

# LINCOLN LORE

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## THE MINORITY CANDIDATE ATTACKS

The unprecedented political upheaval in the November elections has encouraged many experts in the field of politics—with the exception of the poll statisticians who are still in disrepute—to find a rational answer for the great topsy-turvy exhibition of November 2. While there seems to be much difference of opinion regarding the factors which contributed most to the cataclysm, all are agreed that the successful contender, supposed to be a minority candidate, was the aggressor throughout the entire campaign.

During the post election days while the editor of Lincoln Lore was projecting microfilm reproduced from documents in the Library of Congress, there came to his attention letters written to Abraham Lincoln ninety years ago. At that time he was supposed to be the minority candidate in the Lincoln-Douglas senatorial canvass. All of the correspondents counseling Lincoln concurred in this opinion, that if Lincoln were to whip the Little Giant he must take the offensive. Just how fully Lincoln followed out the advice of his friends one can observe for himself. While he did not win a seat in the Senate, representatives favoring Lincoln for the office polled over 5,000 more votes than those representatives favoring Douglas.

There seemed to be little doubt when the 1858 campaign opened that the newly organized Republican Party in Illinois represented the minority group, and that unless something could be done to change public sentiment, their candidate would be vanquished. With this situation in view the friends of Lincoln, singly and in groups, began to supply him with ammunition in the form of advice. Almost without exception they set forth the proposition that he must attack, and attack, and continue to attack.

As early as April 19, 1858, two whole months before Lincoln was nominated for the senatorship, John Wentworth of Chicago wrote to Lincoln with respect to the forthcoming contest with Douglas as follows: "I would state that minorities should never place themselves on the defensive. Douglas is never so much at home as on the attack, never so weak as on the defense."

Even before the discussions between the two contestants were agreed upon, John Mathers, one of Lincoln's friends in Jacksonville, Ill., former home of Douglas, wrote a letter to Lincoln on July 19, 1858, in which he urged Lincoln to take the offensive in the forthcoming canvass. He said: "Occupy the side of the assailant and keep the position until the close of the fight. Don't let Douglas by any strategy drive you from it." Mr. Mathers took occasion to refer to the famous Campbell-Rice debates held at Lexington, Kentucky, in 1843, with Henry Clay as chief moderator, and drew these conclusions: "Rice kept Campbell always on the defensive. . . . Campbell defending had little time to attack Rice." It was Mather's thought that Douglas should be kept continually in the attitude of defending his position.

Horace Greeley wrote to Norman B. Judd at Chicago, "If Lincoln would fight up to the work also, you might get through—if he apologizes, and retreats, and defines, he is lost and all others go down with him." N. M. Knapp wrote to Lincoln on July 24 from Winchester, Ill.: "You are justified now in unsheathing the sword and throwing the scabbard away. Run back on his track, reveal in your way his tortuosity, pick into his motives."

Lincoln did not carry out these suggestions to the full satisfaction of his friends during the first debate at Ottawa, Illinois, on August 21, and Henry C. Whitney, one of his associates in the legal profession, personally complained about it to Lincoln, and concluded: "Your friends also think that you ought not to treat him (Douglas) tenderly. You have got to treat him severely and the sooner you commence the better and easier."

The day before the second debate in the series held at Freeport, Illinois, several of Lincoln's friends including Norman B. Judd, Ebenezer Peck, Leonard Swett, and Joseph Medill, got together and drew up an informal list of recommendations, to be submitted to Lincoln before the debate on the following day, August 27. It appears as if they were agreed with Whitney that Lincoln had not used the right technique in his effort at Quincy. The conclusions were written in pencil by Medill and apparently jotted down in no particular sequence, but just as the suggestions were made. The recommendations were captioned, "confidential," and enclosed in an envelope addressed to Lincoln at Freeport, marked "Present."

When Douglas was referred to in these notes he was called "Dug" which made the recommendations more pungent, at least, and contributed a sort of a prize fight vernacular for the contest between "Abe" and "Dug." The group's first suggestions recommended that "Abe" put "a few ugly questions such as these to Dug:"

"Do you care whether slavery be voted up or down?"

"Do you claim to have discovered or invented the principles of self-government?"

"What became of your vaunted Popular Sovereignty in the territories since the Dred Scott Decision?"

As the group contemplated Lincoln's reluctance to harass Douglas they became more persuasive in their attitude and urged him on to the attack with these admonitions:

"Remember that you have *good backing* today and the more saucy you are the better, for once leave modesty aside. You are dealing with a bold, brazen, lying rascal and you must fight the *devil with fire*.

"Give him fits about his 'insolence' and about 'my place in the Senate.'

"Hold Dug up as a traitor and conspirator, a pro-slavery bamboozling demagogue."

It is apparent that "Abe's" advisors felt he needed to be stirred up, and put in a fighting spirit. Although they must have known that it would be difficult for him to assume such an attitude as they suggested, at least, they hoped to keep him on the offensive. One more suggestion seemed to climax their efforts when they advised him: "Employ your last hour in pitching into Dug. Make your assertions dogmatic and unqualified. Be saucy with the 'Catiline' and permit no browbeating—in other words give him h-1."

This last admonition at least seems like a familiar slogan of the 1948 presidential campaign. We are wondering if perchance one of the presidential nominees happened to read the instructions given to Lincoln in 1858. It would be a strange coincidence if the advice of Joseph Medill was primarily responsible for the success of another minority candidate in 1948. Democratic leaders have not been accustomed to follow the suggestions of the *Chicago Tribune* editors.