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## “I Am Now Going to Be Master”

Inauguration  
(February 23–March 4, 1861)

The nation’s capital, with its 75,000 inhabitants, was little more impressive in 1861 than it had been when Lincoln first set foot there thirteen years earlier. “As in 1800 and 1850, so in 1860, the same rude colony was camped in the same forest, with the same unfinished Greek temples for workrooms, and sloughs for roads,” according to Henry Adams.<sup>1</sup> It was traversed by a noisome canal, which was little more than a malarial open sewer. Henry Villard described the town as “a great straggling encampment of brick and mortar, spread over an infinite deal of space, and diversified with half a dozen government palaces, all in a highly aggravating and inconvenient state of incompleteness.” Society was “shifting, unreliable, and vagabondish to the last degree,” and it was “always full of cormorants, speculators, and adventurers.” Its hotels were “vast caravansaries of noise and rush,” its markets extremely expensive, its newspapers insubstantial, and its hot, humid climate “among the worst in the world.”<sup>2</sup>

Lincoln’s arrival cheered up the town, which had been in despair as the South girded for war and the Buchanan administration dithered. The influential journalist John W. Forney noticed “more joyous faces this Sabbath morning than I have met in years. The friends of the Union, on the streets and in the hotels, are full of buoyant hope, and the enemies of the Union are correspondingly cast down.” The president-elect’s appearance among them, “like the return of Napoleon to Paris from Elba, has effected a magical change in the opinions of politicians, and the anticipations of the local population.”<sup>3</sup> Yet people were unsure what the president-elect’s policy would be, for his speeches en route to the capital had oscillated between hard-line and conciliatory approaches to secession.

### Dealing with the Washington Peace Conference

Fatigued from the long trip, Lincoln relaxed before breakfasting with Seward, who at 11 A.M. escorted him to the White House. His visit surprised President Buchanan. After a brief chat with the lame-duck chief executive, Lincoln was introduced to the members of his cabinet. On the way back to Willard’s, he called on General Scott

briefly. That afternoon, the president-elect was, as Iowa Senator James Harlan recalled, “overwhelmed with callers. The room in which he stood, the corridors and halls and stairs leading to it, were crowded full of people, each one, apparently, intent on obtaining an opportunity to say a few words to him *privately*.”<sup>4</sup> On March 2, John Hay reported that his boss “sits all day in his parlor at Willard’s, receiving moist delegations of bores. That he is not before this torn in pieces, like Actaeon, is due to the vigor of his constitution, and the imperturbability of his temperament.”<sup>5</sup>

On the evening of February 23, Mary Lincoln and the rest of the presidential entourage reached Washington. In Baltimore, an unruly mob had greeted them with three loud cheers for Jefferson Davis and three groans for Lincoln. As the party detrained in the Monumental City, the crowd surged back and forth with such force that it drove people off the platform and trampled them. Roughneck boys and men, not content merely to knock the hats off of leading Republicans, surrounded Mrs. Lincoln’s car, insulting her rudely. Captain John Pope overheard many ugly expressions and observed several menacing faces amid the crowd, which he thought “consisted precisely of the people capable of [committing an] outrage.”<sup>6</sup>

Nonetheless, at lunch Mrs. Lincoln told her hosts “that she felt at home in Baltimore, and being a Kentuckian, was sometimes too conservative for some of Mr. Lincoln’s friends.”<sup>7</sup> She added that “her husband was determined to pursue a conservative course.”<sup>8</sup> With “much indignation” she denounced Lincoln’s advisors and said that she had recommended that he “not depart from the route which he had first intended to take.”<sup>9</sup> In Washington she continued to proclaim her conservative views.

That night, after dining with Seward, Lincoln held an informal reception for members of the Washington Peace Conference. Lucius E. Chittenden, a delegate from Vermont, admired Lincoln’s great aplomb in dealing with a group that included some political opponents. “The manner in which he adjusted his conversation to representatives of different sections and opinions was striking,” Chittenden recalled. “He could not have appeared more natural or unstudied in his manner if he had been entertaining a company of neighbors in his Western home.”<sup>10</sup> Lincoln impressed them with his uncanny memory. As he was introduced to the delegates by their last names, he recalled most of their first names and middle initials. To several he mentioned their family histories. Betraying no anxiety, he conversed with them warmly, candidly, and with animation. He paid special attention to Southern delegates, particularly the Virginia Unionist William C. Rives, a former senator and minister to France. The diminutive, venerable Rives told his son that when he was presented to Lincoln, the president-elect “took me cordially by the hand—said he had imagined I was at least six foot high, as he always formed an idea of every person he had heard much of. On my remarking to him . . . that I felt myself to be a small man in his presence—he said aloud, so that all the company heard him, ‘you are any how a giant in intellect.’ I bowed & retired. This piece of Western free & easy compliment passed off among his admirers for first rate Parisian cleverness & tact.” Some Southern delegates took umbrage at Lincoln’s words, calling him a “boor” and a “cross-roads lawyer.” To Rives, Lincoln appeared “to be good natured & well-intentioned, but utterly unimpressed with the gravity of the crisis & the magnitude of his duties.” He “seems to think of

nothing but jokes & stories. I fear, therefore, we are to expect but little from his influence with the Convention.”<sup>11</sup>

When introduced to the unusually tall Alexander W. Doniphan of Missouri, the president-elect asked: “Is this Doniphan, who made that splendid march across the Plains, and swept the swift Camanchee before him?” The general modestly acknowledged that he was that man. “Then you come up to the standard of my expectations,” said Lincoln.<sup>12</sup> Recalling their days in Congress together, Lincoln told Reverdy Johnson of Maryland, “I had to bid you good-bye just at the time when our intimacy had ripened to a point for me to tell you my stories.”<sup>13</sup>

Asked if he backed the plan that the Peace conferees seemed likely to adopt—James Guthrie’s report urging restoration of the Missouri Compromise line, along with half a dozen less controversial measures—Lincoln allegedly “said he had not thoroughly examined it, and was not therefore prepared to give an opinion. If there was no surrender of principle in it[,] it would be acceptable to him.”<sup>14</sup> (Unlike the Crittenden Compromise, Guthrie’s proposal stipulated that no new territory could be acquired without the approval of a majority of both the Slave and the Free States.) Although this statement seemed to indicate that Lincoln would support compromise measures, Massachusetts delegate John Z. Goodrich reported after a brief conversation with him that “I cannot doubt he is firm & desires no compromise.”<sup>15</sup> Most callers were unable to tell which way the discreet president-elect leaned. “Everybody here seems to look to Lincoln & Lincoln says ‘delighted to see you &c &c’, but no one gets his tongue & everyone has his ear,” reported a fellow guest at Willard’s.<sup>16</sup>

One who did get Lincoln’s tongue was the New York merchant William E. Dodge, who expressed fears that “the whole nation shall be plunged into bankruptcy” and that “grass shall grow in the streets of our commercial cities.” Lincoln sternly replied that he would carry out his oath of office to defend the Constitution: “It must be so respected, obeyed, enforced, and defended, let the grass grow where it may.” In a more conciliatory tone he added, “If it depends upon me, the grass will not grow anywhere except in the fields and the meadows.”<sup>17</sup>

The Peace Conference seemed unable to reach a consensus; on February 26, it voted down Guthrie’s report. The following day, however, after the Illinois delegation reversed itself—perhaps at Lincoln’s instigation—that report was approved, cheering up friends of conciliation. “Every one seemed to breathe easier and freer than before,” wrote a former Ohio congressman. Southern Unionists “were especially joyous and reanimated, not because they had obtained all they had desired, but because they believed the recommendations of the convention would effectually arrest the tide of secession in their states if they were favorably received by Congress.”<sup>18</sup> Lincoln’s Illinois friend William H. L. Wallace, who had come to the capital to angle for a government job, told his wife that the outcome of the conference “gives great satisfaction to all conservative men of all parties. Indeed the crisis seemed so threatening that most good men forgot party & only regarded the safety of the country.” Governor Thomas Hicks of Maryland informed Wallace “that if the conference adjourned without doing anything, . . . he should immediately call the Legislature of his state

together & the state would at once secede.” Similarly, John Bell confided that Tennessee would probably have pulled out of the Union if the Conference had fizzled.<sup>19</sup>

Lincoln may have persuaded his fellow Illinoisans serving as delegates at the Peace Conference to change their minds. One member of the Prairie State delegation, John M. Palmer, recalled that the president-elect “advised us to deal as liberally as possible with the subject of slavery.” (Palmer voted for the Guthrie report with some reluctance.)<sup>20</sup> Moreover, the motion to reconsider was made by Lincoln’s former law partner, good friend, mentor, and political ally, Stephen T. Logan. On February 25, John W. Forney reported that Palmer and Logan “have been closeted with him [Lincoln] since his arrival here.”<sup>21</sup> The “reconsideration was attributed to the interference of Mr. Lincoln or of his recognized friends,” a Massachusetts delegate recalled.<sup>22</sup>

On February 26, the Conference adjourned earlier than planned, evidently so that its members could meet with the president-elect. Governor Hicks warned Lincoln that if the delegates failed to approve a compromise proposal, Maryland would promptly secede. That night, Stephen A. Douglas begged Lincoln to consult with the Illinois commissioners and thereby save the Union. The senator warned that if the Conference failed to agree on a compromise plan, the Upper South and Border States might well secede. He “reminded Mr. Lincoln that he had children as well as Mr. Douglas, and implored him, ‘in God’s name, to act the patriot, and to save to our children a country to live in.’” Lincoln “listened respectfully and kindly, and assured Mr. Douglas that his mind was engrossed with the great theme which they had been discussing, and expressed his gratification at the interview.”<sup>23</sup> The president-elect then met with Illinois’s delegates, who the next day voted for Guthrie’s report.

