

MELANCHOLY

DRAWER

3A

PERSONALITY

714209 085.02496

Abraham Lincoln's Personality

Melancholy

Excerpts from newspapers and other
sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

MORBID TRAITS IN LINCOLN.

Nothing in the history of ABRAHAM LINCOLN's life is more interesting than his profound melancholy—a trait as deeply wrought into the character of the man as his masterful quality of ambition. His law partner and friend, Mr. W. H. HERNDON of Springfield, has made public a mass of evidence in his biography of LINCOLN which will do much to shape the judgment of posterity on the true character of this remarkable man.

The old poets of the classic civilization involved the deepest truths in their myths, as if taunting with them the blindness of mankind. It is in this spirit that the great thinker who illustrated the startling inconsistencies of human character by sincerely seeking truths while serving as pander to NERO, has so treated the myth of the descent of one of the old heroes into hell—a descent necessary in order that he might attain heaven ("inferna telegit posset ut supera adsequi"). If ever a living man "descended into hell" it was LINCOLN. No man was ever less "equal-minded." That quality of common sense he lacked altogether. There are no common-sensible people in the ninth circle of the inferno, which was so familiar to him. That majority of people in the world whose rule of life makes common sense have providentially some such mental safe-guard against deep and bitter thought as aquatic fowls have in the oil bag, by means of the secretions of which they can come out of the water, not unwetted, but with only surface moisture, to be shaken off with a turn of the body and an expansion of the wings. LINCOLN had no such mental organ. "The waves of his trouble" penetrated him. The common-sense equanimity, without which the world would be either a mad house or the arena for the constant struggle of mad ambition, he lacked altogether. He went from extreme to extreme.

Common-sense shrewdness he had in a marked degree. He understood men, perhaps, because he underwent more than the average suffering from what is average human weakness—emotionalism. If his whole life was not a struggle between a brain capable of deep calculation and always inclined to shrewdness, and those feelings which move men out of themselves, unbalance them and make them pathetic, then the evidence of his life, as it is presented by the friend from whom he concealed least, must be rejected.

One cause of the deep melancholy, verging on insanity, to which he was subject seems to have been a sense of the obscurity of his origin weighing down against his ambition. How far he believed or disbelieved the stories about his birth does not fully appear, but he was conscious in himself of qualities he could not account for as derived from his putative ancestry. In a conversation with Mr. HERNDON, in 1850, he reckoned over these qualities, mentioning among them power of logic, a faculty of analysis, mental activity and ambition. He believed in heredity and breeding, and he believed that these qualities "distinguished him from the other members and descendants of the Hanks (his mother's) family." Curiously enough, it does not seem to have occurred to him to search for them in the Lincoln family. He took into account only his maternal parentage, and told Mr. HERNDON that his mother was "the illegitimate daughter of LUCY HANKS and a well-bred Virginia farmer or planter." "He believed that his better nature and finer

qualities came from this broad-minded unknown Virginian." "His words and melancholy tone made a deep impression on me," says Mr. HERNDON. There is the same melancholy tone in a letter LINCOLN wrote the next year (January 7, 1851) in response to a summons to the death-bed of the shiftless THOMAS LINCOLN, for whom he had bought a farm in Coles County, Illinois. "Say to him that if we could meet now it is doubtful if it would not be more painful than pleasant," he wrote, after advising that he should commend himself to "a Merciful Maker." This, addressed to a dying father seems heartlessness, but LINCOLN was never heartless. What reason for it he concealed in his deep self-consciousness will never be known. It is known that THOMAS LINCOLN was worse than a step-father to him, but there is no evidence whatever of maliciousness in the character of ABRAHAM LINCOLN. He could inflict pain on others, but only as a result of logic when he was in his logical mood. In his emotional mood he inflicted on himself the deepest mental anguish.

Naturally, in such a man, emotionalism is most marked in his relations with women. His love for ANNE RUTLEDGE was an emotion which "carried him away" completely—to use the Saxon instead of the Latin expression of the result of emotion. Her death fixed on him the deep melancholy he could never shake off, but it is characteristic of his moods that the next year, while his friends were still fearing he might kill himself, he made offer of marriage to two other ladies. After his failure to appear on the day set for the wedding with Miss TODD, his condition was probably worse than it ever was before or afterwards. He himself described it as "a hell" of suffering. As he was recovering from it on a farm in Kentucky where his friends secluded him, he gave a glimpse of his self-consciousness which explains much in his character. "If what I feel," he wrote, "were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be a cheerful face on earth." And shortly afterwards he declared that he had done nothing to make any human being remember that he had lived, and that what he desired to live for was to link his name forever with some great event.

"Beware what you ask," the French say, "for the gods will give it to you." LINCOLN's ambition mastered his emotion. He had written a communication on "Suicide" to a local paper. When his biographers, years afterwards, looked in the only file of the paper to find it, it had been cut out. LINCOLN, the politician, did not propose that LINCOLN, the man, should interfere overmuch in politics.

The marriage with Miss TODD made his moods of gloom a fixed habit. His biographer describes his married life as "years of self-torture and sacrificial pangs." He would leave his home at daylight, go to his law office and sit there silently, "doubled up," with his feet higher than his head, filling the room with such intense gloom that his partner would be driven out to escape the unbearable oppression. Three or four hours later, going from extreme to extreme, he would be sitting on the Court House steps, keeping a crowd of "loungers" in a roar with his jokes—Lincoln jokes, the obscenity of which his biographer is able to excuse on the ground of their pith and their illustration of human nature.

As the comfort of home was wholly denied him, so he denied himself the comfort of

faith. He held ROBERT DALE OWEN's theory that men are absolutely governed by their motives, and, logical as he was at times, there is no evidence that it ever occurred to him that men's motives change with their lives; that, therefore, men can and do govern their motives by their lives. He was a Fatalist, believing that men are powerless to suspend any natural law acting on their intellectual and moral natures. Always introspective, and never an observer of nature, he never was able to apply to intellect or morals the inference from the perpetual process of the suspension of one law of nature by another through the agency of human will in the activities of human life. The Providence, he believed in was a Providence of fatal law, and living his life of moods—moods of emotion; moods of logic; moods of deep depression, succeeded by the exaltation of a fixed and ambitious purpose, he died as he believed he was "fated" to die.

Such characters have not been rare in the history of the human family. Self-consciousness and the habit of introspection explain many of their peculiarities that would be otherwise unexplainable.

LINCOLN'S SADNESS.

1898

From The Indianapolis Journal.

Boone County Republicans celebrated Lincoln's Birthday with a banquet in Lochinvar Hall. One of the most interesting speeches delivered was that of General Wallace. The address dealt for the most part with personal reminiscences of the great emancipator. In concluding his remarks he said:

"I will tell you at this time of an incident which I have never before made public. I do not know that it is proper, but the man whom it is about is gone, and I will relate it. I had made an engagement with Lincoln to call at the White House and present two women who desired to meet him. The time set for the call was 11 a. m. At the appointed hour I presented myself, in company with the women. As I was ushered in I saw at the further end of the long room the tall form of Lincoln leaning against a window. He waved his hand, indicating that I was to take the women to a sofa, and then by another wave of the hand he motioned for me to come to him. My heart filled with sympathy for him, for I knew something was wrong. As I approached him and looked into his face it seemed to me it was the saddest and most troubled countenance I had ever beheld. There were deep lines of suffering about the face, the features were drawn and pinched. His hair was thin and uncombed. He was naturally somewhat stoop-shouldered, but seemed to be especially so on this occasion. As I drew nearer and caught his eye I was more deeply impressed with the sadness which permeated his whole being. If I were to live a thousand years I would not forget the anguish of the expression of his face. I said:

"Mr. Lincoln, I hope you are not sick."

"He replied: 'No, I am not sick.'"

"I said: 'You look sad. Something terrible must have happened.'"

"He made no reply, but, calling a servant, he asked how long it would be until the boat left the wharf for Harrison's Landing. The answer was, 'In thirty minutes.' Then, turning to me, Lincoln said in an undertone, and the sadness of his face deepened as he said it: 'I must go on that boat to Harrison's Landing on the James River.'"

"What for?" I asked in surprise.

"His voice dropped to a whisper as he replied, 'I must go to Harrison's Landing to keep McClellan from surrendering the army.'"

"It was after the Seven Days' Battle, and the leader of the great army was retreating before the Confederates."

"At this point I introduced the women and retired. In thirty minutes Lincoln was on board the boat, speeding away on his journey. The next I heard of him he was at Harrison's Landing, and the Union Army was not surrendered."

LINCOLN IN DESPAIR

THE TIME WHEN HE WAS TEMPT-
ED TO SUICIDE.

1865

An Instance When he Was More Seri-
ous Than the Case Warranted—
Story Told by Secretary of War
Stanton to Congressman Young.

"Mr. Lincoln during the war was very sensitive of the criticisms on his administration by the newspaper press, believing it to be, as he asserted, the true voice of the people. The failures of McDowell, McClellan, Burnside and Poe with the Army of the Potomac and the criticisms made thereon by the newspapers almost crazed him. Time and again he would free himself from the Executive Mansion and seek my little office, the only place in Washington, he often said, where he could be absolutely free from interruption. When he became closeted with me on these visits Mr. Lincoln would unbosom himself and talk of his cares and woes. Several times he insisted that he ought to resign, and thus give the country an opportunity to secure some one better fitted to accomplish the great task expected of the President. Or, if he did not resign, he thought he ought to impress upon Congress the propriety of giving the absolute control of the army to some purely military man. It was during one of these moods that he conceived the idea of placing Hooker in command of the Army of the Potomac, and of vesting him with such power that, in his opinion, he could not fail of success. He had a great idea of Hooker's ability as a soldier, and in addition he believed him to be an honest man and a sincere patriot. He wanted him to fight what he intended should be and what he felt would be, the closing battle of the war. Accordingly, when Hooker got under way, and the news came that at Chancellorsville he would make his fight, Mr. Lincoln was in the greatest state of mental excitement. From the time that Hooker's army began its march until the smoke of battle had cleared from the fatal field of Chancellorsville, he scarcely knew what it was to sleep.

"It will be remembered that the fight lasted three days. During the first two days it looked as if Hooker was about to accomplish what so many generals before him had failed to do; but, early on the third day, the usual half-hour dispatches began to make matters look dark and ominous of defeat. The whole day Mr. Lincoln was miserable. He ate nothing, and would see no one but me. As it grew dark the dispatches ceased coming at all. Mr. Lincoln would walk from the White House to my apartment and anxiously inquire for news from Hooker. With the going down of the sun a cold and drenching rain set in, which lasted through the night. At about 7 o'clock Mr. Lincoln ceased his visits to my apartment, and gave orders at the Executive Mansion that he would see no one before morning. An hour afterward a dispatch of indefinite character was received from Hooker, and I hurried with it to Mr. Lincoln's apartments. When I entered I found him walking the floor, and his agonized appearance so terrified me that it was with difficulty that I could speak. Mr. Lincoln approached me like a man wild with excitement, seized the dispatch from my hand, read it, and, his

face slightly brightening, remarked: 'Stanton, there is hope yet!' At my solicitation Mr. Lincoln accompanied me to the War Department, where he agreed to spend the night, or until something definite was heard from Hooker. For five hours, the longest and most wearisome of my life, I waited before a dispatch announcing the retreat of Hooker was received. When Mr. Lincoln read it he threw up his hands and exclaimed, 'My God, Stanton, our cause is lost! We are ruined—we are ruined; and such a fearful loss of life! My God! this is more than I can endure!' He stood, trembling visibly, his face of a ghastly hue, the perspiration standing out in big spots on his brow. He put on his hat and coat and began to pace the floor. For five or ten minutes he was silent and then, turning to me, he said: 'If I am not around early to-morrow, do not send for me, nor allow any one to disturb me. Defeated again, and so many of our noble countrymen killed! What will the people say?'

"As he finished he started for the door. I was alarmed. There was something indescribable about the President's face and manner that made me feel that my chief should not be left alone. How to approach him without creating suspicion was the thought of a second. Going up to him and laying my hand on his shoulder I said: 'Mr. President, I, too, am feeling that I would rather be dead than alive; but is it manly—it is brave—that we should be the first to succumb? I have an idea: You remain here with me to-night. Lie down on yonder lounge, and by the time you have had a few hours' sleep, I will have a vessel at the wharf, and we will go to the front and see for ourselves the condition of the army.'

"The idea of visiting the army in person acted like a tonic. Mr. Lincoln immediately adopted the suggestion. The next morning we left Washington on a gunboat for Hooker's command. On our return trip Mr. Lincoln told me that when he started to leave the War Department on that evening he had fully made up his mind to go immediately to the Potomac River and there end his life, as many a poor creature—but none half so miserable as he was at that time—had done before. —Philadelphia Times.

LINCOLN'S DISPOSITION.

Ordinarily Cheerful, It Held a Strain of Deep Melancholy. 1806

Hopeful and cheerful as he ordinarily seemed, there was in Mr. Lincoln's disposition a strain of deep melancholy. This was not peculiar to him alone, for the pioneers as a race were sadder rather than gay. Their lives had been passed for generations under the most trying physical conditions, near malaria infested streams and where they breathed the poison of decaying vegetation. Insufficient shelter, storms, the cold of winter, savage enemies and the cruel labor that killed off all but the hardiest of them had at the same time killed the happy-go-lucky gayety of an easier form of life. They were thoughtful, watchful, wary; capable, indeed, of wild merriment, but it has been said that although a pioneer might laugh he could not easily be made to smile. Lincoln's mind was unusually sound and sane and normal. He had a cheerful, wholesome, sunny nature, yet he had inherited the strongest traits of the pioneers, and there was in him, moreover, much of the poet, with a poet's capacity for joy and pain. It is not strange that as he developed into manhood, especially when his deeper nature began to feel the stirrings of ambition and of love, that these seasons of depression and gloom came upon him with overwhelming force.—Helen Nicolay in St. Nicholas.

LINCOLN'S MELANCHOLY.

His Sympathetic Nature and His Early Misfortunes. 1890

Those who saw much of Abraham Lincoln during the later years of his life were greatly impressed with the expression of profound melancholy his face always wore in repose.

Mr. Lincoln was of a peculiarly sympathetic and kindly nature. These strong characteristics influenced, very happily, as it proved, his entire political career. They would not seem, at first glance, to be efficient aids to political success; but in the peculiar emergency which Lincoln, in the providence of God, was called to meet, no vessel of common clay could possibly have become the "chosen of the Lord."

Those acquainted with him from boyhood knew that early griefs tinged his whole life with sadness. His partner in the grocery business at Salem was "Uncle" Billy Green of Tallula, Ill., who used at night, when the customers were few, to hold the grammar while Lincoln recited his lessons.

It was to his sympathetic ear Lincoln told the story of his love for sweet Ann Rutledge; and he, in return, offered what comfort he could when poor Ann died, and Lincoln's great heart nearly broke.

"After Ann died," says "Uncle" Billy, "on stormy nights, when the wind blew the rain against the roof, Abe would set thar in the grocery, his elbows on his knees, his face in his hands, and the tears runnin' through his fingers. I hated to see him feel bad, an I'd say, 'Abe don't cry'; an' he'd look up an' say, 'I can't help it, Billy, the rain's a fallin' on her.'"

WHEN LINCOLN DESPAIRED.

Worried by Antietam, but Next Day Found Him Cheerful Again.

The late Robert C. Ogden, famous as an educator and philanthropist, said in a public address that on the night after the second day's fighting at Antietam Schuyler Colfax, then speaker of the house of representatives, after a vain effort to obtain news of the result of the battle, went to see the president. It was 3 o'clock in the morning, and he found Lincoln lying on a lounge, with his clothes on, awaiting dispatches. When Colfax said that there was still no news the president said:

"Schuyler, what does it all mean? Are we not on God's side? We have thought we were right." Then, with a gesture of despair, Lincoln added, "I would gladly exchange places tonight with any dead soldier boy on the battlefield."

