the Illinois Republican, that newspaper had championed "the Utopian scheme of an exclusive specie currency, involving the destruction of all banks – and the dangerous doctrine that all incorporated institutions, and all contracts between the State and its citizens, can be changed or annulled at the pleasure of the Legislature." He also accused Douglas of striking a corrupt bargain to win his nomination.[104] Douglas furiously denied the charges and condemned the "vindictive, fiendish spirit" of "Conservative." With some justice, he protested that "my private and

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[100] 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), 71-88.

[101] David Davis, memorial address at services for John Todd Stuart, 13 January 1886, Bloomington, Illinois, Pantagraph, 6 February 1886.

[102] Glenn Seymour, "'Conservative' – Another Lincoln Pseudonym?" Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 29 (1936-37): 135-50; "Lincoln–Author of the Letters by a Conservative," Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association no. 50 (December 1937): 8-9; Michael Burlingame, The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 365-67.

[103] In 1837, Van Buren proposed that government monies be removed from private banks and placed in "subtreasuries" (government vaults) scattered about the country. A modified form of this plan was enacted by Congress in 1840.

[104] Conservative No. 1, Sangamo Journal, 13 January 1838.

moral, as well as public and political character [has] been assailed in a manner calculated to destroy my standing as a man and a citizen."[105]

Two weeks later, "Conservative" branded Douglas a "man of expedients" and once again questioned the legitimacy of his nomination. The Democratic convention in Peoria which chose him to run for Congress was, "Conservative" alleged, "gotten up and conducted in such a manner, as to render it both injurious and disgraceful to the party if they attempt to sustain it." Douglas had been register of the Springfield land office, a post coveted by "a certain gentleman [John Calhoun] who resides in Sangamon county, and who has followed a variety of occupations both here and elsewhere, for a living and failed in all." Calhoun, supposedly eager to replace Douglas, flattered him with the suggestion that he run for Congress, "telling him that he regretted to see him confined to the dry and laborious occupation of writing answers to the endless and silly enquiries of every applicant about N. W. of S. E. of 23, T. 24 R. 3 W., etc. etc.; that for one whom nature designed for nothing else but to be

'Fixed to one certain spot,

To draw nutrition, propegate, and rot.'

such a plodding occupation was well enough; but that for one of his towering genius, it was absolutely intolerable. 'You,' continued he, 'may be President of the United states just as well as not. A seat in Congress is not worthy to be your abiding place, though you might with propriety serve one term in the capacity of Representative – not that it would at all become you; but merely in imitation of some king, who being called to the throne from obscurity, lodges for one night in a hovel as he journies to the palace. History gives no account of a man

[105] Douglas to Simeon Francis, 26 January 1838, enclosed in Douglas to George Weber, Springfield, 30 January 1838, Illinois State Register (Vandalia), 23 February 1838, in Johannsen, ed., Letters of Douglas, 53-55.

of your age [Douglas was twenty-four] occupying such high ground as you do now. At twenty-four Bonaparte was unheard of; and in fact so it has been with all great men in former times. . . . There is no doubt of a seat in Congress being within your reach. The only question is whether you will condescend to occupy it." Thus "flattered out of his senses," Douglas arranged matters so that he could win the nomination at Peoria. Operating craftily behind the scenes, he stacked the convention with his supporters and won.[106] (The two lines of poetry quoted in this missive were from Alexander Pope's "Essay on Man," a favorite of Lincoln's.)[107]

The day that this article appeared, Lincoln gave a speech to the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield. Titled "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions," it focused primarily on recent outbreaks of mob violence, which Lincoln roundly condemned, adding his voice to the Illinois Whig chorus denouncing the upsurge in riots and lynching.[108] (A year earlier he had attacked "that lawless and mobocratic spirit . . . which is already abroad in the land.")[109] In 1835, the nation experienced such a startling increase in mob violence (71 people died in 147 recorded riots that year) that a South Carolina newspaper declared:

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[106] Conservative No. 2, Sangamo Journal, 27 January 1838; Conservative No. 2, addendum, Sangamo Journal, 3 February 1838.

[107] On Lincoln's fondness for Pope, see F. Lauriston Bullard, "Lincoln's Copy of Pope's Poems," Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 4 (1946): 30-35, and George Tuthill Borrett, Letters from Canada and the United States (London: J. E. Adlard, 1865), 254-55 (letter dated "on board the Kangaroo," November 1864).

[108] David Grimsted, American Mobbing, 1828-1861: Toward Civil War (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); John Michael Rozett, "The Social Bases of Party Conflict in the Age of Jackson: Individual Voting Behavior in Greene County, Illinois, 1838-48" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan, 1974), 212-13. See also Philip S. Paludan, "The American Civil War Considered as a Crisis in Law and Order," American Historical Review 77 (1972): 1013-34. On anti-abolitionist mobs in Illinois in the 1830s and 1840s, see Charles N. Zucker, "The Free Negro Question: Race Relations in Ante-Bellum Illinois, 1801-1860"

(Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1973), 217-87.

[109] Speech in the Illinois House of Representatives, 11 January 1837, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:69.

"Mobs, strikes, riots, abolition movements, insurrections, Lynch clubs seem to be the engrossing topics of the day."[110]

In the midst of his ostensibly nonpartisan address, Lincoln slyly alluded to the danger posed by a coming Caesar, a man "of ambition and talents" who would ruthlessly pursue fame and power, overthrowing democratic institutions to achieve his ends. Rhetorically, Lincoln asked if such a person would be content to follow traditional paths to distinction: "Many great and good men sufficiently qualified for any task they should undertake, may ever be found, whose ambition would aspire to nothing beyond a seat in Congress, a gubernatorial or a presidential chair; but such belong not to the family of the lion, or the tribe of the eagle[.]" In a passage aimed at Douglas, whose overweening ambition was notorious, he mockingly added: "What! think you these places would satisfy an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Napoleon? Never! Towering genius disdains a beaten path."[111] Clearly the "towering genius" was Douglas, the man whom the flatterer in "Conservative No. 2" called "a towering genius." (This was probably a slighting reference to Douglas's diminutive stature – 5 feet 4 inches -- which Lincoln in December, 1837, had alluded to: "We have adopted it as part of our policy here, to never speak of Douglass at all. Is'nt that the best mode of dealing with so small a matter.")[112] Other parallels between the coming Caesar and Douglas are noteworthy. "Conservative" likened Douglas to Bonaparte; Lincoln warned against men like Napoleon, belonging to the tribe of the eagle. "Conservative" suggested that Douglas would not be

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[110] Columbia, S. C. Southern Times, 28 August 1835, quoted in Grimsted, American Mobbing, 3. On the riots of the mid-1830s, see ibid., 3-32, and Michael Feldberg, The Turbulent Era: Riot and Disorder in Jacksonian America (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980).

[111] Address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, 27 January 1838, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:113-14.

[112] Lincoln to William A. Minshall, Springfield, 7 December 1837, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:107. I am grateful to Mark Steiner for calling this parallel to my attention.

content with a mere seat in Congress; Lincoln denounced a man whose ambition would not be satisfied with such a post.[113] Since the rules of the Lyceum forbade political speeches, Lincoln could not directly attack Douglas, but because his audience was politically aware, he could assume that they had read "Conservative No. 2" earlier in the day and thus understood that Douglas was the target of his remarks about the coming Caesar. It was evidently a clever maneuver to circumvent the ban on partisanship at the Lyceum.[114] (Two decades later Lincoln would again satirize Douglas in an ostensibly non-political address on "Discoveries and Inventions.")[115] The Lyceum speech could be construed as an attack not only on Douglas but also on the Democratic party, which Whigs denounced for championing "mobocracy." (A headline in an Illinois Whig paper read: "Mobocracy and Loco-Focoism – One and the Same Thing.")[116]

The moral that Lincoln drew from his survey of recent mob violence in Mississippi, Missouri, and Illinois was that "every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity" should "swear by the blood of the Revolution never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others." He urged that "reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap – let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in Primmers, spelling books, and in Almanacs; – let it be preached from the pulpit,

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[113] Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 365-67. Some historians, misguidedly following the suggestion of literary critic Edmund Wilson, have interpreted Lincoln's warning about the ambitious coming Caesar as a reference to his own ambition, a foreshadowing of his tyrannical presidency. See ibid., 253-54 and Mark E. Neely, Jr., "Lincoln's Lyceum Speech and the Origins of a Modern Myth," Lincoln Lore, February 1987, 1-4, and March 1987, 1.

[114] On the nature of the lyceum and its rules, see Thomas F. Schwartz, "The Springfield Lyceum and Lincoln's 1838 Speech," Illinois Historical Journal 83 (1990): 45-49.

[115] Stewart Winger, Lincoln, Religion, and Romantic Cultural Politics (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 22-24.

[116] Alton Telegraph and Democratic Review, n.d., quoted in Rozett, "Social Bases of Party Conflict," 43.

proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the political religion of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars." To tolerate the lawlessness of mobs would be to betray the Revolutionary generation which had sacrificed so much to win religious and political liberty. The mad passion of mobs should be replaced with "cold, calculating unimpassioned reason," which "must furnish all the materials for our future support and defense."[117] Lincoln echoed an earlier speaker before the Lyceum, his friend Anson G. Henry, who in 1835 had appealed to the young men of Springfield to put down "every symptom of mobocracy and lawless violence by enforcing the laws. The blood of our fathers, let it not have been shed in vain."[118]

With some justice, Lincoln's friends later called this florid address "highly sophomoric in character" and a prime example of "'spread eagle' and vapid oratory."[119] It illustrated Albert T. Bledsoe's contention that Lincoln, as a young man, was "woefully given to sesquipedalian words, or, in Western phrase, highfalutin bombast." Referring to some

[117] Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:108-15. Many commentators have sought to read deep meaning in Lincoln's use of the term "political religion." But they are guilty of "investing it with a far broader meaning than the rather commonplace one warranted by the context, namely, adherence to legal process rather than mob action," as Robert V. Bruce said of one such analyst. Bruce, "Commentary on [Dwight Anderson's] 'Quest for Immortality,'" in Gabor S. Boritt and Norman O. Forness, eds., The Historian's Lincoln: Pseudohistory, Psychohistory, and History (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 276. Kenneth M. Stampp rightly suggested that it is unreasonable "to read into the extravagant rhetoric of a young man of twenty-eight 'designs in the pattern of a whole life.'" Ibid., 305. For a discussion of the various "deep readings" of the Lyceum Address, see Joseph R. Fornieri, Abraham Lincoln's Political Faith (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 92-101.

[118] Sangamo Journal, 5 December 1835.

[119] 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), 126; Henry Clay Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln, ed. Paul M. Angle (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, 1940), 12.

particularly banal observations, Bledsoe added: "To those familiar with his sober and pure style at a later age, these sophomoric passages will seem incredible."[120]

Lincoln may have been imitating the flamboyant oratorical style of Daniel Webster, whom he had heard speak a few months earlier in Springfield.[121] He greatly admired Webster's speeches, which he predicted "will be read for ever."[122] In the Massachusetts statesman's 1825 Bunker Hill address, he reflected on the inability of his generation to achieve the fame of their Revolutionary forefathers: "We can win no laurels in a war for independence. Earlier and worthier hands have gathered them all."[123] Similarly, Lincoln observed that during the Revolutionary era "all that sought celebrity and fame, and distinction, expected to find them in the success of that experiment. . . . This field of glory is harvested, and the crop is already appropriated."

Despite its evident banality, Lincoln's address offered beneath the surface a bold commentary on slavery and race, couched so as to give little offense but nevertheless to prick the conscience of his audience.[124] In part, the speech was inspired by the recent murder of abolitionist Elijah P. Lovejoy, whom Missouri slaveholders had driven from their state. When Lovejoy transferred operations across the Mississippi River to Alton, Illinois, he encountered an even more unfriendly reception. At a public meeting in 1837, several Alton

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[120] Albert Taylor Bledsoe, review of Ward Hill Lamon's biography of Lincoln, Southern Review 12 (April 1873): 360-61.

[121] Webster spoke in Springfield on 19 June 1837.

[122] Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettlinger, eds., Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 26 (entry for 17 October 1861).

[123] Quoted in Carl F. Wieck, Lincoln's Quest for Equality: The Road to Gettysburg (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002), 168. Wieck argues that Webster may have been a model Lincoln used when writing the Gettysburg address as well as for the "House Divided" speech.

[124] William Lee Miller sensibly concluded that "one may interpret Lincoln's Lyceum Address as an implicit response to the battle over the new abolitionism, a continuation and expansion of the 'no' vote he had cast exactly a year earlier, and of the carefully worded 'protest' he and Stone entered in the house record in March." Miller, Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography (New York: Knopf, 2002), 139.

residents condemned him; soon thereafter mobs twice destroyed his printing presses, dumping them into the river. On November 7, 1837, as he brandished firearms in an attempt to protect yet another press from mob violence, he was killed. His death aroused indignation throughout the North, where he was regarded as a martyr to freedom of expression.[125]

In the Lyceum speech, Lincoln, who several months earlier had denounced slavery as an institution based on "injustice and bad policy," clearly alluded to the murder of Lovejoy in a passage condemning mobs which "throw printing presses into rivers" and "shoot editors." Lincoln's central theme was the danger that mob violence poses to democracy. Though the speech did not mention Lovejoy by name, its application to his murder was obvious. Lincoln's audience might also have been reminded of the Springfield mob that forced the cancellation of an abolitionist sermon the previous October.

If it took courage in the Springfield of 1838 to express sympathy for an abolitionist like Lovejoy, it required even more nerve to speak compassionately of a black man who in April 1836 had stabbed two white men. Lincoln nonetheless did so, referring to a "highly tragic" and "horror-striking scene at St. Louis," where a "mulatto man, by the name of McIntosh, was seized in the street, dragged to the suburbs of the city, chained to a tree, and actually burned to death; and all within a single hour from the time he had been a freeman, attending to his own business, and at peace with the world." (Because the case of McIntosh had been widely publicized by Lovejoy's newspaper, it seems probable that Lincoln was indirectly expressing further sympathy with Lovejoy by calling attention to that atrocity.)[126]

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[125] Merton Dillon, Elijah P. Lovejoy, Abolitionist Editor (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961), 175-79.

[126] Miller, Lincoln's Virtues, 134. In 1836, Francis J. McIntosh, a "bright mulatto man of great strength" who worked as a steward on a steamboat, was arrested for trying to liberate a shipmate who had been charged with disorderly conduct. When told "jestingly" by a deputy sheriff that he might be hanged for his offense, McIntosh, who had been drinking, stabbed both of his captors and fled. One of his victims died almost immediately. McIntosh was quickly apprehended and jailed. Within an hour of the stabbings, he was burned to death by a

Moreover, Lincoln condemned Mississippi mobs for lynching "negroes, suspected of conspiring to raise an insurrection," and "white men, supposed to be leagued with the negroes," and "strangers, from neighboring States, going thither on business."[127] Thus the Lyceum address subtly attacked not only Stephen A. Douglas but also anti-abolitionists and racial bigotry.[128]

A third installment of the "Conservative" letters submitted to the Sangamo Journal, ostensibly written by unhappy Democrats but probably composed by Lincoln, called the Peoria convention which had nominated Douglas "a mere farce," dominated by "a few supple jacks about the villages, who may be made to throw up their arms and kick up their heels at the pulling of a string by some interested mountebank." The protesters termed Douglas "an ultra loco foco destructive," an advocate of a "monstrous heresy," and "a small balloon fully charged; and cannot be relieved until the election, when the safety valve will fully cure him of his folly." They deplored the candidate's "most pernicious and jacobinical notions of loco focoism" and denounced the "jugglery" and "secret management" which procured him the nomination.[129]

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mob. He roasted in the flames eighteen minutes before he died. Jane S. Hermann, "The Mclntosh Affair," Bulletin of the Missouri Historical Society 26 (1970): 123-43; John F. Darby, Personal Recollections (St. Louis: G. I. Jones, 1880), 237-42; "Execution of McIntosh," Salt River Journal, n.d., copied in the Alton, Illinois, Telegraph, 25 May 1836.

[127] Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:108-15.

[128] See Miller, Lincoln's Virtues, 130-41; Neil Schmitz, "Murdered McIntosh, Murdered Lovejoy: Abraham Lincoln and the Problem of Jacksonian Address," Arizona Quarterly 44 (1988): 15-39. Aryeh Maidenbaum sensibly concluded that "because abolitionism was such a touchy topic with the state electorate, Lincoln had no intention of straying too far ahead of the accepted political attitude espoused by both political parties in Illinois." Maidenbaum, "Sounds of Silence: An Aspect of Lincoln's Whig Years," Illinois Historical Journal 82 (1989): 175.