That same night several other commissioners (including Rives and George W. Summers of Virginia, Guthrie and Charles S. Morehead of Kentucky, and Doniphan) also urged the president-elect to support a compromise. Lincoln reminded Rives of Aesop’s fable about a lion who fell in love with a beautiful damsel, “and how the lion who desired to pay his addresses, solicited permission from the bride’s father, and how the father consented, but with the advice that as the lion’s teeth were sharp and the claws long, and not at all handsome, he advised the King of Beasts to pull out the one and cut off the other, which being done, the good father easily knocked the lion in the head. So when we have surrendered Fort Sumter, South Carolina will do this with us.” When Rives and others insisted that Sumter “could not be relieved without the loss of thousands of lives, and to hold it was but a barren honor,” Lincoln replied with a dramatic proposal to solve the Sumter crisis: “You, gentlemen, are members of the Convention. Go to Richmond. Pass a resolution that Virginia will not in any event secede, and I may then agree with you in the fact a State any day is worth more than a fort!”<sup>24</sup> Morehead recorded that in response to Rives’s comment about Virginia seceding if coercive measures were taken, Lincoln jumped up and exclaimed: “Mr. Rives! Mr. Rives! if Virginia will stay in, I will withdraw the troops from Fort Sumpter.”<sup>25</sup> (Months later, the president, referring to this conversation, “talked about Secession Compromise and other such. He spoke of a committee of Southern Pseudo Unionists coming to him before Inauguration for guarantees &c. He promised to

evacuate Sumter if they would break up their Convention, without any row or nonsense. They demurred.”<sup>26</sup> This was not the last time Lincoln would make that offer.

The following day, just after the Guthrie scheme won approval with the help of Illinois’s commissioners, Lincoln told Washington city leaders “that though the plan of settlement adopted by the Peace Convention was not the one he would have suggested, he regarded it as very fortunate for the country that its labors had thus eventuated harmoniously.”<sup>27</sup> Some stiff-back Republicans who held Lincoln responsible for passage of the Guthrie plan loudly denounced the Conference’s action and threatened “to give their faithless choice for the Presidency the slip.”<sup>28</sup> The only senate Republican who endorsed submitting the Peace Conference plan (a constitutional amendment with seven sections) to the states was Lincoln’s close friend Edward D. Baker. No hard evidence suggests that the Oregon senator took that stand at Lincoln’s urging, but he may well have done so. Despite Baker’s support, the Guthrie proposal went nowhere in Congress.

Threatening to go somewhere was a force bill, which Lincoln helped scuttle. Introduced by Ohio Congressman Benjamin Stanton, that measure authorized the president to call up the militia to suppress an insurrection against the U.S. government and take other military steps. After heated debate, in which Southern Unionists anathematized it, the bill was scheduled to come before the House for a vote on March 1. That day, Representative Alexander R. Boteler of Virginia, fearing that his state would secede immediately upon the passage of such legislation, called on the president-elect, who greeted him warmly: “I’m really glad you have come, and wish that more of you Southern gentlemen would call and see me, as these are times when there should be a full, fair, and frank interchange of sentiment and suggestion among all who have the good of the country at heart.” Boteler asked if Lincoln would help defeat the pending force bill. “Of course,” came the reply, “I am extremely anxious to see these sectional troubles settled peaceably and satisfactorily to all concerned. To accomplish that, I am willing to make almost any sacrifice, and to do anything in reason consistent with my sense of duty. . . . I’ll see what can be done about the bill you speak of. I think it can be stopped, and that I may promise you it will be.” When Boteler requested permission to inform his colleagues of this pledge, Lincoln told him: “By no means, for that would make trouble. The question would at once be asked, what right I had to interfere with the legislation of this Congress. Whatever is to be done in the matter, must be done quietly.”<sup>29</sup>

It is not certain that Lincoln took steps to derail the force bill, but he probably did so; that very night the House adjourned before voting on the measure, thus killing it. (Evidently, it was thought that the Militia Act of 1795 authorized the president to summon troops for suppressing an insurrection.) His good friend and political confidant Elihu B. Washburne led the move to adjourn. Southern Unionists, convinced that Lincoln would not have the power—and lacked the inclination—to use force against the seceded states, were cheered temporarily. Six weeks later they would feel differently. Whatever he may have done about the force bill, Lincoln definitely helped defeat Ohio Congressman John A. Bingham’s bill providing for the offshore collection of import duties.

Lincoln met congressmen and senators on February 25, when Seward escorted him to the Capitol. The New Yorker's face glowed with obvious delight as he introduced the president-elect to everyone; Seward was like a child showing off a new plaything. In the House, Representatives immediately swarmed around Lincoln and received warm, cordial handshakes. Among the less enthusiastic congressmen greeting him was Massachusetts Republican Henry L. Dawes, who had pictured the incoming chief executive in his mind's eye as a kind of deity. "Never did [a] god come tumbling down more suddenly and completely than did mine," Dawes remembered, "as the unkempt, ill-formed, loose-jointed, and disproportioned figure of Mr. Lincoln appeared at the door. Weary, anxious, struggling to be cheerful under a burden of trouble he must keep to himself, with thoughts far off or deep hidden, he was presented to the representatives of the nation over which he was to be placed as chief magistrate."<sup>30</sup> Lincoln towered over the congressmen, resembling "a lighthouse surrounded by waves."<sup>31</sup> As Seward busily urged Democrats to allow themselves to be introduced to Lincoln, he encountered resistance; ominously, only a few accepted the invitation. Virginia Senator James M. Mason, scowling contemptuously, was among those who rebuffed Seward's appeal. In the House, about a dozen Southern Representatives ostentatiously remained seated when the president-elect entered the chamber. Roger A. Pryor of Virginia tried to look like a giant but managed only to resemble a "malicious schoolboy."<sup>32</sup>

Some Southerners found Lincoln even more disillusioning than did Dawes. Alexander W. Doniphan of Missouri thought it was "very humiliating for an American to know that the present & future destiny of his country is wholly in the hands of one man, & that such a man as Lincoln—a man of no intelligence—no enlargement of views—as ridiculously vain and fantastic as a country boy with his first red Morocco hat—easily flattered into a belief that he is King Canute & can say to the waves of revolution, 'Thus far shalt thou come and no farther.'<sup>33</sup>

Like some bipedal, oversized border collie, Seward shepherded Lincoln around Washington, while simultaneously stepping up his efforts to influence the president-elect's policy decisions and appointments. The Illinoisan's speeches en route to Washington caused the senator to remark that the prospect of having to educate Lincoln made him "more depressed than he had been previously during the whole Winter."<sup>34</sup> That education was pursued earnestly in the hectic days of late February and early March, when Lincoln grew ever more conciliatory.

### Toning Down the Inaugural Address

Lincoln proved a willing pupil under Seward's tutelage, submitting his inaugural address to him for comment. Before arriving in Washington, Lincoln had shown it to Carl Schurz, who approved of its hard-line tone, and to Orville H. Browning, who did not. Browning thought the following passage too bellicose: "All the power at my disposal will be used to *reclaim* the public property and places which have fallen; to hold, occupy and possess these, and all other property and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties on imports; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion of any State." Browning suggested that it

read: "All the power at my disposal will be used to hold, occupy and possess the property and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties on imports &c" and recommended "omitting the declaration of the purpose of reclamation, which will be construed into a threat, or menace, and will be irritating even in the border states." Browning conceded that in principle the original draft was justified, but argued cogently that in "any conflict which may ensue between the government and the seceding States, it is very important that the traitors shall be the aggressors, and that they be kept constantly and palpably in the wrong. The first attempt that is made to furnish supplies or reinforcements to Sumter will induce aggression by South Carolina, and then the government will stand justified, before the entire country, in repelling that aggression, and retaking the forts. And so it will be everywhere, and all the places now occupied by traitors can be recaptured without affording them additional material with which to inflame the public mind by representing your inaugural as containing an irritating threat."<sup>35</sup> Others echoed Browning's advice, which Lincoln took, thus making his most important change to that document.

In Washington, Seward suggested many more alterations. Like Browning, he tried to modify the address's belligerent tone. Boastfully, he told Lincoln, "I . . . have devoted myself singly to the study of the case here, with advantages of access and free communication with all parties of all sections. . . . Only the soothing words which I have spoken have saved us and carried us along thus far. Every loyal man, and indeed I think every disloyal man in the South will tell you this."<sup>36</sup> The modest Lincoln may well have recoiled at this display of raw egotism, but he took the advice of his secretary-of-state-designate to omit any allusion to the Chicago platform, which could be interpreted as too partisan; to call secession ordinances "revolutionary" rather than "treasonable"; and to soften the discussion of reclaiming government property and references to exercising power.

More striking was Seward's recommendation about the conclusion of the address, which in its original form posed a bellicose challenge to the secessionists: "In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you, unless you first assail it. You can have no conflict, without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to 'preserve, protect and defend' it. With you, and not with me, is the solemn question of 'Shall it be peace, or a sword?'" Lincoln took Seward's advice to drop the phrase "unless you first assail it" and to replace the ominous final sentence with a lyrical appeal to sectional fraternity. The senator proposed the following language, which called to mind James Madison's 14th Federalist Paper: "I close. We are not we must not be aliens or enemies but fellow countrymen and brethren. Although passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly they must not, I am sure they will not be broken. The mystic chords which proceeding from so many battle fields and so many patriot graves pass through all the hearts and all the hearths in this broad continent of ours will yet again harmonize in their ancient music when breathed upon by the guardian angel of the nation." (This was a variation on passages from Seward's senate speech of February 29, 1860, when he sought to burnish his credentials as a Moderate.)

Like a rhetorical alchemist, Lincoln transformed those leaden words into a golden prose-poem: “I am loth to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.” (The term “better Angel” occurs in Dickens’s *David Copperfield*.)<sup>37</sup>

Lincoln did not take all of Seward’s suggestions. Although he softened the passage dealing with seized federal installations by striking out the phrase “to reclaim public property and places which have fallen”—that was Browning’s advice as well as Seward’s—he did say: “The power confided to me, will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property, and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion—no using of force against, or among the people anywhere.” This was tougher than Seward’s proposed language.<sup>38</sup>

The revised passage about holding federal property and collecting revenues did not sit well with Stephen T. Logan, to whom Lincoln read the address shortly before inauguration day. “I told him that the southern people would regard that language as a threat and the result would be war,” Logan recalled. Lincoln demurred: “It is not necessary for me to say to you that I have great respect for your opinion, but the statements you think should be modified were carefully considered by me and the probable consequences as far as I can anticipate them.”<sup>39</sup>

Among the most conciliatory portions of the address was one that struck the keynote, emphasizing the tentative nature of Lincoln’s policy declarations: “So far as possible, the people everywhere shall have that sense of perfect security which is most favorable to calm thought and reflection. The course here indicated will be followed, unless current events, and experience, shall show a modification, or change, to be proper; and in every case and exigency, my best discretion will be exercised, according to circumstances actually existing, and with a view and a hope of a peaceful solution of the national troubles, and the restoration of fraternal sympathies and affections.” (The second sentence represented a considerable expansion of the original draft, which merely said: “This course will be pursued until current experience shall show a modification or change to be proper.”)