The next morning Colfax went to the capitol and asked several representatives if they had any news of the battle.

"No," was the reply. "But we have seen Lincoln, and he seems to be feeling so good and told us so many stories that everything must be all right."

The Sunday School Journal.

Jan., 1910.

Lincoln, The Man of Sorrows. This volume seems likely to attract attention. It is well printed and issued by the Lincoln Temperance Press of Chicago. One half of its contents consists of a lecture delivered in the "Temple Lecture Course" at Philadelphia by Eugene W. Chafin, LL.B., of the Chicago bar. The remainder consists of Lincoln's Temperance Speech, His First and Second Inaugurals, the text of his Proclamation of Emancipation, and his Gettysburg Address. The writer's treatment of his subject is itself proof of his statement of the impossibility of producing satisfactory biographical sketches of any great American—whether Washington or Lincoln. The path taken by the biographer leads hard by forbidden ground. The pathos of Mr. Lincoln's life is microscopically treated. Sorrow itself makes no man's life great. Without doubt, men have lived into whose life, from beginning to end, has entered more distress than dogged Lincoln's footsteps, from the log cabin to the assassination. The reader can but feel sorrowful that so little discrimination is made between a private life and a public career. All will join with the author in his assertion that the high service and exaltation of Abraham Lincoln were the result of his *character* and his *self-control*. Nothing is more desirable than that the young readers of our land should find that out and believe it. May we not hope that some writer will yet sketch for us the oases and happy moments which must have entered into this human life, which God evidently made so great use of, in the interests of mankind? Meantime the search for Lincoln's secret must abide, side by side with the Quest of the Holy Grail, until some one like-minded with the martyr President is therefore able to interpret the manner of man he was.

WHY LINCOLN WAS MELANCHOLY

INTESTINAL POISONING from putrefactive bacteria was what mado Abraham Lincoln melancholy, we are told by the writer of a leading editorial in *Good Health* (Battle Creek, Mich.). We are reminded at the outset that every biographer of Lincoln speaks of an inexplicable melancholy which perpetually enshrouded him. Herndon, his law partner for twenty years, who has written the most detailed account of the great statesman, speaks as follows of this peculiarity, in his "Life of Lincoln":

"Lincoln's melancholy never failed to impress any man who ever saw or knew him. The perpetual look of sadness was his most prominent feature. The cause of this peculiar condition was a matter of frequent discussion among his friends. John T. Stuart said it was due to his abnormal digestion. His liver failed to work properly—did not secrete bile—and his bowels were equally inactive. 'I used to advise him to take blue mass pills,' related Stuart, 'and he did take them before he went to Washington, and for five months while he was President, but when I came on to Congress he told me he had ceased using them because they made him cross.' The reader can hardly realize the extent of this peculiar tendency to gloom. One of Lincoln's colleagues in the Legislature of Illinois is authority for the statement coming from Lincoln himself that this 'mental depression became so intense at times he never dared carry a pocket-knife.'

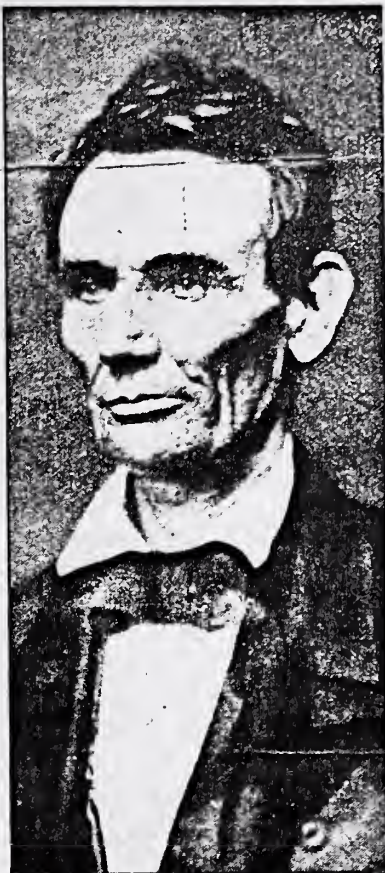
"As to the cause of this morbid condition my idea has always been that it was occult, and could not be explained by any course of observation and reasoning. It was ingrained, and, being ingrained, could not be reduced to rule, or the cause arrayed. It was necessarily hereditary, but whether it came down from a long line of ancestors and far back, or was simply the reproduction of the saddened life of Nancy Hanks, can not well be determined. At any rate it was a part of his nature, and could no more be shaken off than he could part with his brains."

On this the editorial writer comments as follows:

"We feel sure that no reader of *Good Health*, after reading the above paragraphs, will be able to agree with Mr. Herndon in the suggestion that the cause of Mr. Lincoln's melancholy was 'occult.' The description of Mr. Lincoln shows clearly enough that he was a victim, to an extreme degree, of intestinal toxemia. The same author tells us, in a more intimate description of Lincoln's appearance, that 'His skin was sallow,' 'wrinkled and dry and leathery,' from which it is apparent that he was toxic to a most extraordinary degree, further proof of which is shown by the fact that he was temporarily relieved by the use of calomel. Lincoln's observation that the continued use of calomel 'made him cross,' is explained by the fact long ago noted by Von Noorden, Combe and others, that the continued use of drug cathartics results in the development of colitis, a diseased condition which most profoundly affects the nervous system, producing irritability as well as depression, often to an extreme degree.

"In view of such facts, to ascribe Mr. Lincoln's melancholy to heredity is quite gratuitous. If it is true, as some have supposed, that Mr. Lincoln's occasional visits to the theater were prompted by a desire to find diversion from the gloom that preyed upon him, it might be suggested that it is quite possible that if the great President could have had his 'flora' changed, certain sad chapters in American history need not have been written, and without doubt the political history of this country subsequent to the Civil War, and perhaps of some other civilized countries, also, might have been greatly modified.

"Unfortunately, in Mr. Lincoln's day the beneficent germ which has for its function in the world to protect the colon,



"PERPETUAL SADNESS"

Which was "the most prominent feature" of Lincoln's appearance, is now attributed to an intestinal ailment that modern medicine would have cured.

had not yet been discovered, but even to-day, when the veriest tyro knows that 'biliousness' is merely another name for a bad flora, that is, a state of putrefaction of food residues in the colon, there are everywhere hundreds of thousands of people, possibly many millions of men and women, suffering from mental and physical miseries from which they might be promptly relieved by a suppression of the flood of poisons pouring in from the colon, which may now be easily accomplished, thanks to the modern discoveries of efficient methods of increasing intestinal activity and promoting the growth in the colon of the protective bacteria which prevent putrefactive changes.

"So great is the influence of pernicious bacteria upon mind and character as well as every bodily function, the writer has no doubt that the general adoption of an antitoxic diet and the appropriate means for establishing and maintaining a normal, sanitary condition of the human colon, would contribute more greatly to the promotion of human happiness and the suppression of misery, disease, even poverty and crime, than any other one thing that could be done. Biologic or physiologic living is a basic principle of conduct the influence of which, if generally applied upon human life and character, would be found inestimably and beneficently great.

"Such a change in our *mores* as would put us in harmony with modern knowledge of human physiology would change the course of human development so as to make the trend upward instead of downward, as at the present time. A thoroughgoing application of biologic methods to our hospitals for the insane would, without doubt, loose the fetters which bind many a poor victim of chronic melancholy, the so-called 'manic-depressive neurosis,' and restore to useful places in society tens of thousands of victims of a bad flora who are sitting under the shadow not of a bad heredity but of a bad diet or, at least, of a bad heredity plus a bad diet.

"According to Herndon, the great Lincoln's whole life was overshadowed by melancholy which was plainly the result of autointoxication rather than any occult or hereditary influence. To the average man the insane hospital is a place over the portals of which stands out in bold relief, 'Abandon hope all who enter here.' By the planting of biologic ideals in these great and highly organized medical institutions, and the application of thoroughgoing physiologic methods in diet and treatment, these public hospitals might be made the means of setting free from melancholy and madness many thousands who are to-day doomed to die in a madhouse and would become centers of light and education in right living, the influence of which would speedily extend to every community. Nothing is so much needed at the present time as a thoroughgoing application of human physiology to human life."

The Lincoln Blues.

When Lincoln Was Nuts

There is a great deal of humor in secret telegraphic codes.

A favorite story of that kind is connected with the memory of Abraham Lincoln. When the great Civil war president started east from Springfield in 1861 to assume office, feeling was running high against him in certain parts of the country. When he reached Harrisburg he was in possession of letters from William H. Seward and Gen. Scott, telling him that threats had been made to take his life if he went through Baltimore.

His friends advised him that he should avoid Baltimore, but Lincoln declared that he would never sneak into the capital like a thief in the night.

Finally his friends realizing the danger took the matter out of his hands. Col. Scott, then president of the Pennsylvania railroad, assumed complete charge of plans to get Lincoln safely to Washington. He cut all of the telegraph wires leading out of Harrisburg and sent Lincoln with only one companion, a Col. Lamon, in secret to Philadelphia to catch the night train to Washington. The rest of the Lincoln party spent an anxious and sleepless night at Harrisburg.

About daybreak, the wires having been repaired, they received a telegram in the secret code agreed upon by Col. Scott and Col. Lamon. It read:

"Plums delivered nuts safely."

Col. Scott looked at the cipher. Then he threw his hat into the air shouting, "Lincoln is in Washington."

That Abraham Lincoln was subject to periodic attacks of melancholia is established and accepted. No one questions it. As to the cause of his melancholia, there are several opinions. One attributed them wholly to emotional strain. The two periods of melancholy which are generally supported by this school were that which followed the death of Ann Rutledge and the weeks just subsequent to a misunderstanding with Mary Todd.

Another school thinks there was a physical basis for his attacks. Members of this group say Lincoln had chronic constipation and this explained his depression. They cite as proof his sallow skin, his almost habit of taking calomel, and his youth spent in a malarial country.

A third school offers a mental basis for his periodical emotional disturbance. They say that among the members of the family there was recognition of a family trait called by them "the Lincoln Blues." Distant relatives who did not know they were kin to Abraham Lincoln were subject to attacks of depression which they called "Lincoln Blues." This tendency they regarded as hereditary in the Lincoln family.

Dr. Thomas Hall Shastid has still another explanation. Dr. Shastid's grandfather and father knew Abraham Lincoln well, the grandfather having lived at New Salem when Lincoln was there. Later Abraham Lincoln visited the grandfather and father at Pittsfield. Dr. Shastid is an eye specialist. He says the Lincoln blues were the result of eye strain. His eye muscles were not well balanced. His left eye had a tendency to turn upward. Occasionally it would cross turning upward. Eye specialists recognize this peculiar type of lack of eye muscle balance and supply it with a name. It causes an unusually severe form of eye strain.

It will be recalled that Lincoln used glasses for reading, at least during the years of his maturity. These glasses were spectacles, and he wore them far down on his nose. An eye specialist would say that his method of wearing his glasses would cause some eye strain of itself in addition to that due to poor balance in his eye muscles.

Dr. Shastid has an opinion on a related, subject but one that does not cause eye strain or melancholia. He thinks Lincoln may have been color blind. This he bases in part on a statement made by Lincoln to Dr. Shastid's grandmother. When Mrs. Shastid offered to show him her flower garden he said: "I will look at your flowers, mother, but I really cannot understand what people see to admire in such things. I am somehow deficient." *Letter Engle 8-6-29*

How to Keep Well

By Dr. W. A. Evans

THOSE LINCOLN BLUES

Abraham Lincoln was subject to the famous "Lincoln blue," Dr. W. E. Barton, who has done more than all other historians combined to develop this point, tells us the Lincoln family knew of this trait. Some of them spoke of it as the Lincoln blues, in my meaning of what Dr. Barton wrote is correct. The well known example of the disorder was President Lincoln, but it was present and recognized in other members of the family. Dr. Barton found distant relatives of the former President, who did not know that they were relatives, and who knew comparatively little about Mr. Lincoln, but who paid tribute to the Lincoln blues.

Every Lincoln biographer who recorded his personal observation of Lincoln wrote about the sadness of his facial expression at times and of the sloughs of despond through which he would periodically pass.

Two of these depression periods have been grossly exaggerated. They have served as the basis of unfounded stories that Lincoln was at times temporarily insane and that he was once an inmate of a sanitarium for the mentally unsound. While living at New Salem, and after the death of Miss Ann Rutledge, he had such a spell and spent a short vacation in the country at Bowling Green. After his break with Mary Todd he had another spell and again recuperated while on a vacation with his friend, Speed. Two vacations in a lifetime should not cause gossip, but these two did. In both instances gossip and even biography have grossly exaggerated both the causes and the effects.

ROCHESTER N Y CHRONICLE
AUGUST 7, 1929

THE LINCOLN BLUES.

THAT Abraham Lincoln was subject to periodic attacks of melancholia is established and accepted. No one questions it. As to the cause of his melancholia there are several opinions. One attributed them wholly to emotional strain. The two periods of melancholy which are generally supported by this school were that which followed the death of Ann Rutledge and the weeks just subsequent to a misunderstanding with Mary Todd.

Another school thinks there was a physical basis for his attacks. Members of this group say Lincoln had chronic constipation and this explained his depression. They cite as proof his sallow skin, his almost habit of taking calomel, and his youth spent in a malarial country.

A third school offers a mental basis for his periodical emotional disturbance. They say that among the members of the family there was recognition of a family trait called by them "the Lincoln blues." Distant relatives who did not know they were kin to Abraham Lincoln were subject to attacks of depression which they called "Lincoln blues." This tendency they regarded as hereditary in the Lincoln family.

Dr. Thomas Hall Shastid has still another explanation. Dr. Shastid's grandfather and father knew Abraham Lincoln well, the grandfather having lived at New Salem when Lincoln was there. Later Abraham Lincoln visited the grandfather and father at Pittsfield. Dr. Shastid is an eye specialist. He says the Lincoln blues were the result of eye strain. His eye muscles were not well balanced. His left eye had a tendency to turn upward. Occasionally it would cross turning upward. Eye specialists recognize this peculiar type of lack of eye muscle balance and supply it with a name. It causes an unusually severe form of eye strain.

It will be recalled that Lincoln used glasses for reading, at least during the years of his maturity. These glasses were spectacles and he wore them far down on his nose. An eye specialist would say that his method of wearing his glasses would cause some eye strain of itself in addition to that due to poor balance in his eye muscles.

Dr. Shastid has an opinion on a related subject, but one that does not cause eye strain or melancholia. He thinks Lincoln may have been color blind. This he bases in part on a statement made by Lincoln to Dr. Shastid's grandmother. When Mrs. Shastid offered to show him her flower garden he said: "I will look at your flowers, mother, but I really cannot understand what people see to admire in such things. I am somehow deficient."

Chicago Tribune Sep 3 1929

THE LINCOLN BLUES.

THAT Abraham Lincoln was subject to periodic attacks of melancholia is established and accepted. No one questions it. As to the cause of his melancholia there are several opinions. One attributed them wholly to emotional strain. The two periods of melancholy which are generally supported by this school were that which followed the death of Ann Rutledge and the weeks just subsequent to a misunderstanding with Mary Todd.

Another school thinks there was a physical basis for his attacks. Members of this group say Lincoln had chronic constipation and this explained his depression. They cite as proof his sallow skin, his almost habit of taking calomel, and his youth spent in a malarial country.

A third school offers a mental basis for his periodical emotional disturbance. They say that among the members of the family there was recognition of a family trait called by them "the Lincoln blues." Distant relatives who did not know they were kin to Abraham Lincoln were subject to attacks of depression which they called "Lincoln blues." This tendency they regarded as hereditary in the Lincoln family.

Dr. Thomas Hall Shastid has still another explanation. Dr. Shastid's grandfather and father knew Abraham Lincoln well, the grandfather having lived at New Salem when Lincoln was there. Later Abraham Lincoln visited the grandfather and father at Pittsfield. Dr. Shastid is an eye specialist. He says the Lincoln blues were the result of eye strain. His eye muscles were not well balanced. His left eye had a tendency to turn upward. Occasionally it would cross turning upward. Eye specialists recognize this peculiar type of lack of eye muscle balance and supply it with a name. It causes an unusually severe form of eye strain.