[129] Conservative No. 3, Sangamo Journal, 10 February 1838.

Lincoln not only sniped at Douglas in print, but he also confronted him in person, both on the stump and in the courtroom.[130] Like other candidates, Lincoln and Stuart debated their opponents. In one encounter, Stuart became incensed at Douglas's allegations, grabbed his smaller opponent by the neck, and walked about with him; in response, Douglas bit Stuart's thumb, scarring it for life.[131] Earlier in the campaign, Douglas, offended by a piece in the Sangamo Journal, tried to cane its editor, Simeon Francis, who (as Lincoln described it) caught his would-be assailant "by the hair and slammed him back against a market-cart, where the matter ended by Francis being pulled away from him."[132] (Fifteen years later, another Whig editor was caned by a political opponent on the streets of Jacksonville.)[133] In May, when Stuart became ill, Lincoln substituted for him at a debate in Bloomington.[134]

Realizing that the race between his partner and Douglas would be close, Lincoln worked hard and urged other Whigs to follow his example. "If we do our duty we shall succeed in the congressional election," he told a friend, "but if we relax an iota we shall be beaten."[135] His concern proved justified on election day in August, when Stuart narrowly prevailed, receiving 18,254 votes to Douglas's 18,218.[136] Lincoln easily won a third legislative term, running ahead of all the fifteen other candidates, even though some of his

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[130] Douglas and Lincoln clashed two dozen times in court, mostly between 1837 and 1841. Christopher A. Schnell, "At the Bar and on the Stump: Douglas and Lincoln's Legal Relationship, 1837-1841," Lincoln and His Contemporaries: Papers from the Fourteenth Annual Lincoln Colloquium, Springfield, 1999 (Springfield: Lincoln Home, n.d.), 99-106.

[131] Sangamo Journal, 6 March 1840; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 6 March 1840; C. C. Brown, "Major John T. Stuart," Transactions of the Illinois State Historical Society 7 (1902): 110.

[132] Lincoln to John Todd Stuart, Springfield, 1 March 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:206.

[133] The victim was Paul Selby of the Morgan Journal. See Selby v. Dunlap, LPAL, case file # 00871 (1853-54).

[134] Henry Stevens to the editor, Winona, Minnesota, 7 March, Bloomington Pantagraph, 12 March 1898.

[135] Lincoln to Jesse W. Fell, [23 July 1838], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:120.

[136] Douglas lost in part because some voters were induced to vote for "John A. Douglas," "James A. Douglas," and other forms of Douglas. Linder, Reminiscences, 347.

old friends in New Salem, Sandridge, and Petersburg voted against him because his party opposed the division of Sangamon County.[137]

When the Eleventh General Assembly convened in December 1838, Lincoln again found himself pitted against William L. D. Ewing, who had run for the legislature that year promising to "be a thorn in the side of the 'long nine,' should we again see them" in the Hall of Representatives and to "fearlessly expose to the new Legislature the foul corruption by which the seat of Government, contrary to justice and the constitution, was removed to Springfield."[138] As the leader of the Whigs, Lincoln was their obvious choice for Speaker of the House. Ewing managed to win after several ballots by the vote of 43 to 38, making Lincoln in effect minority leader of the lower chamber. Lincoln might have won if all Whigs had been present and voted for him; as it was, three were absent and two defected to Ewing.[139] Disappointed at his loss, Lincoln in February declared that Ewing "is not worth

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[137] Benjamin P. Thomas, "Lincoln: Voter and Candidate, 1831-1849" Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association nos. 36 and 37 (1934); Mark E. Neely, Jr., "The Political Life of New Salem, Illinois," Lincoln Lore, no. 1715 (January 1981), 1-3. Lincoln received 1803 votes, Ninian Edwards 1779, Edward Baker 1745, and John Calhoun 1711. Theodore Calvin Pease, ed., Illinois Election Returns, 1818-1848 (Springfield: Illinois State Historical Library, 1923), 321.

[138] Letter by Ewing, 9 July 1838, in "The Seat of Government," Sangamo Journal, 21 July 1838.

[139] When the election took place, five members were absent (three Whigs, one Democrat, and one Conservative). On the first ballot, Ewing had forty-one votes and Lincoln thirty-eight. Henry L. Webb of Alexander County had three, and three more were scattered. Of the Whigs present, two (William F. Thornton of Shelby County and Benjamin Johnson of Bond County) voted for Ewing. One Democrat (James Copeland of Johnson County) voted for Lincoln. Vandalia correspondence, 3 December, Alton Telegraph, 8 December 1838. After four ballots, the House adjourned. When it reconvened, one representative who had voted neither for Lincoln nor Ewing was induced to support the latter. This swing voter was persuaded by "the vigorous exertions of a certain 'big Sargeant,' elected to Congress from the 1st District [John Reynolds], and a certain Judicial officer of the State." The three absent Whigs were Samuel D. Marshall, Richard Kerr, and James H. Lyon. Vandalia correspondence, 5 December, Jacksonville Illinoisan, 15 December 1838. The Whigs ostensibly had a majority of one in the House, but some purported Whigs (including Orlando Ficklin, William Holmes, and Andrew McCormick) usually voted with the Democrats. Springfield correspondence by "Spy in Springfield," 21 December 1839, Quincy Whig, 4 January 1840. Why some Whigs absented themselves on the early ballots "was never satisfactorily explained." Moses, Illinois, 1:426.

damn."[140] Thus began what one Representative called "a stormy session & a very unpleasant one."[141]

Once organized, the House addressed banking questions yet again, somewhat desultorily.[142] A supreme court justice complained in late December that the "Legislature gets on very slowly."[143] Two weeks into the session, the Committee on Finance submitted a report written, in all likelihood, by Lincoln.[144] Reflecting the standard Whig position, it condemned President Van Buren's proposal for an independent subtreasury, arguing that a divorce between government and banking was unnecessary and citing the history of "the extraordinary and unprecedented degree of prosperity which accompanied us in our onward march during the period of this union [of banks and government] – that system, under which we have increased from a mere handful of people to a most powerful confederacy, and under which we have attained a condition so flourishing." The generally dispassionate document criticized the inconsistency of congressional Democrats who between 1831 and 1835 had voted against proposals to separate banking from the government but who now supported President Van Buren's plan. The Committee expressed concern that the separation of bank and state could lead to the marriage of public funds and executive patronage, an alliance which might corrupt elections. Since the system already in place had worked so well, it

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[140] Lincoln to John Todd Stuart, Vandalia, 14 February 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:143.

[141] John J. Hardin to his wife, Vandalia, 21 February 1839, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

[142] Davis, "Illinois Legislators and Jacksonian Democracy," 162-67; Simon, Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness, 156-57.

[143] Samuel D. Lockwood to Mary V. Nash Lockwood, Vandalia, 27 December 1838, Lockwood Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. The following month Lockwood lamented that "little business has as yet been done in the Legislature." Lockwood to Mary V. Nash Lockwood, Vandalia, 12 January 1839, ibid.

[144] House Journal, 1838-1839, 98-103. On Lincoln's authorship of the report, see Albert J. Beveridge, Abraham Lincoln, 1809–1858 (2 vols.; Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1928), 1:240-41, and Harry E. Pratt, "Lincoln in the Legislature," 10. One observer deemed it "a very able document, and one that will do ample honor to the gentleman who made it." Vandalia correspondence, 19 December, Alton Telegraph, 29 December 1838.

should not be abandoned: "Your committee do not wish to be understood as resisting, without inquiry or examination, all changes in the fiscal affairs of the Government. They are not hostile to such changes as may be shown to be necessary and proper; but, in view of the high degree of prosperity which the American nation has enjoyed under the system pursued since the foundation of the Government to the present day – when it is proposed to forsake that system and embrace a new and untried plan – they ask, what are the grounds, what are the reasons and considerations which render this change necessary and proper?"[145]

Proponents of the separation of bank and state argued that federal funds were insecure in deposit banks, but a recent report by the secretary of the treasury showed that this was not a serious problem. Moreover, President Van Buren in his December 1838 annual message praised the conduct of banks. In January, the General Assembly expressed agreement with Lincoln's arguments by instructing Illinois' congressional delegation to vote against the subtreasury plan.[146]

In addition to debating the bank issue on the national level, the legislators addressed state banking concerns, including a resolution condemning the practice of depositing in a Missouri bank the federal taxes collected from Illinois residents. Lincoln at first agreed with the resolution, but then moved to table it indefinitely.[147]

Equally troublesome was the internal improvements issue. Instead of reducing expenditures for canals and railroads, which would have been a sensible response to the financial panic and recession, the General Assembly, with Lincoln's approval, unaccountably appropriated more funds for such purposes. In December, he said that "his own course was

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[145] House Journal, 1838-1839, 98-100. On the Whig party's criticisms of the subtreasury, see Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 67.

[146] Lincoln to William Butler, Vandalia, 31 January 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:140-41.

[147] Simon, Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness, 156-57.

identified with the system. We had gone too far to recede, even if we were disposed to."[148] The following month, he reiterated this sentiment in a finance committee report: "We are now so far advanced in a general system of Internal Improvements that, if we would, we cannot retreat from it without disgrace and great loss."[149] He had pledged to support the system and announced in the General Assembly "that his limbs should be torn asunder before he would violate that pledge."[150]

One year later, "A Citizen" (probably Lincoln) argued in letter to the Sangamo Journal that Illinois legislators, by passing the internal improvements scheme, "did that which they thought would be for the future glory and honor of the State." They had seen "an enterprising yeomanry struggling with the privations and trials and difficulties of a new country; but their troubles would have been comparatively light had there been a ready market for the fruits of their labor." When the settlers, however, "reflected upon the cost and hazard of carrying their products to a distant market, the hands of their industry began to hang down." Upon perceiving this, the General Assembly "endeavored to remedy the evil by borrowing money and expending it in building roads upon the most feasible and cheap plan, whereon the farmer could transport his products to some port of embarkation. The originators of this business of borrowing money, and works of internal improvement, foresaw that a benefit would result to the inhabitants of this State, from carrying out of their plans, and the result has fully confirmed the correctness of their judgment." The plan's supporters contemplated "the creation, to a considerable extent of a home market, as well as a cheap and easy conveyance of commodities to foreign markets." The parts of the system in place had

[148] Remarks in Illinois Legislature, 8 December 1838, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:123.

[149] Report and Resolutions, 17 January 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:135.

[150] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 January 1840.

"already dispelled the gloom from the face of many a farmer and mechanic." The author warned that to abandon the system would be ill-advised: "I do not like to see so much faint-heartedness." Illinois residents "should be all heart" in difficult times. If the state managed to get "through it honorably she will get glory." Illinois's "own industry and good management" would pay the debt. The author wished his "fellow citizens to keep constantly in mind that no murmuring or complaining of their's will mend matters." They should not, "like the foolish Israelites, by their murmurings, distract the councils of their State, and put back the work of public improvement, which is fast converting their whole country into a fruitful field." Instead, let them with "contented minds, and cheerful industry," go about making "pork and beef enough in the next thirty years to pay for works fifteen times as costly as those now in progress, if they can find a reasonable market for it."[151]

To meet the costs of the internal improvements system, Lincoln proposed that Illinois buy 20,000,000 acres of public land within the state from the federal government for 25¢ per acre, then sell it for $1.25 per acre.[152] If implemented, the plan would have generated enough revenue to pay off the debt.[153] Resolutions endorsing Lincoln's scheme passed the legislature but were ignored by Congress. In 1840, Lincoln urged John Todd Stuart to show them to the influential South Carolina Senator John C. Calhoun, who had proposed a similar plan.[154] Lincoln also voted to impose a modest tax on land and to change the formula used to compute property taxes.[155] To a dissenting Democrat, Lincoln protested that the old system,

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[151] Sangamo Journal, 1 November 1839.

[152] Report and Resolutions, 17 January 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:135-38.

[153] Vandalia correspondence by T., 18 January, Alton Telegraph, 26 January 1839.

[154] Lincoln to Stuart, Springfield, 1 January 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:181.

[155] The tax law of 1839 is summarized succinctly in Robert Murray Haig, A History of the General Property Tax in Illinois (University of Illinois Studies in the Social Sciences, vol. 3; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1914), 78-82.

which relied almost exclusively upon taxes levied on the property of out-of-state landowners, failed to generate enough revenue. Moreover, it valued all land at either $3 or $4 per acre, allowing owners of valuable property to pay less than their fair share of taxes. Lincoln claimed that the new system "does not increase the tax upon the 'many poor' but upon the 'wealthy few' by taxing the land that is worth $50 or $100 per acre, in proportion to its value, instead of, as heretofore, no more than that which was worth but $5 per acre." If the wealthy did not like it, there was little reason to worry, for "they are not sufficiently numerous to carry the elections."[156]

The Eleventh General Assembly addressed the touchy subject of county divisions. One legislator observed that of all the questions pending, "the most difficult to settle are such as grow out of dispute[s] in relation to county towns and lines of counties that affect such local interest."[157] In 1839, David Davis explained to his father-in-law that there was "a great mania in our State for the creation of new Counties. Speculators who own towns want Counties made for prospective county seats. And then again, the office holding spirit, which is diffused very generally in Illinois, induces the people generally within the limits of the proposed new County, to desire its formation."[158]

In September 1838, the Sangamo Journal had run a letter, probably by Lincoln, accusing division proponents of "selfishness – A desire to make money, or to obtain the little offices in the new counties." The author was particularly harsh in criticizing John Taylor:

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[156] Lincoln to William S. Wait, Vandalia, 2 March 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:147-48. On Illinois state taxes, see Gabor S. Boritt, Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream (Memphis: Memphis State University Press, 1978), 43-45; G. S. Borit, "Lincoln and Taxation during His Illinois Legislative Years," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 61 (1968): 365-73; Haig, History of the General Property Tax in Illinois.

[157] Thomas J. Nance to Catherine Nance, Springfield, 23 January 1840, Pond, ed., "Letters of an Illinois Legislator," 417.

[158] David Davis to William P. Walker, Bloomington, 18 March 1839, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

"Old Sangamon must be cut to pieces to accommodate Col. Taylor. He once endeavored to destroy her through the instrumentality of Illiopolis. He now aims to produce the same result by making use of Petersburg." The letter maintained that Aaron Vandever of Lick Creek wanted a division so he could win election to the General Assembly, something he could not do in Sangamon County. "In any of the proposed divisions of Sangamon the mass of the people would not be accommodated so far as county business is concerned, as well as they are now."[159]

Despite Lincoln's opposition, it was clear that some kind of division was inevitable. Lincoln sought to insure that Sangamon would be carved up into three instead of four new counties, and that Springfield would not be disadvantaged. (If the county were split into four equal sections, Springfield would be isolated in the corner of one.) As a member of the Committee on Counties, Lincoln drafted a bill creating three new counties. When it was reported on January 16, 1839, the House referred it to a special committee (among whose members was Lincoln), which amended the bill (all of the amendments being in Lincoln's hand). On February 2, the House debated the measure, with Lincoln arguing against four equal counties. The bill as amended passed, establishing the small new counties of Logan, Dane, and Menard.[160] Sangamon remained large, with five representatives; Lincoln preserved for Sangamon six townships that would have been lost if the county had been divided into four counties of equal size.[161] Thus, as the Sangamo Journal noted, "Old Sangamon, though considerably shorn of territory, will still remain among the most extensive and populous

[159] Letter dated 6 September 1838, Sangamo Journal, 15 September 1838.

[160] Bill Introduced in Illinois Legislature to Supplement Act Establishing Counties of Menard, Logan and Dane, [20 February 1839], Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:144-45.

[161] Thomas J. Nance to Catherine Nance, Springfield, 30 January 1840, Pond, ed., "Letters of an Illinois Legislator," 419.

counties in the State."[162] In protecting the interests of the county, Lincoln employed the same skills he had used in Springfield's campaign to become the state's capital.[163]

Not all of Lincoln's friends applauded his actions. In January 1839, William Butler, known as "a quiet, dignified man," accused him of truckling to land speculators.[164] Judiciously, Lincoln replied: "You were in an ill-humor when you wrote that letter, and, no doubt, intended that I should be thrown into one also; which, however, I respectfully decline being done." Employing the imagery of suicide, as he did surprisingly often, Lincoln declared, "I am willing to pledge myself in black and white to cut my own throat from ear to ear, if, when I meet you, you shall seriously say, that you believe me capable of betraying my friends for any price." In closing, Lincoln called himself "[y]our friend in spite of your ill-nature."[165] Butler had also rebuked the intemperate Edward D. Baker, who responded heatedly, calling Butler "a fool."[166] Acting as peacemaker, Lincoln explained to Butler that Baker had been "writhing under a severe tooth-ache," hence "at that time was incapable of exercising that patience and reflection which the case required." He counseled that it "is always magnanamous to recant whatever we may have said in passion; and when you and Baker shall have done this, I am sure there will be no difficulty left between you."[167]

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[162] Sangamo Journal, 16 February 1839.

