

Setting the Stage for Failure: How Lincoln's Earlier Public Discourse on Slavery Nullified the Effectiveness of his First Inaugural Address

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Despite receiving praise from rhetorical scholars, historians, and great men of his day, Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural Address was not able to prevent the civil war from taking place. This paper argues that one reason for this is because Lincoln's candidacy for the presidency passed through the four identifiable stages of a presidential campaign that Trent and Friedenberg set forth in their landmark book on political campaign communication. Since each stage has different goals that the candidate is attempting to achieve and different strategies for the attainment of those goals, Lincoln's public utterances on slavery were different as he passed through the different campaign stages. Moreover, although his public discourse often helped him achieve the short-term goals of the campaign stage that he found himself in at the time, it also later limited the rhetorical effectiveness of his First Inaugural Address.

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Introduction

Communication scholars have repeatedly praised Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural Address as a great oration. Sandburg (1939) quoted Greenville Dodge, who wrote his wife saying "Old Abe delivered the greatest speech of the age" and Henry Watterson who wrote that "He delivered the inaugural as though he had been delivering inaugural addresses all of his life" (p. 123). Nichols (1954) wrote "The historian has often examined it for its effects and has concluded that "Though not fully appreciated then, it was one of the great American inaugurals. And the literary critic has praised it of being of poetic beauty and enduring worth" (p. 101). And Angle (1954) stated "With rare literary artistry Lincoln transmuted Seward's draft into a speech that was really a prose poem of unsurpassed beauty" (p. 213). However, despite these positive reviews and despite a tone that Garraty (1991) called "conciliatory but firm" (p.415), and Potter (1976) said "had conciliatory features that heartened many border-state Unionists and Northern advocates of compromise" (p. 568), the speech still did not prevent the Civil War from happening. As Suriano (1993) went on to say "At the time of the address, seven states had already seceded, and the Civil War began the next month, when the Confederates fired on Fort Sumter" (p. 82).



This was despite the fact that at one point in the speech Lincoln addressed Southerners directly and tried to show them that their anxieties about him and about a Republican administration were without foundation. The following website contains both the text of and background information on Lincoln's First Inaugural.

<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/1inaug.htm> In his anthology of American rhetorical discourse, Reid (1988) quotes him as saying:

Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern states, that by the

accession of the Republican administration, their property, and their peace, and personal security, are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all of the public speeches of him who now addresses you. I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the states where it exists. I believe that I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.” (p. 452)

If those words weren't enough to alleviate Southern fears and concerns, at another point in the address Reid (1988) quotes him as stating these famous lines. “I now reiterate these sentiments, and in doing so, I only press upon the public attention the most conclusive evidence of which the case is susceptible—that the property, peace, and security of no section are to be in any wise endangered by the now incoming administration” (p.452). Finally, as if to leave no doubt in the minds of his hearers, Reid (1988) again near the close of the speech reports Lincoln as saying:

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to “preserve, protect, and defend it.” I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. (p. 458)

By speaking these words it is obvious, then, that Lincoln was attempting to appease his Southern audience and to act as a peacemaker and prevent the great conflict from taking place. So what happened? Why didn't the speech that many believe was one of the most eloquent of all-time prevent the bloodiest war in U.S. history? That is the question that this paper will address. In the paper it will be argued that the reason for this was because of Lincoln's previous utterances on slavery and because of utterances on these issues by other members of his Republican Party. In other words, the speech came too late. The stage had already been set, and by the time the inaugural was given, the minds of both many Northerners and many Southerners were already made up. It will be shown, then, that Lincoln's First Inaugural Address—no matter how eloquent and well-done, could not possibly have undone the effects of years of public statements by him and those around him (who became dubbed the “Black Republicans” for the extreme views that they held on slavery). It will also be shown that, although Lincoln's statements in the address appear to be appropriate for the rhetorical situation that he found himself in on inauguration day 1861, they were inconsistent with statements that he had made earlier in his political career. These include the remarks he made in his famous “house divided” speech, remarks he made during his infamous debates with Stephen A. Douglas, and views that he expressed in his legendary address at Cooper Union in New York. They were also inconsistent with statements by other prominent members of his party such as William Seward. The paper will also demonstrate that the reason Lincoln's First Inaugural Address did not prevent the civil war was because other addresses that he and his fellow Republicans gave at earlier stages in the sectional conflict functioned to

undermine its effectiveness. Further, it will be shown that although those earlier addresses may have helped to advance Lincoln's career and "lay the foundation" for his elections to both the state legislature and the presidency, they "came back to haunt" him on inauguration day 1861 when he was attempting to "calm" sectional tensions and preserve the union.