It will be recalled that Lincoln used glasses for reading, at least during the years of his maturity. These glasses were spectacles and he wore them far down on his nose. An eye specialist would say that his method of wearing his glasses would cause some eye strain of itself in addition to that due to poor balance in his eye muscles.

Dr. Shastid has an opinion on a related subject, but one that does not cause eye strain or melancholia. He thinks Lincoln may have been color blind. This he bases in part on a statement made by Lincoln to Dr. Shastid's grandmother. When Mrs. Shastid offered to show him her flower garden he said: "I will look at your flowers, mother, but I really cannot understand what people see to admire in such things. I am somehow deficient."

Chicago Daily Tribune
7.3, 1929

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 285

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

September 24, 1934

ABRAHAM LINCOLN—A MELANCHOLY MAN

*The melancholy days are come
The saddest of the year.
Bryant.*

It is accepted, generally, that Abraham Lincoln was a melancholy man. There is much disagreement, however, as to what contributed most to his melancholy disposition. There are three different sources which have been investigated in attempting to explain this very prominent characteristic: the traditional background, the historical record, and scientific conclusions.

The Traditional Background

The earliest attempt to discover the reason for Lincoln's melancholy was made by William Herndon who set out for Kentucky soon after the president's death to gather traditions and folklore about the Lincolns and Hankses. In the preface of his famous three-volume work he writes: "In drawing the portrait tell the world what the skeleton was with Lincoln. What gave him that peculiar melancholy? What cancer had he inside?"

Herndon then began to shake the genealogical tree of Lincoln's mother and alleged he found some spoiled fruit that accounted for the cancer. He also listened to stories about the Lincolns by people who had forgotten the obscure family residing in the county fifty years before. Some of the old citizens did remember a woman of bad character by the name of Nancy Hanks who lived not far from the Lincolns when they resided in Hardin County. It was the stories about this woman, whose name was the same as Lincoln's mother's maiden name, that Herndon confused and associated with Nancy Hanks Lincoln. The stories he heard about this wayward woman led him to believe he had found the source of Abraham Lincoln's melancholy.

The idle gossip about Lincoln's origin, which was undoubtedly responsible for Herndon's theory of the skeleton in some closet of the family, did not originate until the political campaign of 1860. Even if these stories then in circulation became known to Lincoln, it does not account for the fact of his melancholy in the early years of his life.

No student of Abraham Lincoln who has made a painstaking study of Lincoln's parentage and ancestry will accept for a moment the conclusions of William Herndon about irregularities in the Lincoln family. With nothing to worry about in this respect the source of Lincoln's melancholy must be discovered elsewhere.

The Historical Record

When one recalls the tragedies which occurred during Lincoln's early days, he is tempted to rely on the historical record to reveal the mystery of his melancholy.

Abraham Lincoln's infant brother but two years younger than himself died while the family lived in Kentucky. This event, however, could have left no lasting impression on Abraham. Even though at seven years of age when the family moved to Indiana he visited the grave of this child, it is not likely that he was deeply influenced.

The first great tragedy in Abraham's life occurred when he was but nine years of age. His mother died. In the one room of Thomas Lincoln's wilderness cabin all of the preliminary arrangements for the funeral were made, and the family was obliged to live in the same room with the remains until interment took place. All the painful tasks associated with the making of the coffin and the actual burial must have left a deep impression on this boy. The mother was buried on a little hill in front of the cabin. Each morning when Abraham came to the door the burial place of his mother would be most likely to draw his attention. For the next eleven years of his life the

incidents relating to her death would be kept fresh in mind. It was many years later that he spoke of her as his angel mother.

Upon the death of Mrs. Lincoln, Abraham's sister, Sarah, but two years older than himself, took over the burden of caring for the home. If Lincoln had been greatly attached to her before the decease of Mrs. Lincoln, he now became doubly so as she was serving in both the capacity of a sister and a mother. Although a stepmother came into the home a year or so later, Lincoln's affection for his sister did not diminish.

The second great tragedy in Lincoln's life was the death of this only sister, which occurred but ten years after the death of their mother. She died in childbirth which made her passing much more pathetic. One of the neighbors who recalled how Lincoln was affected upon hearing of the calamity said:

"Abe was in a little smoke house when the news came. He sat down, burying his face in his hands, the tears trickled through his large fingers, and sobs shook his frame. From then on he was alone in the world you might say."

Lincoln visited the site of his Indiana home in 1844, and in writing to a friend about the trip he said:

"I went into the neighborhood in that state in which I was raised, where my mother and only sister were buried." Their deaths seemed to be the outstanding facts among his reminiscences of the place. Soon after returning home he wrote a poem which helps one to learn the frame of mind he was in at the time of that visit.

Seven years after the passing of his only sister there occurred the death of his sweetheart, Ann Rutledge, to whom he is said to have been engaged. While no doubt the seriousness of his alleged collapse after this shock has been greatly exaggerated, yet no one will deny that the event contributed to his already depressed spirit.

It is not strange that the death of his mother, his only sister, and his sweetheart occurring at intervals would have a tendency to cast a gloom over his early life from which he never recovered.

Scientific Conclusions

There are those who feel that the source of Lincoln's melancholy can be traced to physical or mental disorders rather than to any emotional climaxes occasioned by a series of events such as has just been related.

John T. Stuart felt that Lincoln's melancholy was due to his abnormal indigestion. Stuart said, "I used to advise him to take blue mass pills and he did take them before he went to Washington and for five months after he was president."

Another reason for his seasons of depression is put forth by Dr. Thomas H. Shastid who feels that it was eye strain. He claims "Lincoln's eye muscles were not well balanced. His left eye had a tendency to turn upward. . . . It caused an unusually severe form of eye strain."

There is still another group which feels that his unnatural, morbid condition was hereditary and that traces of the same disposition to melancholy have been observed in other members of the family.

Regardless of whether any one or any combination of these causes were responsible for Lincoln's sad days, which occurred with more frequency as the great struggle to preserve the Union came to a close, it must be accepted that the loss of mother, sister, sweetheart, two boys of his own, and thousands of his soldier boys, as well as the mental condition of his wife, which verged on insanity, would bring enough sorrow into his life to set him apart as A Melancholy Man.

LINCOLN LORE

Bulletin of the Lincoln National Life Foundation - - - - - Dr. Louis A. Warren, Editor.
Published each week by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, of Fort Wayne, Indiana.

No. 324

FORT WAYNE, INDIANA

June 24, 1935

A CONTRIBUTION TO LINCOLN'S MELANCHOLY

Evidence now available which reveals how Lincoln's early life was a series of tragedies allows one to conclude that even as a lad he had his melancholy as well as his mirthful periods.

A visit which Abraham Lincoln made in 1844 to his old home in Indiana, where he had lived from the time he was seven until he became of age, so impressed him that he was moved to put his reminiscences in verse.

Three poems were inspired by this visit, one the account of a bear hunt in which Lincoln clearly reveals a happy experience of his youth. The opening stanza follows:

A wild-bear chase, didst never see?
Then hast thou lived in vain—
Thy richest bump of glorious glee
Lies desert in thy brain.

The more gloomy aspects of the visit are portrayed in another poem of several verses which concludes with the following four lines:

I range the fields with pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms,
And feel (companion of the dead)
I'm living in the tombs.

Another poem, however, which is seldom seen in print, presents one of the most interesting studies of an early influence in his life which may have contributed very much to his melancholy spirit.

Lincoln wrote a letter to a friend which explains the urge to compose the lines which refer to an insane man he knew as a boy. It will be observed by reading this letter that the boy was a schoolmate of Lincoln and but three years older than he. This would make Lincoln but sixteen years old when his associate became violently insane.

The description of how Lincoln heard the moans of the insane boy in the night and would even arise early in the morning before daylight, apparently unknown to his parents, to listen to the mournful song of the stricken playmate, is an incident which child psychologists who would study the origin of Lincoln's melancholy spirit cannot ignore.

The letter explaining the circumstances which caused the writing of the poem, and the poem itself, are presented:

Springfield, September 6, 1846.

Friend Johnston: You remember when I wrote you from Tremont last spring, sending you a little canto of what I called poetry, I promised to bore you with another some time. I now fulfill the promise. The subject of the present one is an insane man; his name is Matthew Gentry. He is three years older than I, and when we were boys we went to school together. He was rather a bright lad, and the son of the rich man of a very poor neighborhood. At the age of nineteen he unaccountably became furiously mad, from which condition he gradually settled down into harmless insanity. When, as I told you

in my other letter, I visited my old home in the fall of 1844, I found him still lingering in this wretched condition. In my poetizing mood, I could not forget the impression his case made upon me. Here is the result.

But here's an object more of dread
Than aught the grave contains—
The human form with reason fled.
While wretched life remains.

When terror spread, and neighbors ran
Your dangerous strength to bind,
And soon, a howling, crazy man,
Your limbs were fast confined:

How then you strove and shrieked aloud,
Your bones and sinews bared;
And fiendish on the gazing crowd
With burning eyeballs glared;

And begged and swore, and wept and prayed,
With maniac laughter joined;
How fearful were these signs displayed
By pangs that killed the mind!

And when at length the drear and long
Time soothed thy fiercer woes,
How plaintively thy mournful song
Upon the still night rose!

I've heard it oft as if I dreamed,
Far distant, sweet and lone,
The funeral dirge it ever seemed
Of reason dead and gone.

To drink its strains I've stole away,
All stealthily and still,
Ere yet the rising god of day
Had streaked the eastern hill.

Air held her breath; trees with the spell
Seemed sorrowing angels round,
Whose swelling tears in dewdrops fell
Upon the listening ground.

But this is past, and naught remains
That raised thee o'er the brute;
Thy piercing shrieks and soothing strain
Are like, forever mute.

Now fare thee well! More thou the cause
Than subject now of woe.
All mental pangs by time's kind laws
Hast lost the power to know.

O death! Thou awe-inspiring prince
That keepst the world in fear,
Why dost thou tear more blest ones hence,
And leave him lingering here?


If I should ever send another, the subject would be a "Bear Hunt".

Yours as ever,
A. Lincoln.

The Remington-Blender 2/11/57

Lincoln

as
the
Loneliest
Man



"I AM the loneliest man in America." These words dropped from the lips of Abraham Lincoln one evening in 1863, that period which was so dark and unpromising for the cause of the Union.

In March, 1863, writes W. H. Smith in the Washington Post, I heard the incident related to a small group of distinguished men by Bishop Ames of the Methodist church. I do not know if it has ever appeared in print, but if it has, it is worth retelling. The narration took place in the National Hotel, in Washington, in a suite of rooms then occupied by John Evans, territorial governor of Colorado, and father of Evanston, Chicago's beautiful suburb. My presence is accounted for by the fact that Governor Evans was a relative and I had called to pay my respects.

In the group were two or three Methodist bishops, a member of the senate and two of the house. I am sure no one who heard it related ever forgot it, or the impressive manner of the bishop. President Lincoln and the bishop were warm personal friends, and the President had employed the bishop on some delicate mission connected with the war. The bishop said that one evening in June, 1863, he went to the White House to call on the President. The President was in a very despondent mood. Hooker had just suffered his defeat at Chancellorsville. The conversation lasted until a late hour of the night.

The President reviewed the situation at length. The war had been going on for two years, and the North had made little material progress. The bishop asked if he despaired of a final victory. His response was made with great earnestness:

"No. I dare not despair when I know there is a God who controls



"I Dare Not Despair When I Know There Is a God."

the affairs of nations as He does those of individuals, but the thought of the thousands who must yet be slain is appalling."

It was then he uttered the words with which this article begins. He said: "I am the loneliest man in America. There is no one to whom I can go and unload my troubles, assured of sympathy and help."

He spoke of the quibbling, complaining and fault finding in congress, and the harsh and unjust criticisms heaped upon him. He spoke

termed "that meddlesome body," the committee on the conduct of war.

The President rapidly reviewed Grant's record since he joined the army. He was at Cairo with a small force. He urgently asked permission to move, saying he would win a victory. The consent was long delayed, but it came at last. Within two or three hours his men were on the steamers, and the brilliant victory of Belmont followed.



"Grant," He Said, "Fights, and That Is What I Want."

It was not a great victory, for the forces engaged were not large, but it was a beginning and showed the mettle of Grant.

Back to Cairo, with a larger force he again and again urged for permission to move, and when the permission came he rushed his men to the steamers, and three days later he captured Fort Henry. Not delaying an hour he pushed his small force across the country to Fort Donelson. He was not dismayed by the fact that the force in the fort was larger than his own, but immediately locked the doors on that force. When the rest of his men reached him, by a series of brilliant assaults, he captured, not alone the fort, but an army almost equal in number to his own.

At Shiloh, unlike any other general, he remained to fight after his disaster on the first day, he made no effort to get the remains of his army across the river, but at daylight the next morning became the attacking party, winning a victory. He was now at Vicksburg, and complaints of his delay were many. Only that day two senators had urged Lincoln to displace Grant, but he would not do it. "Grant," he said, "fights, and that is what I want." He said Grant had promised him he would capture Vicksburg by the fourth of July, and he intended to give him the opportunity.

The President, with deep earnestness, then declared: "When he captures Vicksburg, I will find some way to boost him over the heads of all others, and give him command of all the armies. With Grant in command, by Jinks!" (his favorite expletive) "the armies will move and move to some purpose. He fights."

HOW TO KEEP WELL

by Dr. Theodore R. Van Dellen

To the limit of space, questions pertaining to the prevention of diseases will be answered. Personal replies will be made when return stamped envelope is inclosed. Telephone inquiries not accepted. Dr. Van Dellen will not make diagnoses or prescribe for individual diseases.

MELANCHOLY LINCOLN

[Copyright: 1950: By The Chicago Tribune]

A BRAHAM LINCOLN was depressed so frequently that his family spoke of his melancholy as "the Lincoln blues." This condition was part of his personality and not unusual for a man subject to a feeling of insecurity and inferiority. But, in spite of his depressive makeup, he was able to minimize the handicap in later years, even tho his responsibilities increased.

It is normal to be downcast after disappointment, failure, or an unhappy event. Some of us take adversities better than others, but it is difficult not to feel hurt when things are not going well. To brood for days or weeks, however, is a different situation and Lincoln was known to do precisely this. On occasion, his attacks were so severe his friends became alarmed and hid his razors and knives in fear of suicide. After the death of his son, Willie, which occurred while he was President, Lincoln decided to lock himself in his room every Thursday and abandon himself to grief over his son and every father's son who died because of the war. Help from outside the family was obtained and he was convinced that the practice would get him nowhere. As a matter of fact, the episode changed Lincoln for the better; it seemed to cure his bouts of depression thereafter.

The man or woman who lives a simple life, is happily married, and is not overburdened with responsibilities has little reason to become dejected. As a rule, everything goes smoothly, since most of the decisions that are made involve problems about the home. This was not Lincoln's lot, however, because he was anxious for fame and success and more a man of the world than historians probably have led us to believe. He was elected to the Illi-

nois legislature at the age of 25 and it is difficult to conceive of a meek country lad going so far without the ability to "make friends and influence people." He seldom missed a trick, but when he did, became disheartened, which is the reaction of most ambitious individuals. It is one of the penalties for possessing this trait.

In addition, Lincoln had no family prestige and his education was not the best, as standards go. Furthermore, he was awkward and lacked a cultural background. Altho he had a sad and homely appearance, there was something engaging about the honesty and thoughtfulness of his expression. It is feasible that his poor background encouraged a feeling of insecurity, making Lincoln feel inferior to his colleagues. This could have made him moody, especially when it thwarted his aspirations.