[163] Harry E. Pratt, "Lincoln and the Division of Sangamon County," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 47 (1954): 398-409. See Lincoln's letters to William Butler, Vandalia, 26 January, and 1 and 23 February 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:139-41, 144-45.

[164] John G. Nicolay interviewed in "Lincoln in Early Life, Colonel Nicolay's Reminiscences," Washington correspondence by C., Chicago Herald, 4 December 1887.

[165] Lincoln to Butler, Vandalia, 26 January 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:139-40.

[166] Baker to Butler, Vandalia, 26 January 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:138. In 1850, Baker apologized to his friend William E. Dummer for expressing himself "incautiously." Baker to Dummer, Washington, 1 May 1860, Dummer Collection, Chicago History Museum, photocopy, Lincoln Collection ibid.

[167] Lincoln to Butler, Vandalia, 1 February 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln 1:141.

The General Assembly also addressed the issue of slavery. On January 5, 1839, the Judiciary Committee moved two resolutions, the first condemning the governor of Maine for his refusal to extradite two Georgia men who had helped runaway slaves, and the second declaring that citizens of the Free States "ought not to interfere with the property of slaveholding States; which property has been guarantied unto them by the Constitution of the United States, and without which guaranty, the Union, perhaps, would never have been formed."[168] Lincoln said that "on the first reading of the resolutions, he inclined to vote in favor of concurring; but upon the second, he felt that he wanted more time for deliberation. He now thought it would be better to postpone the subject indefinitely."[169] The subject, however, would not go away; on February 1, it came up again when John Calhoun, in reply to abolitionist petitions, introduced resolutions urging Congress to ignore pleas for the abolition of slavery in both Washington, D.C., and in the territories, and for the prohibition of slave trading among the states. He added that attempts to grant Illinois blacks fundamental rights were "not only unconstitutional, but improper, inexpedient, and unwise."[170] The House defeated Calhoun's motion 44-36, with Lincoln joining the majority.[171]

In March 1839, the General Assembly adjourned. Lincoln had as usual been conscientious, answering 157 of the 181 roll calls and serving on eleven select committees.[172]

The following December, legislators reconvened at the urging of Governor Thomas Carlin, who proposed modifications to the internal improvement system. The state could not

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[168] House Journal, 1838-39, p. 171 (5 January 1839).

[169] Remarks of 5 January 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:126.

[170] House Journal, 1838-39, p. 323 (1 February 1839).

[171] Simon, Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness, 135.

[172] Harlan Hoyt Horner, "The Education of a Politician: Being the Experience of Abraham Lincoln in the Illinois Legislature," unpublished manuscript, 160-65, 181, Horner Papers, University of Illinois.

pay the interest on the loans necessary for an extravagant network of railroads and canals, he pointed out. Meeting for the first time in Springfield, the General Assembly had to deliberate in churches, for the statehouse, whose cornerstone had been laid two years earlier, stood unfinished on the public square, surrounded by stagnant pools in which many of the city's free-roaming hogs wallowed. (A wag suggested that wild rice be cultivated there: "It will grow in water from six inches to a foot deep – reproduces well and is a very nutritious article of food. A sufficient quantity could be raised in the State House yard to secure rations for all the State offices.")[173]

As the House of Representatives discussed the governor's proposal in its temporary quarters at the Second Presbyterian Church, Lincoln once again tried to salvage the internal improvements system, which Democrats referred to as "Infernal Improvements." He argued "that at least some portion of our Internal Improvements should be carried [out]. That after the immense debt, we have incurred in carrying these works almost to completion, at least one work calculated to yield something towards defraying its expense, should be finished and put in operation."[174] When he voted for an unsuccessful proposal to have joint stock companies take over the system, with the state owning some shares, the Springfield Register sneeringly declared that Lincoln "has blown his pledges to the winds, and has left the system to shift for itself. What an example of good faith!"[175] The jibe was unfair, for Lincoln voted repeatedly to sustain the system, including the Illinois and Michigan Canal. When it was proposed to suspend work on the latter, he said "we should lose much by stopping the work on the Canal – that a mutual injury would result to the State by suspending all operations

[173] Angle, "Here I Have Lived", 90-91.

[174] Remarks made on 30 January 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:201.

[175] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 January 1840.

there. It would be . . . very much like stopping a skiff in the middle of a river – if it was not going up, it would go down. The embankments upon the Canal would be washing away, and the excavations filling up."[176] Though the legislature did not kill the internal improvements system de jure, it did so de facto.[177]

Governor Carlin also recommended an investigation of the state bank. The legislators complied by establishing a special committee, with Lincoln as one of its members. In late December, he reported to John Todd Stuart that the "legislature is in session, and has suffered the Bank to forfeit it's charter, without Benefit of Clergy. There seems to be but verry little disposition to resuscitate it."[178] A month later, Lincoln had better news for his law partner: "The Bank will be resuscitated with some trifling modification."[179] He was right; a day later, the investigating committee on which he sat issued a report, which Lincoln signed, defending the bank.[180] The General Assembly permitted that institution to suspend specie payments until the close of the next legislative session.

In the legislature, the removal of the state capital came up yet again, for the citizens of Springfield, suffering from the economic hard times, had difficulty raising the $50,000 to help pay for the new statehouse. Some legislators were ready to introduce a bill relieving the townspeople of that burden, but Lincoln "objected, and, though fully appreciating the kindly feelings that prompted the proposal, insisted that the money should and would be paid."[181]

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[176] Remarks made on 22 January 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:196.

[177] Simon, Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness, 188.

[178] Lincoln to John Todd Stuart, Springfield, 23 December 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:159.

[179] Lincoln to John Todd Stuart, Springfield, 20 January 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:184.

[180] Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:185-95.

[181] Clinton L. Conkling, "Movement for a Third Capital," in Newton Bateman and Paul Selby, eds., Historical Encyclopedia of Illinois, vol. II, part 1 (Chicago: Munsell, 1912), 646-47.

The legislature adjourned on February 1, 1840, after reviving the State Bank, continuing support for the Illinois and Michigan Canal (but otherwise cutting back on internal improvements), and incorporating the town of Springfield while leaving unchanged its new status as state capital. Characteristically, Lincoln answered most roll calls (145 out of 169).[182]

Well before adjournment, Lincoln and other Whigs girded for the presidential election, which they had a good chance to win, thanks to the hard times caused by the Panic of 1837. Illinois Whigs had at first opposed the convention system introduced by the Democrats, believing it to be "a Yankee contrivance, intended to abridge the liberties of the people by depriving individuals, on their own mere motion, of the privilege of becoming candidates, and depriving each man of the right to vote for a candidate of his own selection and choice."[183] Eventually, however, defeat at the polls forced them to reconsider.[184] David Davis told a fellow Whig in 1839: "The longer I live the more I am convinced that unless the Whigs of this State organize through Conventions they will be beaten at the next General election. Candidates show themselves as plenty as blackberries."[185] The following year, Lincoln and four party colleagues declared that a "disbanded yeomanry cannot successfully

[182] Horner, "Education of a Politician," 238.

[183] Thomas Ford, History of Illinois from Its Commencement as a State in 1818 to 1847, ed. Rodney O. Davis (1854; Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 139. See also Charles Manfred Thompson, "Attitude of the Western Whigs toward the Convention System," Proceedings of the Mississippi Valley Historical Association 5 (1911-12): 167-89; Daniel Walker Howe, The Political Culture of the American Whigs (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 50-53; Lynn L. Marshall, "The Strange Stillbirth of the Whig Party," American Historical Review 72 (1967): 445-68; and Ronald P. Formisano, "Political Character, Antipartyism and the Second Party System," American Quarterly 21 (1969): 683-709.

[184] Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 30-32.

[185] David Davis to John J. Hardin, Bloomington, Illinois, 1 June 1839, Hardin Family Papers. Chicago History Museum.

meet an organized soldiery."[186] In September 1839, the Whigs of Sangamon County resolved that "the misrule of the present Administration of the General Government is such as to require the united and organized efforts of all those who are opposed to their leading measures of policy." Therefore, they urged their fellow Whigs throughout Illinois to send representatives to a state convention the following month.[187] At that conclave, delegates to the Whig national convention were chosen, resolutions passed, a plan for organizing the state adopted, and an address to the people drafted. Lincoln was named one of the five Whig presidential electors and placed on the Whig State Central Committee, which the Democrats derisively called the "Junto." The delegates endorsed the presidential candidacies of both Henry Clay and William Henry Harrison.[188]

Though Lincoln vastly admired Clay, whom he called his "beau ideal of a statesman," he supported Harrison for expediency's sake.[189] An 1838 editorial in the Sangamo Journal, probably by Lincoln, declared (in words which had personal resonance for him) that Harrison's nomination would "proclaim to the world, that poverty shall never arrest virtue and intelligence on their march to distinction." It would also be a matter of simple justice, for Harrison had earned his country's gratitude: "so long as men continue ambitious of distinction, it is not the part of wisdom in any community, to let that ambition go ungratified, in an individual, who has rendered arduous and valuable services to the community."[190] In May 1839, a letter in the Sangamo Journal, probably by Lincoln, argued that Harrison was

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[186] Communication to the readers of The Old Soldier, 28 February 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:205.

[187] Sangamo Journal, 20 September 1839.

[188] Sangamo Journal, 12 October 1839.

[189] Debate with Stephen A. Douglas, 21 August 1858, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 3:29.

[190] Sangamo Journal, 3 November 1838. Albert J. Beveridge thought that this editorial "was almost certainly by Lincoln." Beveridge, Lincoln, 1:270n.

more electable than Clay: "I am not among the most lukewarm admirers of the distinguished statesman and patriot, Henry Clay; yet I do know that the people – the bone and sinew of the country – the main pillar of the republic – I mean the farming and laboring classes [–] are anxiously alive to the interests of General Harrison, while it is generally political men alone of the opposition who are advocating the pretensions of Mr. Clay." The author, who signed himself "A Voice from Southern Illinois," added that "the people are for Gen. Harrison, and be it whim or not – they must be humored or the Vannites [Democrats] will take advantage of the deep toned feeling of the public mind in his favor, and a victory which is properly our's will be their's."[191]

In December 1839, delegates to the first Whig national convention agreed. They passed over Clay and the other conspicuous leader of the party, Daniel Webster, to nominate the popular, colorless Harrison and send him forth unencumbered by a platform. Instead of principles, he would run on his military record, his humble log-cabin origins, and his fondness for egalitarian hard cider rather than elitist champagne. Some Whig campaign organizers seized the moral low ground, contending that "passion and prejudice, properly aroused and directed, would do about as well as principle in a party contest," and that to "correct the abuses of the [Van Buren] Administration is sufficient motive to vigorous and efficient effort, and in politics, as well as in Philosophy – it is unwise to give more reasons than are necessary."[192] They ridiculed Van Buren as an aristocrat who ate with gold cutlery, wore silk hose and ruffled shirts, scented himself with perfume, and primped before immense mirrors. In a circular signed by Lincoln and the other members of the Illinois Whig central

[191] Sangamo Journal, 26 May 1838. Cf. Thomas C. Browne to Henry Eddy, Springfield, 25 February 1840, Eddy Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[192] Thomas Elder, a Pennsylvania banker and Whig organizer, and C. Davis, quoted in Robert Gray Gunderson, The Log-Cabin Campaign (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1957), 76, 65-66.

committee, the president was termed "effeminate and luxury-loving."[193] Whigs championed Harrison as a true man of the people, content with homespun clothes and log-cabin rusticity.[194] When a Democratic newspaper sneered at Harrison's simple ways ("Give him a barrel of hard cider and settle a pension of two thousand a year upon him, and our word for it, he will sit the remainder of his days content in a log cabin"), the Whigs made a virtue of them.[195]

Throughout the country, the campaign insulted the intelligence of many thoughtful people.[196] An Illinois Whig leader, Albert Taylor Bledsoe, declared that observers of the 1840 contest "would have supposed that the whole world had run mad, and rushed into the wild contest on the sublime issues, that log-cabins are the best of all buildings, hard-cider the most delicious of all drinks, and coon-skins the finest of all furs. In no age or country, perhaps, since the dawn of civilization, has humbuggery been exhibited in more gigantic and grotesque forms than in the Harrison campaign of 1840." When Bledsoe expressed "intense mortification that the Whig Party, which had claimed a monopoly of all the intelligence and decency of the country, should descend to the use of such means," Lincoln replied: "It is all right; we must fight the devil with fire; we must beat the Democrats, or the country will be ruined." In response to Bledsoe's protest that ends do not justify means, Lincoln "looked very grave" but "said nothing."[197]

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[193] Circular to the readers of The Old Soldier, 28 February 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:205.

[194] Gunderson, Log-Cabin Campaign, 108-22.

[195] Anthony Banning Norton, The Great Revolution of 1840: Reminiscences of the Log Cabin and Hard Cider Campaign (Mt. Vernon, Ohio: A. B. Norton, 1888), 10.

[196] Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, passim. Michael Holt maintained that the Whigs in 1840 were less demagogic than historians like Gunderson have acknowledged. Holt, Rise and Fall of the Whig Party, 89-121.

[197] Bledsoe's review of Ward Hill Lamon's biography of Lincoln, The Southern Review 12 (April 1873): 360-61. According to a Democratic journal, Lincoln two years earlier had "in speaking of Mr. Van Buren . . . cried out 'crucify him.'" Undated article in the Springfield Republican, copied in The Illinois State Register

Lincoln was not alone in his evident embarrassment. A British visitor reported that many Whigs "seemed to be a little ashamed of the arts to which their own party had had recourse, in order to enlist the labouring classes in their ranks." Noting that the Democrats had used hickory poles to win support for Andrew Jackson ("Old Hickory") in earlier campaigns, some Whigs rationalized that "one piece of vulgarity and bad taste was justified by another." Thus "neither party had dignity or independence enough to rise superior to such absurdities."[198] A case in point was the New York Whig who reasoned that since his party had been "broken down by the popularity and non-committal character of old Jackson," it was "but fair to turn upon, and prostrate our opponents, with the weapons . . . with which they beat us."[199] In Illinois, "the idea prevailed. . . that all things were fair in politics, love, and war."[200]

Lincoln took charge of Harrison's campaign in traditionally Democratic Illinois, which he predicted would turn Whig in 1840.[201] In January, he reported to John Todd Stuart that the "nomination of Harrison takes first rate. You know I am never sanguine; but I believe we will carry the state. The chance for doing so, appears to me 25 per cent better than it did for you to beat Douglass."[202] In the fall and winter of 1839-40, he helped organize two series of debates with Democrats, the first of which took place in November.[203] They were preceded by informal political discussions in Joshua Speed's store, where one evening Douglas

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(Vandalia), 19 October 1838. This utterance was reportedly made at the Whig caucus in Springfield on September 29.

[198] J. S. Buckingham, The Eastern and Western States of America (3 vols.; London: Fisher, 1842), 3:285.

[199] M. Bradley to Thurlow Weed, 29 August 1839, quoted in Gunderson, Log Cabin Campaign, 52.

[200] Linder, Reminiscences, 135-36.

[201] Harry E. Pratt, "Lincoln–Campaign Manager and Orator in 1840," Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association no. 50 (December 1937), 1-8.

[202] Lincoln to Stuart, Springfield, 20 January 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:184.

[203] Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:155-56.

accused the Whigs of committing every imaginable political crime and challenged his opponents to a public debate.[204] The Whig spokesmen were Lincoln, Cyrus Walker, and Edward D. Baker; the Democrats were represented by Douglas, John Calhoun, Josiah Lamborn, and Edmund R. Wiley. The first debate took place on November 19, with Cyrus Walker making the Whig case and Douglas the Democratic response; Lincoln had the final word. In the course of his remarks, Lincoln called the Democratic editors of the Springfield Register "liars" for alleging that he supported John Bennett instead of his old friend Bowling Green for a legislative seat.[205] The Register chided Lincoln for the "assumed clownishness in his manner which does not become him." According to that paper, he "will sometimes make his language correspond with this clownish manner, and he can thus frequently raise a loud laugh among his Whig hearers; but this entire game of buffoonery convinces the mind of no man, and is utterly lost on the majority of his audience."