At the last minute, Lincoln added a paragraph dealing with the Adams–Corwin–Seward amendment to the Constitution guaranteeing slavery in the states where it already existed. On February 27, the House had defeated that measure, but the following day, when seven more Republicans supported it, the amendment obtained the requisite two-thirds majority. At 4 A.M. of Inauguration Day, March 4, this Thirteenth Amendment squeaked through the senate with a bare two-thirds majority (24–12). On the night of March 3, Lincoln may have gone to the Capitol and lobbied in favor of the measure without knowing its precise details. It read: “No amendment shall ever be made to the Constitution which will authorize or give to Congress the power to abolish or interfere, within any State, with the domestic institutions thereof, including that of persons held to labor or service by the laws of said State.” Henry Adams claimed

that it required “some careful manipulation, as well as the direct influence of the new President,” to obtain passage.<sup>40</sup> In addition, Lyman Trumbull and Seward had a few days earlier introduced a resolution, probably with Lincoln’s approval, urging states to issue a call for a national constitutional convention.

In preliminary drafts of his inaugural address, Lincoln had expressed no enthusiasm for changes to the Constitution. In his final revision, he alluded to the freshly-passed amendment and also endorsed Trumbull and Seward’s suggestion that a national convention be held to consider other alterations to the document: “I can not be ignorant of the fact that many worthy, and patriotic citizens are desirous of having the national constitution amended. While I make no recommendation of amendments, I fully recognize the rightful authority of the people over the whole subject, to be exercised in either of the modes prescribed in the instrument itself; and I should, under existing circumstances, favor, rather than oppose, a fair opportunity being afforded the people to act upon it. I will venture to add that, to me, the Convention mode seems preferable, in that it allows amendments to originate with the people themselves, instead of only permitting them to take, or reject, propositions, originated by others, not especially chosen for the purpose, and which might not be precisely such, as they would wish to either accept or refuse. I understand a proposed amendment to the constitution which amendment, however, I have not seen, has passed Congress, to the effect that the federal government, shall never interfere with the domestic institutions of the States, including that of persons held to service. To avoid misconstruction of what I have said, I depart from my purpose not to speak of particular amendments, so far as to say that, holding such a provision to now be implied Constitutional law, I have no objection to it’s being made express, and irrevocable.”

Those two concessions were, as journalist James Shepherd Pike observed, “as much as the Republicans can grant without entering upon the backing-down policy.”<sup>41</sup> Ten months later, when Congressman John A. Bingham mentioned this last-minute insertion, Lincoln said: “It is extraordinary that I should have made such statements in my Inaugural. Are you not mistaken about this?” To Bingham it seemed as if the president “felt that the proposed Amendment had not been correctly reported to him, and that some one had blundered. He reproached no one, nor did he intimate how or by whose agency this passage came to be in the Inaugural Address.”<sup>42</sup> Seward was probably Lincoln’s (mis)informant.

Lincoln’s willingness to support such an amendment was yet another indication of his desire to show that he was not inflexible (except with regard to slavery expansion and secession). He probably thought an unamendable amendment was a contradiction in terms as well as unconstitutional, and that the amendment (as he virtually stated in the inaugural) was a tautology, reaffirming what was already guaranteed in the Constitution. In all likelihood, he regarded his support of the amendment as little more than a sop to the Sewardites and to public opinion in the Upper South and Border States. He doubtless thought that the amendment had little chance of being adopted by three-quarters of the states.

On March 3, Seward offhandedly told dinner guests: “Lincoln that day had shown to him his inaugural address, and had consulted with him in regard to it.”

The senator remarked “that while it would satisfy the whole country, it more than covered all his [Seward’s] heresies.” He added that the address showed Lincoln’s “curious vein of sentiment,” which the senator called “his most valuable mental attribute.”<sup>43</sup> Two days earlier, Lincoln read a draft of the inaugural to the other men who had accepted cabinet positions. Reportedly, he also submitted that document to the scrutiny of Senators Trumbull, Wade, and Fessenden, as well as to Norman B. Judd. On March 3, William H. Bailhache of the Springfield *Illinois State Journal*, who came to Washington to help prepare copies of the inaugural, wrote his wife that the “original draft has been modified every day to suit the views of the different members of the Cabinet. The amendments are principally verbal & consist of softening some of the words & elaborating more at length some of the ideas contained in the original draft.”<sup>44</sup>

Though not as conciliatory as Seward and Stephen T. Logan would have liked, Lincoln’s address was tough but not bellicose. He would not try to repossess forts, customhouses, post offices, courthouses, and other federal facilities, nor would he permit the seizure of any more, such as Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor and Fort Pickens off Pensacola. As for collecting revenues, it was possible to do so aboard ships stationed outside Southern ports. Lincoln did not allude to this offshore option in his address, but in the following weeks he explored that solution as an alternative to having customs officials enforce the law onshore.

Lincoln’s pledge to enforce the laws was softened by his declaration that “Where hostility to the United States, in any interior locality, shall be so great and so universal, as to prevent competent resident citizens from holding the Federal offices, there will be no attempt to force obnoxious strangers among the people for that object. While the strict legal right may exist in the government to enforce the exercise of these offices, the attempt to do so would be so irritating, and so nearly impracticable with all, that I deem it better to forego, for the time, the uses of such offices.” (Why he specified “interior localities” and thus seemed to exempt coastal areas is a mystery.) Lincoln here referred to the ten states where he had received no votes at all. In a similar gesture of forbearance, he said that the “mails, unless repelled, will continue to be furnished in all parts of the Union.”

The passage about “obnoxious strangers” reminded one observer of the instructions given by Shakespeare’s Dogberry (in *Much Ado About Nothing*) to a watchman: “You shall comprehend all vagrom men; you are to bid any man stand, in the Prince’s name.”

“How if ’a will not stand?”

“Why, then, take no note of him, but let him go, and presently call the rest of the watch together, and thank God you are rid of a knave.”<sup>45</sup>

In dealing with the Fugitive Slave Act, Lincoln was also conciliatory. The statute was constitutional and should be enforced, though he suggested that it might be amended to provide accused runaways greater due process: “in any law upon this subject, ought not all the safeguards of liberty known in civilized and humane jurisprudence to be introduced, so that a free man be not, in any case, surrendered as a slave? And might it not be well, at the same time, to provide by law for the

enforcement of that clause in the Constitution which guaranties that "The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States'?"

Also conciliatory was Lincoln's reiteration of his oft-stated pledge not to interfere with slavery in the states where it already existed and his failure to stress the inflammatory issue of slavery in the territories. Alluding indirectly to the Dred Scott decision, Lincoln reiterated arguments he had made four years earlier in response to the Supreme Court's controversial ruling: "I do not forget the position assumed by some, that constitutional questions are to be decided by the Supreme Court; nor do I deny that such decisions must be binding in any case, upon the parties to a suit, as to the object of that suit, while they are also entitled to a very high respect and consideration, in all paralel cases, by all other departments of the government. And while it is obviously possible that such decision may be erroneous in any given case, still the evil effect following it, being limited to that particular case, with the chance that it may be over-ruled, and never become a precedent for other cases, can better be borne than could the evils of a different practice. At the same time the candid citizen must confess, that if the policy of the government, upon vital questions, affecting the whole people, is to be irrevocably fixed by decisions of the Supreme Court, the instant they are made, in ordinary litigation between parties, in personal actions, the people will have ceased, to be their own rulers, having, to that extent, practically resigned their government, into the hands of that eminent tribunal. Nor is there, in this view, any assault upon the Court, or the judges. It is a duty, from which they may not shrink, to decide cases properly brought before them; and it is no fault of theirs, if others seek to turn their decisions to political purposes."

Although Lincoln had clearly followed Seward's advice and softened the hard-line approach taken in early drafts of his inaugural, he emphatically rejected the doctrine of secession. "I hold that in contemplation of universal law, and of the Constitution, the Union of these States is perpetual." Hence no state, "upon its own mere motion," could legally secede. "I therefore consider that, in view of the constitution and the laws, the Union is unbroken; and, to the extent of my ability, I shall take care, as the constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the states. Doing this I deem to be only a simple duty on my part; and I shall perform it, so far as practicable, unless my rightful masters, the American people, shall withhold the requisite means, or, in some authoritative manner, direct the contrary. I trust this will not be regarded as a menace, but only as the declared purpose of the Union that it will constitutionally defend, and maintain itself. In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence; and there shall be none, unless it be forced upon the national authority."

Denying the state-compact theory espoused by secessionists, Lincoln maintained with some questionable logic that the Union was older than the states, but that was immaterial, for he argued plausibly that if two or more parties enter into a contract, it can be rescinded only if all of them agree. Moreover, the central point was not what the states were *before* they ratified the Constitution but what they

became *after* doing so. The states may have been sovereign and independent beforehand but clearly they were no longer so afterwards. Quite pertinently, Lincoln cited the Constitution's supremacy clause and the preamble's reference to forming "a more perfect union," more perfect than the one established by the Articles of Confederation and Perpetual Union. Curiously, he did not point to Article IV, section 3 of the Constitution, which stipulates that "no new State shall be formed or erected within the Jurisdiction of any other State; nor any State be formed by the Junction of two or more States, or Parts of States, without the Consent of the Legislatures of the States concerned as well as of the Congress." By inference, it seems logical to conclude that the Framers did not authorize the secession of a state without the permission of all the other states. Lincoln's constitutional arguments, echoing those put forth by James Madison during the Nullification Crisis thirty years earlier, were sound. He was part of a nationalist tradition expounded by Madison, Alexander Hamilton, John Marshall, Daniel Webster, Joseph Story, James Wilson, and others.