But most historians admit that there was another reason why the Lincoln blues existed. It was Mrs. Lincoln, a domineering and aggressive woman. She nagged and complained and undoubtedly made life miserable for her husband. On the other hand, this helped him indirectly and unconsciously to achieve his political goals by driving him away from home to spend much time making new friends and cultivating the old ones. Running away from trouble is a sign of emotional instability. This characteristic, however, did not impair Lincoln's wisdom, intelligence, or executive ability and, as the years passed, he mellowed and acquired more equanimity.

Chicago Tribune
2-12-50

1
December 22, 1958

Editor of Lincoln Lore
% Lincoln National Life Foundation
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Editor:

The following was found in a MERCER COUNTY ILLINOIS HISTORY (1903) page 716, included in the biography of Hiram Willet Thornton. Born in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania--October 16, 1812, died July 30, 1896. Son of Eli and Rachel Willet, natives of Pennsylvania and of English ancestry.

"In 1840-41 he (Hiram Willet Thornton) was a frequent companion of Abraham Lincoln at the house of Dr. Henry, Springfield. During one week of that winter when Mr. Lincoln was quite law spirited, approaching melancholy, Mr. Thornton dropped his public duties (State Representative) and took sole care of him at the request of Mr. Lincoln's physicians--Drs. Henry and Merryman."

I enjoy reading your Lincoln Lore.

Sincerely,



W. L. Greenslit
931 South 15th Street
Lincoln, Nebraska

December 31, 1958

Mr. W. L. Greenslit
931 South 15th Street
Lincoln, Nebraska

Dear Mr. Greenslit:

I have your letter of December 22 giving me some information which was found in the Mercer County Illinois History, 1903, Page 716 which includes a biography of Hiram Willet Thornton.

I think the paragraph pertaining to Thornton and Lincoln is indeed interesting. I am delighted to have this material to place in our files.

Thank you very much for thinking of us in this connection.

Yours sincerely,

RGMcMurtry:pj

Director

Civil War President Was Man of Sorrows

Lincoln Bore Burden of Anxieties

By DON OAKLEY

Written for NEA

On Feb. 12, 1862, Abraham Lincoln was 53 and president of a divided United States.

The first year of the Civil War was not yet over (and both North and South were now convinced that many more months of bitter fighting lay ahead before the madness should finally cease). There were few tidings from the battlefronts that did anything to dispel the cold, damp, gray winter that had clamped on Washington.

Only in the distant west did the news tell of anything like victory. An unknown brigadier general named U.S. Grant had taken Ft. Henry on the Tennessee River on the 6th. Ten days later he would capture Ft. Donelson, second step in his long campaign down the Mississippi to cut the Confederacy in two.

But in the east, in the crowded, muddy, pestilence-ridden capital, the citizens still stood half in fear of invasion by the seemingly unbeatable Rebels just across the Potomac. And it was on Lincoln's tall, stooping shoulders that the hopes and fears and grief of an entire people rested.

But as if that were not enough for one man to bear, personal tragedy—not the first—was to visit him that month.

THE PRESIDENT'S BIRTHDAY was a happy one, as happy as it could be. His son Willy seemed much better. The little boy had been ailing for days. A public reception on the 5th had almost been cancelled because of it. The Lincolns went through the motions of entertaining their 500 guests, but their minds were bound to the child in bed in a room on the very quiet second floor of the White House.

We do not know today what Willy Lincoln's sickness was. Medical diagnoses of the time were often unreliable. But it was a lingering, fluctuating fever that undoubtedly etched new lines in the sad, gaunt face of Lincoln as he spent what time he could at his son's bedside.

Undoubtedly, also, his thoughts went back to that other February in 1850, twelve years before. Eleven days before his 41st birthday that year, his second-born son had died. Eddie Lincoln had been not quite four.

Children's deaths were com-



net meeting was interrupted by their urgent need of their father, who was never too busy to handle such an important matter as signing a pardon for one of their animal pets who had been found guilty of treason. He seldom disciplined the boys.

Mrs. Lincoln later quoted her husband as saying, "It is my pleasure that my children are free, happy and unrestrained by parental tyranny. Love is the chain whereby to bind a child to its parents."

Of his sons, Willy was the one probably the most like his father. They thought and felt alike. He was a promising boy; he wrote poetry and wanted to be a preacher. He was serious like his older brother Robert, yet had plenty of the impishness that characterized little Tad.

Now Willy lay deathly ill, and Tad, too, had come down with something and his life was feared for.

ON FEB. 20, WILLY LINCOLN died. He was 11 years and two months old. A people already full of mourning for its dead and dying youth felt the president's

loss as their own. The little body was placed in a temporary vault in Georgetown.

To Lincoln's anguish was added the burden of his wife's hysterical grief that bordered on the pathological, and the uncertainties that attended Tad's slow recovery.

Rest from sorrow finally came to Lincoln three years later. The world knows the story of how that rest came, and how a

shocked nation followed the winding course of the funeral train across the land as it made its slow way back home to Springfield.

March 1980

Vol. 116

No. 695

Reader's Digest

95¢

THE GREAT BALLOON ESCAPE

DRAMA IN
REAL LIFE

PAGE 106

FEATURE CONDENSATION

IN PERIL AT FASTNET

AN EPIC TALE OF TRAGEDY AT SEA

PAGE 212

PAGE 95

DOES THE MOON CONTROL YOUR MOODS?

The Triumph of Rina Cahana . . .	Joseph P. Blank	65
A Walk Across America . . .	National Geographic	70
Simplify Your Life! . . .	Martin E. Marty	79
Motel of the Mysteries . . .	From the book	82
North Korea's Secret Invasion Tunnels . . .		

David Reed 90

Does the Moon Control Your Moods? . . .	Edward Ziegler	95
---	----------------	----

Unforgettable S. J. Perelman . . .	Philip Hamburger	99
The Great Balloon Escape . . .	Der Stern	106
How Good Is Your Horse Sense? . . .	Quiz Feature	114
The Amniotic Universe . . .	"Broca's Brain"	117
More Remarkable Names of Real People . . .		

"Even More Remarkable Names" 121

The Deer Rifle . . .	Gerald Moore	122
Court Jesters . . .	Cartoon Feature	128

Who Needs Air Bags? . . .	Earl & Miriam Selby	130
The Wilderness of Howling Zeal . . .	GEO	134
The Master Eye of Ansel Adams . . .	Esquire	139
Tests That Can Cripple Careers . . .		

Ronald Brownstein & Allan Nairn 157

Behind the Marvels of Microsurgery . . .		
--	--	--

The Atlantic Monthly 167

Sam Townsend's Last Fling . . .	"The Hills Are Theirs"	177
Divorce by Mistake . . .	Louise Montague	187
The Wolf Man of Discovery Bay . . .	Sports Illustrated	199

The Height Report, 13

Can You Afford a Major Illness? 27

Bill Rodgers, America's Marvelous Marathon Man, 37

Here Come the Census Takers! 51

Campus Comedy, 9—Notes From All Over, 17—It Pays to Enrich Your Word Power, 33—All in a Day's Work, 47—News From the World of Medicine, 61—Laughter, the Best Medicine, 77—Life in These United States, 104—Toward More Picturesque Speech, 146—Quotable Quotes, 173—Personal Glimpses, 183—Points to Ponder, 210

59th year: Over 30 million copies bought monthly in 15 languages



YOU WILL OWN THE MOST

"Mine's the

From now on, you're going to be hearing that proud claim a lot more frequently. And why do we think America will be reacting so positively to this elegant new LTD?

Because of the quiet...



Ford tests show an LTD rides as quietly as a \$65,000 Rolls-Royce. Why not give the new LTD Crown Victoria's advanced sound engineering your own quiet test.

Because of the elegance...

The elegance surrounds you. Just like the quiet. There's new distinctive wrapover roof styling. And such options as the interior luxury group and rich leather seat trim shown.



Because of the mileage...

With automatic overdrive option, a gas-saving breakthrough, no competitor's full-size V-8 surpasses LTD Crown Victoria's gas mileage ratings.

17 EPA Est. MPG **26** HWY Est. MPG

This is for comparison. Your mileage may differ depending on speed, distance and weather. California estimates lower. Your actual highway mileage may be less.

See your Ford Dealer soon. He's making it easy for everybody to say: "Mine's the Crown Victoria."

LTD CROWN VICTORIA

FORD DIVISION 

Announcing the new

Does the Moon Control Your Moods?

Or is it a genetic, rather than a cosmic, force that molds our shifting mental states? Recent books take both sides of the question

BY EDWARD ZIEGLER

Based on "THE LUNAR EFFECT,"
by Arnold L. Lieber, M.D., produced by Jerome B. Agel;
"MOODSWING," by Ronald R. Fieve, M.D.;
and "LIFETIDE," by Lyall Watson

LOVERS, anglers, teachers, parents—all know there's something about the moon. When it's full, things happen. In fact, a recent book argues that our nearest celestial neighbor determines much of our mental weather.



Other observers of the human condition, acknowledging that we all have our ups and downs, claim that the cause lies not in the stars but in ourselves: that only physiological or psychological factors can trigger the rhythm of our moods. Here, as with most mysteries, explanatory

theories abound. One of the most persuasive is expressed in another current book, which says that our genetic heritage is primarily responsible for our states of mind.

Is either of these views correct? While no definitive answer

is likely to emerge, it may prove stimulating to consider each in turn:

1) *The Moon Controls Our Moods.* National Ocean Survey scientist Fergus J. Wood reported several years ago that two extreme high tides would occur, one after another, on January 8, and February 7, 1974.

"THE LUNAR EFFECT: BIOLOGICAL TIDES AND HUMAN EMOTIONS," COPYRIGHT © 1978 BY ARNOLD L. LIEBER AND JEROME B. AGEL, IS PUBLISHED AT \$7.95 BY ANCHOR PRESS/DOUBLEDAY & CO., INC., 245 PARK AVE., NEW YORK, N.Y. 10017; "MOODSWING: THE THIRD REVOLUTION IN PSYCHIATRY," COPYRIGHT © 1975 BY RONALD R. FIEVE, M.D., IS PUBLISHED AT \$6.95 BY WILLIAM MORROW & CO., INC., 105 MADISON AVE., NEW YORK, N.Y. 10016; "LIFETIDE: THE BIOLOGY OF THE UNCONSCIOUS," COPYRIGHT © 1979 BY LYALL WATSON, IS PUBLISHED AT \$10.95 BY SIMON & SCHUSTER, INC., 1230 AVENUE OF THE AMERICAS, NEW YORK, N.Y. 10020. PHOTO: LICK OBSERVATORY, © REGENTS, UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA.

Wood saw that on both occasions the earth, sun and moon would be positioned along a nearly straight line—called a “syzygy”—and that, on January 8, the moon would also be at proxigee syzygy, very close to earth. This infrequent combination of astronomic events causes ocean waters to rise far above normal levels.

One person who read Wood's forecast with particular attentiveness was Arnold L. Lieber, a Miami psychiatrist with a deep interest in the effects of lunar events on human behavior. Dr. Lieber had come to the conclusion that there is a strong relationship between human aggression and the lunar cycle, especially notable among alcoholics, drug addicts, those who are accident-prone or criminally inclined and the mentally unstable. Says Lieber: “Like the surface of the earth, man is about 80-percent water and 20-percent solids. I believe the gravitational force of the moon exerts an influence on the water in the human body—in you and in me—as it does on the oceans of the planet. Life has, I believe, biological high tides and low tides governed by the moon. At new and full moon, these tides are at their highest—and the moon's effect on our behavior is at its strongest.”

Fortified by the apparent consequences of an earlier incident of syzygy in September 1970 (when he noted a sharp rise in local homicides), Lieber decided to warn Miami officials about the violence that he feared would accompany the predicted extreme high tides.

As he writes in his book, *The Lunar Effect*, Lieber alerted the Miami police department, newspapers and the psychiatric emergency room at Miami's Jackson Memorial Hospital, predicting a “general disturbance in human behavior during the impending cosmic coincidence.”

What happened? “All hell broke loose,” Lieber writes. “Miami's murder toll for the first three weeks of the new year was two times higher than for all of January 1973.” Also, there was a repeated incidence of motiveless and bizarre crimes.

From that and other similar experiences, Lieber has derived a theory that the moon—and the astronomic outer world—has a direct impact on some of us and a latent influence on most of us. He has gathered a fair amount of evidence to support his speculation.

2) *Our Genes Determine Our Moods*. Another current book, *Moodswing*, by Ronald R. Fieve, professor of clinical psychiatry at New York's Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, takes the view that our genes are more influential than any outside force in determining our moods. Dr. Fieve is particularly interested in the lives of manic-depressives, whose moods ride a constant roller coaster from wild elation to deep depression.

From over 6000 case histories, Fieve derives his basic conclusion that most of our mood swings are the result of altered body chemistry set in motion by our genes and major life stresses. Fieve does not rule out the possibility of lunar

influence on biological clocks. He acknowledges the historical observations of lunacy which today are occasionally seen as 30-day manic-depressive cycles.

But to Lieber, the moon is an especially important influence on our states of mind. Among the incidents and findings he lists in support of his view:

- The Phoenix fire department has found that it receives 25 to 30 more calls on nights of full moon.

- Some psychiatric ward attendants report that at full moon mental patients evidence increasing erratic and disturbed behavior.

- A woman's menstrual cycle is usually about the same length as the lunar month, 29½ days; human gestation takes about nine lunar months.

Do outside influences, then, set in motion our inner states of mind? Not necessarily, says Dr. Fieve in *Moodswing*. He cites the lives of three great men in support of his thesis. One is Abraham Lincoln, who was well-known for deep depressions, which Fieve describes as "recurrent and intrinsic, indicating some chemical vulnerability."

Perhaps Lincoln's best-known low coincided with the breaking of his engagement to Mary Todd in January 1841. For more than a week, Lincoln could not bring himself to attend sessions of the Illinois state legislature, and his colleagues feared that he was becoming suicidal.

Years later, when he was in an elated state, Lincoln engaged in the famous debates with Stephen Doug-

las. Writes Fieve: "Even though Lincoln lost this crucial Senate race, he remained in good spirits; the stress of losing did not seem to precipitate a depressive reaction. In some instances, Lincoln's depressions may have been precipitated by stress, but more often than not they seem to have occurred independently of loss and adversity, as most chemical or metabolic depressions do."

A second President, Theodore Roosevelt, provides an instance of mood elation. Unlike Lincoln's moods, which were predominantly melancholy, Roosevelt's were preponderantly cheerful. Fieve writes: "The White House became a circus. At luncheon Roosevelt would talk incessantly with the visitors crowding his table. After lunch he would run to his office, where he saw Senators, Cabinet members, bureau chiefs, Congressmen and a stream of average citizens. Later he would go riding, swimming or walking—sometimes all three—before dinner. At the dinner table, Theodore talked—shouted, actually—nonstop."

A third great historical figure seems to have mixed both qualities—profound depression and sparkling elation—in a way that made it possible for him to work around the clock. This was Winston Churchill.

Churchill's mood swings, like Roosevelt's, caused a lack of caution and proportion that made his associates uneasy. "There is little doubt that the moody temperament was part of the Churchill inheritance," Fieve says. And he concludes that

"high genetic loading" was at work through the family pedigree, that Churchill's mood swings were "transmitted mainly through the genes and less by the environment."

The alternate thesis, as expressed in Dr. Lieber's *The Lunar Effect*, looks toward the influence of celestial bodies upon our own bodies' intricate balances of hormones, fluids and nerve-firing electrolytes. Lieber argues that "the skin is a semi-permeable membrane that permits movement of electro-magnetic forces in *both* directions, maintaining a dynamic equilibrium." Each nerve impulse generates its small aura of energy; each cell, like a miniature solar system, has its own faint electro-magnetic field. He contends that the gross electro-magnetic forces originating with celestial bodies can affect the balance of this microscopic cellular world.

As Lieber writes, "When there is a coincidence of cosmic cycles, like that which caused the extreme tides in 1974, the human organism is bombarded suddenly by a massive disturbance of gravity and the surrounding electro-magnetic field. The disturbance dramatically shifts the equilibrium between our inner and outer worlds." Thus, "the nervous system may become irritable, altering thresholds of nerve firing. There are buildups or deficiencies of water in different parts of the body."