The next night, Douglas and Lincoln discussed the Bank of the United States. If the account in the Register is accurate, Lincoln did badly. On Tuesday, he and Walker "were driven from every ground which they assumed," and on Wednesday, Lincoln "commenced with embarrassment and continued without making the slightest impression. . . . He could

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[204] Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Lincoln, 127; Speed, Reminiscences of Lincoln, 23.

[205] In 1838, when Green wanted to run for the state senate, the Whig leadership had backed Archer G. Herndon. Green ran without the party endorsement and won the support of Democrats eager to split the Whig vote. After the election, the Sangamo Journal published an editorial, probably by Lincoln, saying: "To see our old friend, Bowling Green, beaten, and to have been under the necessity of aiding in defeating him, we confess is, and has been, extremely painful to us. Under other circumstances we would have been glad to do battle for him; but as it was, he threw himself in the ranks of our enemies, and therefore we could do no less than we did." Sangamo Journal, 11 August 1838. The following year, Green once again ran for the General Assembly when a special election was held to fill the seat vacated by John Calhoun's resignation. The Springfield Whig leadership backed John Bennett, though Lincoln claimed that he supported Green. When the balloting took place on November 25, 1839, Lincoln avoided the polls. Benjamin P. Thomas, "Lincoln: Voter and Candidate, part two," Bulletin of the Abraham Lincoln Association 37 (1934): 4-5; letter from Petersburg, 26 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 2 November 1839; "Dictation of the 'Springfield Junto,'" ibid., 16 November 1839; "Mr. Lincoln and the Register," ibid., 23 November 1839. See also a letter by "'28 & '32" to William Walters and George Weber, n.d., ibid., 23 November 1839.

only meet the arguments of Mr. Douglass by relating stale anecdotes and old stories, and left the stump literally whipped off of it, even in the estimation of his own friends."[206] One of those friends, Joseph Gillespie, said Lincoln "was very sensitive where he thought he had failed to come up to the expectations of his friends." Against Douglas, "Lincoln did not come up to the requirements of the occasion." Gillespie, who said he "never saw any man so much distressed," thought that Lincoln "was conscious of his failure."[207] (Years later, Lincoln said: "I'm one of the thinnest skinned men to any marks of impatience in my audience.")[208]

Later that week, the hot-tempered Edward D. Baker spoke for the Whigs. Baker was "a fiery fellow -- and when his impulsiveness was let loose among the rough elements which constituted a large part of his audience, it was generally understood that there might be trouble at any time."[209] (One election day, the British-born Baker assaulted a prominent Democrat who had questioned his right to vote. Lincoln said that the bloody-faced Democrat was "the worst whipped man he had ever seen." In the Illinois General Assembly, Baker threatened to beat a judge who challenged his word.)[210] Baker made some harsh remarks about George R. Weber, co-editor of the Illinois State Register, much to the dismay of Weber's brother John, who yelled: "Pull him down!"[211] Relaxing in his office on the second floor of the building where the debate took place, Lincoln heard the commotion below and

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[206] "The Campaign," Illinois State Register (Springfield), 23 November 1839.

[207] Joseph Gillespie to Herndon, Edwardsville, Illinois, 31 January 1866, Wilson and Davis., eds., Herndon's Informants, 181.

[208] He said this in 1856. Speech of "Judge Park" (perhaps Samuel C. Parks) at a banquet in Joliet, Illinois, Washington Post, 1 April 1883.

[209] Milton Hay, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 4 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 29.

[210] Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 145; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 12 February 1841.

[211] "Mr. Calhoun & Mr. Baker," Illinois State Register (Springfield), 30 November 1839; "To The Public," ibid., 3 April 1840; John B. Weber, interview with Herndon, [ca. 1 November 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 389. The Weber brothers were accustomed to violent political disagreements. Short, Early Days in Illinois, 36-37.

promptly "jumped off the bed, and in about three strides he went down the stairs and into the court room," and beheld Baker confronted by a menacing crowd.[212] Lincoln grabbed a stone pitcher and threatened to smash it on the head anyone who attacked Baker.[213]

(Lincoln performed a similar service for Usher Linder around this time. As Linder recalled the event, he was speaking for the Whig cause in the statehouse when some hecklers in the balcony taunted him. After he had finished his remarks and Edward Baker had concluded his, Lincoln approached Linder saying, "Baker and I are apprehensive that you may be attacked by some of those ruffians who insulted you from the galleries, and we have come up to escort you to your hotel. We both think we can do a little fighting, so we want you to walk between us until we get you to your hotel.")[214]

In the second round of debates, which attracted an audience of about 500, Lincoln proved more effective than he had been in the first round. Gillespie said that he "begged to be permitted to try it again and was reluctantly indulged and in the next effort he transcended our highest expectations[.] I never heard & never expect to hear such a triumphant vindication as he then gave of Whig measures or policy[.]"[215] On December 18, Lincoln branded the Democrats' subtreasury plan a "scheme of fraud and corruption."[216] Douglas responded in a manner that prompted Lincoln to say he "is not now worth talking about."[217]

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[212] Milton Hay, interview with John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 4 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 29.

[213] Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Lincoln, 129-30.

[214] Linder, Reminiscences, 249.

[215] Joseph Gillespie to Herndon, Edwardsville, Illinois, 31 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 181.

[216] Thomas J. Nance to Catherine Nance, Springfield, 19 December 1839, Pond, ed., "Letters of a Frontier Legislator," 411; Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:158.

[217] Lincoln to John Todd Stuart, Springfield, 23 December 1839, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:159.

On December 26, Lincoln gave an address that became the Illinois Whig party's 1840 "text book."[218] He began with a candid admission: "It is peculiarly embarrassing to me to attempt a continuance of the discussion, on this evening, which has been conducted in this Hall on several preceding ones. It is so, because on each of those evenings, there was a much fuller attendance than now, without any reason for its being so, except the greater interest the community felt in the Speakers who addressed them then, than they do in him who is to do so now. I am, indeed, apprehensive, that the few who have attended, have done so, more to spare me of mortification, than in the hope of being interested in any thing I may be able to say. This circumstance casts a damp upon my spirits, which I am sure I shall be unable to overcome during the evening." After this painful acknowledgment, Lincoln offered a sober analysis of President Van Buren's independent subtreasury scheme for government funds, a deflationary plan which, he argued, would create "distress, ruin, bankruptcy and beggary" by removing money from circulation. Hardest hit would be poor people in states with large tracts of public land. "Knowing, as I well do, the difficulty that poor people now encounter in procuring homes, I hesitate not to say, that when the price of the public lands shall be doubled or trebled . . . it will be little less than impossible for them to procure those homes at all." Lincoln cited history to support his alternative to the subtreasury, a national bank, which for over forty years had managed to "establish and maintain a sound and uniform state of currency." The Bank of the United States had performed this service cheaply, while the subtreasury would cost more and do less to restore prosperity. In addition, government money was safer in a Bank of the United States than it would be in the hands of government

[218] "The Subtreasury," Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 May 1840.

officials like those who had recently embezzled large sums. The Bank was clearly constitutional, Lincoln argued.

As he proceeded, Lincoln abandoned his didactic exposition of economic theory and history to attack the Jackson and Van Buren administrations for their extravagant spending. At length he rebutted Douglas's attempt to explain the unusual expenses incurred by the federal government in 1838. Lincoln was occasionally abusive: he ridiculed arguments of the opponents of the Bank of the United States as "absurd;" he called Douglas "stupid" and "deserving of the world's contempt;" and deemed one of his arguments "supremely ridiculous." He indulged in some demagoguery, asking of the subtreasury: "was such a system for benefiting the few at the expense of the many, ever before devised?" In his peroration, Lincoln became almost hysterical as he attacked the Van Buren administration: "Many free countries have lost their liberty; and ours may lose hers; but if she shall, be it my proudest plume, not that I was the last to desert, but that I never deserted her. I know that the great volcano at Washington, aroused and directed by the evil spirit that reigns there, is belching forth the lava of political corruption, in a current broad and deep, which is sweeping with frightful velocity over the whole length and breadth of the land, bidding fair to leave unscathed no green spot or living thing, while on its bosom are riding like demons on the waves of Hell, the imps of that evil spirit, and fiendishly taunting all those who dare resist its destroying course, with the hopelessness of their effort; and knowing this, I cannot deny that all may be swept way. Broken by it, I, too, may be; bow to it I never will. The probability that we may fall in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just; it shall not deter me. If ever I feel the soul within me elevate and expand to those dimensions not wholly unworthy of its Almighty Architect, it is when I contemplate the

cause of my country, deserted by all the world beside, and I standing up boldly and alone and hurling defiance at her victorious oppressors. Here, without contemplating consequences, before High Heaven, and in the face of the world, I swear eternal fidelity to the just cause, as I deem it, of the land of my life, my liberty and my love."[219]

Though rhetorical bombast marred Lincoln's speech, it made some legitimate economic points. The independent treasury scheme would have been deflationary, if not so badly as Lincoln predicted. The useful regulatory function that the Bank of the United States had served, something like the role played later by the Federal Reserve System, he sensibly praised.[220]

Joshua Speed recalled that Lincoln gave this address "without manuscript or notes." Speed marveled at Lincoln's powers of concentration: "He had a wonderful faculty in that way. He might be writing an important document, be interrupted in the midst of a sentence, turn his attention to other matters entirely foreign to the subject on which he was engaged, and take up his pen and begin where he left off without reading the previous part of the sentence. He could grasp, exhaust, and quit any subject with more facility than any man I have ever seen or heard of."[221] (Responding to Speed's remark "that his mind was a wonder," Lincoln modestly observed, "you are mistaken – I am slow to learn and slow to forget that which I have learned – My mind is like a piece of steel, very hard to scratch any thing on it and almost impossible after you get it there to rub it out.")[222] A Democrat who heard the speech said that Lincoln "surprised me by his ability and by his apparent logical frankness. . .

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[219] Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:159-79.

[220] Boritt, Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream, 65-70.

[221] Speed, Reminiscences of Lincoln, 25.

[222] Speed to Herndon, Louisville, 6 December 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 499.

. His statements were clear, and his arguments must have given great satisfaction to the party he represented. He asserted his proposition with firmness and supported them in the most effective manner."[223] Even the Springfield Register praised Lincoln's effort as "in the main, temperate, and argumentative" and mercifully free of "coarse invective, unfounded ridicule, and personal abuse." The Democratic editor said it was "pleasant to find a man among them [the Whigs] who occasionally is able to . . . deal in sober reason."[224] The speech was widely published in the Whig press and issued as a campaign document.[225]

On behalf of Harrison, Lincoln stumped throughout Illinois. In March, he campaigned as he made his rounds on the legal circuit. With Edward D. Baker, he spoke in Jacksonville, where replies were made by Douglas and the bibulous, combative Josiah Lamborn, noted for his "bitter and unmeasured" denunciations of Whigs.[226] A "tall, slim man, with a most singularly musical voice, and the strangest tawny complexion imaginable," Lamborn was "almost criminally avaricious" and suffered from "a physical deformity that badly lamed him and seemed to have dwarfed the nobler part of his nature," filling him "with the spirit of revenge" and causing him "to glory in the faults and frailties of his fellow men."[227] Lamborn's undoubted brilliance was overshadowed by his unscrupulousness and alcoholism. He "gave himself up to intemperance, to the neglect of his wife and child, whom he

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[223] "Oration of John M. Palmer, Delivered at Galesburg, Ill., October 7, 1896," in Personal Recollections of John M. Palmer: The Story of an Earnest Life (Cincinnati: Clarke, 1901), 604-5.

[224] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 February 1840. On February 8 and 14, 1840, the Register devoted five full columns to a rebuttal of Lincoln's points.

[225] Great Western (Belleville), 22 February 1840.

[226] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 27 March 1840; Springfield correspondence by Virginius [George T. M. Davis], 7 December, Alton Telegraph, 12 December 1840.

[227] J. H. Matheny, clerk of the Sangamon County circuit court, quoted in Samuel Lamborn, "A Remarkable Trial by Jury," letter in The Century Magazine, March 1892, 797; Matheny quoted in an unidentified clipping, George Pasfield Scrapbook, p. 43, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

abandoned," and as attorney general of Illinois, "shamelessly took bribes from criminals prosecuted under his administration."[228]

Lincoln spent much time in the southern part of the state, known as "Egypt," chief stronghold of the Democratic party.[229] There his speaking style, accent, and approach to politics seemed more suitable than in the northern part of the state.[230] He canvassed Egypt most intensively after the August elections, in which the Democrats won the legislature and two of the state's three congressional seats.[231] He was joined by his friend Edward D. Baker, former governor Joseph Duncan, and Alexander P. Field, the fiercely partisan Illinois secretary of state, a "tall, perfectly formed" man "with erect, soldierly bearing, and the polished manners of a born courtier" whose "otherwise handsome features were marred by a nodular, potato-like nose."[232] Field told a friend that the Whigs "lost the legislature in consequence of the Great Majorities against us in the southern part of the State. That part of the State has not been properly attended to or their Majorities certainly would have been greatly reduced. Baker (Ed) Lincoln Gov Duncan & myself are going to spend all our time in the Southern Counties discuss[ing] the principles of our party in every neighborhood: and challenge these men [Democratic leaders] to a fair discussion of this administration[,] organize our friends, [and] circulate documents amongst them."[233] The Democratic press sarcastically remarked, "Missionaries Field and Lincoln have again been sent forth . . . by the

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[228] Linder, Reminiscences, 258-59.

[229] Pratt, "Lincoln–Campaign Manager in 1840," 5-8.

[230] S. T. Logan, interviewed by John G. Nicolay, Springfield, 6 July 1875, Burlingame, ed., Oral History of Lincoln, 39.

[231] "The Decree Has Gone Forth!" Illinois State Register (Springfield), 21 August 1840; George W. Smith, When Lincoln Came to Egypt (Herrin, Illinois: Trovillion, 1940), 54-73.

[232] Snyder, Adam W. Snyder, 341.

[233] Field to Henry Eddy, Springfield, 17 August 1840, Eddy Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Springfield; Logan Hay, "Lincoln One Hundred Years Ago," Abraham Lincoln Quarterly 1 (1940): 89-90; Linder, Reminiscences, 206-7.

'Junto' of Springfield, to make a last effort in bringing the ignorant and heathenish Democrats of Illinois from out of their blinded and self-destructive errors and threaten them with the anathema of the Holy Federal Church if they do not open their eyes."[234]

The hardships of campaigning in a primitive region were compounded by illness. As Baker and Lincoln "stumped all the middle and lower part of the State with great effect, travelling from the Wabash to the Mississippi in the hot months," they found themselves "shaking with the ague one day, and addressing the people the next." In the absence of railroads and stage lines, they "were obliged to travel on horseback, carrying their saddle-bags filled with 'hickory' shirts and woolen socks." Often they had "to travel long distances, through swamps and over prairies, to meet their appointments." Accommodations "were invariably wretched, and no matter how tired, jaded and worn the speaker might be, he was obliged to respond to the call of the waiting and eager audiences."[235]

Lincoln's oratorical skills proved a valuable weapon in the Whig campaign arsenal, for, as an Illinoisan noted in 1848, Westerners seldom read and thus "expect to get their political information from the lips of Stump Orators."[236] John Hay observed that it was difficult for city-dwellers "to form any adequate conception of the intense affection and eager interest that a . . . jolly, eloquent, and discreet partisan leader excites among his constituency of the backwoods." His triumphs occur in "rural school-houses and groves," where his "wit is rewarded by hearty laughter, and his eloquence by yells of approbation." In regions with few

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[234] Belleville Advocate, 29 August 1840.

[235] Elihu B. Washburne, "Abraham Lincoln, His Personal History and Public Record, Speech delivered in the U.S. House of Representatives, May 29, 1860," pamphlet ed. (1860), 2; Washburne in Allen Thorndike Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln by Distinguished Men of His Time (New York: North American Review, 1888), 9-10.