Stages and Strategies of Political Campaigns

Trent and Friedenber (2004) labeled four stages that they say all presidential campaigns go through and discussed the rhetorical techniques and strategies that are used by presidential candidates in each stage. The following websites contain biographical information on the authors and a scholarly review of their work:

<http://cas.bethel.edu/dept/comm/nfa/journal/vol11no2-7.pdf>

<http://www.lsu.edu/policomm/authors/trent.html>

One thing that is obvious in their writings is that these techniques and strategies are very different in each stage – even to the point of being contradictory to each other. The four stages that these scholars say all presidential campaigns go through are 1) surfacing, 2) primaries, 3) nominating conventions and 4) the general election. This paper will show is that as Lincoln's candidacy passed through each of these stages his public discourse was such that it helped him in the stage that he was in at the time, but also hurt his rhetorical effectiveness later when he delivered his First Inaugural Address.

Surfacing

Trent and Friedenber (2004) say that the first stage that all presidential campaigns go through is the surfacing stage. This is the stage when the public first learns about a candidate, when a candidate's image with the public is shaped, when a candidate determines his/her main campaign issues and reveals his/her positions on key issues in the public forum, and when the voting public makes a determination of who the "serious" contenders for the office will be. According to Goodwin (2005) Lincoln first "surfaced" to the people of Illinois when he "delivered his first great antislavery speech in Springfield at the State Fair before a crowd of thousands on October 4, 1854" (p. 164) and another twelve nights later, by torchlight in Peoria" (p. 165). In the former she stated "many of his arguments were familiar to those who had followed the senate debate (on the Kansas-Nebraska Act) and had read Chase's masterly 'Appeal'; but the structure of the speech was so clear and logical, the *Illinois Daily Journal* observed, the arrangement of facts so 'methodical', that the overall effect was strikingly original and most effective" (p. 165). Zarefsky (1993) wrote that "Lincoln's speech was virtually repeated two weeks later at Peoria, and has become known to history as the 'Peoria Speech'" (p. 38). He went on to say:

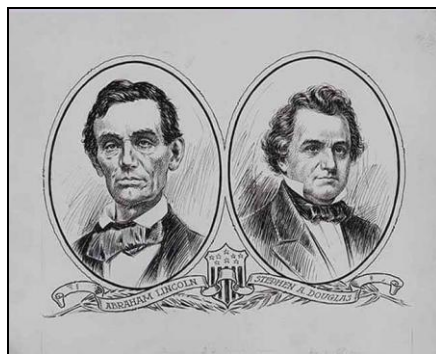
It was notable for its careful staking out of a position. Lincoln did not recite the cruelties of slavery but stuck to the legal as aspects of the question. He did not call for abolition, but he was equally uncompromising in his opposition to the Nebraska bill. Moral indignation against that measure was combined with appeals to the Founding Fathers. "The result," Neely writes, "was to legitimize the antislavery

movement as conservative and thoroughly American. (p. 38)

These two speeches let persons in Illinois know where Lincoln stood on the “hot button” issue of slavery—that it was a moral wrong and should be left alone to “die out” as the Founding Fathers had intended.

However, most scholars agree that the nation as a whole came to know Lincoln as a result of his campaign for the U.S. Senate in 1858, and particularly because of his infamous “house divided” acceptance speech as the Republican nominee and his debates with Stephen A. Douglas as both pursued that office. (Read more about the latter at <http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debates.htm>) Dodd (1915) wrote that “The Lincoln-Douglas campaign continued all the autumn and the country became acquainted with the obscure lawyer who had persisted in his purpose to run against Douglas, contrary to the counsels of the leaders of his party” (p. 257). Reid (1988) too, remarked on the nation becoming familiar with Lincoln as a result of his campaign for senate. He stated “The skill with which he (Lincoln) conducted his campaign thrust him into the national limelight” (p. 402). Goodwin (2005) perhaps summed up best the widespread publicity that the senate campaign generated for Lincoln and the boost that it gave to his political career. She said “The prospects for his candidacy had taken wing in 1858 after his brilliant campaign against the formidable Democratic leader, Stephen Douglas, in a dramatic senate race in Illinois that had attracted national attention” (p. 8). Garraty (1991) echoed similar sentiments when he wrote:

In any case, defeat did Lincoln no harm politically. He had more than held his own against one of the most formidable debaters in politics, and his distinctive personality and point of view had impressed themselves on thousands of minds. Indeed, the defeat revitalized his political career. (p. 405)



Once chosen as the Republican candidate for Senate, it did not take long for Lincoln to begin making a stir among the people. As a matter of fact, it was in his speech accepting the Republican candidacy that some of Lincoln’s most remembered words would be spoken. In it he let both Northerners and Southerners know where he stood on the great issue of the day—slavery. And, having come to be known as the “house divided” speech, it did not particularly endear him to persons in the slaveholding regions of the country. The following website contains background information on and the text of this speech: <http://www.historyplace.com/lincoln/divided.htm>