Lieber adds that his patients include a number of manic-depressives who are stabilized on the drug lithium. "On occasion, many of them call in *at the same time*, all reporting recurrence of similar symptoms—restlessness, depression, insomnia, rapid heartbeat. I am certain the only reason for this pervasive phenomenon is that these patients respond en masse to an atmospheric perturbation. Most likely it is lunar-related."

WHICH view is right? Perhaps both. In any event, these short observations from a remarkable book, *Lifetides*, by British anthropologist Lyall Watson, suggest something of the unity of all creation. Says Watson:

Each of us is a mobile museum. The fluid in our bodies is a perfect replica of the ancient sea. The concentrations of sodium, potassium and chloride in our blood, the cobalt, magnesium and zinc in our tissues are the same as those that once prevailed in the primordial ocean.

We still carry that ocean around inside us, trapped there like a living fossil. And in each miniature internal sea, the same old struggles go on much as they did three billion years ago.

You can collect as many seawater samples as you like, but none will contain, nor tell you anything about, the tide. Life is a pattern, a movement, a syncopation of matter; something produced in counterpoint to the rhythms of contingency; a rare, wonderfully unreasonable thing.



WHY IS IT THAT political leaders don't seem to have all the answers until they write their memoirs?

—Jim Fiebig, NANA

New Light on Lincoln

BY MICHAEL BURLINGAME

IN THE 128 YEARS SINCE HIS ASSASSINATION, HISTORIANS HAVE NEVER FULLY plumbed the secrets of Lincoln's inner world, and improbable as it may seem, scholars still are discovering important new information about our 16th president. Ironically, many of these new findings have been buried in very accessible libraries or historical archives. This year's Pulitzer Prize for history, for example, went to Mark E. Neely Jr. for *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties*, which was based on voluminous documents available in the National Archives for over three decades.

Since 1984, when I began working on *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (to be published later this year by the University of Illinois Press), I too have stumbled across significant caches of revealing new Lincoln data, many of them reminiscences of people who knew him.

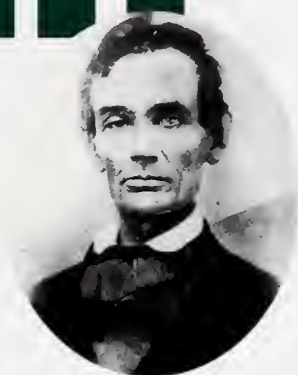
Enslaved by a promise

At Brown University last spring, while examining the personal papers of John Hay, one of Lincoln's three private secretaries in the White House, I discovered several interviews with Lincoln's friends and political allies in Springfield that add a new dimension to our understanding of his personal life. Conducted in 1875 by Lincoln's principal secretary, John G. Nicolay, these documents were intended for use in the 10-volume Lincoln biography that Nicolay and Hay published in 1890. But the authors decided to quote only a small fraction of what they gathered. Perhaps the most dramatic news is in the interview Nicolay had with Illinois Senator Orville H. Browning, who knew Lincoln well in his early years and who recalled much about Lincoln's marriage and courtship:

"I think Mr. L's insanity [depressed behavior in January 1841] was but an exaggerated attack of the fits of despondency or melancholy to which he was subject.

"I was here [in Springfield] at the time — and when here attending court I used to live in Mr. Butler['s] family in which Mr. L was then boarding.

"Mr. L was engaged to Miss Mary Todd. She was here on a visit living at Mr. [Ninian] Edwards[']....



21

Despite dozens of biographies, even a recent four-hour ABC-TV documentary miniseries, historians continue to add to the body of Lincolnian knowledge. In never-before-published correspondence, Michael Burlingame finds that Honest Abe's self-imposed ethical standards may have contributed to his bouts of deep depression.



"Miss Todd [above] was thoroughly in earnest [in] her endeavors to get Mr. Lincoln, while on the other hand Miss Edwards was something of a coquette...."



Lincoln with Hay and Nicolay (at left).

"She had taken a fancy to Mr. Lincoln and I always thought she did most of the courting until they became engaged.

"After an engagement of perhaps a year or so a Miss Matilda Edwards came to spend a winter here. She was a cousin to Ninian Edwards.

"Mr. Lincoln became very much attached to her, [Miss Matilda Edwards] and finally fell desperately in love with her, and proposed to her, but she rejected him....

"I think that Mr. Lincoln's aberration of mind resulted entirely from the situation he thus got himself into — he was engaged to Miss Todd, and in love with Miss Edwards, and his conscience troubled him dreadfully for the supposed injustice he had done, and the supposed violation of his word which he had committed....

"He was so much affected as to talk incoherently, and to be dilirious [sic] to the extent of not knowing what he was doing....

"In this affair of his courtship, he undoubtedly felt that he had made [a mistake?] in having engaged himself to Miss Todd. But having done so, he felt himself in honor bound to act in perfect good faith towards her — and that good faith compelled him to fulfill his engagement with her, if she persisted in claiming the fulfillment of his word.

"In those times I was at Mr. Edwards' a great deal, and Miss Todd used to sit down with me, and talk to me sometimes till midnight, about this affair of hers with Mr. Lincoln. In these conversations I think it came out, that Mr. Lincoln had perhaps on one occasion told Miss Todd that he loved Matilda Edwards, and no doubt his conscience was greatly worked up by the supposed pain and injury which this avowal had inflicted upon her.

"I always doubted whether, had circumstances left him entirely free to act upon his own impulses, he would have voluntarily made proposals of marriage to Miss Todd. There is no doubt of her exceeding anxiety to marry him. She made no concealment that she had very bitter feelings towards her rival Matilda Edwards.

"Miss Todd was thoroughly in earnest [in] her endeavors to get Mr. Lincoln, while on the other hand Miss Edwards was something of a coquette....

"[H]e always had these spells of melancholy. I have frequently found him in Washington in these very moods. And many times even there, when in these moods, he used to talk to me about his domestic troubles. He has several times told me there that he was constantly under great apprehension lest his wife should do something which would bring him into disgrace.

"I recollect one occasion very distinctly when I went to his room in the Executive Mansion and found him in a spell of deep melancholy, such as I have attempted to describe. After talking to me

awhile about his sources of domestic sadness, he sent one of the boys to get a volume of Hood's poems. It was brought to him and he read to me several of those sad pathetic pieces — I suppose because they were accurate pictures of his own experiences and feelings....

"As for poor Mrs. Lincoln I have for several years past considered her demented."

I explore this story further in an article appearing in an upcoming issue of *American Heritage*, "'A Fountain of Misery, of a Quality Absolutely Infernal': The Marriage of Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd."

The burden of being "Honest Abe"

This summer, in the Nicolay papers at the Library of Congress and the Nicolay-Hay collection at the Illinois State Historical Library in Springfield, I encountered many more interviews Nicolay held with cabinet members, senators, congressmen and others who dealt with the president during the Civil War. Modern scholars scarcely have used these papers.

A handful of them are preserved in an idiosyncratic shorthand that was, mercifully, readable by an expert I met in Washington. One passage he translated especially intrigued me. During an interview with a Pennsylvania politico, Nicolay recorded a description of this man's visit to Lincoln in Springfield to urge the appointment of Simon Cameron, a major player in the Republican Party in the Keystone State, to a cabinet post. The document recounts in longhand how Lincoln resisted this pressure, then switches into shorthand just as the president-elect is about to utter his true feelings.

When the shorthand expert sent me the transcriptions, I tore open the envelope and eagerly sought Lincoln's words about Cameron. Here they are: "All through the campaign my friends have been calling me 'Honest Old Abe,' and I have been elected mainly on that cry. What will be thought now if the first thing I do is to appoint C., whose very name stinks in the nostrils of the people for his corruption?"

Cameron eventually became secretary of war, a job he botched.

At Brown I also discovered serious inadequacies in the published version of John Hay's diary, perhaps the single most important source of information about Lincoln during the Civil War aside from the president's own writings. The original manuscript at Brown contains a fair amount of material omitted by the editor, who also transcribed some passages inaccurately and annotated Hay's entries skimpily and at times erroneously.

For example, on May 6, 1861, Hay wrote the following diary entry, omitted in the published version: "I told him [the president] of a truculent letter written by a State Senator of Kentucky protesting against the occupation of Cairo [Illinois] by Federal troops. He directed an answer and I wrote as follows: 'The President has the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your communication of the 26th ult[imo] protesting against the stationing of United States troops at Cairo. The President directs me to say that the views so ably stated by you shall have due consideration, and to assure you that he would never have ordered the movement of troops complained of, had he known that Cairo was in your Senatorial district.'"

Cairo is the southernmost town in Illinois (not Kentucky, hence the sarcastic response), and Lincoln ordered the reinforcements as a precaution shortly after the Civil War began.

Piecing history together

The more I delve into Lincoln's life, the more amazed I am at how historians have neglected obvious sources such as daily newspapers. Several scholars have written about Civil War military correspondents, and a prize-winning study of press coverage of Congress appeared recently, but no one has systematically examined press coverage of Lincoln himself.

Moreover, in addition to their published dispatches, correspondents also wrote private letters to their editors brimming with confidential information about Lincoln.

Lincoln's third secretary, William O. Stoddard, I found to my surprise, wrote 13 long letters to an obscure New York newspaper in 1866 describing life inside the White House during the Civil War.

In his second term Lincoln was planning to replace Nicolay and Hay with a young journalist named Noah Brooks, whom the president saw almost daily from late 1862 until his death two and a half years later. Brooks wrote more than 200 dispatches to the *Sacramento Daily Union*, many of them about Lincoln.

From 1860 to 1865, Nicolay and Hay sporadically kept memoranda of conversations Lincoln held with various callers. And there are several other revealing items by Hay — including a lecture on Lincoln, an obituary for Tad Lincoln and pseudonymous letters to the *Providence Journal* about Lincoln in the campaign of 1860 that scholars have overlooked.

In the unpublished lecture, Hay describes a conversation between Lincoln and his White House predecessor, James Buchanan, on Inauguration Day, 1861: "The courteous old gentleman [Buchanan] took the new President aside for some parting words into the corner where I was standing [in the President's Room of the Capitol]. I waited with boyish wonder and credulity to hear what

momentous counsels were to come from that gray and weather-beaten head. Every word must have its value at such an instant. The ex-President said: 'I think you will find the water of the right-hand well at the White House better than that at the left,' and went on with many intimate details of the kitchen' and pantry. Lincoln listened with that weary, introverted look of his, not answering, and the next day, when I recalled the conversation, admitted he hadn't heard a word of it."

The search continues

Several other ongoing projects providing new data on Lincoln are worthy of note. Don E. Fehrenbacher of Stanford University is compiling and editing all of Lincoln's purported utterances. When published, Fehrenbacher's annotated version of *The Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln* will prove an invaluable source for students of Lincoln's life and times.

Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis of Knox College will soon release two fat volumes containing reminiscences of Lincoln gathered by his law partner, William H. Herndon, in the years immediately after the assassination. This underutilized cornucopia, in a carefully edited version, will revolutionize scholarly views of Lincoln's pre-presidential years. For reasons unclear to me, historians have treated the Herndon interviews, available at the Library of Congress for the past half-century, as if they were high-level nuclear waste. The Wilson-Davis project will finally help establish this oral history collection as a major source for understanding the forces that shaped Lincoln.

Gabor S. Boritt of Gettysburg College is devising a computer program to help identify items written but not signed by Lincoln. It will compare canonical Lincoln writings with documents that Lincoln may have composed and will likely uncover scores of pseudonymous and anonymous newspaper contributions by Lincoln in the Illinois press. By plowing through several years of the *Springfield Journal*, I have detected many such pieces that seem suspiciously Lincolnian. In addition, Boritt's computer program will doubtless help identify pieces in *The Official Records of the War of the Rebellion* signed by cabinet members and generals but actually written by the president. Conversely, I am almost certain it will demonstrate that Lincoln did not write the famed letter of condolence to the widow Bixby, who lost five sons during the Civil War.

From all this new information we can look forward to a richer, fuller understanding of our greatest president. ●



Keeping up with the prolific Mr. Lincoln

Michael Burlingame, a member of the Connecticut College history department for 24 years, is an ambitious man.

"With so much new material coming to light, there is a need for a modern cradle-to-grave, multi-volume biography of Lincoln. No such study has appeared since Carl Sandburg's day," he says. Burlingame aspires to write such a work, but not before cranking out a few other projects.

He currently is editing the Nicolay interviews in the form of a book to be called *Lincoln Recollected*, a new edition of Hay's diary and a collection of correspondence by journalists he will title *Lincoln Meets the Press*. Look for his *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* later this year.

DEAN TO DEAN :

EDUCATIONAL *Pre*COGNITION

*In the writings of Gertrude Noyes '25, Alice
Johnson finds remarkable foresight.*

24 IF SOMEONE WERE TO WEAVE A TAPESTRY DEPICTING the history of Connecticut College, one bright, golden thread would cross its entire length. That thread would belong to Gertrude Noyes. Through sheer good fortune — or perhaps fate — she was born in New London and either has witnessed or had an active role in shaping every important event in the history of the college.

“As a child I attended the opening day [at the college],” Noyes wrote, “and I remember a muddy, bare stretch of land with three buildings poised incongruously on it, and a brave flagstaff. There was a solemn procession of black-robed men and women through the mud and much speech-making, but animating it all was a sense of adventure, of high things beginning.”

Not too many years later, Gertrude was graduated with high honors from this young college; moved on to Yale to earn a master’s degree and a Ph.D in English; and, after a short stint at the University of Illinois, returned to her alma mater. Here she gave 40 years of dedicated service as professor, dean and counselor to students, to faculty and to staff.

Over the years and right up to this very spring, Gertrude has given many speeches and written many articles, all of which in one way or another reveal what is happening at the college, what new ideas are affecting the curriculum and what changes should be anticipated in relation to what was going on beyond the confines of the campus. In fact, a careful reading of her public statements over the years demonstrates a remarkable quality of foresight.

Gertrude anticipated, well in advance, every

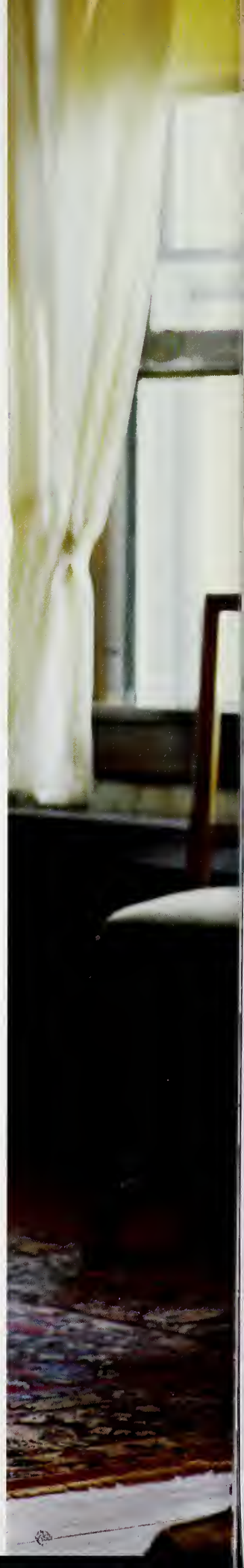
major shift and new development in the realm of higher education. And she quickly enlightened the Connecticut College community with her remarkably astute analysis of what, at the moment, appeared to be an insignificant bump on the educational horizon. Because of this prescience, the Connecticut College community was kept up to date — forewarned and forearmed to meet the challenges of the future.

Shortly after World War II, in 1946, for example, she wrote an essay entitled “The Proper Study of Mankind is Man.” In this summary of current educational activity she wrote, “We laborers in the education vineyard are challenged, sometimes indeed staggered, by the insistent cries of the newspapers, the learned journals, and the marketplace for more and better education. Never has the demand been so universal, nor the public so critical of the educational product.”