[236] John H. Bryant to William C. Bryant, Princeton, 20 August 1848, Bryant-Godwin Papers, New York Public Library.

sources of entertainment, "a popular orator, who can make men laugh and cry, becomes entwined with their sluggish, emotional natures, and a speech is to them not an incident of an evening, but the event of a week."[237] Baker's style was different from Lincoln's. Lincoln "did not possess the poetry and pathos of Baker or Linder, but he had an earnestness which denoted the strength of his inward convictions and the warmth of his heart."[238] Hamon G. Reynolds, an attorney in Knoxville, Illinois, recollected hearing Lincoln in this campaign: "The very first impression made upon us was that he could be implicitly trusted, and he had not spoken five minutes until we felt certain that he was a man of power." Reynolds was especially struck by "the rich and musical intonation of his voice, his honest utterances, and naïve, homebred way of thinking and speaking, so unlike other men."[239]

Gustave Koerner reported that at a Belleville rally in April, the other speakers outshone Lincoln in "melody of voice and graceful delivery," but that he was the strongest "in argument." Lincoln's "appearance was not very prepossessing," for his "exceedingly tall and very angular form made his movements rather awkward," and his features, especially his high cheek bones, were unpleasant to behold, said Koerner. "His complexion had no roseate hue of health, but was then rather bilious, and, when not speaking, his face seemed to be overshadowed by melancholy thoughts." Koerner observed Lincoln carefully and detected "a good deal of intellect in him, while his looks were genial and kind," but doubted that he "had much reserve will-power."[240]

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[237] John Hay, "Colonel Baker," (1861) in Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln's Side, 155-56.

[238] Reminiscences of Anthony Thornton, Chicago Tribune, 12 February 1900.

[239] Masonic Trowel (Springfield), 15 May 1865, p. 70.

[240] Thomas J. McCormack, ed., Memoirs of Gustave Koerner, 1809-1896 (2 vols.; Cedar Rapids, Iowa: Torch Press, 1909), 1:443-44.

Earlier that month, Lincoln won a more positive notice in a Whig newspaper, the Alton Telegraph, which said that his "highly argumentative and logical" speech in that city "was enlivened by numerous anecdotes" and "was received with unbounded applause." The Telegraph also reported that at Carlinville on April 6, Lincoln spoke "with great power and eloquence."[241]

Few accounts of the substance of Lincoln's speeches are extant.[242] Those that do survive show that he indulged in the same race-baiting that he had so freely employed four years earlier. The Democrats resorted to similar tactics, portraying Harrison as an "Abolitionist of the first water" and a hypocrite who would "make slaves of White men" while making "free men of black slaves."[243] A Democratic campaign paper in Springfield denounced Lincoln and his fellow Whigs for seeking to deliver the federal government "into the hands of a set of fanatics, who boldly proclaim that they would sacrifice their country, its liberties, its honor, and its glory, TO MAKE THE NEGRO THE EQUAL OF THE WHITE MAN!" and alleged that wherever "an abolitionist is found, he is loud and warm in support of Harrison. There are some three hundred abolitionists, it is said, in the county of Sangamon, every one of whom is for Harrison."[244] In Springfield, Democrats issued a set of

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[241] Alton Telegraph, 11 April 1840.

[242] See Wilson, ed., Uncollected Works of Lincoln, 1:566-71, and Simon, Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness, 214-22.

[243] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 17 July and 25 January 1840. See also "The Abolition Candidate for President," ibid., 22 January 1840.

[244] Old Hickory (Springfield), 24 February 1840; Old Hickory, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register, 21 February 1840, in Johannsen, ed., Letters of Douglas, 79. The former may have been written by Stephen A. Douglas, whose biographer stated that the "rumor that Douglas was an editor of the paper was denied, but it was obvious that he exercised a great deal of editorial control." Johannsen, Douglas, 80.

resolutions attacking the Whigs for soliciting the support of "that separate, distinct, and fanatical party, called Abolitionists."[245]

Responding in kind, Lincoln and other Whigs reiterated their earlier charges about Van Buren's support for black suffrage in 1821. A Whig attorney in Carlinville reported that on April 6, Lincoln showed that the Democratic presidential nominee was "clothed with the sable furs of Guinea," that his "breath smells rank with devotion to the cause of Africa's sons," and that his "very trail might be followed by scattered bunches of Nigger wool."[246] In a debate with Douglas, Lincoln said "that if his opponent tacked the wool upon Harrison's head he would pull it off." Douglas "retorted that he would begin just where the other gentleman left off, and that he would stick to the wool question."[247] In another debate with Douglas, Lincoln praised the Bank of the U.S., denounced the president's subtreasury plan, told "many highly amusing anecdotes which convulsed the house with laughter," and "reviewed the political course of Mr. Van Buren, and especially his votes in the New York Convention in allowing Free Negroes the right of suffrage."[248] When Douglas accused the Whig presidential candidate of ducking the issue of abolitionism, Lincoln protested that the document cited by his opponent was not genuine.[249]

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[245] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 12 June 1840, in Johannsen, ed., Letters of Douglas, 84.

[246] John A. Chesnut, letter in the Sangamo Journal, 8 May 1840.

[247] Reminiscences of Abram Brokaw, Bloomington Pantagraph, 18 February 1903. Brokaw was a pioneer plow manufacturer in Bloomington for whom Lincoln did some legal work.

[248] Tremont correspondence, 4 May, Sangamo Journal, 15 May 1840; Illinois State Register (Springfield), 29 May 1840.

[249] "Gen. Harrison's Keepers," Illinois State Register (Springfield), 15 May 1840. The document in question was a letter from David Gwynne, O. M. Spencer, and John C. Wright to Miles Hotchkiss of Oswego, N.Y., dated Cincinnati, 29 February 1840. The Illinois State Register published affidavits attesting to the genuineness of the letter. Ibid.

In turn, Douglas accused Lincoln of fabrications. In March 1840, the two men conducted a debate at Jacksonville.[250] While preparing for that event, Lincoln had his friend Dr. William H. Fithian, a skilled practitioner of political dirty tricks, write to Van Buren asking if William M. Holland's biography of the president accurately described Van Buren's support for black suffrage in 1821.[251] Van Buren confirmed Holland's account. In a debate with Douglas, Lincoln asserted that Van Buren "had voted for Negro Suffrage under certain limitations." When Douglas denied it, Lincoln read aloud from Holland's life of the president. Douglas called it a forgery, whereupon Lincoln produced Van Buren's letter to Fithian. "Douglas got mad" and "Snatched up the book and Slung it into the crowd – saying d[am]n such a book." Lincoln told James Matheny that Douglas "was always calling the Whigs Federalists – Tories – Aristocrats" and alleging that "Whigs are opposed to liberty – Justice & Progress. This is a loose assertion I suppose to Catch votes. I don't like to catch votes by cheating men out of their judgment, but in reference to the whigs being opposed to Liberty &c let me Say that that remains to be seen & demonstrated in the future. The brave don't boast. A barking dog don't bite.'"[252] (At Pontiac, Illinois, Douglas had misquoted Holland's biography of Van Buren. When Lincoln reached Bloomington, David Davis "sent a man through on horseback with a note from Lincoln asking for the book." That messenger

[250] Lincoln debated Douglas in Jacksonville in March 1840. "The Good Cause Going Ahead," Illinois State Register (Springfield), 27 March 1840.

[251] On Lincoln's friendship with Fithian, see Donald G. Richter, Lincoln: Twenty Years on the Eastern Prairie (Mattoon, Illinois: United Graphics, 1999). Fithian was, according to Usher F. Linder, "as cunning as a fox." In 1842, he allegedly defeated John J. Brown for the Illinois State Senate by distributing an anonymous handbill on election day calumniating himself in the vilest terms. Voters, thinking Brown had circulated the document, revolted against him and elected the underdog Fithian by a narrow margin. Linder, Reminiscences, 135-36; Richter, Lincoln: Twenty Years on the Eastern Prairie, 55-59. Ward Hill Lamon called Fithian "head-strong, and revengeful." Lamon to Lincoln, Bloomington, Illinois, 17 August 1860, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

[252] James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 471. Cf. Herndon, "Lincoln & Douglas – Joint Debates in 1840," undated manuscript, Herndon-Weik Papers, Library of Congress.

"stopped at W[illia]m Constant[']s – got new horse – then pushed on to Springfield – on following day was back in Bloomington where Lincoln confronted Douglas with the book.")[253]

In April, Lincoln once again used Holland's life of Van Buren to prove that the president had "advocated and supported Abolition principles, and opposed in the New York Convention the right of universal suffrage." Addressing a Whig rally in heavily Democratic Belleville, he charged that "Van Buren had always opposed the interests of the West – was in feeling and principle an Aristocrat – had no claims upon the people on the score of Democracy, and was unworthy of their confidence and support." Lincoln analyzed Van Buren's rise to power "in a manner which drew forth bursts of applause and peals of laughter from the assemblage."[254]

Lincoln's Whig friends like Simeon Francis also emphasized the race issue. The Sangamo Journal denounced Van Buren's "love for free negroes," manifested not only in the president's previous support for black suffrage, but also in his tolerance for courtroom testimony by blacks. In 1839, at the court martial of a naval officer, two free blacks who had witnessed the alleged crime testified against the officer, who was convicted and cashiered. Calling this a "monstrous and high-handed proceeding," the Journal protested Van Buren's refusal to declare a mistrial: "We can see no good reason if negroes are allowed to testify in one case, why they should not be in another; nor can we discover why the testimony of the

[253] Clifton H. Moore was the source of this story. Diary of Jesse W. Weik, 5 October 1885, quoted in Weik to Horace White, Greencastle, Indiana, 10 September 1914, White Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Johannsen, Douglas, 79-80.

[254] Great Western (Belleville), 18 April 1840. A Democratic newspaper reported that Lincoln asserted that produce sold for less than it did three or four years earlier and accused Van Buren of opposing the War of 1812 and of participating in the "corrupt bargain" struck fifteen years earlier by Henry Clay and John Quincy Adams. An account of the Whig meeting by "Anti-Monarchist," Belleville Advocate, 18 April 1840. According to this report, Lincoln "did not come up to the expectations which his Whig friends had entertained regarding his powerful talents as a stump speaker."

slave, as well as the free negro, should not be allowed." Such a policy "would place the lives, the property, and the reputation of our citizens, our wives and our daughters, at the mercy of the most worthless, depraved and degraded of our race." The editor predicted even more dire consequences from Van Buren's approval of the court martial verdict: "Once admit negro testimony, and the right of suffrage, and a participation in the government, would soon follow. There would then be but one step more – too horrid to be contemplated – and that amalgamation."[255] In 1835, when neighboring Missouri threatened to expel free blacks, the Journal declared that Illinois "is threatened to be overrun with free negroes. . . . We do not want the negroes who will be thus thrown upon us; they should be sent to N. York!"[256]

Aside from racial demagoguery, Lincoln fought Democrats with ridicule and sarcasm. In Springfield on July 20, he excoriated Judge Jesse B. Thomas, who had been accused of writing anonymous letters for the press. In fact, Lincoln and his fellow Whigs were the authors of those letters, for which Thomas chided them in a speech. Arriving at the conclusion of Thomas's remarks, Lincoln rose to answer. As he delivered his "absolutely overwhelming and withering" response, Lincoln was "terrific in his denunciation" and "had no mercy," all the while mimicking Thomas's gestures and accent. He was "easy, natural, and self-possessed, and his language was simple, direct, and plain Anglo-Saxon English, delivered in a conversational, rather than an oratorical, style and tone." Lincoln "began by saying, that he was a humble member of 'the Long Nine,' so that he could not swell himself up to the great dimensions of his learned and eloquent adversary. The effort to do so would, he feared, be attended with the fate of the frog in the fable, which tried to swell itself to the size of the ox. But he . . . could prick a few pin-holes in his adversary, and cut him down to

[255] Sangamo Journal, 3 July 1840. See also the issues of 17 July and 14 August 1840.

[256] Sangamo Journal, 7 November 1835.

his natural size." So he proceeded to describe "with minute accuracy, the political career of Judge Thomas, and his various somersaults." He told how "a new light had struck the learned Judge, and with what wonderful agility he went right over." Thomas "began to blubber like a baby, and withdrew from the assembly. He cried all the rest of the day."[257] The Democratic Illinois State Register chided Lincoln for his "rude assault upon the private character" of Thomas, declaring that Lincoln had so overstepped the bounds of propriety that "many of the Whigs, themselves, became disgusted, and have since openly avowed their decided disapprobation of his conduct."[258] The next day Lincoln, "filled with the deepest chagrin," apologized for having "gone too far." In the annals of Illinois politics, the episode became celebrated as "the skinning of Thomas."[259]

Lincoln also skinned Colonel Dick Taylor, a Democratic candidate for the state senate whose assaults on Whig elitism nettled him. The "showy, bombastic" Taylor was "a talkative, noisy fellow" and "a consummate fop" who "never appeared in public without a ruffled shirt, a blue coat and brass buttons, and a gold-headed cane."[260] When Taylor

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[257] David Davis, quoted in Willard L. King, Lincoln's Manager: David Davis (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), 38; Albert Taylor Bledsoe, review of Ward Hill Lamon's biography of Lincoln, The Southern Review 12 (April 1873): 332-33. See also Abner Y. Ellis to Herndon, [ca. January 1866], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 161; Ellis to Herndon, Moro, Illinois, 30 January and 14 February 1866, ibid., 179, 210.

[258] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 24 July 1840.

[259] Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Lincoln, 130. See also Samuel C. Parks to Herndon, Lincoln, Illinois, 25 March 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 239; David Davis, interview with Herndon, 20 September 1866, ibid., 350.

[260] J. McCan Davis to Ida Tarbell, Springfield, Illinois, 11 March 1895, copy, J. G. Randall Papers, Library of Congress; Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Lincoln, 128-29; Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 143. Whitney reported that "This habit he persisted in to his ninetieth year, when, with his oiled and glossy locks and erect deportment, he would easily pass for a youth of sixty." Ibid. In the original version of his Lincoln biography, Whitney added: "This same Taylor, after Mr Lincoln's lamented death, used to aver that it was he that induced both Lincoln and Trumbull to study law; also that it was on his advice that the Administration of Lincoln adopted the 'greenback': propositions about as veracious as his claim of true and undefiled democracy." Manuscript of Lincoln the Citizen, 170, Lincoln Memorial University, Harrogate, Tennessee. On these fraudulent claims by Taylor, see Thomas F. Schwartz, "One or Two Lincoln Forgeries?" For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association vol. 2, no. 3 (autumn 2000): 5.

denounced Whigs as aristocrats, Lincoln "replied that whilst Col. Taylor had his stores over the county, and was riding in a fine carriage, wore his kid gloves and had a gold headed cane, he [Lincoln] was a poor boy hired on a flat boat at eight dollars a month, and had only one pair of breeches and they were of buckskin." He explained to the audience, "if you know the nature of buckskin when wet and dried by the sun they would shrink and mine kept shrinking until they left for several inches my legs bare between the top of my Socks and the lower part of my breeches – and whilst I was growing taller they were becoming shorter: and so much tighter, that they left a blue streak around my leg which you can see to this day – If you call this aristocracy I plead guilty to the charge."[261] Lincoln then unbuttoned Taylor's vest and out cascaded his "ruffled shirt like a pile of Entrails," causing the crowd to "burst forth in a furious & uproarious laughter."[262]

(Political opponents were not the only object of Lincoln's ridicule. One day in the courthouse, a cattleman proud of his intelligence bragged that he could answer any question posed by a lawyer. To deflate the boastful fellow, Lincoln "quietly put the question, 'How long is your pecker?'")[263]

Lincoln joined the Whig chorus blaming the Democrats for the economic distress following the Panic of 1837. At Belleville, he "sought to make much of the point that he had seen in Belleville that morning a fine horse sold by a constable for the [low] price of twenty-

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[261] Ninian W. Edwards, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 447. See also Arnold, Life of Lincoln, 50; Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 143-44.

[262] James H. Matheny, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 472. The previous year, when Taylor was running for commissioner's clerk, a letter in the Sangamo Journal by "Spring Creek" – probably Lincoln – called him "notoriously incompetent to the discharge of the duties" of that office.) Letter by "Spring Creek," 5 November, Sangamo Journal, 8 November 1839.

[263] Joseph Fifer told this to Carl Sandburg. Notes of an interview with Fifer, n.d., Sandburg-Barrett Collection, Newberry Library, Chicago. Fifer explained that "I've heard lawyers who were on the circuit with Lincoln tell that as if it happened. [W. W.] Orme and [Leonard] Swett and [James S.] Ewing and [Richard J.] Oglesby and Milt Hay used to tell stories like that about Lincoln."

seven dollars, all due to the hard times produced by the Democrats." The town's constable "somewhat nonplussed" Lincoln by crying out that the horse "had but one eye." Lincoln "seemed rather depressed and was less happy in his remarks than usual."[264] A Democratic editor ridiculed his allusion to the $27 horse: "How very fortunate for the Whigs that Mr. Lincoln saw the sale of the one-eyed horse that day! He was thus enabled to prove that Mr. Van Buren caused it, together with all the other ills of life that us poor mortals 'are heir to.'"[265]

Lincoln's oratory in 1840 was, like that of the other Harrison campaigners, not elevated.[266] In an unusually perceptive commentary on the young Lincoln, John M. Scott, an attorney who eventually became chief justice of the Illinois State Supreme Court, described one of Lincoln's speeches during that campaign. The young legislator, "already regarded as one of the ablest of the Whig speakers in that campaign," stood in a wagon to address his audience. There was something "in him that attracted and held public attention," Scott recalled. "Even then he was the subject of popular regard because of his candid and simple mode of discussing and illustrating political questions." In 1840, the dominant economic issues "were not such questions as enlisted and engaged his best thoughts – they did not take hold of his great nature and had no tendency to develop it." Occasionally "he discussed the questions of the time in a logical way, but much time was devoted to telling stories to illustrate some phase of his argument, but more often the telling of these stories was resorted

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[264] Koerner, Memoirs, 1:443-44.