Perceptions were thus, being formed already about Lincoln and what his true his views on the slavery issue were. Goodwin (2005) remarked on the impact of the “house divided” address. She stated “Lincoln’s rise from relative obscurity to a presidential nomination, Don Fehrenbacher has convincingly argued, includes no more decisive date than June 16, 1858,” when the convention met in Springfield and enthusiastically endorsed Lincoln as it’s “first and only choice...for the United States Senate, as the successor of Stephen A. Douglas” (p. 198). However, what did Lincoln actually say in this infamous address that would help him in his Illinois senate campaign but also that Southerners would remember with disdain over two years later, and that would cause them to be skeptical of the conciliatory remarks he made in his First Inaugural Address? Zarefsky (1993) answered this when he wrote “The speech was controversial from the start. Saying that to make the nation all free was the only alternative to make it all slave sounded dangerously close to abolitionism” (p. 44). See biographical information on Professor Zarefsky at the following website: <http://www.teach12.com/store/professor.asp?ID=60>

At another place in his book, he quotes the Illinois State Register as saying that “The abolitionist Frederick Douglas was giving Lincoln’s speech a radical construction, and ‘the only true one’. Such reactions served multiple purposes. They defined Lincoln as an abolitionist and assumed that men such as Douglas were his close associates” (p. 45). Sandburg (1936) showed this too when he wrote, “In the Senate George Pugh of Ohio quoted Lincoln’s house divided’ speech as bringing fear to the South which required reassurance from the President-elect” (p. 15).



Obviously, the most well known passage from the address and that from which it derived its name was the following, which was reported by Wrage and Baskerville (1960) in their anthology of great American speeches:

A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the union to be dissolved. I do not expect the house to fall, but I do expect that it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing or all the other. (p. 180)

Goodwin (2005) remarked on the reactions persons had to these words and the perceptions that people were forming about Lincoln. She stated that “Supporters and opponents alike believed that with his image of a house that could not ‘endure, permanently half slave and half free,’ Lincoln had abandoned the moderate approach of his Peoria speech four years earlier in favor of more militant action” (p. 198). Thus, Lincoln came across more as a radical abolitionist than a moderate. Davis (1971) would

later cite Southern concerns about the seemingly radical nature of Lincoln's proclamations in the house divided speech when he wrote "and was not Lincoln the author of the 'house divided' doctrine, announced even before Seward's 'irrepressible conflict,' and was not Lincoln on record as saying that slavery must be put on the course of ultimate extinction?" (p. 11). Sandburg (1939) too, illustrated this when he quoted Robert Barnwell Rhett as specifically referring to the "house divided" line in one of his many letters of opposition to Lincoln. "Rhett wrote", he said, that "The people of the North have not left us in doubt as to their designs and policy. United as a section in the late presidential election, they have elected as the exponent of their policy one who has openly declared that all of the states of the United States must be made Free states or Slave states" (p. 6). Reid (1988) even went so far as to refer to the "house divided" line as "a rhetorical mistake because it was too easily taken out of context to give credence to Douglas's charges that Lincoln was predicting civil war" (p. 402). Garraty (1991) too, affirmed this when he wrote that "the house divided speech was often quoted out of context" (p. 405). Interestingly, most of Lincoln's acceptance speech that day was more moderate and centrist. Goodwin (2005) wrote that "his call for action was no more radical than before—to 'arrest the further spread' of slavery and 'place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief' that it was back where the framers intended it, in course of ultimate extinction" (p. 198). However, history would show that what persons (and particularly Southerners) most remembered about his words that day was the "house divided" phrase and Mr. Lincoln coming across as almost a radical abolitionist. Zarefsky (1993) too, emphasized this when he wrote:

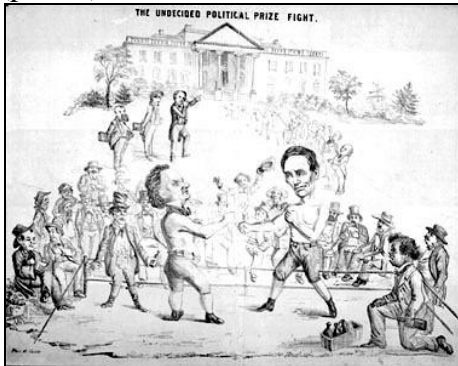
The speech and the phrase were widely publicized, both in Illinois and beyond. The Democratic press promptly branded it abolitionism, though cunningly prepared to conceal the full implications of the doctrine...For a good part of the campaign, Lincoln found himself re-explaining what the "house divided" doctrine really meant. The opposition repeatedly drew the issue back to the doctrine's radical implications, realizing that to do so made Lincoln vulnerable. (p. 45)

This notion that Lincoln was "radical" in his view on the slavery issue and was actually promoting abolitionism was reinforced again and again in the public's mind in the months to come, as during the course of their debates for the U.S. Senate, Stephen Douglas repeatedly attempted to brand him as just that.

