

Lincoln's Emergence on the National Scene

October 4, 1854 – In Peoria Lincoln, speaking about the Kansas-Nebraska Act, makes what is now regarded as his first great speech, containing many of the themes that he will use in speeches for the rest of his life; among other things: “Thus, the thing [slavery] is hid away, in the constitution, just as an afflicted man hides away a wen or a cancer, which he dares not cut out at once, lest he bleeds to death; with the promise, nevertheless, that the cutting may begin at the end of a given time ... They hedged and hemmed it in to the narrowest limits of necessity.” Lincoln also refers to the Declaration of Independence as the nation’s “lodestar,” and expresses his determination to defend America’s Founding document from those who deny that the Declaration of Independence applies to black Americans.

1855 – With Mary Lincoln’s urging, Lincoln begins a campaign to be appointed by a new anti-slave majority in the Illinois legislature to the U.S. Senate; even though he leads the first ballot, Lincoln, realizing he could not secure a majority of votes, throws his support behind Lyman Trumbull, an anti-slavery former Democrat, to prevent the election of the pro-slavery Democratic governor.

Lincoln concludes his political career is over and is determined to resume focus upon his legal career. In the so-call “Reaper Case,” a patent infringement case involving a “dream team” of attorneys, the head of Lincoln’s team, Edwin Stanton, refers to Lincoln as a “damned long armed ape” and makes clear that he thinks Lincoln should withdraw from the case.

March, 1856 – Lincoln attends an Anti-Nebraska convention in Decatur, approximately five miles east of Springfield.

Wednesday, May 21, 1856 – The town of Lawrence, KS, is partially destroyed by a pro-slavery mob.

Thursday, May 29, 1856 – In Bloomington, Illinois, Lincoln gives the main speech at the convention of the “Anti-Nebraska party of Illinois.” The speech was a powerful indictment of slavery, the violence over Kansas, and the national Democratic Party’s role in producing the troubles. The speech becomes known as the “Lost Speech” because reporters were so carried by Lincoln’s impassioned rhetoric that they forgot to take notes. Some of those in attendance remember will remember it as Lincoln’s greatest speech prior to the Civil War. According to some, Lincoln uses the epigram “You can fool all the people some of the time, you can fool some of the time, but you can’t fool all the people all the time.”

June 19, 1856 – The National Anti-Nebraska convention nominates Fremont. Lincoln receives some limited attention as a possible vice-presidential candidate but obviously is not nominated

Fall of 1856 -- Most anti-slavery elements, including Whigs as well as the Anti-Nebraska Party, have coalesced into the new Republican Party, with Lincoln becoming one of its leaders. Although Lincoln originally supported another candidate for the Republican nomination, he vigorously campaigns for Fremont, delivering more than 50 speeches upon Fremont’s behalf. Buchanan is elected as President.

1857 – The *Dred Scot* decision is announced. Lincoln, in particular, starts becoming more vocal in his criticism of the Court and of those supporting the expansion of slavery into the territories. One of Lincoln’s specific, and available, targets is Stephen Douglas, the “Little Giant,” Senator from Illinois who espouses the notion of popular sovereignty as a means of deciding whether territories should allow slavery.

To Republicans, and especially Lincoln, slavery is such a moral wrong that its expansion into the territories simply cannot be condoned, or otherwise legitimatised, by popular sovereignty; in addition to moral authority, Lincoln bases much of his arguments against slavery upon the Declaration of Independence, especially that part that read “All Men Are Created Equal.” (Lincoln also consistently recognizes that the Constitution gave slaveholding states the right to continue that practice.) Throughout the remainder of 1857 Lincoln appears at Douglas’ functions to challenge Douglas. Almost always Douglas refuses to response to Lincoln’s taunts whereupon Lincoln announces he will be appearing the next day at the same location to make his own views known.

1858 -- Reaction to Lincoln’s speeches is so positive, and his own ambition is so great, that he decides to challenge Douglas for election to the U.S. Senate. Having no serious opposition for the Republican nomination, he delivers his acceptance speech known as “House Divided,” destined to become one of the most famous orations in American history. However, at the time, and for a couple years thereafter, Lincoln’s political adversaries and rivals, and even some of his allies, interpret it as Lincoln’s determination to compel the continuation of the Union by force if necessary.