[265] Belleville Advocate, 18 April 1840. The editor dismissed Lincoln's speech as "weak, puerile and feeble." According to this account, many Whigs exclaimed, "How different to what we had expected." See also Smith, When Lincoln Came to Egypt, 53-54.

[266] Gabor Boritt's contention that Lincoln high-mindedly emphasized issues while his party concentrated on hoopla and character assassination is not supported by the evidence of Lincoln's speeches and writings. Boritt, Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream, 63-78.

to for the purpose of rendering his opponents ridiculous." That "was a style of speaking much appreciated at that early day." In such oratory, Lincoln "excelled most of his contemporaries – indeed he had no equals in the state." A story he told was "not one it would be seemly to publish, but rendered as it was in his inimitable way it contained nothing that was offensive to a refined taste." Scott noted that a characteristic "feature of all the stories told by Mr. Lincoln on the stump and elsewhere, although the subject matter of some of them might not have been entirely unobjectionable, yet the manner of telling them was so peculiarly his own, they gave no offense even to refined and cultured people." That day Lincoln's story, "much liked by the vast assembly," was met "with loud bursts of laughter and applause." It placed "the opposing party and its speakers in a most ludicrous position" and "gave him a most favorable hearing for the arguments he later made in support of the measures he was sustaining." In that period, most speakers used "mirth-provoking stories when discussing political questions and Mr. Lincoln practiced that habit with wonderful effect" making him "a most popular political speaker." Acknowledging that it was "not a fair mode of treating an adversary," Scott explained that "it is a mode of attack greatly relished by popular assemblies" because "most people like to see their opponents discomfited by being made the butt of a well told story."[267]

As Scott observed, the use of insult and ridicule was not uncommon in frontier politics, but Lincoln deployed them so mercilessly and effectively that they constituted a form of cruelty that reflected his primitive background.[268] Not until midlife would he change

[267] John M. Scott, "Lincoln on the Stump and at the Bar" enclosed in Scott to Ida Tarbell, Bloomington, Illinois, 14 August 1895, Tarbell Papers, Allegheny College. Lincoln knew Scott, a Bloomington attorney, "very well." David Davis to William H. Seward, Bloomington, Illinois, 29 March 1861, State Department Records, Applications and Recommendations, 1861-1869, Record Group 59, M650, National Archives;

[268] Bray, "'The Power to Hurt,'" 43-51; Burlingame, Inner World of Lincoln, 147-55.

his ways and earn a justified reputation for infinite forbearance and good will. If, as president, he could declare that he had "not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom," during his youth and early adulthood he delighted in planting such thorns.[269]

Not all accounts of Lincoln's oratory were negative. In late May, the Quincy Whig reported that he was "'going it with a perfect rush,' in some of the interior counties," where the Democrats "have not been able to start a man that can hold a candle to him in political debate, – All of their crack nags that have entered the lists against him, have come off the field crippled or broken down."[270] On September 5, during a debate with John A. McClernand at Shawneetown, Lincoln "amused his auditors, and made a favorable impression" with "the novelty of his attacks, ludicrous comparisons and fund of anecdote."[271] He also won credit for eschewing criticism of Van Buren's purportedly sybaritic style of living, a staple of Whig campaign strategy originated by Whig Congressman Charles Ogle of Pennsylvania.[272] According to a letter in the Democratic Illinois State Register, at Shawneetown Lincoln "emphatically declared that the Ogle mode of demagoguing is a small and contemptible affair" and "stated that he never alluded to the furniture of the President's house himself, and that he knew it was a mere trick to gull the people – and his only justification for his party was that Mr. [John Quincy] Adams was denounced on the same ground."[273]

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[269] Response to a serenade, 10 November 1864, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 8:101.

[270] Quincy Whig, 23 May 1840.

[271] Letter by "Patriot," Mt. Vernon, Illinois, 3 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 16 October 1840.

[272] Ogle's speech, on the civil and diplomatic appropriation bill, was delivered on 14 April 1840 and given wide circulation by the Whigs in the form of a pamphlet titled "The Royal Splendor of the President's Palace." The bulk of it was reprinted in The Old Soldier (Springfield), 24 August 1840.

[273] Letter by an unidentified correspondent, Equality, Illinois, 14 September, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 25 September 1840. The author declared: "You may rely upon the correctness of this statement to

Shortly thereafter at Equality, Lincoln delivered an "ingenious" speech "well calculated to command attention." Replying to an address by Democrat Josiah Lamborn, he was "listened to, with so much patience, that the whigs were in extacies."[274] In that speech, Lincoln poked fun at Lamborn for switching from the Whig to the Democratic party, an act that called to his mind the adventures of a slave in Kentucky who had been sent by his master to deliver two puppies to a neighbor. En route, the slave stopped at a dram shop for refreshment, leaving outside the covered basket containing the dogs. While he was imbibing, two jokers replaced the pups with piglets. Upon arrival at his destination, the slave was astounded to see that the canines had become porcine. Returning to his master, the slave once again paused at the dram shop, where the pranksters removed the pigs and restored the pups to the basket. When explaining to his master how the dogs had been transformed into pigs, the slave was startled to observe that the pigs were once again pups. The nonplussed slave expostulated: "I isn't drunk, but dem dar puppies can be pigs or puppies just when dey please!" Just so, Lincoln said, Lamborn could be a Whig or a Democrat "just when he pleased."[275]

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the fullest extent, for I heard the remarks of Mr. Lincoln myself, and I have used milder language than he did on the occasion alluded to. It is an important admission on the part of one of the Whig champions." In 1828, Democrats had accused Adams of wasting public funds on a White House billiard table. Paul C. Nagel, John Quincy Adams: A Public Life, a Private Life (New York: Knopf, 1997), 321.

[274] Letter by "Patriot," Mt. Vernon, Illinois, 3 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 16 October 1840. After Lamborn spoke, Lincoln "rose and told the people that if they would attend on the next day, he would prove to their satisfaction that the Van Buren party was the old Federal[ist] party, and that the Whigs were the old fashioned Democrats." But when an elderly Whig named Wilson objected, saying he venerated the Federalists as the ancestors of the Whigs, Lincoln evidently changed his mind, for on the following day he "made a speech without alluding to the name of Federalist once. He entered into an elaborate defence of Federal principles under the name of Whiggery, and when he had concluded, his venerable grey-headed friend advanced and gave him his hand, saying 'Well done, my young friend; our cause is safe in your hands.'" "A Damper," ibid., 2 October 1840.

[275] Judge William H. Stickney of Chicago related this story in a letter to the Palatine, Illinois, Enterprise, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Journal (Springfield), 13 February 1884. In 1844, Lincoln and Stickney had argued opposite sides of a case before the Illinois Supreme Court.

When Lincoln visited Mt. Carmel in early September, he delivered in the afternoon a "dignified and eloquent" address before a mixed audience and a more informal one to an all-male group that evening, when "he seemed to let himself down to their level, pouring forth a current of witticisms and anecdotes which aroused the wildest bursts of applause."[276] A Democratic paper reported that in Mt. Vernon later that month, as Lincoln debated McClernand, he spoke with "much urbanity and suavity of manner" and "was listened to with attention." He showed that he was "well calculated for a public debater," for "he seldom loses his temper, and always replies jocosely and in good humor," so much so that "the evident marks of disapprobation which greet many of his assertions, do not discompose him, and he is therefore hard to foil."[277]

Elsewhere on his tour of Egypt, Lincoln did not fare so well. In late August at Waterloo, he suffered a defeat. His remarks prompted the opposition speaker, Adam Snyder, to observe that "he expected Mr. Lincoln would have occupied high and lofty ground," that "he would have laid down some political principles, some wise, wholesome, and judicious measures that his party professed to advocate." Snyder told him "that if his mission was to convert the lost and benighted, other weapons must be used."[278] In Salem, Lincoln "was completely done up, even his anecdotes failed to command attention." When an ally "told him he was wasting

[276] Andrew J. Galloway's reminiscences, Chicago Tribune, 12 February 1900. In 1857, Galloway, a wealthy landowner, had been a defendant in a case over which Lincoln presided as a judge. See also James R. Gillespie, "Lincoln's Buggy Ride to Mr. Carmel," Grimke-Lincoln Journal 1 (February 1990): 9-10.

[277] Letter by "Patriot," Mt. Vernon, Illinois, 3 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 16 October 1840. Cf. "A Damper," ibid., 2 October 1840.

[278] Letter by an unidentified correspondent, Waterloo, Illinois, 26 August, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 4 September 1840; Belleville Advocate, 29 August 1840.

his time," he replied: "it is a fact, but my friends at home think I am not doing my duty unless I am out, so I may as well stay."[279]

On his swing through Egypt, Lincoln debated Isaac P. Walker, "an ultra Democrat" and a "very sarcastic and disagreeable man" who "strove to make everybody feel their inferiority to him and his superiority to them."[280] They clashed in Albion, where Walker had once lived.[281] In his silk hat and black broadcloth suit, Walker looked far more distinguished than Lincoln, who wore blue jeans. But even though "Walker's polished and elegant appearance made Lincoln seem even more homespun and awkward than usual," the Whig spokesman "won the crowd with his wit."[282] Seeking to deprive his opponent of any advantage that his former residence in Albion might confer, Lincoln began by quoting from Byron's poem "Lara":

> He, their unhoped but unforgotten lord,
> The long self-exiled chieftain, is restored:
> There be bright faces in the busy hall,
> Bowls on the board, and banners on the wall.
> He comes at last, in sudden loneliness,
> And when they know not, when they need not guess,
> They more might marvel, when the greetings o'er,
> Not that he came, but why he came not before.

A townsman recalled that Walker's attempt to capitalize on his years living in Albion failed, for "Lincoln's sallies on 'why he came not before' had taken the wind out of his opponent's

[279] Letter by "Patriot," Mt. Vernon, Illinois, 3 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 16 October 1840.

[280] Linder, Reminiscences, 379.

[281] Walter Coyler, "Times When Lincoln Remembered Albion: An Early-Day Joint Debate," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 9 (1916): 489-98.

[282] Walter Coyler and an unidentified author, quoted in Smith, When Lincoln Came to Egypt, 63-64.

sails completely while his command of pure, sententious English and the correctness of his diction were . . . favorably commented on by some of our best citizens."[283]

In late October, a Jacksonian legislator, Dr. William G. Anderson, repeatedly interrupted Lincoln's speech at Lawrenceville, charging that the speaker was "falsifying the acts and record of the Democratic party."[284] Lincoln must have replied heatedly, for Anderson declared that Lincoln's attack on him "imported insult" and ominously demanded an explanation. A duel seemed likely, but Lincoln obviated that threat with a conciliatory reply: "I entertain no unkind feeling to you, and none of any sort upon the subject, except a sincere regret that I permitted myself to get into such an altercation."[285]

What Lincoln said in his many other speeches may be inferred from contributions in the Sangamo Journal and The Old Soldier, a campaign paper which he helped edit. In November 1839, "A Looker-On" (probably Lincoln) excoriated Democrats for attacking the Illinois state bank, calling them "would-be dictators" whose charges were mere "absurdities." He added that "intelligent people will not be always misled. They are beginning to see the game playing on their confidence, and will assuredly hurl back on those, their deceivers, their just indignation." The author, who claimed to have been in Vandalia in 1835 when the General Assembly chartered the bank, pointed out that leading Democrats had championed

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[283] Gibson W. Harris, "My Recollections of Abraham Lincoln," Women's Home Companion, November 1903, p. 10.

[284] J. A. Powell to the editor of The Century, copy, and Powell to John G. Nicolay, Homer, Illinois, 11 February 1889, both in the Nicolay Papers, Library of Congress. Anderson, a prominent physician, represented Wabash County in the Illinois state legislature from 1832 to 1844. Frederick W. Keller to Jesse W. Weik, Lawrenceville, Illinois, 5 February 1914, Weik Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield. In 1845, in Menard County, J. A. Powell served on a jury which convicted Lincoln's client of manslaughter.

[285] Lincoln to William G. Anderson, Lawrenceville, 31 October 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:211.

that institution.[286] Similarly, in 1837 Democrats had procured the suspension of the requirement that the bank redeem its notes in specie. So, "A Looker-on" concluded, as the bank "is their own dog, they may whip it, and, I trust, the Whigs will only stand by and see it well done."[287]

Several articles by "An Old Jackson Man" (probably Lincoln) roundly condemned the Van Buren administration for its extravagance. Democrats had denounced John Quincy Adams for spending $12,000,000-$15,000,000 annually, he pointed out, but Van Buren had expended over $40,000,000. Under Van Buren, "republican simplicity and economy" were "lost in the vain pomp and idle pageantry of the imaginary monarch of the White House, or swallowed up in the wild experiments, the reckless extravagance, and corrupting policy of this administration." He also alleged that Van Buren had bribed newspaper editors with patronage and had abandoned the one-term principle, which Democrats had championed in the 1820s. The Democratic party in Illinois abused the patronage power, "An Old Jackson Man" charged: "Look at the list of Van Buren Conventions held throughout the State, in all of them you find the Registers and Receivers of Land Offices the prominent members of all such conventions, dictating to the people who they shall vote for almost every office, while the small fry, composing the main body of these dictatorial assemblies, is principally composed of post masters, office-holders and office seekers." The Van Buren administration tolerated corrupt officials like William L. D. Ewing, who, when he stepped down as receiver of pubic monies at Vandalia, "was found a defaulter and judgment obtained against him, for

[286] On the Democrats' role in chartering the bank, see Davis, "Illinois Legislators and Jacksonian Democracy," 110-24.

[287] Letter by "A Looker-on," Clinton County, Illinois, 23 October, Sangamo Journal, 8 November 1839. The editors of the Illinois State Register (Springfield) believed that Lincoln wrote it, as did Paul Simon, Rufus Rockwell Wilson, and the editors of Lincoln Day by Day.

about fifteen thousand dollars," but the Democrats nonetheless ran him for the state senate, the U.S. Senate, and made him acting governor and speaker of the Illinois House of Representatives, thus degrading "the morals of the community all distinctions between the honest, punctual and faithful public servants and the public defaulter." The author also denounced the Van Buren administration's proposal for a 200,000-man militia, which, he alleged, amounted to "a proposition to raise a standing army," a "new engine of patronage and power, carved out by the present administration, more extensive in its range – it is to cover the whole people and the whole land – more dangerous to liberty, and more daring in its conception, than any thing which has ever before emanated from an American Statesman." This "Old Jackson Man" issued a warning: "Give to an ambitious and unprincipled President – the sub-treasury – the control of the national funds; – and to his army of office holders and office hunters, two hundred thousand trained militia men – twenty-five thousand men in each military division – twelve thousand five hundred men in actual pay and active service in each division, – the whole body looking to the President for appointment and promotion, the whole under his direction and control; – give him these, and you will afterwards scarce dare to refuse any thing his rapacity may demand."[288]

In a similar vein, "Son of an Old Ranger" (probably Lincoln) attacked Van Buren's record during the War of 1812: while Harrison "was camped in the field or ranging our frontiers, fighting our battles, defending our women and children from the murderous tomahawk and scalping knife, and adding new lusture to the American name with his splendid victories," at the same time Van Buren "was in the New York Legislature, voting

[288] "An Old Jackson Man," Nos. I, II, III, IV, VII, Sangamo Journal, 6 and 13 March, 10 April 1840.

for Rufus King, the federal anti-war candidate for Senator."[289] When a Democratic campaign paper alleged that Harrison had not behaved heroically at the Battle of Raisin River, a "Kentucky Volunteer" (probably Lincoln) replied: "I have no doubt the writer of the above lines had rather be considered a knave than a fool, and therefore, I shall pitch him on to the first horn of the dilemma, and treat it as a base attempt to deceive the people."[290]

In a public debate at Petersburg, Lincoln attacked Archer Herndon, whom he "Cut . . . off at the knees." Herndon had accused Lincoln of being "an interloper." Lincoln replied that "when he had been a candidate as often as Herndon he would quit."[291] Herndon was also assailed in the press. A letter by "A Citizen" (probably Lincoln) chastised him for supporting Van Buren in 1840 after having opposed him four years earlier: "I have seen you in some crowd, with a cane in one hand to knock down and a knife open in the other to cut the throats of the poor whigs. You seemed to me like a crazy man, wrestling with a demon." Scornfully the author asked: "What apology can you give to a free and intelligent people for changing your position? Is there less corruption now than there was under the administration of Gen. Jackson?" In equally vehement tones "A Citizen" declared: "If any man does deserve office at the hands of Van Buren, you surely do. To sustain him, you have sacrificed all – character, reputation, conscience, and the good opinion of tried friends." This citizen did not eschew strong language: "He who seeks and obtains office, as you did in 1838, by making pledges to those who supported you, which you never intended to redeem, and evading a direct answer to questions proposed to you, is richly entitled to the appellation of Traitor." The author further taunted Herndon, saying: "there is a manifest truckling and fawning – a bowing and

[289] "Son of an Old Ranger" to the editor, Macoupin County, 20 February, The Old Soldier, 1 April 1840.