The main way that Abraham Lincoln "surfaced" to the American people, however, was as a result of those debates. For a thorough discussion of the debates see: http://www.debates.org/pages/his_1858.html Reid (1988) remarked on the publicity that the debates generated both in the state of Illinois and in the nation as a whole. In his well-known anthology of public address he said the following:

Partly because of their novelty and partly because of Douglas' national prominence, the debates attracted considerable attention. Each was attended by thousands of people. The state's two major newspapers, the Chicago Press and Tribune (Republican) and Chicago Times (Democrat), published complete texts provided by their teams of shorthand reporters. Other papers, both in and out of

the State, published summaries and excerpts and also reported the parades and hoopla surrounding the debates. A few months after the election the debates were published in book form. (p. 410)



It was obvious from this account that many persons throughout the country either attended the debates in person or read accounts of them in various forms of print media. Garraty (1991) too, discussed the popularity of the debates and the fact that they gained much attention. He reported that “The debates were well attended and widely reported, for the idea of a direct confrontation between candidates for an important office captured the popular imagination” (p. 404). Eric Foner of Columbia University discusses the widespread popularity the debates had in the following internet video: <http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/lincolndouglas/video.html> The fact that this propelled Lincoln to a position of national prominence was related by Goodwin (2005). She stated, “So the stage was set for a titanic battle, arguably the most famous Senate fight in American history, a clash that would make Lincoln a national figure and propel him to the presidency while it would, at the same time, undermine Douglas’s support in the South and further fracture the Democratic Party” (p. 200). Nichols (1954) too, in her landmark essay on Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address, remarked on how the 1858 Senate campaign was where Lincoln really emerged as a viable candidate for the presidency in 1860. In her seminal article she stated:

It is true that after the Lincoln-Douglas debates he had gained recognition beyond the limits of his state. The Chicago Democrat called attention to the fact that “Mr. Lincoln’s name has been used by newspapers and public meetings outside the State in connection with the Presidency and Vice Presidency, so it is not only in his own State that Honest Old Abe is respected.” Again, the Illinois State Journal took pride in reporting his growing fame. In “other states,” it said, he had been found “not only... an unrivaled orator, strong in debate, keen in his logic and wit, with admirable powers of statement, and a fertility of resources which are equal to every occasion; but his truthfulness, his candor, his honesty of purpose, his magnanimity... have stamped him as a statesman whom the Republicans throughout the Union may be proud of. (p. 81)

Zarefsky (1993) too, echoed similar sentiments when he wrote that “Originally the debates were reported only in the Illinois papers, but they sparked nationwide interest, and soon the speeches were telegraphed and reprinted in the major national organs from coast to coast” (p. 54). He went on to say that “Although some editors ignored the debates altogether, Fehrenbacher concludes that even fragmentary national coverage

‘greatly exceeded’ that given most state elections” (p. 54). The following internet sites contain the newspaper accounts and commentary that were included in many papers:

<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/lincolndouglas/debatenews.html>

<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu/lincolndouglas/commentary.html>

Lincoln, then, became better known as the debates wore on. This, then, brings up the question. What did Americans in general and Southerners in particular find out from these debates about him? What positions was he putting forth in the debates that they would later associate with him, particularly on the big issue that was stirring great emotions in Americans and contributing to the growing sectional tensions—slavery?

During the course of the debates Lincoln repeatedly reiterated ideas that he had espoused on slavery in the Springfield and Peoria speeches four years before and in his “house divided” address. Partly because of Douglas’s constant attempts to paint him as a radical that was for total equality for the Negro and partly because of the way Lincoln phrased his arguments, many Americans, particularly in the South, came to see him as an extreme abolitionist. Many Southerners, then, began to see him as a threat and as a danger to their entire way of life, something they were not likely to forget two years later when he won the presidency. That Douglas did try to label him as a radical at every opportunity during the course of the debates was reported by Goodwin (2005). She wrote that “Douglas understood from the onset that his primary goal, more important than debating or defining his own position, was to cast Lincoln as a radical, bent on abolishing all distinctions between the races” (p. 204). This was depicted well in the following political cartoon where Lincoln is portrayed as dancing with a female slave and where the famous slave Dred Scott (whose case against his owner went all the way to the United States Supreme Court) is playing the violin. It was included in many newspapers and other publications that were widely circulated at the time.



Garraty (1991) too, proclaimed this when he wrote “Douglas’s strategy was to make Lincoln look like an abolitionist. He accused the Republicans of favoring racial equality, and of refusing to abide by the decision of the Supreme Court in the Dred Scott case” (p. 404). Perhaps the most conclusive evidence of this strategy that Douglas undertook, however, was when Goodwin (2005) stated the following:

At every forum, therefore, Douglas missed no opportunity to portray Lincoln as a Negro-loving agitator bent on debasing white society. “If you desire negro citizenship,” Douglas baited his audience, “if you desire them to vote on an equality with yourselves, and to make them eligible to hold office, to serve on juries, and to adjudge your rights, then support Mr. Lincoln and the Black

Republican Party.” The crowd responded as Douglas hoped: “Never, never.” (p. 204)

Such attempts to portray Lincoln as a radical not only made a lasting impression on persons in the state of Illinois where the debates took place, but all across the nation, as well. This included the South, where many were following with interest the words of the two Northern politicians and the arguments that they traded over what many had come to believe was the foundation of their entire economic system.