Lincoln also introduces his assertion that there has been a conspiracy among Douglas, Pierce, Buchanan, and Taney to nationalize slavery, including throughout the territories. Honest Abe continues making this assertion throughout the ensuing campaign even in the absence of any known evidence, or even realistic basis, of such a conspiracy.

August 21, 1858 – The first of the famous Douglas-Lincoln debates, a series of seven events highly orchestrated by the respective campaign committees. Each debate lasts three hours with ample opportunity for give and take between the campaigners. By his own admission, Lincoln does not fare especially well in the first debate, not being adequately prepared for Douglas’ aggressive barrage of cross-examination type questions.

August 27, 1858 -- Lincoln is much better prepared in the second debate, held in Freeport in staunch Republican region near the Wisconsin border. This time Lincoln posits several questions to Douglas; the second of these questions cleverly include a “poison pen” designed to force Douglas either to wrap his hands whole heartedly around the *Dred Scott* decision or to continue to promote his popular sovereignty doctrine, two inconsistent, if not contradictory, approaches. One contemporary historian, Allen Guelzo, claims Lincoln uses the “poison pen” question to assure that Douglas could never be accepted as a future Republican for president. Lincoln also relentlessly keeps accusing Douglas of being part of the “conspiracy” along with Pierce, Buchanan, and Taney to nationalize slavery, an assertion that Douglas never is able to defuse, at least to the satisfaction of Lincoln’s supporters.

September 18, 1858 – During the 4th debate, held in Charleston, Douglas is able to goad Lincoln into making the following statement: “I am not, or have ever been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races ... of making voters or jurors of Negroes, not of qualifying them to hold office, not to intermarry with white people. There is a physical difference between the white and black races which I believe will forever forbid the two races living together on terms of social and political equality.”

October 25, 1858 – In Rochester, NY, William Seward makes his “irrepressible conflict” speech that propels him into the forefront of the potential Republican nominees for president.

November 1858 -- Lincoln’s Republican Party wins the Illinois popular vote of 1858 but because of earlier gerrymandering, even before there was a Republican Party, Douglas wins more legislative seats, thus assuring his reelection to the Senate. Lincoln lost in large part because he failed to gain enough votes from independent Whigs in the central part of the state. However, the 1858 debates, including the extensive and intensive arguments about the *Dred Scott* case, have ramifications well beyond the Senatorial race. Republicans continue to be galvanized, contending that a slaveholding minority is exercising disproportionate control of the nation’s destiny, with Lincoln beginning to receive recognition as one of the leading anti-slavery spokesmen.

February 11, 1859 – Lecturing on the importance of the invention of the printing press, Lincoln discusses several Enlightenment values such as the “habit of freedom of thought.”

February 27, 1860 – Lincoln makes his Cooper Union speech in New York City. That afternoon before speaking, Lincoln has a portrait taken by Mathew Brady resulting in the first arresting image many would see of Lincoln. In his speech, which he had labored to craft for weeks, Lincoln takes the approach of never allowing slavery to spread into the territories; he begins by rebuffing a recent article written by Douglas in Harper’s Magazine. Although this approach was moderate, Lincoln spoke with such certainty and passion that even the most radical Republicans are captivated.

Lincoln’s Cooper Union speech is so well received that he was in demand to extend an exhausting nine-speech tour across New England before returning to Springfield.

April 1860 -- Democrats, until then the national majority party, have their convention in Charleston. The party becomes split as: 1) delegates cannot come to any agreement on a platform plank that would guarantee the right of any citizen to take his slave property into the territories. This causes some of the Southern faction to leave the convention. 2) Largely because of Douglas’ refusal to support the Lecompton constitution for Kansas and because of his response to the Freeport question, the convention refuses to support his nomination as its Presidential candidate. Unable to agree upon anything else, the convention agrees to adjourn for six weeks before meeting again in Baltimore.

May 16, 1860 – The Republican National Convention opens in Chicago. Results of 1st round of balloting (needing a two thirds majority or 233 votes for nomination):

Seward, William of New York 173 ½

Lincoln, Abraham of Illinois 102

Chase, Salmon of Ohio	49
Bates, Edward of Missouri	48

Lincoln's strategy is to be everyone else's second choice. After Lincoln garners 231 ½ votes on 3rd ballot, Ohio switches four votes from its governor, Chase, to Lincoln giving him the nomination. Ohio's switch would embitter Chase for years.