[290] Sangamo Journal, 27 March 1840.

[291] William G. Green, interview with James Q. Howard, [May 1860], Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

scraping to the powers that be – which, in the absence of any other testimony than your own professions of honesty, furnishes us with the best key to your motives."[292] The combative Herndon heatedly rejected such charges made by members of what he called "the British-Negro-Indian-Sympathy-and-Anti-Republican-Blood-hound party."[293]

A writer (probably Lincoln) pretending to be Herndon asked Van Buren: "We know you honestly consider the negroes, particularly the fat sleek ones, superior to poor white folks; but why, in the name of Guinea itself, can you not suppress even your honest sentiments until after the election?"[294]

In 1840, Lincoln sought a fourth legislative term, though in March he told Stuart that "I think it is probable I shall not be permitted to be a candidate."[295] Many Sangamon County Whigs outside the capital had resisted the convention system and objected to the "Springfield Junto" that supported it.[296] The "Junto" had further alienated voters by opposing the division of the county.[297] Thomas J. Nance, a Democrat in Rock Creek near New Salem, told a Springfield resident: "I must say that while the spirit of intolerance and the hand of injustice continue to mark the actions of the dominant party [i.e., the Whigs] of your town I cannot feel as I would like to feel for the welfare of our common county town. . . . Most of our citizens are becoming acquainted with the officious meddling of a few men. . . . this disposition to misrepresent all our reasonable askings will have one good effect – this is to

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[292] "A Citizen" Sangamo Journal, 3 and 10 July 1840.

[293] Herndon to "Fellow Citizens," Springfield, 14 July 1840, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 17 July 1840. He specifically replied to "A Citizen" in a letter dated Springfield, 6 July, ibid., 10 July 1840.

[294] "Quiz" [Archer Herndon] to Van Buren, Springfield, 14 July, Sangamo Journal, 17 July 1840.

[295] Lincoln to Stuart, Springfield, 1 March 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln,1:206.

[296] Donald W. Riddle, Lincoln Runs for Congress (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1948), 7-8.

[297] "Division of Sangamon County," report of a meeting at South Fork, Illinois State Register (Vandalia), 20 April 1838.

convince us that we must unite to repel their dictating edicts."[298] At a meeting in South Fork, voters declared that they "disapprove of the dictative course pursued by the Springfield Junto of lawyers and office holders." They threatened to "do all we can to put the Junto down."[299] In 1839, the "Junto" had also antagonized some Whigs by selecting John Bennett of Petersburg, rather than Bowling Green, as a candidate for the General Assembly.[300]

The Sangamon County Whigs did nominate Lincoln at their convention that March, but they rejected all other Springfield residents save Edward D. Baker, whom they chose to run for State Senate. (Why Lincoln did not receive that honor is unclear.) Lincoln reported that Ninian W. Edwards "was verry much hurt at not being nominated" and added that he himself "was much, verry much, wounded myself at his [Edwards's] being left out. The fact is, the country delegates made the nominations as they pleased; and they pleased to make them all from the country, except Baker & me, whom they supposed necessary to make stump speeches."[301] (Lincoln was better known for his oratory than his organizational skills. Anson G. Henry complained that when it came to such tasks as compiling lists of important Whigs who should receive government documents, "You need not expect Stewart [John Todd Stuart], Baker or Lincoln to do this kind of work. I am the only working man of this Sort in Springfield. I have all my life beat the bush for others to catch the bird.")[302] On

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[298] Nance to John Taylor, Rock Creek, 30 January 1838, Records of the Auditor's Office, Springfield Land Office, Illinois State Archives, Springfield.

[299] Sangamo Journal, 14 April 1838.

[300] Letter dated Petersburg, 26 October, Illinois State Register (Springfield), 2 November 1839; "Mr. Lincoln and the Register," ibid., 23 November 1839.

[301] Lincoln to John Todd Stuart, Springfield, 26 March 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:208. Many years later Edwards claimed that he had insisted that he be passed over in favor of Lincoln if one Springfield member of the legislature must be dropped. Edwards to Lincoln, Springfield, 18 June 1863, Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

[302] Anson G. Henry to John J. Hardin, Springfield, 11 November 1843, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

election day in August, Lincoln retained his seat in the General Assembly, coming in fifth in a field of ten, with 1844 votes. (The leading candidate received only 15 more votes than Lincoln, while the sixth-place finisher lagged 578 votes behind him.)[303]

Three months later, Harrison swamped Van Buren, carrying nineteen of the twenty-six states. The president did manage to eke out a victory in Illinois, capturing 51% of the votes to Harrison's 49%, despite Lincoln's efforts.[304] (In Springfield, Harrison won 63% of the vote, slightly more than the 59% which Whig presidential candidates usually received there.)[305] In the country at large, hard times, Van Buren's bland personality, and the vogue for egalitarianism combined to doom the incumbent's reelection chances. His victory in Illinois, the only Free State he carried other than New Hampshire, apparently owed much to immigrants who worked on the Illinois and Michigan Canal. David Davis, a Whig friend of Lincoln's who narrowly lost a bid for the state senate, complained that "if the Irish did not vote more than 3 times we could easily carry the State." Davis added that the "Irish vote along the line of the canal increased (at the late election) most wonderfully, and in nearly every other county of the State, the Whig vote has enlarged greatly."[306]

Like Davis, Lincoln was upset by such irregularities. On election day, when he heard that an Illinois railroad contractor had brought a construction gang to take over the polls, he told that gentleman menacingly: "You will spoil & blow if you live much longer." That night Lincoln confided to Joshua Speed, "I intended to knock him down & go aw[a]y and leave

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[303] Pease, ed., Illinois Election Returns, 344.

[304] Pease, ed., Illinois Election Returns, 117. The Whigs had been badly hurt by the controversies over Alexander P. Field's right to remain secretary of state and over the Whigs' purported hostility to the foreign-born. See infra, pp.?* Curiously, Lincoln received 188 fewer votes than the other Harrison electors. Evidently those voters cast their ballots for a Van Buren elector, James H. Ralston.

[305] Winkle, The Young Eagle, 188.

[306] Davis to William P. Walker, Bloomington, Illinois, 16 November 1840, David Davis Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

him a-kicking."[307] On a similar occasion in Springfield, Lincoln stymied a group of Democrats who had threatened to seize the polls and prevent their opponents from voting. Herndon recalled that he grabbed "an axe-handle from a hardware store and went alone to open a way to the ballot-box. His appearance intimidated them, and we had neither threats nor collisions all that day."[308] When the legislature convened soon after the November elections, Lincoln proposed an investigation of electoral fraud.[309]

Despite the result in Illinois, Lincoln was jubilant over Harrison's victory. At a raucous celebration, he "made a great deal of sport with his speeches, witty sayings and stories." He "even played leap-frog."[310]

Shortly after election day, the General Assembly began a session "of much bitterness and personal hatred."[311] A Whig editor deplored the rampant partisanship of most lawmakers: "Elected at a time of high party excitement, and with an eye single to his blind devotion and subserviency to that party, without any regard whatever being had to his qualifications for the station he is about to fill in one of the co-ordinate branches of our State Government, the Representative too frequently enters upon the discharge of his duties bereft of every feeling that should animate the breast of a statesman, and with a mind governed and controlled only by the most sordid views, selfish motives, and basest passions, to which the asperity of party feeling can give birth."[312] One Representative lamented that the "poor

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[307] Joshua Speed, interview with Herndon, [1865-66], Wilson and Davis., eds., Herndon's Informants, 475.

[308] Springfield correspondence by George Alfred Townsend, 25 January, New York Tribune, 15 February 1867.

[309] Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:212-13.

[310] Edward H. Thayer, quoted in Thomas Dale Logan, "Lincoln, the Early Temperance Reformer," The Christian Century, 13 February 1909, p. 152. Thayer was a prominent merchant in Springfield.

[311] Ford, History of Illinois, ed. Davis, 155.

[312] Springfield correspondence by Virginius [George T. M. Davis], 4 January, Alton Telegraph, 16 January 1841.

Whigs are in a woeful minority;" the Democrats, aware that this session represented "the last apple they will have" because of the Whigs' triumph in the national election, were "determined to extract every drop of juice while they have the chance."[313] Whig Senator William H. Fithian likened the Democrats to "the Indian who was badly wounded and knew that he must die [and therefore was] determined to do as much mischief before he did expire as he possibly could."[314]

Governor Thomas Carlin summoned the legislature to a special session beginning November 23, two weeks before the constitutionally stipulated date for the regular session, in order to grapple with the mounting state debt. It seemed unlikely that Illinois could meet the interest payments due on January 1. Once again, William L. D. Ewing defeated Lincoln for Speaker of the House. Because the new capitol was not ready for occupancy, the legislators met in Springfield churches. After some vigorous but futile attempts to have Vandalia restored as the state capital, the General Assembly prepared to convene its regular session on December 7. Since a recent law provided that the Bank of Illinois would have to resume specie payments at the end of the next session of the legislature, Democrats argued that as of December 5 (when the special session closed), the Bank must meet that burdensome requirement. The Whigs, hoping to have the regular session combined with the special session and thus postpone the bank's day of reckoning, boycotted the legislature, thus preventing the necessary two-thirds quorum for adjournment sine die.[315] When the

[313] T[homas] D[rummond] to the editor, Springfield, 19 December, Rock River Express (Rockford), 26 December 1840.

[314] William H. Fithian to Amos Williams, Springfield, 12 December 1840, Woodbury Collection, Illinois Historical Survey, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, in Richter, Lincoln: Twenty Years on the Eastern Prairie, 40.

[315] Leander Munsell, Whig member of the House of Representatives from Edgar County, letter in the Paris Statesman, n.d., copied in the Illinois State Register (Springfield), 8 January 1841.

representatives gathered on December 5, the Whigs stayed away, except for Lincoln, Joseph Gillespie and Asahel Gridley, who were to observe the proceedings and demand roll call votes.[316] The frustrated Democrats, eager to hurt the state bank by adjourning, instructed the sergeant-at-arms to round up absent Whigs. When that tactic failed, the Democrats managed to bring in enough of their own previously absent members to create a quorum.[317] Lincoln and his two Whig colleagues "became quite furious" and "rushed impetuously towards the door," which was locked.[318] Because "no order had been given to unlock it, the officer in charge refused to let them out."[319] Lincoln "then made an assault upon an unoffending window, through which he broke his way and made his escape," followed by Gillespie and Gridley, who "slid gracefully out of the window and piled themselves beneath it upon the body of their chivalrous leader."[320] When the sergeant-at-arms was instructed to pursue, he allegedly replied: "My God! gentlemen, do you know what you ask? Think of the length of Abe's legs, and then tell me how I am to catch him."[321]

This unconventional departure through the church's first-floor window drew laughter from the Democratic members, who derisively shouted: "He who fights and runs away, lives to fight another day."[322] The Register sneered at the "gymnastic performance of Mr. Lincoln

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[316] Joseph Gillespie to Herndon, Edwardsville, Illinois, 31 January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 187-88. See also Temple and Temple, Illinois' Fifth Capitol, 42-44.

[317] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 11 December 1840.

[318] Springfield correspondence, 6 December, Belleville Advocate, 12 December 1840.

[319] Thomas J. Henderson's reminiscences, Omaha Daily Bee, 9 February 1896.

[320] Springfield correspondence, 6 December, Belleville Advocate, 12 December 1840. Another eye witness said that Lincoln, "who appeared to enjoy the embarrassment of the House, suddenly looked very grave after the Speaker announced that a quorum was present." He "came under great excitement, and having attempted and failed to get out at the door, very unceremoniously raised the window and jumped out, followed by one or two other members." Illinois State Register (Springfield), 11 December 1840.

[321] Springfield correspondence, 11 June, New York Herald, 26 June 1860.

[322] Reminiscences of John A. McClernand, Chicago Tribune, 12 February 1900.

and his flying brethren" and recommended that the statehouse be raised "in order to have the House set in the third story! so as to prevent members from jumping out of the windows!" If that remodeling were done, "Mr. Lincoln will in future have to climb down the spout!"[323] One observer reported that after the House adjourned, "Such a clapping of hands and stamping you never heard – on the whole I must say I consider the conduct of both parties disgraceful in the extreme."[324] Years later Lincoln was ridiculed as "a long-legged varment" who was "great at jumping" and who "earned his membership in the junto by jumping out of the windows of the State House to save the bank."[325]

Understandably, Lincoln found this episode embarrassing. According to Gillespie, he "always regretted that he entered into the arrangement as he deprecated everything that Savored of the revolutionary."[326] In later years, whenever the matter came up, he "would always have some little inapposite story to narrate" serving "to divert the subject."[327]

When the regular session began on December 7, 1840, the House of Representatives, meeting for the first time in the new capitol, addressed the debt crisis. Lincoln managed, after much cajoling, to persuade his colleagues to raise the general land tax and to issue special bonds to cover the pending interest obligations. Lincoln's "interest bonds" scheme was criticized as "a mere gull trap, set for the purpose of catching money holders & sharpers."[328] The tax hike, however, yielded insufficient revenue to solve the problem, and in July 1841

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[323] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 11 December 1840.

[324] Lucian P. Sanger to Augustus A. Evans, Springfield, 5 December 1840, Augustus A. Evans Papers, Missouri Historical Society.

[325] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 16 February 1844.

[326] Joseph Gillespie to Herndon, Edwardsville, Illinois, 3l January 1866, Wilson and Davis, eds., Herndon's Informants, 188.

[327] Whitney, Lincoln the Citizen, 148.

[328] Springfield correspondence by "Pompey," 4 December, Peoria Register and North-Western Gazette, 11 December 1840.

the state defaulted on its interest payments, causing the price of Illinois bonds to plunge.[329] A Democratic state senator complained that the "very men who voted for the rail Road system, men who indebted the State millions, are afraid to vote one cent of taxes on their constituents to sustain the tottering credit of the State."[330] In 1842, the state took in revenues of less than $100,000, while interest payments approached $800,000.[331]

A struggle over the Whig-dominated supreme court convulsed the legislature. The justices had angered Democrats by overruling Governor Carlin's decision to remove Alexander P. Field, a partisan Whig, from his post as secretary of state.[332] When the court seemed likely to deny aliens the right to vote, thus threatening the Democrats' electoral base (most of the state's 10,000 foreign-born voters were Democrats), the General Assembly entertained a motion to pack the supreme bench by adding five justices, a proposal which became "the Lion measure of the session."[333] The ensuing debate was "vehement & exciting, partaking much of party abuse & personal crimination."[334] In the midst of the heated exchanges, a member of the lower house reported that the "Legislature is cutting up all kinds of splurges. The very Genius of Disorganization is holding the reins whilst Old Nick whips the horses. Every thing is done by party votes."[335] Beholding the spectacle from Washington,

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[329] To cover the interest on the state debt, the general land tax would have had to be increased fivefold. Thompson, Illinois Whigs, 96n.

[330] Adam W. Snyder to Gustave Koerner, Springfield, 21 February 1841, John Francis Snyder Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[331] Krenkel, Illinois Internal Improvements, 149.

[332] See Arnold Shankman, "Partisan Conflicts, 1839-41, and the Illinois Constitution," Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society 63 (1970): 337-67, and Davis, "Illinois Legislators," 280-88.