For Gertrude, in the post World War II period, after the advent of the atomic bomb when many feared for the survival of the human race, Gertrude insisted that mankind must now strive to achieve better and more rewarding goals. As she said, “In short, the

BY ALICE JOHNSON

January/February 1993



Lincoln thought to have been a manic depressive

By John Lang

SCRIPPS HOWARD NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Abraham Lincoln most likely suffered from a mental disorder, a federal agency says.

The president who preserved the union, freed the slaves, wrote and spoke some of the wittiest and most inspiring words of any American leader likely was — during the time of his greatest achievements — a manic depressive.

This claim comes from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, or SAMHSA, a division of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

"Abraham Lincoln is an inspiration to everyone who is living with depression and/or bipolar disorder," the agency says.

An estimated 17.4 million Americans are similarly afflicted, and many are reluctant to seek treatment because of the stigma associated with mental illness. So the agency is using Lincoln as a historical poster boy for the mentally ill.

That Lincoln's wife, Mary, was schizophrenic is widely accepted today both by historians and medical experts. But Abraham Lincoln?

"From the time he was a teen-ager," SAMHSA says, "Abraham Lincoln lived with what today some people think might have been depression and bipolar disorder. Bipolar disorder,

also known as manic-depressive illness, is a mental illness involving episodes of serious mania and depression."

As evidence that Lincoln might have suffered from a bipolar disorder, the agency cites six references.

One is from Encyclopedia Americana: "Abraham Lincoln is believed to have lived with alternating moods of hilarity and dejection."

Another is from Collier's Encyclopedia: "Abraham Lincoln, in December 1836, is reported to have had an episode of severe depression after the sudden death of Ann Rutledge, with whom he had fallen in love."

The four remaining references all come from the same source, "Moodswing," a book by Ronald R. Fieve, M.D. (1975, William Morrow & Co.)

One states: "Abraham Lincoln's recurrent states of despair and exhaustion, alternating with periods of hard work and very effective functioning, were what I would consider a mild form of bipolar manic-depression."

If Lincoln is tagged as mentally ill so long after he lived and died, what about some other great figures of the past?

Was Columbus, who never admitted that America wasn't India, delusional? Was George

Washington, who led rabble in arms against the professional soldiers of Britain, suicidal?

Dr. Melvyn Haas, associate director for medical affairs of SAMHSA's Center for Mental Health Services, wants no part of diagnosing these important figures.

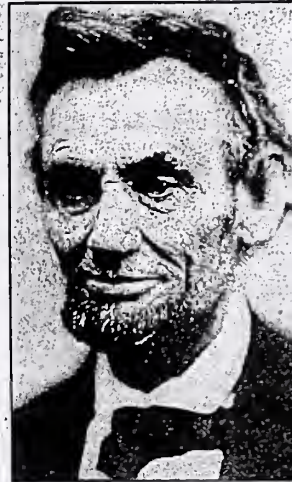
"I think it would be extremely dangerous to attempt to sort any of these out and come up with a diagnosis," he says.

Haas, a psychiatrist, says he doesn't think it's fair to retroactively diagnose anybody as having a clinical disorder without examining that person. However, he adds, "One can reasonably glean possibilities from documentation."

Therefore, Haas says: "I think it's reasonable to take the many references listed here on the fact sheet and suggest there is at least the possibility that Abe Lincoln may have had bipolar disorder."

Yet in holding Lincoln up as an inspiration to the mentally ill, SAMHSA goes well beyond the "possibility" of this president's imbalance.

"Most Americans are aware that Abraham Lincoln held the country together throughout the Civil War," the agency says. "Many Americans, however, are unaware that through most of his adult life Abraham Lincoln was fighting yet another war — the war within himself."



FILE PHOTO

Bipolar president: The federal agency says Abraham Lincoln likely suffered from mental disorder.

THE NEW YORK TIMES **OP-ED** SATURDAY, AUGUST 14, 1999

Journal

FRANK RICH

*What Tony Soprano
Could Teach Bill Clinton*



From: Elizabeth Kehoe
To: Museum Staff
Date: 7/17/01 8:41AM
Subject: *Chicago Tribune* article today

For Lincoln, ancient cure worse than his malady Depression treated with mercury pills

By Jeremy Manier
Chicago Tribune staff reporter
July 17, 2001

Before Abraham Lincoln became president, his Illinois friends and colleagues noted that the lanky lawyer was prone to sudden mood swings and angry outbursts--one story claims he grabbed a bystander at a political debate, lifted him up by the collar and shook him violently.

Now researchers believe those flashes of temper may have been symptoms of mercury poisoning, brought on by a common remedy for depression.

A study published Tuesday gives a new perspective on a president revered for his calm and focused leadership through the historic crisis of the Civil War. That steady temperament appears to have emerged only after Lincoln stopped taking the pills that his law partner William H. Herndon described as "blue mass."

Several historians have recorded that Lincoln took the pills, which were as widely used in the 1800s as Prozac is today, said Dr. Norbert Hirschhorn, a New York medical historian and lead author of the study. But many Lincoln scholars appear not to appreciate the dangers blue mass posed.

Hirschhorn and researchers at the University of Minnesota used a common 19th Century formula for blue mass to re-create the concoction, which contained about 65 milligrams of elemental mercury per pill. They found that a typical regimen of two to three such pills each day would have exposed Lincoln to mercury levels nearly 9,000 times what current federal rules allow.

In addition to outbursts of rage, the researchers believe the mercury Lincoln ingested may have caused insomnia, forgetfulness and possibly a hand tremor. One historical account suggests he quit the blue pill regimen about five months into his presidency because it "made him cross."

"He stopped taking this medicine at the most crucial time in our history, when we needed his saintliness the most," said Hirschhorn, whose study appears in the journal *Perspectives in Biology and Medicine*.

It may be impossible to prove Lincoln's mercury poisoning without a hair sample from the period when he took the pills, experts said. But historians said the diagnosis fits much of what is known about the former president's behavior.

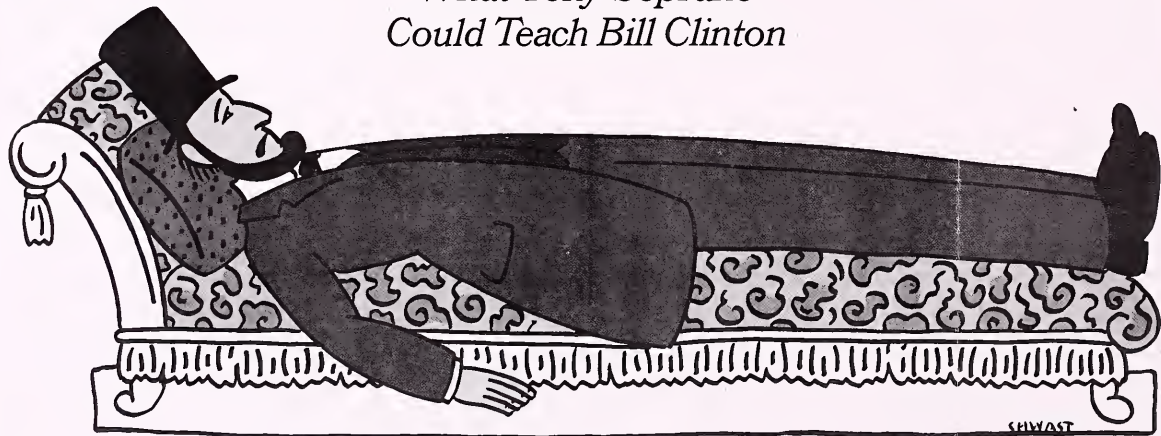
"I think they make a compelling case," said Robert John, a professor of 19th Century history at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "We know so much about Lincoln--there's probably no American figure about whom more is written. To have what could be a fresh insight about him is remarkable."

Historians without backgrounds in medicine traditionally have not delved into

Journal

FRANK RICH

What Tony Soprano Could Teach Bill Clinton



(over for article)

At this late date in the Bill Clinton melodrama, it's no scoop that the man has long been in serious need of a good shrink. If anything, the compulsive lying may be the least of his aberrations. I'm still amazed that so little has been made of this curious sentence in the Starr report: "The longer conversations [between the President and Monica Lewinsky] often occurred after their sexual contact."

Is there another man alive who tells to women more often sex than before?

Nor is it a scoop that Mr. Clinton's ills are rooted in his childhood, since that's the case with most troubled people, not just a reckless, cigar-fixated product of the redolent Freudian venue of Hot Springs. The real question raised by the entire Talk magazine fracas is why a man of his age, resources and intelligence — not to mention public duties — has not had proper help for a treatable condition. Had he sought it, he, his family and the country would all be happier today.

This question, however, was rarely raised in the fatuous debate over whether Hillary Clinton had made an "abuse excuse" for her husband by citing his travails as a 4-year-old to her Talk interviewer, Lucinda Franks. That debate was easily resolved: it's there in black and white that Ms. Franks, not Mrs. Clinton, brought up the subject of Bill Clinton's rough childhood, and it's also there in black and white that Mrs. Clinton said of her husband, "He's responsible for his own behavior whether I'm there or 100 miles away." But if the First Lady was guilty of only trying to explain her husband's history and not, as was widely charged, of floating an excuse for his adult transgressions, she, like him, is hardly off the hook.

"Everybody has some dysfunction in their families," Mrs. Clinton also says in Talk. "They have to deal with it. You don't just walk away if you love someone — you help the person." Those are the right things to

say, but there's no evidence either in the highly detailed interview or the public record or in her husband's now excessively documented private behavior that Mrs. Clinton actually helped steer her husband to effective professional help, despite her stated knowledge of the symptoms and history of what she calls his "weakness." Though the President did submit to some welcome pastoral counseling — or at least did so once the impeachment wolf was at his door — the White House has repeatedly knocked down the possibility that he has received any psychological treatment from a doctor. Instead, as Ms. Franks reports, enabling and denial

'By not confronting problems early, you end up making things worse.'

still rule, even now: "Public office has prevented the President from seeking therapy, but friends told me they expect him to after leaving the Oval Office."

Talk about too little, too late. This is compartmentalization at its most self-destructive. Public office should no more prevent a President from seeking psychotherapy than it should prevent him from seeking chemotherapy. And the Clintons, of all people, should know that better than anyone — they've made mental-health care a political cause. In the 1992 campaign they joined with Al and Tipper Gore to court boomers by talking openly of their past experiences with family counseling, occasioned by the drug bust of Mr. Clinton's half-brother and the hospitalization of the

Gores' son after he was hit by a car. "By not confronting problems early," Mr. Clinton said all too prophetically at that time, "you end up making things worse."

Similarly — and just two months ago — the Clintons and the Gores held a full-day White House Conference on Mental Health. The supposed point of that event, they said, was to counter the myths of mental illness, thereby encouraging the frightened or embarrassed to seek help. "Mental illness is nothing to be ashamed of, but stigma and bias shame us all," said Mr. Clinton in a radio address. If mental illness is left untreated, he said at the conference, "the loss of human potential is staggering."

For all his lofty preaching to the rest of us, perhaps it was fear of just such bias that explains (but does not excuse) Mr. Clinton's inability to seek treatment for his own condition, even at the cost of putting himself and everyone around him through hell. Perhaps he felt that while a sports hero like Mark McGwire or a TV news star like Mike Wallace or even the country's most popular fictional Mafia boss, Tony Soprano, can flourish after going public with their mental-health histories, such revelations still condemn a chief executive to charges of weakness. But isn't it weaker to let one's emotional problems metastasize rather than address them? What does it say about our culture that it may be easier for a President to live down having oral sex with an intern in the Oval Office than having oral discourse in a doctor's office?

Representative Lynn Rivers of Michigan, the only current member of the House or Senate to talk openly about battling a mental illness (manic depression, for 20 years), points out that politicians would rather admit to alcoholism or drug abuse than to receiving psychiatric care, even perhaps for a milder ailment. The record does not contradict her. She and the late Florida Governor Lawton Chiles are the only two front-rank American politicians to be open about their histories

since Thomas Eagleton was thrown off the Democratic ticket in 1972 after admitting he had been treated for depression.

Indeed, it could be argued that we are retreating rather than progressing in attitudes about mental illness in public life. Joshua Wolf Shenk, who is writing a book about what would now be diagnosed as depression, notes that Lincoln called melancholy "a misfortune not a fault." Lincoln wrote and spoke openly of his "moods & gloom," Mr. Shenk says, and friends regarded that melancholy as a source of concern and sadness, but not shame.

On the eve of the White House conference,

Enabling and denial still rule at the White House.

Tipper Gore tried to counter the taboos that can surround mental illness by going public about her own experience with depression. But for all her good work on behalf of this issue, Mrs. Gore gave a mixed message similar to that of the Clintons. As the otherwise approving Representative Rivers puts it, the Vice President's wife "could have contributed more by being more specific." Mrs. Gore refused to describe the duration or most details of her treatment, and was careful at each stop of her staged self-outing, from USA Today to "Oprah," to avoid use of the word "doctor," let alone a doctor whose professional title might include the prefix "psych-." (She said she had been treated by a social worker rather than a psychiatric

social worker.) Even as Mrs. Gore made a cause of stamping out the shame associated with being treated for mental illness, her mystifying circumlocutions sent the signal, consciously or not, that she wasn't entirely free of shame herself.

The consequences of Washington's halting efforts to address this subject — and most law makers would prefer to avoid it altogether — can be far more profound than the Starr

report. The more obfuscation and fear that surround mental illnesses of all types and their treatment, the less hope we have of ameliorating public policy and prejudices that leave these illnesses undertreated, untreated and mistreated. At the gravest end of the mental-health spectrum, this failure produces catastrophes that are fast becoming a fixture of the evening news.

In the aftermath of Columbine, no one stated our predicament more acutely than Dr. W. Walter Menninger, of the famed clinic bearing his family's name in Topeka, Kan. Speaking to the American Psychiatric Association in Washington, he pinpointed the national hypocrisy: "We recognize incidents of mental illness, and at the same time we stigmatize people who suffer from it or seek help to deal with it. We say 'seek treatment,' but at the same time we limit access, and availability, and insurance to pay for it, and in the end make it more difficult to get treatment. There is a disconnect between what we say we need as a society and what we do as a society."

The results of this schism between words and actions, and the piecemeal mental-health system it leads to, cut across all demographic and cultural lines. As the White House sex farce was preventable, so, conceivably, was the tragic rampage of this week's shooter, the latest human time bomb who appears to have entered that so-called system only to fall through its cracks. □

the detailed clinical problems of figures such as Lincoln, said Thomas Schwartz, state historian with the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency.

Schwartz said although it's still unclear how much of Lincoln's behavior can be traced to mercury poisoning, it would make sense if he stopped the regimen because it kept him from thinking clearly.

"It's certainly an interesting hypothesis," Schwartz said. "It's something historians are going to be more mindful of."

Analyzing Lincoln's health

Lincoln's health has been more scrutinized in recent decades, as some scientists have sought to show that he inherited a genetic ailment called Marfan Syndrome, which can lead to a gaunt frame, slender fingers and internal bleeding.

The hypothesis that he also suffered from mercury poisoning puts him in a roster of historical figures who may have felt its effects, including President Andrew Jackson, physicist Isaac Newton and author Charlotte Bronte. Last year, a study of composer Ludwig van Beethoven's hair indicated that he had lead poisoning.

In Lincoln's case, the mercury poisoning may have been a side effect of medicine he took in his lifelong battle against depression. One of the worst early episodes of his "constitutional melancholy" began on Jan. 1, 1841, when an engagement to his future wife, Mary Todd, was broken off.

The incident sent Lincoln into a state that physicians of the time knew as hypochondriasis.

Many medical experts in the 1800s still believed that such mental conditions were linked to the ebb and flow of bodily fluids that the ancient Roman physician Galen had outlined. In that system, hypochondriasis stemmed from a buildup of black bile in the liver.