Lincoln offered practical as well as constitutional and historical objections to secession. If states were allowed to withdraw whenever they felt so inclined, chaos would result, leading to anarchy or tyranny: "Plainly, the central idea of secession, is the essence of anarchy. A majority, held in restraint by constitutional checks, and limitations, and always changing easily, with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it, does, of necessity, fly to anarchy or to despotism. Unanimity is impossible; the rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy, or despotism in some form, is all that is left."

Lincoln pointed out the obvious economic, geographic, and political drawbacks to secession. "Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced, and go out of the presence, and beyond the reach of each other; but the different parts of our country cannot do this. They cannot but remain face to face; and intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them. Is it possible then to make that intercourse more advantageous, or more satisfactory, after separation than before? Can aliens make treaties easier than friends can make laws? Can treaties be more faithfully enforced between aliens, than laws can among friends? Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always; and when, after much loss on both sides, and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions, as to terms of intercourse, are again upon you." (Lincoln privately ridiculed secession as a doctrine based on the premise that "the big tub ought to go into the little one.")<sup>46</sup>

Lincoln was following the advice he had given to Pennsylvania Governor Andrew G. Curtin, who had asked him how to couch his inaugural. The president-elect recommended that Curtin make clear "without passion, threat, or appearance of boasting, but nevertheless, with firmness, the purpose of yourself, and your State to maintain the Union at all hazzards."<sup>47</sup>

### Completing the Cabinet

While trying to wean Lincoln away from his hard-line positions and rhetoric, Seward also lobbied intently for pro-compromise cabinet aspirants. Five of the seven posts had yet to be filled, including the office of secretary of the treasury. The struggle over that important position raged for days, with hard-liners supporting Salmon P. Chase and soft-liners, led by Seward and Weed, favoring Simon Cameron. Chase reportedly had Lincoln “by the throat and clings with the tenacity of a bull dog to his claim—against an amount of opposition wholly unprecedented.”<sup>48</sup>

That the Pennsylvania boss would have a seat in the cabinet had been virtually settled during Lincoln’s February 21 stopover in Philadelphia, where he met with James Milliken, a leading industrialist, and several other Cameron supporters. Milliken said that he was authorized to speak for McClure, Curtin, and other opponents of the Chief; that they had withdrawn their objections to Cameron and now supported his candidacy; and that the leading iron and coal men of the Keystone State desired his appointment. Lincoln replied “that it relieved him greatly” but that “he was not . . . prepared to decide the matter and would not until he should reach Washington. That, it had been suggested, it would perhaps be proper and desirable to retain some of the present cabinet officers, for a short time at least, if they would consent to remain.” He referred specifically to the strong Unionists Joseph Holt, Edwin M. Stanton, and John A. Dix, who had stiffened Buchanan’s backbone.<sup>49</sup>

Why the anti-Cameron forces capitulated is a mystery. According to one account, Cameron, acting on the president-elect’s willingness to appoint any Pennsylvanian that the state’s party leaders could agree upon, disingenuously offered to step aside in favor of Thaddeus Stevens if McClure, Curtin, and his other critics would withdraw their charges against him. When those critics complied, Cameron double-crossed them by using a letter from McClure to convince Lincoln that Pennsylvania Republicans were united behind the Chief. (Although he asserted that he was “very friendly” toward Stevens, Lincoln told a Pennsylvanian that at age 67, the congressman was too old. That seems implausible, for Stevens was the same age as Attorney-General-Designate Edward Bates. Lincoln considered the Great Commoner too radical rather than too ancient.)<sup>50</sup> Milliken paved the way for Cameron’s victory by assuring McClure and Curtin that their faction would receive a fair share of the patronage. David Davis helped Cameron’s cause by promising to read to Lincoln a list of reasons that Samuel A. Purviance, the attorney general of Pennsylvania, had drawn up for appointing Cameron treasury secretary.

In addition, some Pennsylvanians feared that if they could not settle on one of their own, their state’s seat in the cabinet might be given to a New Jersey leader like William L. Dayton. Not all Pennsylvanians regarded Dayton unfavorably. Congressman John Covode told Lincoln: “I am satisfied that what I said to you about Dayton being a man that would suit Penna was right.”<sup>51</sup> Robert McKnight, another Pennsylvania Representative, offered similar advice: “I firmly believe that the selection of Judge Dayton of N. Jersey would be more acceptable to the people of Penna” than

Cameron.<sup>52</sup> Some colleagues in the House echoed McKnight and Covode, and Governor Curtin reported that “there is a large sentiment in [favor of] Dayton for a place in the cabinet & I concur with it.” The Jerseyman “would be very acceptable in this state.”<sup>53</sup>

Other Pennsylvania Republicans demurred. “We want no New Jersey statesman for Pennsylvania,” declared Thaddeus Stevens.<sup>54</sup> Cameron said he would just as soon “have an enemy at home as in N Jersey & did not want Dayton to be appointed.”<sup>55</sup>

In Washington, opponents of Cameron besieged Lincoln. On February 26, John Hay reported that if the president-elect “was in any respect an object of sympathy while on his travels, he is certainly doubly so now. He has exchanged the minor tribulations of hand-shaking and speech-making for the graver woes which attach to the martyr toasted between two fires. The conservatives have chiefly had the presidential ear since the unexpected arrival last Saturday morning. Last night a deputation of the straight-outs had an interview with him, their rumored object being to defeat the appointment of Gen. Cameron to the cabinet.”<sup>56</sup>

That visit may have been the one during which Thaddeus Stevens and several other members of Congress protested against Cameron, whom Stevens called “a man destitute of honor and honesty,” one who would “make whatever department he may occupy a den of thieves.”<sup>57</sup>

The president-elect asked the Great Commoner, “You don’t mean to say that Cameron would steal?”

“No, I don’t think he would steal a red-hot stove.”

When Lincoln repeated this quip to Cameron, the Chief was so incensed that he refused to speak to Stevens.

The Lancaster congressman asked why Lincoln had repeated his hostile remark to Cameron. “I thought that it was a good joke, and I didn’t think it would make him mad,” replied the president-elect.

“Well, he is very mad and made me promise to retract. I will now do so. I believe I told you that I didn’t think he would steal a red-hot stove. I now take that back.”<sup>58</sup>

On February 28 and March 1, Lincoln met with Cameron, who later recalled that “he asked me what I wanted—told him I didn’t want anything. He might take the offices and keep them. I spoke pretty sharp. He offered to make me Atty. Genl. or give me the Interior. I told him I was no lawyer; I didn’t want anything if he couldn’t give me what he had offered [in Springfield, namely, the portfolio of either the Treasury or the War Department].”<sup>59</sup> Since Lincoln had already decided to name Chase secretary of the treasury, he gave Cameron the War Department post.

As it turned out, the Cameron appointment was, as Horace White put it, “the most colossal blunder of Lincoln’s public life.”<sup>60</sup> If Pennsylvania Republicans had been able to unite on anyone else, or if the Chief’s opponents had not caved in, or if McClure had submitted documents proving Cameron’s lack of integrity, or if Cameron had come from a less important state, or if he had not been a candidate for president at the Chicago Convention, or if David Davis and Leonard Swett had not led the Pennsylvanians at that convention to believe that they would have a place in

the cabinet, Lincoln might have avoided naming a man “whose very name stinks in the nostrils of the people for his corruption” (in Lincoln’s own words).<sup>61</sup> Lincoln told his friend James C. Conkling that, though he was personally opposed to appointing Cameron because of his unsavory reputation, he had received a petition signed by many members of the Pennsylvania State Legislature, whose opinion he could not safely ignore: “It is highly important that the influence of so large and powerful a State as Pennsylvania should be on the side of the Government, and I must waive my private feelings for the public good.”<sup>62</sup>

Cameron’s selection pleased Seward, who had lobbied for him so hard that Montgomery Blair concluded that “Cameron was brought into the cabinet by Seward.”<sup>63</sup> But that was not enough for the New York senator, who also wanted as colleagues former Whigs like Charles Francis Adams, Caleb B. Smith, and Henry Winter Davis, all soft-liners on secession. Lincoln did name Smith as secretary of the interior in preference to the 36-year-old Schuyler Colfax, explaining to the latter that “I had partly made up my mind in favor of Mr. Smith—not conclusively of course—before your name was mentioned in that connection. When you were brought forward I said ‘Colfax is a young man—is already in position—is running a brilliant career, and is sure of a bright future in any event.’ ‘With Smith, it is now or never.’”<sup>64</sup> (In time, Lincoln came to regard Colfax as “a little intriguer,—plausible, aspiring beyond his capacity, and not trustworthy.”)<sup>65</sup> Smith, who unlike Colfax aggressively campaigned for the job, proved to be a mediocre secretary, but Indiana had been promised a seat in the cabinet and no other Hoosier commanded so much home support.

Seward was not pleased with the remaining choices of former Democrats Gideon Welles for secretary of the navy, Montgomery Blair as postmaster general, and most especially Salmon P. Chase as treasury secretary. Lincoln favored Blair in part because of the influence of his family, especially his father, Francis P. Blair, Sr. The president-elect read that old man his inaugural address and asked for suggestions. Lincoln explained that “it was necessary to have Southern men & men of Democratic antecedents” and that Montgomery Blair “fulfilled both requirements.”<sup>66</sup> Leading Maryland Republicans like Governor Thomas Hicks assured Lincoln that Henry Winter Davis was unacceptable to Union men in his state.

Welles, a newspaper editor and leader of the Connecticut Republican Party, proved to be a good choice, though his appearance made him the object of ridicule. Charles A. Dana recalled that the navy secretary “was a curious-looking man: he wore a wig which was parted in the middle, the hair falling down on each side; and it was from his peculiar appearance, I have always thought, that the idea that he was an old fogy originated.” Massachusetts Governor John A. Andrew called him “that old Mormon deacon.” To the public he was “Father Welles,” and Lincoln referred to him as “Grandfather Welles.” Undeniably, there was a “fossiliferous” quality to Welles, which prompted the New York *Herald* to deem him a “fossil almost from the Silurian period.” Lincoln liked to tell a joke about Welles: “when asked to personate the grandmother of a dying sailor,” the navy secretary begged off, saying “that he was busy examining the model of Noah’s ark.” But, Dana noted, Welles “was a very wise, strong man. There was nothing decorative about him; there was no noise in the street

when he went along; but he understood his duty, and did it efficiently, continually, and unvaryingly.”<sup>67</sup> He was familiar with the Navy Department, in which he had served as chief of the bureau of provisions and clothing during the Mexican War.

