

ABRAHAM LINCOLN – The Middle Years (part 3)

In December of 1839, Abe met Mary Todd, a “handsome” woman from a wealthy, slave-owning family from Lexington, Kentucky. Abe had been involved in two romances prior to Mary; one with Ann Rutledge, who died of typhoid, and another with Mary Owens, which ended abruptly. By 1840, however, Abe and Mary Todd became engaged. Unfortunately, their mutual affections failed to last and by 1841, the engagement was broken, plunging Abe into a deep depression that rendered him unable to attend to his business or his job. Mired in sadness, Lincoln went back to his boyhood home in Kentucky with his friend Joshua Speed, where he apparently recovered sufficiently to return to his life in Springfield. To this day, there is no historical record of why the pair decided to call off their engagement. In 1842, however, Abe and Mary had re-established relations and were married on November 4 of that year. Abe and Mary would have four children, two of which died in childhood. In 1844, Abe and Mary Todd bought their first house on the corner of Eighth and Jackson Streets in Springfield.

Abe as Congressman

Following his marriage, Abe’s interest in politics continued to influence the course he would take in life. Despite entering a law partnership with Judge Stephen Logan, Abe made several unsuccessful attempts to gain the Whig nomination for congressman in the 30th District of Illinois. In 1846, however, Abe was finally nominated and elected in August of that year. Abe served one two-year term in Washington and was the only Whig representative in the Democrat-dominated Illinois delegation. During his time as congressman, Abe spoke out against the Mexican-American War, attributing its cause to president James K. Polk’s desire for “military glory—that attractive rainbow that rises in showers of blood.” Lincoln believed the United States was waging an unprovoked war for the purposes of expanding its boundaries. This stance made him particularly unpopular, and Lincoln lost much of the political support he once enjoyed, and hence, was not reelected to Congress.

Back to Law

After this stint as congressman, Lincoln returned to Springfield with a new vigor to practice law. He “rode the circuit” twice every year for ten weeks, practicing law in county seats throughout the state of Illinois. Many of his cases involved disputes which involved the operations of barges, drawbridges, and railroads. He would argue cases in front of the Illinois Supreme Court some 175 times, and even argued a case in front of the United States Supreme Court. Of the 51 cases in which he was the only lawyer for a particular client, 31 of the cases were decided in his favor. Abe, who called himself “the prairie lawyer,” took other kinds of cases as well, including those involving murder. In 1858, he successfully defended “Duff” Armstrong against charges of

homicide. One of the witnesses testified to seeing the murder committed in the moonlight. Abe proceeded to consult his copy of the Farmer's Almanac, which showed the moon at the time was at a low angle, reducing visibility and making it highly unlikely anyone could witness a crime using moonlight alone. Armstrong was acquitted. At this point, Abe was one of the foremost lawyers in the state of Illinois. Abe, however believed he lacked the logic, reasoning, and mathematical skills needed to be an elite lawyer and dedicated himself to intensive late-night readings until he felt he had improved himself with respect to those subjects. As the issue of slavery continued to strain relations between the North and the South and with the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854, which opened up the new territories to the possibility of slavery, Abe returned to politics.

Abe Speaks out Against Slavery

On October 16, 1854, Abe issued his famous "Peoria Speech" in which he condemned the institution of slavery, declaring,

"I hate [slavery] because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world..."

Later that year, Abe decided to run for the Illinois Senate seat as a Whig. The Whigs, at the time, were crumbling from the inside out. Differing opinions within the party concerning the Kansas-Nebraska Act threatened to tear the party in two, or to obliterate it all together. Consequently, Lincoln lost the nomination but became instrumental in the formation of a new party—the Republican Party. The Republican Party quickly gained influence and became a national political powerhouse by the time Lincoln would be elected president.

In 1857, Chief Justice of the United States Supreme Court Roger Taney ruled that blacks had no rights in America as citizens in the famous Dred Scott s. Sandford decision. The decision was a major blow to the abolitionists in the North and further polarized relations between the two parts of the country. Although Lincoln spoke out against the decision, he affirmed the Court's right to issue such a decision. That same year, after his nomination by the Illinois Republican Party for the Senate, Abe delivered the immortal words,

"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 it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other."

1.) Which of the following best describes Mary Todd Lincoln?

- a.) She came from a poor family that believed in slavery.
- b.) She came from a rich family that believed in slavery.
- c.) She came from a rich family that did not believe in slavery.
- d.) She came from a poor family that did not believe in slavery.

2.) What happened first?

- a.) Abe and Mary bought their first house.
- b.) Abe first became engaged to Mary Todd.
- c.) 1841
- d.) Abe went back to Kentucky with Joshua Speed.

3.) Why did Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd call off their first engagement?

- a.) Mary had second thoughts.
- b.) Abe wasn't sure if he wanted to get married.
- c.) Abe was broke.
- d.) No one knows.

4.) How many children did Abe and Mary Todd have?

- a.) 1
- b.) 2
- c.) 3
- d.) 4

5.) Why did Abraham Lincoln lose political support as congressman?

- a.) He was more interested in his law practice.
- b.) He spoke out against the Mexican-American War.
- c.) He spoke out against slavery.
- d.) He supported President James K. Polk.

6.) How would you describe the success of Abraham Lincoln in arguing cases in front of the Illinois Supreme Court?

- a.) Somewhat successful
- b.) Always successful
- c.) Somewhat unsuccessful
- d.) Not very successful

7.) Why did Abraham Lincoln call himself the "prairie lawyer"?

- a.) He wanted to save the prairies from development.
- b.) He, himself, was from an area of the country that had a lot of prairies.
- c.) He specialized in prairie law.
- d.) No one really knows.

8.) Why did Abraham Lincoln stay up late at night studying mathematics and logic?

- a.) He thought he needed to practice those skills to become a better lawyer.
- b.) It was a hobby of his.
- c.) He wanted to be an astronomer.
- d.) He needed to master those subjects for an important trial.

9.) Why did Abraham Lincoln return to politics?

- a.) He wanted to become president.
- b.) He was sick of practicing law.
- c.) The issue of slavery was threatening the relationship between the North and South.
- d.) He had mastered mathematics and logic.

10.) In the following sentence, what does "instrumental" mean?

Lincoln lost the nomination but became **instrumental** in the formation of a new party—the Republican Party.

- a.) having to do with an instrument
- b.) slide
- c.) helped make happen
- d.) musical