One of the most common treatments for the disorder called for stimulating the liver and getting black bile moving again through use of mercury pills--the so-called blue mass.

"It really was the Prozac-plus of the time, because they used it to treat a lot of conditions," Hirschhorn said. "They used it for anything they thought was related to the liver. But that was based on a faulty theory. It only poisoned you."

Mercury's effects can include decreased brain-wave activity, irritability, depression, memory loss and impaired kidney function.

There are no records showing when Lincoln started taking his blue pills, though many friends knew he used them. Ward H. Lamon, a bodyguard of Lincoln's, wrote that "blue pills were the medicinal remedy which he affected most."

Hirschhorn believes some of Lincoln's most unusual behavior linked to the blue pills came during the 1850s.

Wild, incoherent nonsense

One of Lincoln's fellow Illinois lawyers and traveling companions, Henry Clay Whitney, described awakening before daylight one morning to see Lincoln sitting up in bed and "talking the wildest and most incoherent nonsense to himself."

Another incident recounted by Lamon's daughter supposedly occurred during one of the famous 1858 Senate debates between Lincoln and Stephen Douglas. In response to an accusation by Douglas about Lincoln's record in Congress, Lincoln furiously grabbed the collar of a former congressional colleague who, Lincoln said, knew the charge was false. While making his point, Lincoln shook the man "until his teeth chattered."

The effects of mercury on the brain can be reversed, and that was fortunate for Lincoln, Hirschhorn said.

"He recognized that it wasn't doing him any good during his first months in the White House," Hirschhorn said. "I think that was a crucial decision. Who knows what would have happened if he had continued taking it?"

Historian: Suicide poem may have come from Lincoln

SPRINGFIELD (AP) — A presidential historian has found a poem about suicide that he believes might have been penned by Abraham Lincoln.

Richard Lawrence Miller, the author of "Truman: The Rise to Power," noticed "The Suicide's Soliloquy" several years ago while going through every issue of the weekly Sangamo Journal from 1831 to 1842. The poem was found in the publication's Aug. 25, 1838, issue.

Miller said it wasn't until later that he concluded a 29-year-old Lincoln had written it. Miller wrote about his find in the spring 2004 issue of the newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association of Springfield.

Lincoln scholars have long known of a suicide poem but had never found it. Some dated the poem's existence to 1841, the year Lincoln suffered from depression after breaking his engagement to Mary Todd. William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner and biographer, reported that the poem had been published in the Sangamo Journal but was later clipped out of the only copy he could find.

Miller said he was reviewing letters written about Lincoln by his friends when he realized the poem could have been written by Lincoln.

In one letter to Herndon, Lincoln's friend Joshua Speed wrote that the suicide poem had been published in 1840 or

1841. Herndon would later write in a letter that Speed had told him the poem was published in 1838.

"This was the thing that got me thinking," Miller recalled Monday. He checked the date of "The Suicide's Soliloquy" and analyzed it for similarities in meter and style to other Lincoln poems.

Kim Bauer, the Lincoln curator for the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum, agrees that the possibility is strong Lincoln wrote the poem.

"The basic sentence structure and the words that are used are certainly well within the parameters that Lincoln wrote a lot of his poetry," Bauer said.

State historian Tom Schwartz also believes Miller's theory is plausible.

"We all know that Lincoln had his moods, was a depressive personality," Schwartz said. "And this lends credence to what people have reported, both his contemporaries and historians generally concede was part of his personality makeup."

Schwartz said there is risk of being wrong with any claim that Lincoln was the author of an unsigned piece of writing. At some point, Schwartz said, a computer program will be developed to analyze Lincoln's writing style and evaluate such anonymous pieces.

Lincoln Mental Health Program

Here at the museum, one of the most frequently asked questions by a visitor is, "Was Mary crazy?" My answer would be that there is no doubt that she at the very least suffered from severe depression and that today she would be treated with medication and therapy...but the same diagnosis could be applied at times to Abraham Lincoln. He, too, suffered from deep periods of what they called melancholy. With both, the symptoms sometimes could be traced to an incident or situation (the most obvious being the death of their son Willie in the White House in 1862). Remember that Mary lost 3 sons, and her husband was shot while sitting next to her. It would be a stretch to think that anyone could withstand such events without some evidence of emotional trauma. From Abe's standpoint, the awful tragedy of the Civil War took a terrible toll with the total death count of 620,000. (That staggering total equaled the combined casualty count in all U.S. wars until Vietnam.) In the Civil War gallery of the museum, there are photographs of Lincoln, starting in 1858 and ending in 1865. You can see the president visibly age, and you can see an unrelenting sadness in his eyes.

One point that should be made is that they both lost their mothers at an early age, so there was a shared childhood trauma. This wasn't an unusual occurrence in the 19th century, particularly for frontier families such as the Lincolns. Abraham appeared to have been very close to his loving stepmother, but Mary did not have the same positive experience. In fact, her unhappiness at home in Lexington is perhaps one of the reasons that she spent so much time visiting her sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth and Ninian Edwards, leading social lights in Springfield.

At first glance, Abe and Mary were not well matched. She was from a wealthy Kentucky family, and her formal education far exceeded his. As an adult he said that he received his education "by littles...a little bit here and a little bit there." He estimated that, all told, he had spent a total of one year in formal schooling. She was trained in the social graces, and he was ill-at-ease and totally unprepared to treat a woman as she might expect. Her family members were appalled that she was attracted to this country bumpkin. But she was wise enough to look beyond the gangly appearance and the ill-fitting clothes and to see the potential in this prairie lawyer.

Perhaps in such a program we should look at the two individuals separately. As mentioned earlier, while living in Southern Indiana, Abraham Lincoln lost his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, when he was nine years old. She died of what was called "milk sickness," a disease contracted by drinking milk from cows which had eaten poisonous white snakeroot. As he grew older, his relationship with his father Thomas left much to be desired...especially given the fact that Thomas scoffed at his son's fierce desire to read and learn. Abe was such a strong youth that his father saw him mainly as a source of income, either working on the Lincoln farm or being hired out to neighbors. Any thought of education was nonsensical. Ten years after his mother died, Abe lost his sister Sarah Lincoln Grigsby, who died in childbirth. At any rate, Lincoln's childhood left much to be desired, although the early death of family members was very common on the frontier. Perhaps a better relationship with Thomas Lincoln might have helped Abe

cope with these crises, but in 1851 when told that his father was near death, he refused to go to visit him, stating that "if we could meet now, it is doubtful whether it would not be more painful than pleasant." The fact that Abraham was also very reluctant to share his thoughts added to what became a lifelong sense of loneliness.

Three of his major attacks of depression coincided with problems with the opposite sex. The story of his "one true love," Ann Rutledge, cannot be proven by written records, but belief in that love remains alive and well in central Illinois. (I grew up in a town that was almost exactly mid way between Chicago and St. Louis. Two trains made the roundtrip from one city to the other twice each day. One train was named the Abraham Lincoln and one the Ann Rutledge. We did not want to hear that there was no written evidence of this relationship. We knew it was true.) Most of the relevant stories of this romance came from friends looking back on their New Salem days.

Ann was definitely a resident of the community, moving from Kentucky to Illinois with her father, one of the founders of New Salem. Lincoln first came to the site in July 1831 and boarded at the Rutledge Tavern. She was engaged to another man, who left Illinois to return to the East for business purposes. He did not return, and Ann died in 1835, so the relationship between Ann and Abe would have had only a relatively short time to develop. According to Lincoln's friends as they looked back through the years, Abe went into deep depression at Ann's death, and many feared for his health. Years later (in 1866, a year after the assassination) Lincoln's former law partner William Herndon gave a speech in which he stated that Lincoln's lost love for Ann Rutledge had forced him to marry a woman he did not really love. (When judging this opinion, we have to remember that Mary Lincoln and Herndon had a record of mutual dislike and distrust, each fearing the other's negative influence on Abraham Lincoln.)

Another courtship-related episode was an on-again-off-again relationship with a woman named Mary Owens, who first met Lincoln in 1833 when she visited her sister in New Salem. He was pathetic as a suitor, frequently warning her by letter that she would be well advised to ignore him...perhaps the opposite of a Dear John letter. (Instead of the traditional "I am dumping you" statement, Abe said, "You should dump me." It should come as no surprise that Mary turned him down when he finally proposed marriage in 1837. William Herndon reached Mary in 1866 to solicit material for a proposed biography of Lincoln. One of her comments was that Lincoln was, "deficient in those little links which make up the chain of a woman's happiness." She also referred to the disparity in their family backgrounds. She re-told to Herndon the famous story that several couples had been out riding when they came to water which had to be crossed. Apparently, all the other gentlemen helped their ladies with the crossing, but Lincoln, completely oblivious, rode on ahead, never looking back. In 1838 Lincoln wrote a rather cruel letter to a friend in which he confided feelings about Mary Owens, saying that when he last saw her she resembled Shakespeare's Falstaff and looked "weather beaten." There were several other comments about Mary's size, so it is difficult to judge from this

distance if the marriage proposal had been activated by love or a 19th century sense of duty. One can almost imagine that in retrospect Lincoln was happy about her refusal.

He later became engaged to Mary Todd, but that relationship was terminated on New Year's Day 1841. This breakup brought another serious bout of depression in which he wrote to describe himself as "the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better I cannot tell; I awfully forbode that I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better, it appears to me." Mary and Abraham reconciled and were eventually married in November 1842, almost 2 years after their breakup.

Abraham had what might be considered today a pre-occupation with death. However, perhaps his outlook only reflected the reality of life on the frontier. In a famous dream shortly before the assassination, he dreamed that he visited the White House and found the president's body laid out for funeral services. In 1846 he wrote "My Childhood Home I See Again," a poem describing a recent trip back to Indiana. The ending of the poem is especially poignant and gives a good look at his overwhelming sense of loss:

Now twenty years have passed away,
Since here I bid farewell
To woods, and fields, and scenes of play
And school-mates loved so well.

Where many were, how few remain
Of old familiar things!
But seeing these to mind again
The lost and absent brings.

The friends I left that parting day,
How changed as time has sped!
Young childhood grown, strong manhood gray,
And half of all are dead.

I hear the lone survivors tell
How nought from death could save,
Till every sound appears a knell,
And every spot a grave.

I range the fields with a pensive tread,
And pace the hollow rooms,
And feel (companion of the dead)
I'm living in the tombs.

Much of the poetry which he loved, read and quoted dealt with death. "Mortality" by William Knox was a great favorite. Of Mortality he once said, "I would give all I am worth, and go into debt, to be able to write so fine a piece as I think that is." Friends from his circuit riding days remembered him in the evenings quoting from the poem:

Oh why should the spirit of mortal be proud!
Like a swift flying meteor – a fast flying cloud –

A flash of lightning – a break of the wave,
He passeth from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the Oak, and the Willow shall fade,
Be scattered around, and together be laid.
And the young and the old, and the low and the high,
Shall moulder to dust, and together shall lie.

Abraham Lincoln read and quoted Shakespeare at length. One of his favorite lines was Richard II's lament, "Let us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings." He also loved Oliver Wendell Holmes' "The Last Leaf," particularly the stanza that read:

The mossy marbles rest
On lips that he has pressed
In their bloom;
And the names he loved to hear
Have been carved for many a year
On the tomb.

Of the Holmes' poem, Lincoln told William Herndon, his law partner, "Recite it, praise it, laud it, swear by it." Herndon later told Henry Whitney, "It took him in all moods and fastened itself upon him as never poem on man." When Lincoln recited this stanza, most listeners believed that the tears in his eyes were for his mother and Ann Rutledge.

The study of the poetry which Lincoln both read and wrote produces a fascinating insight into his mind and soul. One poem which he wrote tended to show his belief that there were things much worse than death. It, too, was written after his trip to visit his childhood home in Indiana. The subject was Matthew Gentry, a former schoolmate. In a letter to a man named Johnston, Lincoln said that Matthew "was rather a bright lad, and the son of the rich man of our very poor neighborhood. At the age of nineteen he unaccountably became furiously mad, from which condition he gradually settled down into harmless insanity. In my poetizing mood I could not forget the impressions his case made upon me." To quote a few stanzas:

But here's an object more of dread
Than ought the grave contains –
A human form with reason fled,
While wretched life remains.

Poor Matthew! Once of genius bright,
A fortune-favored child –
Now locked for aye, in mental night,
A haggard mad-man wild.

Lincoln continues to describe the “shrieks and howls” emitting from the crazed man, shrieks and howls which eventually became “forever mute.” The final stanza of the poem illustrates Abraham’s belief that death is far from fair:

O death! Thou awe-inspiring prince,
That keepst the world in fear:
Why dost thou tear more blest ones hence,
And leave him ling’ring here?

It is an interesting sidelight to consider whether or not one’s taste in poetry and literature can be used by historians in an attempt to explain a person’s state of mind. If this is true, I am afraid that my biographers will have a difficult time in picturing me as a towering genius when they discover that the only poem I know by heart is Ogden Nash’s “The trouble with a kitten is that...eventually it becomes a cat.”

However, many will no doubt recognize in Abraham Lincoln traces of depression. We also need to add the caveat that morose and somber poetry and stories were part and parcel of the 19th century, and that historical figures must be studied, first of all, in the context of their times. And we have to add the footnote that however ill he might have been (and that will probably never be known), his wife Mary was much more severely afflicted.

[For additional information on Lincoln’s feelings and emotions, see *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* by Michael Burlingame.

Lincoln letters, speeches, etc. can be found in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, edited by Roy P. Basler.

For information about comments of William Herndon, see *Herndon’s Life of Lincoln*.]

Although Robert Todd Lincoln was an extremely private man and burned many family papers which are forever lost, for some reason he preserved a bundle of papers marked "MTL Insanity File." He was no doubt aware of some of the negative thoughts directed at him for having his mother committed to, in terms of the 19th century, an insane asylum.

The papers were found in a locked bedroom closet and were given to The Lincoln Museum by Robert's grandson, Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith, Abraham and Mary's last direct descendant, who died Christmas Eve 1985. The resulting book, *The Insanity File*, was written by Mark E. Neely, Jr. and R. Gerald McMurtry, both Former Directors of the Museum.

In his letter of May 1981, Beckwith explains:

"Stored away in my grandfather Robert Todd Lincoln's Manchester, Vermont, home, Hildene, was a bundle of letters, papers and documents marked by him "MTL Insanity File." Tied with a ribbon, the file had lain in his file room just off his study, undisturbed since his death on July 26, 1926. At my sister Mary Lincoln Beckwith's death in 1975, Hildene's use as a family residence came to an end.

Many items and this file therefore came to me. What to do with this file and the information it could contribute on this very controversial subject was not easily decided. I have decided to have the contents published by two competent Lincoln scholars R. Gerald McMurtry and Mark E. Neely, Jr.

My reasons are several. First, it is likely that this is the only definitive record of this tragic story. Second, as the last member of my family I must either take this course or destroy the file. Third, it would seem to me that although my grandfather destroyed much of his incoming correspondence and many personal family letters, this file he retained. I believe that he did so knowing that in the future its contents should be made known.

Fourth, and most important, I believe that because of this file history will treat my great-grandmother Mary Todd Lincoln more kindly in regard to this very disturbing period of her life, and most of all recognize that my grandfather acted in the best possible way towards his mother."

My personal belief is that the major impetus to Mary's growing instability was Willie's death in 1862, probably from drinking poison water from the Potomac. Willie was 12 at the time of his death, and while we all admit that parents shouldn't have a favorite child, there is no doubt that both Abraham and Mary Lincoln favored Willie. Mary went into deep mourning for 3 years. At one point her husband pointed out the window and stated that her excessive woe might force him to send her to "that large white house in the hill yonder," the government hospital for the insane.

Mary was also wildly anxious about money. Her shopping sprees perhaps are symptomatic of an obsessive-compulsive disorder. She had extravagant spending incidents: trunkfuls of drapes purchased for non existent windows; 84 pairs of kid gloves purchased in less than a month; and \$3,200 worth of jewelry purchased in the 3 months before the assassination.