Montgomery Blair, who acquired a reputation as “the meanest man in the whole government,” was “awkward, shy, homely and repellent,” according to journalist Noah Brooks.<sup>68</sup> Another newspaperman, William Howard Russell of the London *Times*, was more charitable, describing the postmaster general as a leader of great influence and determination. “He is a tall, lean man, with a hard, Scotch, practical looking head,” which served as “an anvil for ideas to be hammered on. His eyes are small and deeply set, and have a rat-like expression; and he speaks with caution, as though he weighed every word before he uttered it.”<sup>69</sup> (To placate Henry Winter Davis, Lincoln gave him control of the Maryland patronage.)

In deciding between Cameron and Chase for the Treasury Department, Lincoln polled Republican senators, who favored the latter. Southerners regarded Chase’s appointment as “a declaration of war” against their region.<sup>70</sup> They and Northern Conservatives lobbied furiously against the Ohioan. On February 24, Lincoln told John Z. Goodrich that “personally he preferred Chase for the Treasury Department to any other man—but added that he was very much embarrassed by the strong opposition to him by certain politicians in Ohio, Wade included.”<sup>71</sup> Horace Greeley—who had been pressuring Lincoln to reject Cameron and to appoint Schuyler Colfax, Thaddeus Stevens, and Chase—was jubilant. After the cabinet choices were announced, the *Tribune* editor crowed to a friend: “we did, by desperate fighting, succeed in getting four honest and capable men into the Cabinet—by a fight that you never saw equaled in intensity and duration. Gov. Chase, the ablest Republican living, who (so Gen. Dix said) was almost indispensable to the Treasury, got it at last.” Mrs. Lincoln evidently opposed the Ohioan, for Greeley said that Chase’s appointment was obtained “by the determined [pluck?] and clear-headed sagacity of Old Abe himself, powerfully backed by Hamlin, who is a jewel. All the Kitchen Cabinet, including the female President, were dead against him, while the ‘Border States’ swore they would go out if he were put in.”<sup>72</sup> According to a close friend of Mrs. Lincoln, her “hostility to Mr. Chase was very bitter. She claimed that he was a selfish politician instead of a true patriot, and warned Mr. Lincoln not to trust him too far.”<sup>73</sup>

The long struggle over the cabinet, which annoyed and depressed Lincoln, culminated on the night of March 2, when in an agitated voice he told his numerous callers, including Sewardites ferociously resisting the appointment of Chase and Blair, “it is evident that some one must take the responsibility of these appointments, and I will do it. My Cabinet is completed. The positions are not all definitely assigned, and will not be until I announce them privately to the gentlemen whom I have selected as my Constitutional advisers.”<sup>74</sup> To Marylanders protesting against Blair, Lincoln was equally emphatic: “I have weighed the matter—I have been pulled this way and that way—I have poised the scales, and it is my province to determine, and I am now going to be master.”<sup>75</sup> When Hannibal Hamlin bluntly asked him “whether the Administration was going to be ‘a Seward or a Lincoln Administration,’” the president-elect emphatically answered that it would be the latter.<sup>76</sup> For good reason a journalist concluded

that "Lincoln is found to possess a will of his own. He is as firm as a rock when he once thinks he is right."<sup>77</sup>

When some senators urged him to dump Seward, Lincoln expressed resentment against "the assumption which such a protest implies that he [Lincoln] will be unduly under the influence of any individual among his advisers."<sup>78</sup> Greeley, who was in Washington to lobby against the Seward-Weed faction, reported on February 28 that the president-elect "is honest as the sun, and means to be true and faithful; but he is in the web of very cunning spiders and cannot work out if he would," thus giving the "compromisers full swing."<sup>79</sup> But Seward himself hardly felt that he had mastered the president-elect. To be sure, he acknowledged that Lincoln was "very cordial and kind toward me—simple, natural, and agreeable." Among other things, the president-elect said: "One part of the business, Governor Seward, I think I shall leave almost entirely in your hands; that is, the dealing with those foreign nations and their governments."<sup>80</sup> Still, the *New Yorker* was not entirely happy with his attempts to move Lincoln toward compromise. When asked if "things were right at head quarters," Seward promptly answered: "No, they were not wrong, but scarcely quite right."<sup>81</sup>

In fact, Seward was so furious at Lincoln's choices that he threatened to renege on his agreement to join the cabinet. He complained "that he had not been consulted as was usual in the formation of the Cabinet, that he understood Chase had been assigned to the Treasury, that there were differences between himself and Chase which rendered it impossible for them to act in harmony, that the Cabinet ought, as General Jackson said, to be a unit. Under these circumstances and with his conviction of duty and what was due to himself, he must insist on the excluding of Mr. Chase if he, Seward, remained." The president-elect "expressed his surprise after all that had taken place and with the great trouble on his hands, that he should be met with such a demand on this late day." He asked Seward to think the matter over.<sup>82</sup> The next day, Seward formalized his refusal in a letter: "Circumstances which have occurred since I expressed to you in December last my willingness to accept the office of Secretary of State seem to me to render it my duty to ask leave to withdraw that consent. Tendering to you my best wishes for the success of your administration with my sincere and grateful acknowledgements of all your acts of kindness and confidence, towards me I remain, very respectfully."<sup>83</sup>

Seward overplayed his hand. Perhaps he had gotten a swelled head from his success in persuading Lincoln to soften his hard-line stance. It had been an impressive achievement. Before leaving Springfield, the president-elect had expressed a willingness to accept the Seward-Adams-Corwin New Mexico Compromise. Since arriving in Washington, he had approved the Guthrie plan passed by the Peace Conference; he had perhaps even maneuvered behind the scenes to have that plan adopted; he may have helped defeat a force bill; he definitely helped squelch a bill authorizing the off-shore collection of custom duties; he had asked Seward's advice in drafting his inaugural address and had followed most of his suggestions; at Browning's urging he had omitted from that address the threat to repossess federal property in the seceding states; and he had appointed Cameron, a leading advocate of compromise, to the cabinet.

Lincoln also made conciliatory public remarks, including a statement on February 27 to Mayor James G. Berret of Washington. Addressing slaveholders in general as well as the mayor, Lincoln said: “I think very much of the ill feeling that has existed and still exists between the people of the section from whence I came and the people here, is owing to a misunderstanding between each other which unhappily prevails. I therefore avail myself of this opportunity to assure you, Mr. Mayor, and all the gentlemen present, that I have not now, and never have had, any other than as kindly feelings towards you as to the people of my own section. I have not now, and never have had, any disposition to treat you in any respect otherwise than as my own neighbors. I have not now any purpose to withhold from you any of the benefits of the constitution, under any circumstances, that I would not feel myself constrained to withhold from my own neighbors; and I hope, in a word, when we shall become better acquainted—and I say it with great confidence—we shall like each other the more.”<sup>84</sup> Just why Lincoln became more conciliatory in the week before his inauguration is not entirely clear, but Seward’s counsel surely played an important role in effecting that transformation. In addition, the president-elect became more aware of the depth of secessionist feeling in the Upper South and Border States, where Unionism was more conditional than he had understood when he was in Springfield.

Realizing that Seward meant to dominate him the way he had dominated President Zachary Taylor, Lincoln decided to call the senator’s bluff by letting it be known that he might appoint someone else to head the State Department and name the New Yorker minister to Great Britain. Rumors spread quickly, including speculation that Chase was to be dropped. When Norman B. Judd heard that Henry Winter Davis rather than Montgomery Blair would become postmaster general, he asked Lincoln about this alteration in the reported cabinet slate. “Judd,” came the reply, which clearly referred to Seward, “I told a man at eleven o’clock last night that if this slate broke again it would break at the head [i.e., Seward would have to go].”<sup>85</sup> The man he took into his confidence was George G. Fogg, to whom Lincoln said: “We must give up both Seward and Chase, I reckon; and I have drawn up here a list of the cabinet, leaving them both out.” The new slate included William L. Dayton as secretary of state, John C. Frémont as secretary of war, and a New York opponent of Seward as secretary of the treasury. “I am sending this to Mr. Weed,” Lincoln remarked.<sup>86</sup> To Seward he sent a different message, written as he was leaving the hotel to deliver his inaugural address: “Your note of the 2nd. inst. asking to withdraw your acceptance of my invitation to take charge of the State Department, was duly received. It is the subject of most painful solicitude with me; and I feel constrained to beg that you will countermand the withdrawal. The public interest, I think, demands that you should; and my personal feelings are deeply inlisted in the same direction. Please consider, and answer by 9 o’clock, A.M. to-morrow.”<sup>87</sup>

Seward, aware that he had lost his gamble, capitulated. After conferring with the president on the night of March 4, he withdrew his resignation. Lincoln gave him “to understand that whatever others might say or do, they two would not disagree but were friends.”<sup>88</sup> To his wife, Seward explained that Lincoln was “determined that he

will have a compound Cabinet; and that it shall be peaceful, and even permanent. I was at one time on the point of refusing—nay, I did refuse, for a time to hazard myself in the experiment. But a distracted country appeared before me; and I withdrew from that position. I believe I can endure as much as any one; and may be that I can endure enough to make the experiment successful. At all events I did not dare to go home, or to England, and leave the country to chance.”<sup>89</sup> Though defeated on this opening trick, Seward had not yet learned that Lincoln meant to control his own administration. In time, that lesson would sink in, but only after he issued another dramatic challenge to the president’s authority.

Lincoln had to call Chase’s bluff as well as Seward’s. Assuming that the Ohioan would accept the treasury portfolio, he had not consulted him about the matter since arriving in Washington. On March 6, when the names of all cabinet members were submitted to the senate, the hypersensitive Chase explained to Lincoln his reluctance to accept the post. As Chase later recalled, the president “referred to the embarrassment my declination would occasion him,” leading Chase to promise that he would reconsider. After Lincoln had Frank Blair sound out Congressman John Sherman about becoming treasury secretary, and rumors had spread that Chase would be named minister to England, Ohioans opposed to Chase reversed course and urged Lincoln to name him. Finally, Chase yielded.

