

ABRAHAM LINCOLN – The Middle Years (Part 2)

Illinois Legislature

Abe became an influential force of the Whig Party in the Illinois legislature and was reelected in 1836, 1838, and 1840. During this time, the issue of slavery became more and more contentious in Illinois and many other states. In 1837, Lincoln first spoke publicly to the legislature concerning his views on slavery when it passed a set of resolutions against abolitionist (anti-slavery) groups. Although Illinois was a free state at the time, it had many people who supported slavery, especially in its southern portions. In addressing the legislature, Abe opposed the resolutions and asserted that he believed slavery was an evil institution. Despite his feelings against slavery, Lincoln admitted he did not think the time was right to free all of the slaves.

Abe Earns his Law License

In 1836, Lincoln endeavored to study law. Not surprisingly, by the end of 1836, he was admitted to the Illinois state bar and obtained his license to practice. The next year he moved to Springfield, where he was already popular with the city's residents for his efforts to get the state capital moved there from Vandalia. Despite the fact he had become a lawyer, Abe was still in debt, had no money, and had no place to live. Sometime shortly after arriving in Springfield, Abe took up residence in the upstairs room above a store owned by Joshua Speed. Abe could not afford to pay the price for his own room, so Joshua offered to share his room. Abe, who was carrying all of his possessions in two saddlebags when he inquired about the price for a room, remarked, "Well, Speed, I am moved!" after setting his saddlebags on the floor of the room. Abe and Joshua quickly became inseparable and forged a lifelong friendship.

Joshua Speed

Abe soon became a respected lawyer known for his honesty, wit, oratory, and hard work. In the 1830s, lawyers and lawmakers were expected to travel to circuit courts throughout the state, oftentimes covering great distances. Abe was assigned to what was called the Eighth Judicial Circuit. As a politician and lawyer, Abe would travel to such courts to explain to the people the meanings of the laws created in the legislatures that were being applied to the local cases. Abe endeared himself to the people with the anecdotes and stories he used to explain the difficult concepts to people in terms they could understand. Oftentimes, such educational "sessions" were held in the village tavern or meetinghouse, would include meals, and would last well into the night. It was at these "sessions" where Abe's legend was born and grew; where his stories, speeches, and explanations became legendary. Though poor, Abe was beginning to make a name for himself beyond the confines of New Salem or even Springfield.

1.) Which of the following would be an accurate summary of Abraham Lincoln's views toward slavery?

- a.) He thought the Southern economy needed it.
- b.) He thought all slaves should be freed immediately.
- c.) He thought it was evil, but that the time was wrong to free all of the slaves.
- d.) He thought it served a purpose.

2.) Which of the following was true about Illinois?

- a.) Many people in southern Illinois supported slavery.
- b.) It was considered an eastern state at the time.
- c.) Slavery was legal in Illinois.
- d.) Many people in northern Illinois supported slavery.

3.) Why was Abe popular in Springfield before he moved there?

- a.) He knew Joshua Speed.
- b.) As a legislator, he fought to get the state capital moved there.
- c.) He was an outstanding lawyer.
- d.) He lived in the largest house in town.

4.) Which of the following was NOT true about Abe when he moved to Springfield?

- a.) He took all of his possessions in two bags.
- b.) He was in a lot of debt.
- c.) He bought a small house.
- d.) He had no place to live.

5.) Why did Abe have to travel great distances to practice law?

- a.) Because he practiced in the circuit courts
- b.) He was in a lot of debt.
- c.) Because the people of Springfield did not trust he was a good lawyer
- d.) Because he was against slavery

6.) Which of the following words probably DOES NOT describe Abraham Lincoln?

- a.) witty
- b.) funny
- c.) ferocious
- d.) humble

7.) What happened first?

- a.) Abe moved in with Joshua Speed.
- b.) Abe traveled the circuit courts.
- c.) Abe obtained his law license.
- d.) Abe moved to Springfield.

8.) In the sentence, "Abe endeared himself to the people with the anecdotes and stories he used to explain the difficult concepts to people in terms they could understand."

What does "endeared" mean?

- a.) begged
- b.) obtained goods
- c.) made people like him
- d.) made people feel sorry for him

9.) Where was the "legend" of Abraham Lincoln born?

- a.) In Springfield
- b.) In the courtroom
- c.) In Chicago
- d.) In village taverns and meetinghouses

10.) Why did Abraham Lincoln use stories when discussing the law?

- a.) They helped people relate to what he was saying.
- b.) They helped the people begin to make laws.
- c.) He wasn't a particularly serious man.
- d.) They helped him relax in front of big crowds.