The Republicans select Hannibal Hamlin of Maine as it vice presidential candidate. Hamlin had been a Democratic office holder, most recently as U.S. Senator, until 1856 when he switched to the Republican Party. Hamlin and Lincoln had previously only met once, a meeting that Hamlin says he cannot remember.

Late May 1860 – The reconvened Democratic convention accomplishes little. The Southern faction walks out and quickly forms its own convention. As a result, there are two Democratic candidates for President, Douglas for the Northern faction and John Breckenridge (Buchanan's vice-president) for the Southern faction, thereby for all intents and purposes preordaining Lincoln's Electoral College election.

After being nominated, and for fear that anything he said might be used against him, Lincoln does not make any speeches or any other public utterances. He does have a steady stream of private meetings, and closely monitors political activities in the Northern tier of states. He is his own Karl Rove, making strategy and assuring his surrogates and other friends to keep a moderate line on slavery, the only issue seriously at play during the campaign. Lincoln does have a campaign committee that prepares a pamphlet creating much of the lure of Lincoln being a back woodsman who split rails almost up to the time of accidentally being nominated by the Republicans, mythology that unfortunately has found its way into too many history and text books. In fact, Lincoln had been a political activist ever since his early adulthood, and for more than twenty years had a highly respected law practice in the state's capital. He is even amused by the rail splitting image of his campaign.

Lincoln is Elected

November 1860 – As a result of the Democratic Party split, Lincoln is elected even though he garners less than 40% of the popular vote. For the first time in its history the United States has a president of a party that declares: “... the normal condition of all territory of the United States is that of freedom.”

All the previous 15 presidents except the two Adamses had been to some extent politically beholden to the slave states of the South.

During 49 of the 72 years from 1789 to 1861, the presidents had been Southerners – all of them slaveholders. The only reelected presidents were slaveholders. Both Adamses reasonably believed they would have been reelected had it not been for the three-fifths clause awarded to slave states. Two-thirds of the House speakers, chairmen of the House Ways and Means Committees, and presidents pro tem of the Senate were Southerners. At all times before 1861, a majority of the Supreme Court justices were Southerners.

In 1848, slaveholding states had only 30% of the voters but enjoyed 48% of the Electoral College. When Lincoln was elected all 12 of the Committee Chairmen in the Senate were Southerners.

December 1860 – In reaction to Lincoln’s election, seven slaveholding states along the southern portion of the south, led by fire-eaters among slave owning South Carolina aristocrats, ostensibly because they feared Lincoln would attempt to abolish slavery throughout all the states, begin to secede from the Union.

Various proposals are made to find a compromise; one of the leading proposals, under the auspices of John J Crittenden, Senator from Kentucky, essentially would restore the Missouri Compromise of 1820 to extend the free territory/slave territory line across the continent. (Note: the *Dred Scott* decision had previously declared among other things that Congress had no authority to ban slavery from the territories.) The parties adopt none of these proposals.

Lincoln, still in Springfield, tries to avoid making any commitments on the situation except to state that: “Let there be no compromise on the position of extending slavery.”

Tuesday, January 29 1861– Kansas, with a constitution prohibiting slavery, is finally admitted as the 34th state. (The status of Kansas has long been a bitter source of controversy between the slave states and free states.)

Friday, February 1, 1861 – Texas becomes the 7th state to secede.

Friday, February 8, 1861 –The seven Confederate states provisionally adopt a constitution that is very similar to the United States Constitution except that it expressly preserves slavery as a property right.

Monday, February 11, 1861 –Lincoln departs Springfield. E. Elmer Ellsworth, famous for organizing the Chicago Zouaves and staging spectacular drill exhibitions throughout the country, accompanies Lincoln.

Wednesday, February 13, 1861 – A convention convenes in Virginia to decide whether that state should secede. One of the more outspoken anti-secession delegates is Jubal Early, later to become one of Lee’s lieutenants and an originator of the myth of the Lost Cause.

Thursday, February 14, 1861 – On the day the Electoral College is to meet to count electoral votes, Winfield Scott calls out the troops to suppress any disruption.

Friday, February 15, 1861 – In Pittsburgh, Lincoln makes a cryptic remark that: "... there is really no crisis except an artificial one."