Lincoln’s “compound cabinet” did not please all Republicans. Charles Francis Adams called it a “motley mixture, containing one statesman, one politician, two jobbers, one intriguer, and two respectable old gentlemen.”<sup>90</sup> The sardonic Thaddeus Stevens said it consisted “of an assortment of rivals whom the President appointed from courtesy, one stump-speaker from Indiana, and two representatives of the Blair family.”<sup>91</sup> Actually, Lincoln chose his four competitors for the presidential nomination not as an act of courtesy but to strengthen his administration by having the most prominent leaders of the party’s factions as well as the most important regions represented. He was especially concerned about the Border States, where the cabinet seemed acceptably “moderate and conciliatory in complexion.”<sup>92</sup>

Lincoln was careful to balance the cabinet with former Whigs and former Democrats. When Weed protested that there were four of the latter and only three of the former, Lincoln replied that he had been a Whig and would be attending cabinet meetings. (He might also have pointed out that Cameron had hardly been a dyed-in-the-wool Democrat. The New York *Herald* satirically—and aptly—labeled him a “Democratic Know Nothing Republican Conservative.”)<sup>93</sup>

Former Congressman David K. Cartter of Ohio asked Lincoln: “Do you not think the elements of the Cabinet are too strong and in some respects too conflicting?”

He replied: “It may be so, but I think they will neutralize each other.”<sup>94</sup>

### Inauguration Day

On the cloudy morning of March 4, Lincoln rose at 5 A.M. and, after eating breakfast and conferring with Seward, put the finishing touches on the address, which his son Robert read aloud to him. Until 11 A.M., he consulted with various other callers,

including Bates, Welles, Cameron, Trumbull, David Davis, and Illinois state senator Thomas Marshall.

At dawn, crowds began gathering at the Capitol, where the senate was about to take a three-hour break after its all-night session. Two thousand volunteer soldiers, organized by Colonel Charles P. Stone acting on General Scott's orders, deployed to their posts; 653 regular troops, summoned from distant forts, together with the marines based at the navy yard, supplemented their ranks. Sharpshooters clambered to the roofs of the taller buildings fronting Pennsylvania Avenue, along which police took up positions. Cavalry patrolled the side streets. Plainclothes detectives circulated among the crowd with instructions to arrest for "disorderly conduct" anyone speaking disrespectfully of the new president. The sound of fife and drum filled the air. Flags and banners fluttered in the chill wind. Rumors of bloody doings were bruited about, though the heavy military presence made it unlikely that anyone would disturb the day's ceremony. Colorfully attired marshals assembled, ready to lead the procession. Gradually, the streets became choked with humanity, eagerly awaiting the appearance of the president-elect. Good humor, decorum, order, and enthusiasm prevailed among the people who turned out to witness the event. The *Washington National Intelligencer* called it "in some respects the most brilliant and imposing pageant ever witnessed in this Capital."<sup>95</sup> Ominously, however, the parade lacked the customary civic groups and political clubs, a sure sign that many Washingtonians did not sympathize with the new president or his party.

A handsome open barouche bore President Buchanan, looking rather feeble, to Willard's Hotel, where Lincoln climbed aboard, taking a seat beside the Old Public Functionary. The president-elect's bearing was "calm, easy, bland, self-possessed, yet grave and sedate."<sup>96</sup> Accompanying them were Lincoln's good friend, Oregon Senator Edward D. Baker, and Maryland Senator James A. Pearce. As the carriage, surrounded by a double row of cavalry and led by sappers and miners from West Point, rolled over the dusty cobblestones of Pennsylvania Avenue, cheers rang out from the dense crowd lining the sidewalks. The troops escorting the presidential carriage made it difficult for the 40,000 spectators to catch a glimpse of its occupants. To some observers, the troops seemed like guards conveying prisoners to their execution. In response to the sociable and animated observations made by Lincoln, who seemed calm and oblivious to the excited crowd, the anxiety-ridden, nerve-wracked Buchanan had little to say and gave the impression that he would have preferred to be elsewhere. Unable to engage Buchanan in conversation, Lincoln then stared at the floor of the carriage absently.

Arriving at the Capitol at 1:15 P.M., Lincoln and Buchanan descended from their carriage. The weary, sad-faced, white-haired incumbent aroused pity, for he seemed friendless and abandoned. By contrast, the black-haired, younger Lincoln, though looking somewhat awkward, radiated confidence and energy. The party repaired to the President's Room, where they shed the dust of Pennsylvania Avenue.

As Lincoln and Buchanan chatted amicably, John Hay eavesdropped on their conversation with "boyish wonder and credulity to see what momentous counsels were to come from that gray and weather-beaten head." Though Hay assumed that

each “word must have its value at such an instant,” that was not the case. “I think you will find the water of the right-hand well at the White-House better than that at the left,” said Buchanan, who “went on with many intimate details of the kitchen and pantry.” The president-elect “listened with that weary, introverted look of his, not answering.” The following day, when Hay mentioned this colloquy, Lincoln “admitted he had not heard a word of it.”<sup>97</sup>

Arm-in-arm the two presidents entered the senate chamber, where diplomats, congressmen, senators, military officers, state governors, justices of the Supreme Court, cabinet members, and other officials had foregathered. Preternaturally calm and impassive, Lincoln sat still, heedless of the gaze that all onlookers directed at him. The nervous, discouraged, and tired Buchanan, on the other hand, fidgeted and sighed gently. After the swearing in of Vice President Hamlin, the assembled dignitaries proceeded to a temporary platform erected over the steps of the east facade of the Capitol. That building was undergoing a major expansion that had begun nearly a decade earlier. Above the ramshackle scaffolding loomed the skeletal, half-finished, new cast-iron dome, flanked by a crane. Before it stood thousands of cheering spectators of all ages and both sexes, coming from near and far, some from neighboring Pennsylvania, others from the distant Pacific coast. Many trekked in from the Midwest and Border States. The clouds which had seemed so threatening that morning had lifted, giving way to bright sunshine.

In his famously sonorous voice, Senator Baker announced: “Fellow Citizens: I introduce to you Abraham Lincoln, the President elect of the United States of America.” Charles Francis Adams thought Baker undignified, speaking “just as if about to make a speech from the stump.”<sup>98</sup>

Before rising to speak, Lincoln sought a place to put his hat. Observing his awkwardness, Stephen A. Douglas (according to an Ohio congressman who witnessed the proceedings) “gallantly took the vexatious article and held it during the entire reading of the Inaugural.”<sup>99</sup> Lincoln then stood up, calm, cool, and self-possessed. The crowd cheered, but not vociferously.

After surveying the vast assemblage, Lincoln began deliberately and solemnly reading his address, which lasted thirty-five minutes. He seemed very much at ease and cheerful as he recited the carefully prepared text in a clear, high, firm voice that carried to the outer edge of the vast crowd. A Douglas Democrat reported that each sentence “fell like a sledge hammer driving in the bolts which unite our states.”<sup>100</sup> Lincoln’s voice faltered only in the final paragraph, whose reference to “the better angels of our nature” brought tears to many eyes. He delivered that peroration feelingly.

“What an audience!” exclaimed Republican leader John Z. Goodrich of Massachusetts. “How attentive!”<sup>101</sup> It often applauded, especially when Lincoln alluded to the Union. After his pronouncement that “I hold, that in contemplation of universal law, and of the Constitution, the Union of these States is perpetual,” the lusty cheering went on and on. An exceptionally vigorous shout of approval greeted his pledge to “take care, as the constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the states.” The loudest demonstration occurred

when he said to secessionists, “You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to ‘preserve, protect and defend’ it.” This passage received several rounds of cheering, as did his firm statement that the “power confided to me, will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property, and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties and imposts.” In addition to cheers, the crowd interjected shouts of “Good,” “That’s right,” “We’ll stand by you,” “Thank God, daylight appears at last,” and “That is the doctrine.” On the platform, Douglas made *sotto voce* comments: “Good!” “that’s so,” “no coercion,” and “good again.” At the conclusion, the crowd waved hats and manifested its joy with thunderous applause.<sup>102</sup> Grenville M. Dodge of Iowa told his wife: “Old Abe delivered the greatest speech of the age. The ‘Sermon on the Mount’ only excels it. It is backbone all over.”<sup>103</sup>

As the ancient, shriveled, parchment-faced Chief Justice Roger B. Taney, who resembled a “galvanized corpse,” rose to administer the oath of office, he appeared very agitated, evidently upset by the new president’s remarks about the Supreme Court. After Lincoln swore to “faithfully execute the office of President” and to “preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution,” he kissed the Bible. People in the crowd tossed hats into the air, wiped their eyes, and shouted till they grew hoarse. Lincoln shook hands with Taney and the other dignitaries on the platform and then rode with Buchanan back down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House, where a public reception was held. There the ex-president shook his successor’s hand, wished him luck, and returned to Pennsylvania to write a defense of his administration. Lincoln cordially received all well-wishers and kissed thirty-four young girls, representing each state of the Union.

During the inaugural ceremony, Thurlow Weed left early and passed by Winfield Scott, stationed near the Capitol beside an artillery battery. The anxious general asked how the ceremony was going. “It is a success,” answered Weed. “God be praised! God in his goodness be praised!” exclaimed Old Fuss and Feathers. The two men then embraced like a pair of joyful school-boys.<sup>104</sup>

The retiring president, who during the delivery of the inaugural “looked the very picture of a forlorn, wretched, careworn, conscience-sore, decrepit old man,” seemed unenthusiastic.<sup>105</sup> Yet that afternoon, in conversation with friends, he called the address “high-toned, patriotic, conservative,” and “very able.”<sup>106</sup> (In fact, many passages in it closely resembled language Buchanan had employed in his annual message to Congress the previous December.)