[333] Ford, History of Illinois, ed. Davis, 147; Adam W. Snyder to Gustave Koerner, Springfield, 6 February 1841, John Francis Snyder Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[334] James Harvey Ralston to "Dear Sir," Springfield, 30 January 1841, Ralston Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[335] John J. Hardin to John Todd Stuart, Springfield, 20 January 1841, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

John Todd Stuart lamented: "I have often been ashamed of my State or rather of its Loco Legislators. They are a laughing stock."[336] Lincoln's friend, Senator William H. Fithian, thought that he had previously seen "the business of the people . . . carelessly and tardily attended to by their Representatives," but now he felt "compelled to say, I have never until this session, fully realized the length and breadth of the unparalleled embarrassments of the people of Illinois."[337]

Although "it was in the house where the grand fight took place," Lincoln scarcely participated; he had prepared remarks which he could not deliver because speaker Ewing allowed the Democrats to cut off debate.[338] On February 1, when the bill cleared the House by a 45-43 vote, the Sangamo Journal published a letter by a member of that body (probably Lincoln) indignantly protesting that the "Judiciary of Illinois is to be assailed, and the constitution in its spirit, if not in the letter, violated, and the members who would have raised a voice in its defence, are to be gagged into silence!" Hyperbolically comparing the proceedings to the Alien and Sedition Acts of 1798, the author denounced Ewing, whose parliamentary rulings were "of so alarming a character, that I have felt it to be my duty, not only to myself, as a member of the House, but also to my constituents, whose interests, whose honor, whose liberties, it is my duty, as well as my pride, to defend, by all lawful and proper means; and I should regard myself as unworthy [of] the confidence of those manly and generous bosoms, through whose suffrages I have the honor to have a seat in the House, if I could shrink and silently acquiesce in any measure which involved their rights, or that

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[336] Stuart to John J. Hardin, Washington, 30 January 1841, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

[337] William H. Fithian to Amos Williams, Springfield, 29 December 1840, Woodbury Collection, Illinois Historical Survey, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, in Richter, Lincoln: Twenty Years on the Eastern Prairie, 40.

[338] Adam W. Snyder to Gustave Koerner, Springfield, 6 February 1841, John Francis Snyder Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

should preclude me from defending them." He added that "it is sufficiently revolting to the feelings of freemen, to be gagged into silence under any circumstances," but "if this gag law can be enforced, in relation to a particular measure before that measure is before the House, then any thing like freedom of debate may be cut off, and the members literally gagged into silence."[339]

When Ewing rejected this protest as "gratuitous and unfounded," the aggrieved legislator replied in a conciliatory fashion, stating that he "had not been induced by any unkind feelings towards the speaker" and that there was "no reason we should wound each other's feelings, or that those civilities and kindnesses which mark the character and intercourse between gentlemen, should be violated and endangered." He maintained that the "official conduct, or decisions of public officers is public property, and are fair and legitimate subjects of criticism, so that facts are correctly stated, and inferences fairly drawn. In my own much more humble sphere, I freely concede the right of investigating my public conduct, and if dealt ingenuously with, will not be found to complain."[340]

Lincoln was not so conciliatory in late February, when he and thirty-four other Whig Representatives denounced the court-packing statute as "a party measure for party purposes" which manifested "supreme contempt for the popular will," undermined "the independence of the Judiciary, the surest shield of public welfare and private right," and set a "precedent for still more flagrant violations of right and justice."[341] In April, a satirical communication in the Sangamo Journal, probably by Lincoln, suggested that the judiciary bill passed only because a member (Ebenezer Peck) was bought off with an appointment as clerk of the state

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[339] Davis, "Illinois Legislators," 288-92; "The Case Stated," by "a member of the House," Sangamo Journal, 5 February 1841.

[340] Sangamo Journal, 12 February 1841; letter dated Springfield, 13 February, ibid., 19 February 1841.

[341] Protest dated 26 February 1841, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:244-49.

supreme court.[342] Another such communication, probably by Lincoln, ridiculed Stephen A. Douglas for his inconsistency as an opponent of "life offices" who nevertheless accepted a "life office" as a supreme court judge.[343]

In the 1840-41 session, Lincoln once again fought on behalf of the Illinois and Michigan Canal, moving that the state increase the land tax and issue bonds to complete the project.[344] A Democrat from Montgomery County ridiculed Lincoln, comparing him to an Arkansas toper who had passed out and, when all other means to revive him failed, regained consciousness at his wife's suggestion that a brandy toddy might be the best medicine. Upon hearing the words "brandy toddy," the bibulous gentleman sat up, saying "that is the stuff!" Lincoln seemed to think the more debt that the state assumed, the better.[345] Lincoln responded in kind. His critic's actions during the legislative session, he quipped, called to mind an old Indiana bachelor who "was very famous for seeing big bugaboos in every thing." One day while hunting with his brother, this gentleman fired repeatedly at a tree top. His sibling, who saw no target, asked what he was trying to shoot. When told that it was a squirrel, the brother, "believing that there was some humbug about the matter, examined his person, and found on one of his eye lashes a big louse crawling about. It is just so with the gentleman from Montgomery. He imagined he could see squirrels every day, when they were

[342] Anonymous letter to "Dear Colonel," Springfield, 13 April, Sangamo Journal, 16 April 1841; Don E. Fehrenbacher, Chicago Giant: A Biography of "Long John" Wentworth (Madison, Wisconsin: American History Research Center, 1957), 35. Democrats alleged that Whigs engaged in similar misconduct. On February 8, Adam W. Snyder reported that "in the house, the Whigs have bought up and intimidated 6 of our Democrats by which they have a majority." Snyder to Gustave Koerner, Springfield, 8 February 1841, John Francis Snyder Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[343] Unsigned letters, purportedly by a Democrat, dated Springfield, 13 and 26 April 1841, Sangamo Journal, 16 and 30 April 1841.

[344] Remarks in the legislature, 4 December 1840, Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:215-17, and bill, [7 December 1840], ibid., 217-18.

[345] Sangamo Journal, 5 March 1841.

nothing but lice."[346] Lincoln's remarks "convulsed the whole house," forcing a halt to all business. The Speaker banged his gavel to no avail. Legislators of both parties laughed, "screamed and yelled," "thumped upon the floor with their canes," "clapped their hands," "threw up their hats," "shouted and twisted themselves into all sorts of contortions, until their sides ached and the tears rolled down their cheeks." One spasm succeeded another until the Representatives "seemed to be perfectly exhausted."[347] Much as they admired Lincoln's wit, the legislators rejected his argument that "to prosecute the work now was in fact the most economical plan that could be adopted: to stop it, would involve the State in much more debt and ruin."[348]

Lincoln clashed with another Democrat, John A. McClernand, over the state bank.[349] From southern Illinois, McClernand -- of medium height, thin, with a high forehead and a "prominent nose of the broken rainbow type" -- had "commenced an uncompromising War against all the Banks in the World."[350] The "vain irritable overbearing exacting" McClernand was a "political demagogue" and "a tolerable effective speaker, perfectly indifferent . . . as to the means necessary to attain success. The 'end justifies the means,' is a cardinal maxim in his creed."[351] His "martial spirit" rendered him "naturally a fighter, brave to rashness, with

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[346] Remarks made on 26 February 1841, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:244.

[347] James C. Conkling in Francis Fisher Browne, The Every-Day Life of Abraham Lincoln (New York: N. D. Thompson, 1886), 171.

[348] Illinois State Register (Springfield), 12 March 1841, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:244n.

[349] Victor Hicken, "From Vandalia to Vicksburg: The Political and Military Career of John A. McClernand" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Illinois, 1955),

[350] Taylorville (Illinois) Independent Press, 30 December 1859, clipping in a scrapbook, McClernand Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield; Representative George W. Waters to Henry Eddy, Springfield, 22 December 1840, Eddy Papers, Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield.

[351] Burlingame and Ettlinger, eds., Diary of John Hay, 240 (entry for 11 October 1864); "A member of the lobby" to the editor, Springfield, 23 December 1840, Quincy Whig, 9 January 1841; Richard L. Kiper, Major General John Alexander McClernand: Politician in Uniform (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1999), 21, 184, 192, 205, 272.

the will and force to command," and his knowledge of the classics, his grandiloquent manner, and his "great fluency" earned him a distinctive sobriquet: "The Grecian Orator."[352] According to Gustave Koerner, McClernand "possessed the qualities of a party leader in high degree." A "lawyer of long practice and good parliamentarian," with "unbounded ambition" and "untiring energy," he "was bold in his assertions, denunciatory of his opponents, perfectly fearless, an experienced public speaker, never trying to persuade but to subdue."[353]

McClernand and Lincoln held a "peculiarly sharp and personal" debate over the question of whether the state bank should be the fiscal agent for Illinois. Lincoln, with some asperity, declared that there was "a manifest disposition on the part of some of the Van Buren men to prop up the Bank, and it is perfectly apparent that the party are prepared to detach a fraction of themselves to go with the Whigs in sustaining the Bank – their usual policy – and then throw the odium of suspension upon the Whigs." Lincoln "said he was tired of this business. If there was to be this continual warfare against the Institutions of the State, the sooner it was brought to an end the better. If the great body of the [Democratic] party would act upon conservative principles, he was willing to go with them, but this scheme of detaching a fragment from their party to help the Whigs pass a measure and then turn around and kick and cuff us for it, he had seen practiced long enough."[354] Lincoln's attempt to protect the interests of the bank proved futile, for it was compelled to shut its doors the following year.

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[352] Snyder, Adam W. Snyder, 2nd ed., 340-41; Linder, Memoirs, 71; Carr, The Illini, 367. A good example of his oratory is a speech he delivered in the U.S. House of Representatives in 1848. Congressional Globe, 30th Congress, 1st Session, 131-34 (10 January 1848).

[353] Koerner, Memoirs, 1:480.

[354] Northwestern Gazette and Galena Advertiser, 17 February 1841, in Basler, ed., Collected Works of Lincoln, 1:237-38.

When the legislature adjourned on March 1, Lincoln found himself out of office for the first time in seven years.

With his departure from the General Assembly, Lincoln closed the apprentice phase of his political career. Since entering the legislature in 1834, he had gained stature. In December 1840, a member of "the lobby" – a kind of mock legislature that met in the capitol after the General Assembly sessions adjourned for the day – called him "emphatically a man of high standing," a "self-made man, and one of the ablest, whether as a lawyer or legislator, in the State. As a speaker he is characterized by a sincerity, frankness, and evident honesty, calculated to win the attention and gain the confidence of the hearer."[355] (Thomas J. Henderson, who recalled hearing Lincoln during this session of the General Assembly, was less favorably impressed, saying that he "was awkward in manner, when speaking, with a swaying motion of body and a swinging of his long arms that were somewhat ungraceful." Henderson "heard members laughing and talking about appointing a committee to hold his coat tails when he was speaking and keep him still.")[356] A few months later, the Fulton Telegraph said: "we think the great talents, sacrifices and high standing of Mr. Lincoln should bring our friends to the decision of taking him up as a candidate for Governor."[357]

Lincoln had little interest in that post, for Whigs stood no chance of winning statewide office.[358] In July 1841, a western Illinois newspaper reported that "since his return from the circuit [in mid-June], Lincoln declines being considered as a candidate for

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[355] Springfield correspondence by "A Member of the Lobby," 23 December 1840, Quincy Whig, 9 January 1841.

[356] Henderson's reminiscences, Omaha Daily Bee, 9 February 1896.

[357] Editorial copied in the Sangamo Journal, 15 October 1841.

[358] On 21 April 1848, the Illinois State Register (Springfield) declared that any Whig candidate for governor could expect to lose by 15,000 votes.

Governor."[359] Five months later, the Sangamo Journal announced that "since Mr. Lincoln returned from the circuit, he has expressed his wishes not to be a candidate for Governor."[360] An item in that same paper the following year scotched the proposal: "We do not believe that he desires the nomination. He has already made great sacrifices in sustaining his party principles; and before his political friends ask him to make additional sacrifices, the subject should be well considered. The office of Governor, which would of necessity interfere with the practice of his profession, would poorly compensate him for the loss of four years of the best portion of his life."[361] (Some Whigs objected that Springfield should not have both the party's only congressional seat and the governorship.)[362]

In 1840, Lincoln's ambition had grown more intense, fueled by his new status as a presidential elector, Whig campaign manager, chief stump speaker and organizer, and Whig floor leader in the state House of Representatives. William H. Herndon believed that "Lincoln as Early as 1830 be[g]an to dream of destiny –. I think it grew & developed & bloom[ed] with beauty &c in the year 1840 Exactly. Mr Lincoln on that year was appointed general Elector from the State –. Mr Lincoln told me that his ideas of [becoming] something – burst on him in 1840."[363]

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[359] Alton Telegraph quoted in Lincoln Day by Day, 1:164 (entry for 20 July 1841).

[360] Sangamo Journal, 12 November 1841.

[361] Sangamo Journal, 15 October 1842. To run for governor was a sacrifice indeed, as Orville H. Browning explained: a candidate for governor should "traverse every part of the State. His entire time, from early Spring till August, should be given up to the canvass. He should have no other vocation than electioneering, and should devote not only his time, but his best energies to the service of his country." Orville H. Browning to John J. Hardin, Quincy, 14 January 1841, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

[362] George T. M. Davis to John J. Hardin, Springfield, 29 January 1844, and Alton, 19 February 1844, Hardin Family Papers, Chicago History Museum.

[363] Herndon to Ward Hill Lamon, 25 February 1870, Lamon Papers, Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Having arrived politically, he now felt ready to advance from the state to the national level. In the General Assembly he had learned how to build coalitions, how to persuade his colleagues to do his bidding, and how to roll logs. According to Lyman Trumbull, one of his colleagues in the Illinois House of Representatives, Lincoln was viewed "by his political friends as among their shrewdest and ablest leaders, and by his political adversaries as a formidable opponent." Trumbull, who was generally critical of Lincoln, acknowledged that among the highly talented men who served in the legislature in 1840-41, "he stood in the front rank."[364]

But for all his growing sense of strength and competence, there was, as Samuel C. Parks noted about the Lincoln of 1841, "nothing to indicate the future reformer, either in religion, or morals, or politics."[365] In the General Assembly, he had initiated little legislation.[366] Of the 1647 bills passed during Lincoln's four terms, he directly introduced only 10; another 21 had been brought forward by committees on which he served. Lincoln offered only 8 resolutions and 14 petitions.[367] It is no wonder that a fellow Whig leader, Elihu B. Washburne, observed that during his years in the legislature, Lincoln "never gave

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[364] Lyman Trumbull to Walter Trumbull, n.p., n.d., in Horace White, The Life of Lyman Trumbull (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1913), 427. Paul Simon concluded that Lincoln's strength lay "in the ability to get along with his colleagues and to sense what they would support and not support." Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness, 156. William Patton called the Illinois legislature of 1834-41 "a wonderful academy of political science" for Lincoln. Patton to Albert J. Beveridge, Springfield, 17 April 1925, Beveridge Papers, Library of Congress.

[365] Samuel Chipman Parks's lecture on Lincoln, delivered at the University of Michigan, 1894, in Parks, The Great Trial of the Nineteenth Century (Kansas City, Missouri: Hudson-Kimberly publishing co., 1900), 141. In 1899, Parks (1820-1917) recalled that he had, as a young man studying law with Ninian W. Edwards and John Todd Stuart, first met Lincoln in 1840 in Springfield. For more than two decades, he said, "my relations with him were intimate and confidential." In 1862, Lincoln appointed him associate justice of the Supreme Court of Idaho Territory. Le Roy H. Fischer, ed., "Samuel C. Parks's Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln," Lincoln Herald 68 (1966): 11-19.

[366] Paul Simon concluded that Lincoln's legislative "role was not . . . creative . . . . For the most part his leadership was provided in reaction to legislation introduced by others." Simon, Lincoln's Preparation for Greatness, 156.

[367] Horner, "Education of a Politician," 310-11. Lincoln served on 63 select committees, of which he chaired 25.

any special evidence of that masterly ability for which he was afterward distinguished."[368] Albert Taylor Beldsoe called his fellow Whig stalwart "talented, but low, ignorant, and vulgar."[369] In sum, Lincoln at the age of thirty-two was little more than an ambitious, gifted partisan.[370]

[368] Washburne in Rice, ed., Reminiscences of Lincoln, 8. Harry E. Pratt saw in Lincoln's record "few signs of greatness." Pratt, "Lincoln in the Legislature," 12. As his voluminous notes in the reference files of the Abraham Lincoln Association at the Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield show, Pratt did a formidable amount of research on Lincoln's legislative career.

[369] Bledsoe, review of Ward Hill Lamon's biography of Lincoln, Southern Review 12 (April 1873): 364.

[370] Joel H. Silbey, "'Always a Whig in Politics': The Partisan Life of Abraham Lincoln," Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association 8 (1986): 21-42.