In addition to Douglas’s portrayal of him as an abolitionist, some of the statements that Lincoln, himself, made during the debates seemed to show a more radical and extremist side of him on the slavery issue. For example, in the seventh debate, which took place at Alton, Illinois on October 15, 1858, Suriano (1993) reported Lincoln as saying:

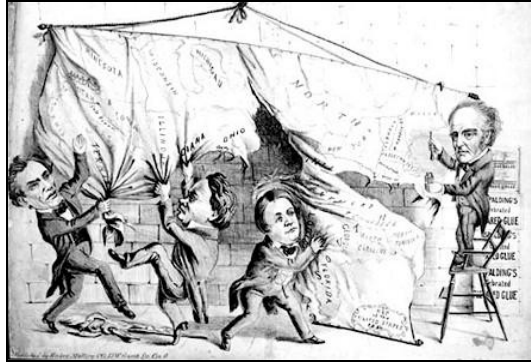
The real issue in this controversy—the one pressing upon every mind—is the sentiment on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery as a wrong, and of another class that does not look upon it as a wrong. The sentiment that contemplates the institution of slavery in this country as a wrong is the Republican party. It is the sentiment around which all their actions, all their arguments circle and from which all their propositions radiate. They look upon it as being a moral, social, and political wrong. (p. 69)

See the complete text of the seventh Lincoln-Douglas debate at:

<http://www.nps.gov/archive/liho/debate7.htm>

These are words that although some Southerners might privately agree with, most would never admit, and many took issue with. They were words that would do little to encourage the South to trust him when he became President.

Many of the impressions that were formed about Lincoln by the American people during the “surfacing” stage were created due to the image of his recently formed Republican Party and public statements that were made by his fellow Republicans. Garraty (1991) wrote that “Far more significant in the long run was the formation of the Republican Party. Republicans presented themselves as the “party of freedom”. They were not abolitionists (though most abolitionists were soon voting Republican), but they insisted that slavery be kept out of the territories” (p. 394). This was a goal that would be incompatible with the interests of many Southerners who wanted to move their slaves West with them as they sought new, fresh, fertile land for their crops, and especially later when they were trying to preserve the congressional balance of power between the North and South. Davis (1971) wrote “In the eyes of the South, it mattered little whom the Republicans chose as their candidate. Born in 1854 in opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Republican Party was the bete noire of the South, and its candidate, whoever he might be, would share the odium visited upon his party” (p. 8). This, too, was depicted in another popular political cartoon of the times.



Perhaps the best example of Southern hatred for the new party, however, occurs at another point in his book when Davis (1971) writes:

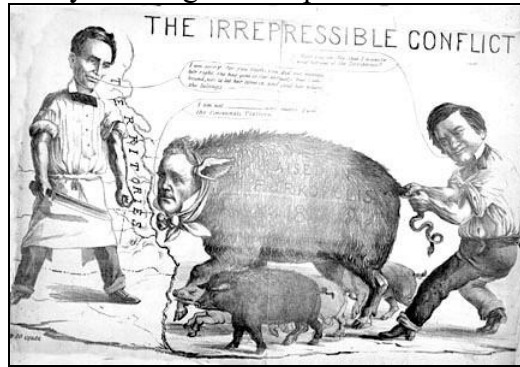
But the least common denominator of Republicanism was opposition to the expansion of slavery into the territories...This principle struck at the sanctity of the institution which most Southerners believed to define the correct relationship between white and black and to be the foundation of Southern prosperity and of civilization itself. The victory of a Black Republican—rarely in the South was the party called simply “Republican”—standing upon that principle meant the establishment in power of forces hostile to the equal treatment of property. (p. 9).

Davis went on to write that “The slavery debate, hitherto confined to intra-party and extra political spheres, finally had become an issue of party politics, to the alarm of the South. The Republican candidate by the very nature of the party banner that he carried, was damned in the South from the day of his nomination” (p. 9). This “damning” by Southerners would become a barrier too great for even the eloquence of Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address to overcome.

In addition to the image of his party, the “surfacing” of Lincoln to the American people was also influenced by the public utterances that were made by other fellow Republicans. Salmon Chase (see an in-depth online biography of Mr. Chase at <http://www.ustreas.gov/education/history/secretaries/spchase.shtml>) was a well-known abolitionist, as was the man many viewed as the “frontrunner” for the Republican nomination, William Seward. (See an in-depth online biography of Senator Seward at: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=S000261>) Both of these men were outspoken and their views became widely known in all parts of the country. Seward, in particular, delivered several speeches that created alarm in the South. Back on March 11, 1850 he had delivered an address on the floor of the U.S. Senate in which he argued that there is a “higher law” than even the constitution, that demands the regulation of slavery and clearly spells out our authority to limit it—that being the law of the Creator of the universe. Additional information on Seward’s “Higher Law” speech can be found at the following internet address: <http://facweb.furman.edu/~benson/docs/seward.htm> Goodwin (2005) wrote, “with this single speech, his first national address, Seward became the principal antislavery voice in the Senate” (p. 146). These antislavery rumblings reflected on his Republican Party and on Lincoln, a member of that party.

The second address by Seward that provoked anxiety among Southerners came in

1859 when he spoke of slavery as being an “irrepressible conflict”.



