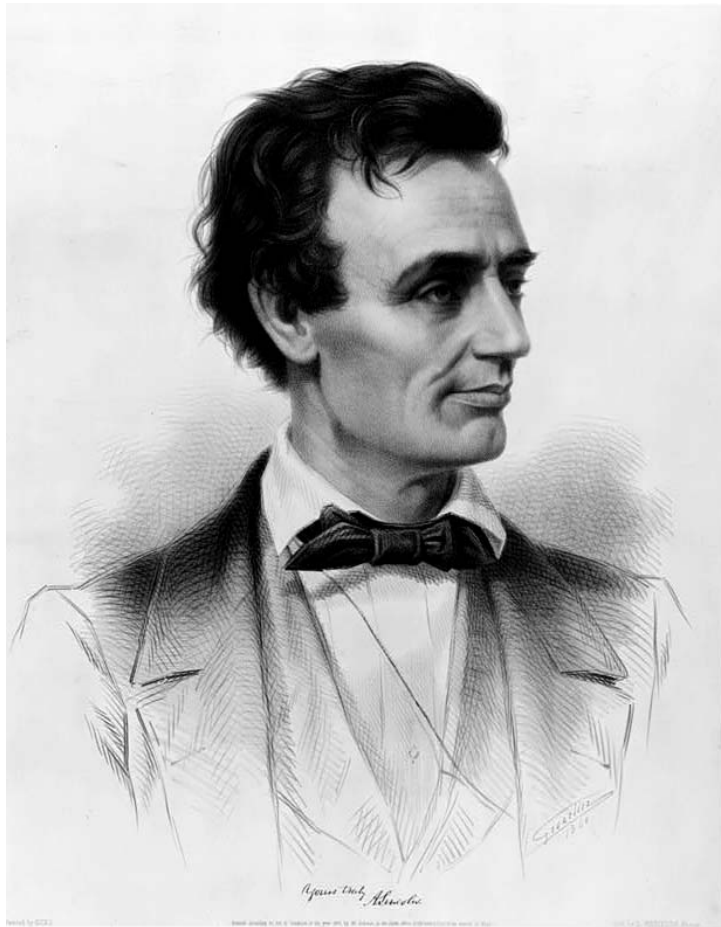


Lincoln As A Model of Humility

by Keith Ross

In Doris Kearns Goodwin's book, *Team of Rivals*, which depicts the governing team that Abraham Lincoln forged with many of his previous political rivals, she shares two incidents from 1855 that reveal the exemplary character of the 16th President. By humbling himself and his ambitions, Lincoln modeled a generosity of spirit rarely seen in public life.



In the first event, Goodwin reports that in February of 1855, after several weeks delay due to severe snow storms, the Illinois Senate was seated to elect the next Senator. After the first ballot, Lincoln led with 45 votes (a majority of 51 was needed), James Shields received 41, and Congressman Lyman Trumbull held 5 votes. Trumbull was aligned with the antislavery party and expected he would eventually have to yield his votes to Lincoln. After nine ballots, Lincoln held a high of 47 votes, but the five voters for Trumbull, led by Norman Judd of Chicago, refused to yield and give Lincoln the victory.

At this point Lincoln realized that the only way for the antislavery coalition to win was to yield his votes to Trumbull and allow Trumbull to be the next Senator from Illinois. According to Goodwin, Lincoln "advised his floor manager, Stephen Logan, to drop him for

Trumbull. Logan refused at first, protesting the injustice of the candidate with the much larger vote giving in to the candidate with the smaller vote." Lincoln was adamant and said, "You will lose both Trumbull and myself and I think the cause in this case is to be preferred to men."

Trumbull became the next Senator from Illinois and Lincoln "expressed no hard feelings toward either Trumbull or Judd. He deliberately showed up at Trumbull's victory party, with a smile on his face and a warm handshake for the victor." As a young man attempting to forge his career, to step back without resentment and allow a colleague with 5 votes to prevail when he was holding a near decisive total displays a unique ability to put a higher good ahead of personal desires. The point of the vignette is not the outcome, but Lincoln's bold decision. Yet Goodwin reports a happy ending in that "Neither Trumbull nor Judd would ever forget Lincoln's generous behavior. Indeed, both men would assist him in

his bid for the U.S. Senate in 1858, and Judd would play a critical role in his run for the presidency in 1860.”

The other incident Goodwin chronicles was also in 1855 when Lincoln was retained to be co-counsel in a patent case McCormick vs. Manny. The attorney for Manny, George Harding, expected the case to be tried in Chicago and thought it would be advantageous to have local Illinois representation and was recommended to Lincoln. Lincoln was very pleased to work on a high profile case and worked diligently to prepare. At the last minute, the case was moved to Cincinnati, Ohio. Lincoln did not receive instruction on how to proceed, so he traveled to Cincinnati to present the case with Harding.

After Lincoln arrived, he saw Harding walking in the street with one of the best patent attorneys of the day, Edwin Stanton. Lincoln introduced himself, and Stanton said to Harding, “Why did you bring that d__d long armed ape here....he does not know anything and can do you no good.” Stanton and Harding made it plain to Lincoln that he should withdraw from the case. Lincoln did withdraw but stayed to watch the trial.

Harding and Stanton were rude and insulting. But Lincoln was interested in the trial and stayed until its completion. He had every reason to be upset with these two men, yet Lincoln maintained his demeanor and did not alienate his fellow attorneys. They must have respected him because Stanton went on to become Lincoln’s Secretary of War when Lincoln became President. What Lincoln displayed to his rivals in both this anecdotes was a startling ability to allow, even facilitate, the success of a rival. It is easy to imagine that his adversaries might view this subordinating of his own ambitions as a weakness unworthy of a leader. But what they came to understand was that on display was not weakness of character but strength so indomitable that it could endure insult and defeat in order to accomplish his goal. By humbling himself, Lincoln gained the respect of his rivals and challenged the conventional wisdom that to get ahead, you must leave your rivals behind.