Friday, February 22, 1861 – In Philadelphia, Lincoln says, "I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence. ..."

Saturday, February 23, 1861 – Lincoln arrives at 6:00 am in the capital after an embarrassing but perhaps necessary secret trip from Philadelphia through strife-torn Baltimore under dark of night, and immediately begins to receive various delegations, including those from Crittenden's Peace Conference.

February 27, 1861 – While meeting with Unionists from the upper South states, Lincoln makes an off-the-cuff suggestion that he would abandon Fort Sumter in exchange for Virginia staying in the union. Nothing comes of this "offer".

Friday, March 2, 1861 – Crittenden's attempt to amend the Constitution, the culmination of the Peace conference, fails to pass in the Senate.

Sunday, March 3, 1861 – Winfield Scott advises Secretary of State-designate Seward that relief of Fort Sumter is not practical.

Monday, March 4, 1861 -- Lincoln is inaugurated. Edward Baker, Republican Senator from Oregon, who had befriended Lincoln when they served in the Illinois legislature, accompanies Lincoln.

In his inaugural address, Lincoln tries to have it both ways: on one hand, he disavows the use of force against the seven seceded states while on the other hand denying them the right to leave the Union. Different listeners and readers of newspapers are left with different, even conflicting, interpretations. Furthermore, there are reports that several others had made contributions to the final draft, giving rise to the impression that Lincoln is not the dominant force in his own administration. Lincoln does say in his inaugural address:

One section of our country believes slavery is right and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is wrong, and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute.

At the time of Lincoln's inauguration, Fort Sumter and Fort Pickens, in Florida, are the only major military installations still under Federal control and within the borders of the seven seceding states.

Lincoln's original cabinet:

Secretary of State – William H. Seward – Born 1801. After graduating from Union College, he studied law and entered Whig politics serving as Governor of NY 1839-42. He later served in the Senate, where he was known as a sly operator but where he vigorously opposed slavery, and joined Republican Party in 1856. While both served in the Senate, he had been Jefferson Davis' best friend. During

the period between Lincoln's election and inauguration Seward tried to maneuver several compromises. Twice passed over for president (1856 & 1860).

Secretary of Treasury – Salmon P. Chase – Born 1808. After graduating from Dartmouth, he practiced law in Ohio and became a leader in the Leader (later Free-Soil) Party. Elected to the Senate in 1849, he was chosen Governor of Ohio, representing the new Republican Party, in 1855 and served for two terms. He had an extreme anti-slavery viewpoint that prevented his getting the presidential nomination in 1860. Chase is Seward's bitter rival.

Secretary of War – Simon Cameron – Born 1799. A lawyer, he entered politics, served in the Senate, and joined the new Republican Party, where he became a rival of Thaddeus Stevens. While in the Senate in 1857 Cameron built up Pennsylvania party machine. With a history of bribing himself into office, one opponent had called him “the very incarnation of corruption.” In 1860 Lincoln received Cameron's powerful support only after Lincoln's managers had promised Cameron a cabinet post, and Lincoln, reluctantly recognized the bargain made without his knowledge.

Secretary of Navy – Gideon Wells – Born 1802. A newspaper editor and former Democrat from Connecticut, he held various political offices and was one of the founders of Connecticut's Republican party. Although untrained in naval matters, had held civilian positions in the Navy Dept before joining the Republican Party in 1855.

Attorney General – Edward Bates – Born 1793. A lawyer in Missouri, he held numerous minor political offices and sat in the state legislature and US Congress. He was a leader in the Whig Party before joining the Republicans.

Postmaster General – Montgomery Blair – Born 1813. Graduated from USMA, '35, and resigned the year after serving in the Seminole War. He studied law at Transylvania University before settling in Missouri where he entered Democratic politics. He moved to Silver Spring, Maryland to be near his father, Francis P. Blair, and continued to practice law, being Scot's counsel in Dred Scot case. His free-soil ties made him change to the Republican Party.

Secretary of Interior – Caleb Smith – Born 1808 -- The last Cabinet appointment, and is considered as payment of “a debt to Indiana for early support” of Lincoln. Had attended Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. An old Whig colleague from Indiana politics who had seconded Lincoln's nomination in 1860. He is opposed to making concessions to the South.