See background information as well as the text of this address at the following internet website: <http://www.nyhistory.com/central/conflict.htm> In this speech, Goodwin states, “Seward argued that the United States was divided by two ‘incompatible’ political and economic systems, which had developed divergent cultures, values and assumptions” (p. 191). “He went on to say”, she said that “It is an irrepressible conflict between opposing and enduring forces, and it means that the United States must and will, sooner or later, become either entirely a slaveholding nation, or entirely a free-labor nation” (p. 191). These words sounded eerily similar to Lincoln’s “house divided” address and they caused the same apprehension in the South. Garraty (1991) described how the public utterances of Lincoln, Seward, and other Republicans had created a stir of panic in the South. He wrote:

In early 1859 even many moderate Southerners were uneasy about the future. The radicals, made panicky by Republican victories and their own failure to win in Kansas, spoke openly of secession if a Republican was elected president in 1860. Lincoln's “house divided” speech was quoted out of context, while Douglas’s Freeport Doctrine added to Southern woes. When William H. Seward of New York spoke of an “irrepressible conflict” between freedom and slavery, Southerners became still more alarmed. (p. 405)

Goodwin (2005) too, wrote of the alarm Seward’s speech caused in the South. She stated; “To Southerners, however, Seward seemed to be threatening the forced extinction of slavery and the permanent subjugation of the South. Seward, the historian William Gienapp suggests ‘never comprehended full the power of his words’. He failed to anticipate the impact that such radical phrases as ‘higher law’ and ‘irrepressible conflict’ would have on the moderate image that he wished to project” (p. 192). At another point in her book, Goodwin (2005) wrote, “The realization that the ‘irrepressible conflict’ might prove more than rhetoric came too late. The divided house would indeed fall. These phrases, intended by Seward and Lincoln as historical prophecies, were perceived by many in the South as threats—imminent and meant to be answered” (p. 275). They were words that were still ringing in the ears of many Southerners in March 1861 when Lincoln was delivering his First Inaugural Address and was attempting to reassure those in the South of his own goodwill and that of his administration.

Nominating Convention

Although the second of Trent and Friedenbergs (2004) stages of presidential campaigns (the primary) did not exist at the time of the 1860 presidential election, the third stage (the nominating convention) certainly did, and was the next stage that Lincoln passed through in his route to the presidency. The Republican National Convention was held in Chicago in May 1860. The chief purposes of nominating conventions, according to Trent and Friedenbergs (2004) are legitimizing the party nominee, demonstrating party unity, and introducing the candidate's campaign issues. In various speeches that he made, Lincoln aimed to accomplish all of these things just prior to and at the May 1860 convention. Goodwin (2005) described in detail how Lincoln went about attempting to secure the long-shot Republican nomination:

Though a successful bid for the nomination remained unlikely, a viable candidacy was no longer an impossible dream. Slowly and methodically Lincoln set out to improve his long odds. He arranged to publish his debates with Douglas in a book that was read widely by Republicans. As more and more people became familiar with him through the newspaper stories of the debates, invitations to speak at Republican gatherings began to pour in. Not yet an avowed candidate, Lincoln delivered nearly two dozen speeches in Iowa, Ohio, Wisconsin, Indiana, and Kansas in the four months between August and December 1859. (p. 224)

In these speeches and in his attempt to become his party's nominee, Lincoln put forth rhetoric that, though it would help him achieve these immediate goals, would also function to prevent his peacemaking efforts in his inaugural address the following year. For example, he attempted to make the slavery issue his key campaign issue. Goodwin (2005) wrote that "The story of Lincoln's rise to power was inextricably linked to the increasing intensity of the antislavery cause" (p. 9). She went on to quote historian Don Fehrenbacher, who wrote that making slavery his key issue involved repeatedly reiterating his position that, "although he had no wish to interfere with slavery where it already existed, the future spread of it must be headed off" (p.224). This was something that many Southerners would not have been very happy to hear, and since his speeches drew much publicity and were widely reported by papers all over the country, including those in the South, many Southerners were once again exposed to ideas of Lincoln that they felt were threatening to their entire way of life. One of these was a speech that was particularly bothersome to Southerners because in it Lincoln directly addressed many Southerners (from Kentucky) who had crossed the river to listen to him. The speech referred to was a speech that he delivered in Cincinnati just prior to the convention in late 1859. Goodwin (2005) reported that Lincoln directed the following passage to the Southerners in his audience. Though meant to pacify a volatile situation, many scholars claim these words instead provoked anger and rage. She quotes Lincoln as telling them:

Will you make war upon us and kill us all? Why, gentlemen, I think that you are as gallant and as brave men as live; that you can fight as bravely in a good cause, man for man, as any other people living...but, man for man, you are not better than we are, and there are not so many of you as there are of us. You will never make much of a hand at whipping us. If we were fewer in numbers than you, I think that you could whip us; if we were equal it would likely be a drawn battle; but being

inferior in numbers, you will make nothing by attempting to master us. (p. 225)
 Like many of the other addresses that Lincoln was making at the time (he spoke that same week in Columbus, Dayton, Hamilton, and Indianapolis, as well), Lincoln's words drew the ire of those in the South and were met with increasing hostility. Davis (1971) wrote that "Southerners had been told that extreme measures would be taken by the South to protect itself in the event of Lincoln's election, and state legislatures resolved that the election of a Black Republican would justify secession" (p. 12). It is no wonder, then, that more words from the same man in the way of his inaugural address would fail to calm Southern fears barely over a year later.