Douglas was also positive about Lincoln’s speech, which he termed “very dignified,” and predicted that “it would do much to restore harmony to the country.”<sup>107</sup> Lincoln, said the senator, “does not mean coercion; he says nothing about retaking the forts or Federal property—he’s all right.” The president “deals in generalities—he don’t commit himself—and that is doubtless wise,” and “the tone is very kind and conciliatory.”<sup>108</sup> In the senate, Douglas described the inaugural as “a peace-offering rather than a war message” and said that Lincoln deserved “the thanks of all conservative men.”<sup>109</sup> According to Edwin M. Stanton, “Lincoln & the family at the White House, are represented to be greatly elated at Douglas joining in defence of the new

administration. It is said to be the chief topic of conversation with visitors at the Executive Mansion."<sup>110</sup>

That evening at the inaugural ball, held in a specially constructed pavilion accommodating 2,500 guests, Mrs. Lincoln entered on the arm of Senator Douglas, which some regarded as an indication that the Little Giant and the Rail-splitter had "buried the hatchet." Relieved to be safely installed, and drained by the ordeal of preparing and delivering his momentous address, the new president appeared tired. One woman blurted out: "Old Abe, as I live, is tipsy. Look at that funny smile."<sup>111</sup> After fifteen minutes of exchanging pleasantries in the receiving line, Lincoln remarked: "This hand-shaking is harder work than rail-splitting." But when the journalist Gail Hamilton offered to spare him the necessity of shaking her hand, he exclaimed: "Ah! Your hand doesn't hurt me."<sup>112</sup> (Lincoln's handshake as well as his hand could hurt; an English reporter told his readers that it "was so hard and so earnest, as to have reduced my own hand nearly to the consistency of pulp.")<sup>113</sup> Charles Francis Adams noted that the Lincolns "came in quite late. They are evidently wanting in all the arts to grace their position. He is simple, awkward and hearty. She is more artificial and pretentious."<sup>114</sup> One commentator wrote that the dignified First Lady "seems to feel her station is as high as that of any of the Queens of the earth."<sup>115</sup> An attendee recalled that it "at once became obvious to all that Mrs. Lincoln would never shine as a hostess in Washington society. She lacked presence, spontaneity, and all the magnetic and intellectual qualities which made Dolley Madison so popular."<sup>116</sup> When a correspondent of the New York *Herald* asked the president if he had any message to convey to that paper's editor, James Gordon Bennett, Lincoln replied: "Yes, you may tell him that Thurlow Weed has found out that Seward was not nominated at Chicago!"<sup>117</sup> The president stayed for only thirty minutes; his wife remained for another two hours.

### Public Reaction to the Inaugural

People throughout the country eagerly read and discussed the inaugural. On Broadway, New Yorkers walking along with their noses buried in newspapers collided with each other. There speculation about the inaugural led to heated exchanges among impatient men waiting outside newspaper offices.

"I'll bet he sticks just as firm as firm as a rock," predicted one.

"Well, he won't," rejoined another.

"Old Abe's the Shanghai chicken that'll not be afeared to fight."

"Go long with you, he's as innocent as a sucking babe."

"Fifty to a hundred dollars, he says coercion."

"I take you; where's your money?"

"Put it up; put it up; I'll hold stakes."

"No you won't."<sup>118</sup>

One influential resident of the Empire State opined that the "tone of the Inaugural has caused some Republicans to be 'born again.' Our party seems now united."<sup>119</sup>

Baltimoreans nearly came to blows in their eagerness to obtain copies of the inaugural. In Charleston, anxious crowds surrounded newspaper bulletin boards where

telegrams were posted. Richmond secessionists danced with joy, confident that Lincoln's address would strengthen their hand. Their counterparts in Nashville lustily crowded over the imminent prospect of war. In Montgomery, Alabama, Confederate leaders eagerly read the text as it came in over the telegraph. Vice-President Alexander H. Stephens exclaimed, "the man is a fool!" while Robert Toombs grumbled and Jefferson Davis clenched his teeth and remained silent.<sup>120</sup>

Northerners received the address positively. Benjamin Brown French, a New Hampshire native whom Lincoln was to appoint commissioner of public buildings, wrote that it "is conciliatory—peaceable—but firm in its tone, and is exactly what we, Union men, want."<sup>121</sup> Another admirer said it "breathes kindness & conciliation, but no dishonorable submission."<sup>122</sup> Others rejoiced that "we have a firm, vigorous, but temperate administration at this critical hour."<sup>123</sup> In Washington, Vermont Congressman Justin Morrill noted that the inaugural was acknowledged "by all to be a paper of extraordinary ability, and, handling difficult topics, one of extraordinary tact."<sup>124</sup> Weed's Albany *Evening Journal* thought Lincoln's address foreshadowed "the conciliatory spirit which will govern his administration, and presents solid ground upon which to base the hope that, ere long, the dark war clouds which hang over the Republic will be dispersed by the rising sun of fraternal fellowship and peace."<sup>125</sup> Iowa Congressman Samuel R. Curtis speculated that the inaugural would "cause reflection to supplant the excitement and fury that now seems to carry everything before it" and thus help to "arrest the revolution."<sup>126</sup> The New York *Tribune* rejoiced that "the Federal Government is still in existence, with a Man at the head of it," one "who will bring order out of seeming chaos, reason out of folly, safety out of danger."<sup>127</sup> Henry J. Raymond of the New York *Times* praised the inaugural's "intellectual and moral vigor" and "profound sincerity." It would have been impossible for Lincoln, said the *Times*, "to go further towards the conciliation of all discontented interests of the Confederacy" without "virtually abdicating the Presidency."<sup>128</sup> The Boston *Atlas and Bee* judged that the "language of conciliation—not compromise—is very freely and strongly used in the last half of the address, while the obligation to obey the expressed will of the people, as provided by law, is as distinctly announced." The only objection "can be possibly made to it, it is in too great a lenience to the revolutionists."<sup>129</sup>

Although most Northerners liked the substance of the inaugural, Lincoln's "rhetorical infelicities" did not suit everyone.<sup>130</sup> The Jersey City *American Standard* deplored it as "involved, coarse, colloquial, devoid of ease and grace, and bristling with obscurities and outrages against the simplest rules of syntax."<sup>131</sup> Others found Lincoln's prose "exceedingly plain, not to say hard-favored."<sup>132</sup> A virulently partisan Ohio Democrat, Congressman Clement L. Vallandigham, suggested that Seward had composed the inaugural, which he asserted was "not written in the direct and straightforward language . . . expected from the plain, blunt, honest man of the North-west." Vallandigham detected in the speech "the forked tongue and crooked counsel of the New York politician, leaving thirty millions of people in doubt whether it meant peace or war."<sup>133</sup>

The discriminating New York attorney George Templeton Strong was more favorably impressed, calling "the absence of fine writing and spread-eagle-ism" a "good

sign.” Though he objected to Lincoln’s treatment of the powers of the Supreme Court and his moral condemnation of slavery, Strong praised the inaugural for being “unlike any message or state paper of any class that has appeared in my time, to my knowledge. It is characterized by strong individuality and the absence of conventionalism of thought or diction. It doesn’t run in the ruts of Public Documents, number one to number ten million and one, but seems to introduce one to *a man* and to dispose one to like him.” Strong recorded that “Southronizers [i.e., pro-Southern Northerners] approved and applauded it as pacific and likely to prevent collision. Maybe so, but I think there’s a clank of metal in it.”<sup>134</sup>

Many others heard that same clank, including the editors of the New York *Daily News*, who said that despite the address’s “courteous, considerate, and even conciliatory tone,” there “is still left a sting.”<sup>135</sup> On Wall Street, a broker observed that he and his colleagues were “afraid there is too much fight in it,” and consequently “the *market* is feverish.”<sup>136</sup> *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* remarked that the address’s “words of peace and good-will seem to be traced by the bayonet point, by a mailed hand, and overtopping the figure of Mercy frowns the shadow of Force.”<sup>137</sup> Varying the metaphor, Charles Sumner likened the inaugural to a “hand of iron in [a] velvet glove.”<sup>138</sup>

Many feared the consequences of Lincoln’s pledge to hold the forts and to collect the revenues. “Either measure will result in Civil War which I am compelled to look upon as almost certain,” Edward Everett speculated presciently.<sup>139</sup> Most Southerners were of the same mind. The Richmond Whig and the Nashville *Union and American* both thought that sentence meant war. The Washington correspondent of the Charleston *Mercury* called it a “fiat of war” and grimly proclaimed that “the declaration of war has been spoken.”<sup>140</sup> The editor of that journal warned that if Lincoln should attempt to carry out the policy implicit in that sentence, “there will be war—open, declared, positive war—with booming cannon and blood.” He added dismissively: “If ignorance could add anything to folly, or insolence to brutality, the President of the Northern States of America has, in this address, achieved it. A more lamentable display of feeble inability to grasp the circumstances of this momentous emergency could scarcely have been exhibited.” Scornfully the editor asked, “has this vain, ignorant, low fellow no counselors—nobody of any comprehension to control and direct him?”<sup>141</sup> The Washington *States and Union* denounced the inaugural as “a miserable shilly-shallying around Robin Hood’s barn, meaningless and inexplicable.”<sup>142</sup>

Political leaders of the Lower South echoed those views. Texas Senator Louis Wigfall declared that the “Inaugural means war,” a “war to the knife and knife to the hilt.”<sup>143</sup> Supreme Court Justice John A. Campbell of Alabama deemed it “a beastly thing,” a “stump speech . . . wanting in statesmanship—of which he has none—and of dignity and decorum. I should call it an incendiary message—one calculated to set the country in a blaze. He is a conceited man—evidently he has been a great man in—Springfield, Illinois.”<sup>144</sup> The Confederate Commissioners, several Southern members of Congress, and Lucius Quinton Washington “agreed that it was Lincoln’s purpose at once to attempt the collection of the revenue, to re-enforce and hold Fort Sumter and Pickens, and to retake the other places. He is a man of will and

firmness.”<sup>145</sup> The readiness of warships in New York harbor convinced them that those plans would be implemented soon.