Tuesday, March 5, 1861 – Lincoln meets with Joseph Holt, Buchanan's holdover Secretary of War, having replaced the perfidious John B. Floyd. Holt introduces a packet of documents from Anderson describing the dire and desperate circumstances in Fort Sumter. Among other things, Anderson says they need at least 20,000 reinforcements but the whole U.S. Army numbers fewer than that. This catches Lincoln totally by surprise.

Wednesday, March 6, 1861 – The first meeting of Lincoln’s new cabinet. Fort Sumter is not mentioned.

Saturday, March 9, 1861 – Senator John Sherman of Ohio brings his brother, William T. Sherman, to the White House to meet Lincoln. While leaving “Cump” tells his brother “You have things in a hell of a fix.”

Lincoln’s cabinet meets again. This time the situation at Fort Sumter is discussed; the cabinet is astonished to learn that General Scott advocates retreat, a position that Lincoln is reluctant to agree with.

Wednesday, March 13, 1861 – Lincoln is introduced to Gustavus Vasa Fox, a former naval officer, who has a plan for Fort Sumter. Fox’s plan calls for transporting men and supplies to the waters around Fort Sumter in large, seagoing vessels and then running them to the fort in shallow-draft tugboats.

Friday, March 15, 1861 – Lincoln asks each of his cabinet members that assuming it was possible to reprovision Fort Sumter “under the circumstances, is it wise to attempt it?” In response all but one cabinet member, Postmaster-General Blair, oppose any attempt to reprovision the fort as any effort is likely to lead to war.

Friday, March 22, 1861 – Lincoln dispatches Stephen Hurlbut, a personal friend, accompanied by one of Lincoln’s bodyguards, to Charleston to assess the situation. A few days later Hurlbut returns to Washington to advise Lincoln that Unionist sentiment was completely gone in Charleston, that the seceded states east of the Mississippi River were “irrevocably gone” from the Union, and that any effort to even send provisions to Fort Sumter would meet resistance.

Thursday, March 28, 1861 – Lincoln hosts his first state dinner. A British correspondent sates with admiration how Lincoln “raises a laugh by some bold west-country anecdote, and moves of the cloud of merriment produced by his joke.” Afterwards Lincoln keeps his cabinet members for an impromptu meeting to discuss briefly Fort Sumter.

Friday, March 29, 1861 – Lincoln – at last beginning to function actively as Commander-in-Chief -- finally announces his Fort Sumter plan, which is to send a force to resupply and support the troops already there. Lincoln’s preference is that the effort should be in readiness “as early as the 6th of April.” Lincoln’s plan is not unanimously supported by the cabinet with Secretary of War Cameron remaining silent.

Sunday, March 31, 1861 – Lincoln also orders a force to relieve the military at Fort Pickens in the Pensacola Bay.

Monday, April 1, 1861 – Scott advises that “... Fort Washington could be taken now with a bottle of whiskey.”

Lincoln and Seward confer on a number of issues during which Lincoln tactfully, yet firmly, establishes that he, and not Seward, will make policy decisions.

Thursday, April 4, 1861 – Secession proponents in the Virginia convention submit a straightforward proposal to secede but lose 45-90.

Saturday, April 6, 1861 – Scott appoints Charles F. Stone, USMA '40, an old soldier of indisputable loyalty, to command all the troops in Washington.

Thursday, April 11, 1861 – Beauregard sends a boat to Fort Sumter with a demand for surrender. Anderson, the Fort Sumter commander, had taught the use of artillery to Beauregard at West Point.

Friday, April 12, 1861 – Charles Sumner introduces Lincoln to the idea of using the president's war powers as a means to free slaves.

Saturday, April 13, 1861 – After 40,000 shells had been fired back and forth – resulting in no casualties on either side – Anderson, with no food remaining and being seriously outmanned and outgunned, concludes the further conflict is purposeless and surrenders at 1430 hours.

Sunday, April 14, 1861 – After learning of Anderson's surrender, Lincoln meets with his cabinet, and decides (1) to call for 75,000 volunteers, and (2) to reconvene Congress on July 4. After meeting with Lincoln for more than two hours, Stephen Douglas pledges his support for Lincoln and says "If I were President, I'd convert [Washingtonians with Confederate sympathies] or hang them all within forty-eight hours."