Another speech that Lincoln gave just prior to the Republican National Convention that was seen as threatening to those in the South was his infamous Cooper Union Address. Detailed background information as well as the complete text of this address can be found at the following website:

<http://showcase.netins.net/web/creative/lincoln/speeches/cooper.htm> Delivered on February 27, 1860, Reid (1988) wrote, "Although ostensibly a lecture, Lincoln actually delivered a campaign address for the party's nomination to a predominantly Republican audience. The speech was so well received that it is generally credited with earning him the presidential nomination" (p. 430). Holzer (2004) made a similar assessment of the address. He said:

All in all, while Cooper Union did not produce significant new first-ballot support for the Lincoln candidacy at the forthcoming Republican convention, it won him enough prominence in the East to transform him into the favorite westerner in the race for the presidential nomination. It all but eclipsed the better-known Edward Bates of Missouri and Salmon P. Chase of Ohio, no small feat. Lincoln had arrived in New York as an ambitious pretender. He would return to Illinois as an intriguing second choice for the White House, deftly positioned to triumph at the convention if the front runner stumbled—which he did. (p. 236)

However, the effect of the Cooper Union Address might have been best described by Goodwin. She wrote:

The pinnacle of his success was reached at Cooper Union in New York, where on the evening of February 27, 1860, before a zealous crowd of more than fifteen hundred people, Lincoln delivered what the New York Tribune called "one of the happiest and most convincing political arguments ever made in this city" in defense of Republican principles and the need to confine slavery to the places where it already existed. (p. 9)

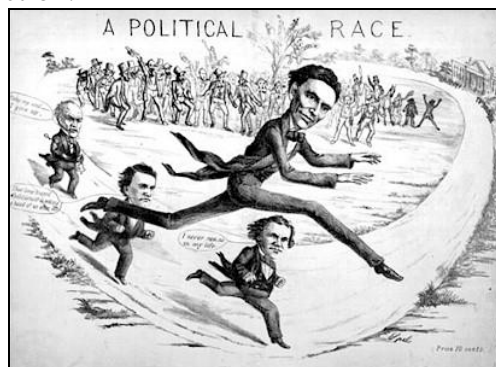
Many scholars, therefore, agree that Lincoln's Cooper Union Address was successful in gaining him the Republican nomination for president. However, this poses the question. What did Southerners hear in the speech? Was it something that would give them hope that their institution of slavery would be left alone where it now existed and that civil war could be avoided or did Southerners hear words that threatened the economic foundation of their society? Davis (1971) answered this when he wrote that "Most Southern

observers were alarmed at Lincoln's words and conduct, and the more-extreme Southerners found their worst fears confirmed" (p. 28). Goodwin (2005) stated that "At Cooper Union, as he had done in his celebrated Peoria speech six years earlier, Lincoln attempted to cut through the rancor of the embattled factions by speaking directly to the Southern people and assuring them that the Republicans desired only a return to the old policy of the fathers" (p. 231). "However", she added "though the approach was moderate, Lincoln spoke with such passion and certainty about the unifying principle of the Republican Party—never to allow slavery to spread into the National Territories and to overrun the Free States—that even the most radical Republicans in the audience were captivated" (p. 231). If radical anti-slavery Republicans were this delighted with the address, it is only reasonable to assume that Southerners were not exactly thrilled with it.

Another function of nominating conventions according to Trent and Friedenber (2004) is to demonstrate party unity, something Lincoln and his group of supporters also attempted to do just before and during the 1860 Republican National Convention. Goodwin (2005) wrote that "Lincoln managed to unite the disparate elements of his state's fledgling Republican Party—that curious amalgamation of former Whigs, antislavery Democrats, foreigners, radicals, and conservatives. The Republican Party had come together with the common goal of preventing the spread of slavery to the territories" (p. 8). Of course, this unification was good for the Republican Party and good for Lincoln's chances to gain the nomination, but emphasizing party unity by stressing their common desire to stop the spread of slavery did not do anything to win him friends in the South or to build trust with Southerners. Lincoln was, again, then, achieving his short-term goal of winning his party's nomination, while at the same time hurting his long-term image with persons in the Southern part of the country—something that would "come back to haunt him" at the time of his First Inaugural Address.

General Election

The last stage that Trent and Friedenber (2004) say presidential campaigns pass through is the general election.