Some abolitionists disapproved of the inaugural, which they scorned as “double distilled conservatism” whose aim was to “gladden the hearts of ‘doughfaces.’” The “Hour has come and gone,” said Edmund Quincy, “but the Man was not sufficient for it. The speech was made with the face turned toward the South and with both knees bowed down before the idol it worships.”<sup>146</sup> Frederick Douglass saw in the inaugural little hope “for the cause of our down-trodden and heart-broken countrymen [i.e., slaves].” The president “has avowed himself ready to catch them if they run away, to shoot them down if they rise against their oppressors, and to prohibit the Federal Government irrevocably from interfering for their deliverance.”<sup>147</sup> Lydia Maria Child was willing to make “great allowance for the extreme difficulty of his position,” but she nevertheless thought Lincoln “bowed down to the Slave Power to an *unnecessary* degree.” The inaugural, she told John Greenleaf Whittier, “made *me* very doubtful of him.”<sup>148</sup>

But other abolitionists thought that Lincoln “met the trying emergency with rare self possession and equanimity” and called his address “a very manly sensible document” that “must inspire the respect and confidence of all who are not blinded by jealousy or partizan zeal.”<sup>149</sup> Elizur Wright deemed it “the most masterly piece of generalship which human history has yet to show,” demonstrating “that the new President’s heart is in the right place, and that, though far in advance of the average North, he knows how to make it follow him—solid.”<sup>150</sup> Although Oliver Johnson deplored Lincoln’s willingness to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act, he “was so exultant over the defeat of the compromise schemes in Congress and the failure of Weed and Seward in their efforts to exclude Chase from the Cabinet,” that he “was predisposed to a favorable judgment of the Inaugural.” He told a fellow antislavery militant that “when we consider what it *might* have been if Lincoln had fallen into Seward and Weed’s trap, and when we compare it with former papers of the sort, we may well congratulate ourselves.”<sup>151</sup>

Foreign press opinion was divided. The mighty London *Times* sneered at Lincoln’s “childish” focus on constitutional issues while ignoring the political and practical reality of secession and suggested that he negotiate with the Confederate States.<sup>152</sup> *Punch* was more favorable, lauding the president’s insistence that he could not allow such a dangerous precedent as secession to go unchallenged, lest seceders “go on seceding and subsequencing, until at last every citizen will secede from every other citizen, and each individual will be a sovereign state in himself.”<sup>153</sup> Across the English Channel, *La Patrie* in Paris criticized Lincoln’s “irresolution.”<sup>154</sup>

Some Northern Democrats were unimpressed. An Ohio legislator thought it contained “too much special pleading to satisfy any portion of the country.” He sniffed that “I know many very *small politicians* who could get up as good an inaugural with two days labor—men who never dreamed of being statesman.”<sup>155</sup> The ambiguity of the address left the public “at a loss to know what will be his line of policy in regard to the seceding states,” commented the *Illinois State Register*.<sup>156</sup>

Such confusion was especially noticeable in the all-important Upper South and Border States. To many in that region the inaugural seemed bellicose. North Carolina

Senator Thomas Clingman warned that if the president “intends to use the power in his hands as he states in his inaugural, we must have war.”<sup>157</sup> Such statements resonated with his constituents, who had narrowly rejected calls for a convention and were now reconsidering. Clingman’s colleagues from Virginia were reportedly “most discouraged” by the thousands of onlookers at the inaugural ceremonies who were “prepared to sustain and defend the Union.”<sup>158</sup> Representatives Henry C. Burnett and John W. Stevenson of Kentucky, along with Albert Rust of Arkansas, indignantly declared that “it smacks of coercion, compulsion, and blood.”<sup>159</sup> Unionist delegates to the Virginia secession convention reported that the inaugural, which “came upon us like an earthquake, and threatened to overthrow all our conservative plans,” had severely embarrassed them and weakened their position.<sup>160</sup> A resident of the Shenandoah Valley told Stephen A. Douglas that it was “almost dangerous for any one here even to suggest that the inaugural is not a declaration of war.”<sup>161</sup> The Baltimore *Sun* thought it “an exhibition of remorseless fanaticism and unprincipled partisanship,” breathing “the spirit of mischief,” assuming “despotic authority,” and signaling a desire “to exercise that authority to any extent of war and bloodshed.”<sup>162</sup>

Many in the Border States read it differently. Kentucky Congressmen Robert Mallory and Francis Bristow thought the address signified peace rather than war. Inspired by the inaugural, Representatives John Bouligny of Louisiana and Andrew J. Hamilton of Texas planned to return home “and battle for the flag and the Union.”<sup>163</sup> In St. Louis, the *Missouri Democrat* called the inaugural “emphatically a peace message,” and the *Missouri Republican* editorialized that “[s]o far as Missouri and the Border States are concerned, we have to say, that the positions assumed in the Inaugural . . . remove, to a great extent, the causes of the anxiety which have been felt by them, and do not furnish, in any sense, a justification for secession from the Union.”<sup>164</sup>

Some Marylanders shared those views. A Baltimore correspondent said that the inaugural “is generally well spoken of, and hopes are freely entertained that it will have a good effect in restoring peace to the country. Maryland will unhesitatingly support the policy of Mr. Lincoln’s inaugural, in preference to secession or disunion in any shape.”<sup>165</sup> John Pendleton Kennedy liked the inaugural, with its “dignified and truthful” tone and “its spirit for the promotion of concord.” To that literary son of Baltimore, it seemed “conciliatory and firm—promising peace, but breathing a purpose to resist aggression against the Government.” He had “not the least doubt in the world” that the president “meant peace by it.” Kennedy rejoiced that “Lincoln is beginning to perceive the realities of the case and is growing more and more conservative.”<sup>166</sup> The Baltimore *American* deemed the inaugural “pacific” and asserted that “it furnishes no pretext for disunion.”<sup>167</sup> The *Clipper* also maintained that the inaugural “means only peace and nothing but peace, as far as is possibly consistent with our national honor and the public welfare.”<sup>168</sup>

In North Carolina, John A. Gilmer thought that Lincoln had given “most cheering assurances, enough to induce the whole South to wait for the sober second thought of the North.”<sup>169</sup> A leading newspaper in the Tarheel State judged that the inaugural “is not unfriendly to the South” and that it “deprecates war and bloodshed, and pleads

for the Union.”<sup>170</sup> State Senator Jonathan Worth insisted that it “breathes peace to any candid mind.”<sup>171</sup>

Some Tennessee papers detected peace rather than war in Lincoln’s words. The Nashville *Republican Banner* commented that in light of his oath to enforce the laws, Lincoln had made a “mild and conservative address.” The editors thought it conciliatory enough “to dispel all idea of ‘coercion.’” Thus, “if civil war is to ensue, it will not be upon his responsibility.”<sup>172</sup> The Knoxville *Whig* called the address “peace-loving and conservative in its recommendations.”<sup>173</sup>

In the nation’s capital, John C. Rives, the slaveowning editor of the Washington *Daily Globe*, tellingly asked critics of the inaugural “what position . . . the President of the United States could possibly take, other than that taken by President Lincoln, without a palpable, open violation of his inaugural oath, and an utter abnegation and abdication of all the powers of government?”<sup>174</sup> Border State congressmen like John S. Millson of Virginia, James M. Leach of North Carolina, and John S. Phelps of Missouri reportedly did “not endorse all the positions taken by Mr. Lincoln” but nevertheless praised “his decision and straightforwardness.”<sup>175</sup> The Louisville *Democrat* sensibly observed that Lincoln “is powerless to extricate himself from the obligations of the Constitution. He cannot surrender the forts, if he desired; nor say, on the back of his oath to see that the laws are faithfully executed, that he will forbear their execution.” Yet by including modifiers like “as far as practicable” and “unless the people will withhold the requisite means, or direct otherwise,” he clearly created “a remonstrance against war.”<sup>176</sup> In Alabama, the Mobile *Register* echoed that view, commenting that the tone of the inaugural “seems conciliatory, and upon the whole, rather more dignified—thanks, probably, to Mr. Seward—than recent emanations from the same source had led us to expect.”<sup>177</sup>

The country shared the concern expressed by Maryland Congressman Henry Winter Davis, who admired Lincoln’s inaugural but feared that he “will be another illustration of the wide difference between a writer & thinker & a man of action—between talking & administration. *If* he will *act* on his Inaugural his administration may yet be a great success.”<sup>178</sup>

Lincoln could breathe a sigh of relief and look forward to a peaceable solution to the secession crisis. He had delivered a firm but conciliatory address that seemed likely to strengthen the hand of Southern Unionists. Now time could work its healing wonders. “Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time,” he had said in his inaugural. Southerners would eventually realize that Lincoln was no wild-eyed abolitionist; the Upper South would probably remain in the Union; the Deep South would eventually come to understand that it was too small to survive as a viable nation and would therefore return to the fold. In May, Virginia voters would elect Unionists to Congress; in August, Tennessee, Kentucky and North Carolina would follow suit; in November, Maryland would do the same. The nation would be restored without bloodshed. Southern senators like Crittenden, Andrew Johnson, and Lazarus Powell of Kentucky declared “that the action of the past few days, with the Inauguration to-day, means peace and a settlement of all the National difficulties.”<sup>179</sup> Johnson said that armed with the Thirteenth Amendment and the bills organizing the territorial

governments in Dakota, Nevada, and Colorado with no provision regarding slavery, he could effectively prevail over secessionists in Tennessee.

On March 6 and 7, Congressmen Horace Maynard and Thomas A. R. Nelson of Tennessee asked Lincoln how his inaugural should be interpreted. He told them “that he was for peace, and would use every exertion in his power to maintain it; that he was then inclined to the opinion that it would be better to forego the collection of the revenue for a season, so as to allow the people of the seceding States time for reflection, and that regarding them as children of a common family, he was not disposed to take away their bread by withholding even their mail facilities. He expressed a strong hope that, after a little time is allowed for reflection, they will recede from the position they have taken.”<sup>180</sup>

The day after the inauguration, Lincoln was shown a letter demolishing that rosy scenario. From Charleston, Major Robert Anderson wrote that his Fort Sumter garrison would run out of food within six weeks. The fort, sitting on an island in the harbor and ringed by hostile South Carolina batteries, must either be resupplied or surrendered. The former course would probably lead to war, the latter to “national destruction.”<sup>181</sup> Lincoln had to choose between them.