Like the other ones they say this stage has certain goals that candidates strive to achieve and certain strategies that they often undertake to achieve them. For Lincoln the chief strategy chosen has been baffling to and questioned by historical scholars. It has also been cited as a main reason that so many of his earlier speeches were misinterpreted and/or taken out of context. This was the "strategy of silence". Garraty (1991) wrote "Lincoln avoided campaigning and made no public statements" (p. 408) and Potter

(1976) wrote that “for nearly a year, when his ways were least known and his attitude was of the greatest import, Lincoln remained silent. Not one campaign speech did he make; not one public letter did he write” (p. 135). Sandburg (1939) quoted Lincoln as saying the reason he chose this strategy was because “the honest men will look at our platform and what I have said. There they will find everything I could now say, or which they would ask me to say. All I could add would be but repetition. Having told them all these things ten times already, would they believe the eleventh declaration?” Goodwin (2005) too, explained Lincoln’s use of this strategy when she wrote “While Seward prepared for his grand tour, Lincoln remained in Springfield. In deference to political tradition and to his own judgment that further public statements could only damage his prospects, he decided against a personal speaking tour” (p. 264). She went on to say:

When his friend Leonard Swett asked his approval to mail a letter expressing the candidate’s sentiments. Lincoln replied, “Your letter, written to go to N.Y. is substantially right.” However, he advised, “Burn this, not that there is anything wrong in it; but because it is best not to be known that I write at all.” He recognized that anything he said would be scanned scrupulously for partisan purposes. The slightest departure from the printed record would be distorted by friends as well as enemies. Even his simple reiteration of a previous position might, in the midst of a campaign, give new emphasis. He preferred to point simply to the party platform that he had endorsed. (p. 266)

Ironically, Lincoln consciously maintained his silence because he thought that it would keep his positions clear in the minds of the people. However, Wright (1970) wrote that just the opposite took place. Lincoln’s refusal to speak out and set the record straight when his words were misinterpreted allowed others, especially Southern extremists, to twist his words to suit their own purposes. Wright said:

Lincoln’s role in the campaign of 1860 followed the tradition of passivity established by the major party candidates but interrupted for the first time by Douglas. Others did the work, with a hint here and there by Lincoln. With the nomination, the record of the nominee was closed. The voter had the party platforms, the printed speeches of the candidates made before the campaign opened, and what might be found in the public record of the candidate. In the case of Lincoln, the record was very brief and not very illuminating, having been closed in 1849, the last year he had held public office. This situation gave orators and editors a wide scope available for interpretation suitable to the locale. (p. 178)

Davis (1971) described some of the interpretations that were given of Lincoln’s previous statements and what Southerners took them to mean. At one point in his book he wrote “Lincoln’s alleged conservatism was a delusion; why would a Black Republican cease to act like a Black Republican after he has tasted power? And was not Lincoln the author of the 'house divided' doctrine, announced even before Seward’s irrepressible conflict, and was not Lincoln on record as saying that slavery must be put on the course of ultimate extinction?” (p. 11). At another place in the book he said:

For years the South had watched with apprehension the growing strength of a sectional party opposed to its institutions. Now the Republicans, having gained ascendancy in the North and standing at the threshold of national power, placed at their head a silent and unknown candidate. Many Southerners assumed Lincoln was a mere cipher, a figurehead for Seward or William Lloyd Garrison or other evil spirits identified with Black Republicanism—a conviction strengthened by Lincoln's ambiguous conduct after the election. (p. 38)

And, at still another place in the book Davis stated "Lincoln did little to counter his image as a straight-out Black Republican. Throughout the campaign and in the weeks before his inauguration, he refused to speak out on the issues of the day. Instead of campaigning, he remained quietly in Springfield and let others take the stump for him. He made no speeches and granted no interviews with the press" (p. 15). Historian David Potter (1976) explained further the result of Lincoln's silence during the campaign and the effects that it had on persons in the South. He wrote:

When Lincoln was elected, the result came to the South as a much greater shock than it would have if Republican speakers, or even Lincoln himself, had been ranging up and down and back and forth throughout the South, asking voters to trust him. The Republicans would have had nothing to gain from such a campaign, and southerners surely never would have permitted it, but the point is that the voters of the South were naturally prepared to believe the worst of a candidate when most of them had never seen even one of his supporters, much less the man himself. (p. 439)

Thus, though Lincoln's silence in the general election was a carefully devised strategy that might have contributed to his presidential victory, it might also have made his role of peacemaker, once elected, much more difficult. It also might have prevented his First Inaugural Address from having the calming, reassuring effect on the Southern part of the country that he hoped.

Conclusion

In the preceding paper it has been shown how Abraham Lincoln's discourse (like that of most presidential candidates) changed as he passed through the campaign stages that Trent and Friedenbergl (2004) say all presidential campaigns pass through. His public utterances on the great issue of slavery evolved as he went through the surfacing, nominating convention, and general election stages. It has also been shown that although, this refining and honing of his views often helped him in the stage of the campaign that he found himself to be in at the time, it also limited the rhetorical effectiveness of his First Inaugural Address had once he assumed office. This, in turn, sheds light on why even though the First Inaugural Address has received great praise from critics, it did very little to prevent the civil war from taking place.

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