She also sometimes showed signs of paranoia, believing that people were trying to kill her. In one of her most infamous incidents, in 1873 she told a doctor that an Indian spirit was removing wires from her eyes and bones from her cheeks.

Unpopularity in Washington certainly didn't help Mary's problems. She was criticized for her flagrant spending habit and was even accused of being a Confederate spy...due to her Kentucky upbringing and the fact that she had Confederate relatives. Some even blame the assassination on Mary's lack of popularity. Supposedly, several people turned down the invitation to accompany the Lincolns to Ford's Theatre on April 14, 1865, because no one wanted to spend the evening with Mary. General and Mrs. Grant evidently turned down the invitation because Mrs. Grant wanted nothing to do with Mary Lincoln. Had the Grants attended the play, the General would have been accompanied by his usual aides and guards, and John Wilkes Booth would not have been able to carry out his plot. Thus, Mary was to blame for her husband's death.

Our book *The Insanity File* addresses 5 basic questions:

1. The extent of Mary's illness
2. The fairness of her trial
3. The motives of those who had her committed
4. The legal status of women in the 19th century
5. The legal and medical treatment of insanity in the 19th century

In the time allotted here, there is simply no way to explore these questions in any depth whatsoever. A few general comments will have to suffice.

There is no doubt that Mary had severe emotional problems and that life in the public eye did not help her situation. On the other hand, she sought the political life and was one of Lincoln's foremost supporters and advisers.

The list of medications with which she was treated are typical of treatment in mid 19th century America...that is treatment for those who could afford it. She was given a sedative and mixed it with a compound of opium, saffron, cinnamon and wine, the compound having been suggested by her son Tad's doctor. She also took chloral hydrate for insomnia. The place at which Mary was eventually institutionalized had a policy of

heavily sedating patients. There is no doubt that families with sufficient means were more likely to institutionalize females than males. Many other women with symptoms similar to Mary's were simply restrained at home.

The legal status of women in the time of the Lincolns was ambivalent at best. Although there are, as always, some notable exceptions, fathers, sons, husbands, and uncles made the major decisions in a family. The "little woman" was in charge of the household and was responsible for seeing that men were served and honored. Many of the first feminists grew out of the abolition movement, but at the time that the Lincolns were in the White House, they had not yet gone much beyond the slavery issue.

In 1875, 10 years after the assassination of her husband, Mary Lincoln's son began the legal process which resulted in a judgment that she should be confined at Belleview in Batavia, Illinois. After less than four months, she was released into the custody of her sister and brother-in-law in Springfield. Another trial in 1876 judged her sane. From what I have studied, I personally do not ascribe ulterior motives to Robert Todd Lincoln's actions. He may have had some thoughts of the potential reflection of Mary's behavior on the family name, especially in 1867 when her growing concerns about money led her to sell her old clothes, but I don't believe that these were the most important issues for him. He was also concerned about the fact that she was known to sew negotiable securities into the folds of her clothing, thus making her a potential target for theft and personal injury. Much later criticism of Robert also centered on the fact that the doctors who testified to Mary's insanity were his personal friends. One doctor even made the error of mistaking her migraine headaches for hallucinations. Other doctors had not even bothered to examine her before testifying, but Robert himself appears to have been genuinely concerned for his mother's safety and well-being.

Patients at Belleview were given sedatives at bedtime. Those who were underweight (never Mary's problem) were given eggnog with 2 teaspoons of whiskey. Those who refused to eat were force fed. Other medications were quinine, morphia, marijuana, cod-liver oil, beer and ale.

"Mrs. Lincoln's trial occurred at a watershed point in the treatment of mental illness. The belief that insanity could be cured was on the wane, and as asylums became more and more crowded, they evolved from hospital-like situations for curing patients into custodial care only. Revelations of the worsening conditions in crowded state mental institutions, popular books about nefarious conspiracies to commit sane persons in order to gain control of their property, more conservative estimates of the curability of insanity, and conflicting testimony from medical experts at trials of persons using the insanity defense" all contributed to changing perceptions about mental illness.

In Mary's case, Neely and McMurtry zero in on the 19th century's notorious reputation for misogyny combined with the declining quality of treatment for the insane. Could the

men who testified against Mrs. Lincoln be trusted? Once committed, did she receive the proper treatment? Was she a victim of both the legal system and the medical system?

According to Neely, "Womankind had no worse enemy in the 19th century than the medical doctor. Medical science in Mrs. Lincoln's era merely endorsed and reinforced the dominant view of woman's frailty, low intellect, and restricted social destiny. In general, 19th century medicine saw woman as radically different from man, smaller and weaker, and it laid special emphasis on her nervous system. A woman's nervous system was at once more dominant and more prone to dysfunction than a man's. Male doctors focused obsessively on female sexuality, seeing the woman's reproductive system in control of her physical and social destiny." If you love words as I do, it is interesting and somewhat scary to note that the word hysteria comes from the Greek word hystera for womb or uterus. Hence, it can be concluded that a hysterectomy will cut out a woman's propensity for hysteria, poor judgment and perhaps even insanity. Neely and McMurtry venture the opinion that Mary could well have been judged insane that spring of 1875, but not before or after that date. Later that year, Mary's sister wrote to Robert to say that she was now "far more reasonable." She believed that the illnesses before and during a recent trip to Florida and the free use of Chloral had much to do with what she termed the "sad result." However, medical evidence today would perhaps contradict the sister's diagnosis with the objection that fever and Chloral were not sufficient in and of themselves to cause Mary's hallucinations.

The judgment of some is that Robert truly thought that he was acting in his mother's best interests when he initiated the legal action that eventually led to her institutionalization, especially in view of what he believed to be her suicidal tendencies. I also believe that Robert exhibited 19 Century society's common ignorance of mental illness, an ignorance which sadly is still present today. Mary Lincoln's most eminent biographer Jean Baker has another take on the insanity trial, **"Admittedly she was nervous and miserable, but a broken heart was not a ruined mind."**

Abraham and Mary Lincoln constituted an unlikely pair from the beginning, but we shouldn't judge their relationship from afar. Each brought something different to the marriage, but they also had some similar life experiences, especially the death of their mothers. Both suffered from deep depression. We aren't certain if there were genetic predispositions to depression in either family. The marriage suffered because of the death of two sons (Eddie and Willie. Tad was to die 6 years after the assassination.) and the enormous stress of White House life during the Civil War. Both were inundated by public criticism, some of it justified, most not. From this distance, perhaps we should not judge the relationship, and perhaps Abraham's engraving of "Love is eternal" on Mary's wedding ring was really the way they felt about each other. Shortly after the wedding, he wrote to a friend that he found his marriage to be "a matter of profound wonder." Since Abraham Lincoln well deserves his reputation as a national hero, perhaps it is natural that history looks at the less-than-perfect marriage and blames Mary, just as her contemporaries did. But here's a closing thought...For better or for worse, in spite of

sickness and loss, without the marriage would Abraham Lincoln have become the man and the president that he was.

[For a complete biography of Mrs. Lincoln, see Jean Baker's *Mary Todd Lincoln*. All information regarding Mary's trial and medications is taken from *The Insanity File* by Mark E. Neely, Jr. and R. Gerald McMurtry. Direct quotations are so cited. The letter from Robert Todd Lincoln Beckwith is in the archives of The Lincoln Museum.]

Sara Gabbard, The Lincoln Museum
June 15, 2004



NEW YORKmetro.com

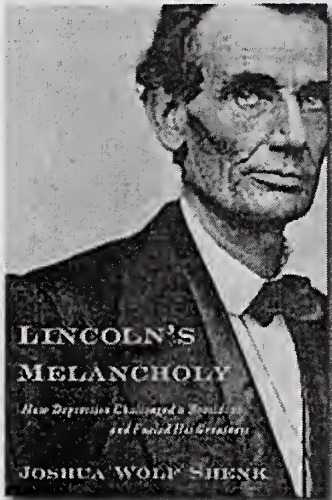
PRINT THIS

Book Review

The Blue and the Gray

Joshua Wolf Shenk elegantly argues that Abraham Lincoln's depression was the fire beneath his ambition.

By Andrew Solomon



It's been quite a year for Honest Abe. January saw the publication of C. A. Tripp's *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*, which makes a strained case for Lincoln's being gay. Now, in *Lincoln's Melancholy*, Joshua Wolf Shenk argues that the sixteenth president suffered from major clinical depression. A comparison of the books is instructive. Tripp is both presumptuous and anachronistic, presenting polemical arguments as if they were facts. Even if Lincoln's desires were in some (or most) instances homoerotic, which is certainly possible, the likelihood is that he didn't perceive himself as gay in any contemporary sense of the word. Tripp falls prey to the sin of psychobiography, the retrospective study of character that was spearheaded by Freud's dubious analysis of Leonardo. It is among the saddest truths of history that a great many secrets are carried to the grave. Attempts to excavate them, though interesting, are doomed. Speculation presented as speculation may be edifying; presented as fact, it becomes dangerous.

Although Lincoln's sexuality is a mystery we cannot fully probe, his melancholy was extensively documented, acknowledged both by himself and by those around him; and though he would have found our understanding of clinical depression as a biological disease somewhat exotic, his symptomatology is not difficult to trace. It is well known today; indeed, Lincoln and Churchill are regularly described as the highest-functioning depressives in modern history. It is a fact, however, that was suppressed for most of the twentieth century. Lincoln described melancholy as "a misfortune not a fault," and so it was taken in his time. But later historians did not allow this spin on what was by then held to be a fault not a misfortune, and

it is a sign of social progress that Shenk can write about Lincoln's depression without seeming to disparage him—though, as Shenk himself is quick to point out, a current presidential candidate would be significantly hurt by such a discussion.

Shenk's book is a shapely and insightful exegesis of the Civil War president's inner life, written with authority. It is a kind and admiring book, but it is also measured and honest. Despite occasional lapses into ponderousness and repetition, it contains some extremely beautiful prose and fine political rhetoric and leaves one feeling close to Lincoln, a considerable accomplishment given that few people felt close to Lincoln even when he was alive. Shenk's intimacy with his subject never seems arrogant because it is enormously well-informed, predicated on a mixture of identification and awe. Further, he has the skills of historiography down pat and anticipates and engages with the implications of his arguments.

Shenk gives us a surprisingly complete story of Lincoln's life with a persistent emphasis on melancholy and how it sat with miserable times. "It is no coincidence," Shenk writes in a passage about Lincoln's pessimism, "that Lincoln found his power at a time when the skies turned dark in the United States. His power came in part because he quickly saw the approaching storm." It is perhaps gratifying to one's sense of Schadenfreude to read of these difficulties and know that achievement comes at a price, but what one really comes away with is a sense of wonder. It would have been difficult for a cheery person to become Lincoln, and almost inconceivably hard for someone who was perennially depressed to face down so many setbacks and failures and a difficult personal life, and then to have responsibility for the day-to-day management of the Civil War and the leadership of a country divided against itself.

Both *Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln* and *Lincoln's Melancholy* are predicated on identity politics' tendency to claim heroes. If Lincoln was gay, that dignifies other gay people; if he was depressed, it dignifies others who are depressed. It should be emphasized, though, that these books also set a rather high standard: Most depressed or gay people (much less depressed gay people) will not be president. Most depressed people will be doing well if they can rise and shine—indeed if they can rise—on an ordinary day. Lincoln had a remarkable ability, in Chaucer's famous words, to "maken vertu of necessitee."

It is enlightening to realize that the very qualities that made Lincoln—exquisite empathy, transcendent humanity, prodigious intellect, and urgent moral clarity—were the ones that made him miserable, that his genius was contingent on his unhappiness. Shenk writes, "The qualities associated with his melancholy—his ability to see clearly and persist sanely in conditions that could have rattled even the strongest minds; his adaptations to suffering that helped him to be effective and creative; and his persistent and searching eye for the pure meaning of the nation's struggle—contributed mightily to his good work." To his greatest



BACKSTORY

The Great American Fathers genre continues to explode, and there are few more salable subjects than Abe Lincoln. The sixteenth president's personality dominates Tripp's and Shenk's biographies, but Doris Kearns Goodwin dissects his political skill—in Washington and in war—in *Team of Rivals: The Genius of Abraham Lincoln*. Even in historical fiction, the Civil War itself takes center

friend, Joshua Speed, who shared his melancholy tendencies, Lincoln wrote, "I think if I were you, in case my mind were not exactly right, I would avoid being *idle*; I would immediately engage in some business, or go to making preparation for it, which would be the same thing." Lincoln handled his depression by becoming president—a novel approach, but one that served magnificently both his own interests and those of his country. In an era of victimhood, this model of someone who through steely resolve put his pain to the service of an exalted cause is exciting, even astonishing. Shenk refers throughout to William James and traces Lincoln's story as that of mystic and martyr, in whom trial by fire took on the trappings of divine inspiration; but he never loses sight of Lincoln's specific humanity. The real radicalism of this book (and I say this as someone who takes and has advocated for the use of antidepressants) is that it shows starkly what we stand to lose when we lose depression. Had effective psychopharmacology been around sooner, Shenk demonstrates, we might not have had the Emancipation Proclamation or the Gettysburg Address, at least not in the same form and with the same exquisite energy.

stage this year. *The Widow of the South*, by Robert Hicks, novelizes a Confederate woman's achievements honoring the southern dead, while E. L. Doctorow's *The March* observes General Sherman's rampage through the weary eyes of some of his most compelling characters to date—among them the melancholic president himself.

Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness
by Joshua Wolf Shenk.
Houghton Mifflin.
368 pages. \$25.

Find this article at:
<http://www.nymetro.com/nymetro/arts/books/reviews/14700>

☐ Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.

October 23, 2005

'Lincoln's Melancholy': Sadder and Wiser

By PATRICIA COHEN

Can the generally disappointing crop of national leaders today be attributed to the Prozac Generation's addiction to cheeriness? That is one strain of thought in Joshua Wolf Shenk's book, which argues that Abraham Lincoln's lifelong struggle with depression was responsible for his becoming one of America's greatest presidents.

The idea that suffering fuels creativity and wisdom is an old one, but in a country where 25 million people take antidepressants, it has its limits. The emotionally suffering artist stokes our romantic imagination; the emotionally suffering politician evokes panic. Who wants to think about Eeyore nose to nose with bin Laden?

But depression, Shenk says, has gotten bad press. This is not a contrarian's gimmick; he has firsthand knowledge. In previous writings about his own depression, Shenk credited it with shaping his personality. That he would then conclude the same about his hero should not be all that surprising.

If "Lincoln's Melancholy," a thoughtful but uneven book, is the product of a particularly personal experience, it is also the result of the latest currents in psychology and Lincoln studies. After years of dismissing the significance of Lincoln's inner life, scholars have reversed course in the last two decades. (A history of this history is nicely summarized in the afterword.) And in a series of 1998 lectures at Harvard, Andrew Delbanco linked Lincoln's private despair with his public work. "The lesson of Lincoln's life," he said, is that "a passion to secure justice" can be a "remedy for melancholy."

Shenk inverts this formulation. Melancholy, he declares, led Lincoln to have that passion. In making the case, he synthesizes the latest research, recounts family history and eyewitness testimony, and even offers readers his own interpretation of Lincoln's poetry.

Trying to capture the mental state of someone who lived 150 years ago, however, is like trying to hold fast to a shadow. Fortunately, Shenk has a nuanced understanding of the difficulties: how psychiatric diagnoses can't account for reality's complexity; how some areas, like Lincoln's sex life, are unknowable; how incomplete sources, intuition and common sense are used to construct a story we call history.

The structure of Shenk's story is like that of a mythic tale in which the hero sets out on a journey, goes through various trials and then uses the knowledge he gained along the way to triumph. That this journey takes place across the landscape of depression rubs against the modern American grain. "Whereas 'melancholy' in Lincoln's time was understood to be a multifaceted phenomenon that conferred potential advantages along with grave dangers, today we tend to discount its complexities," Shenk writes. "As a culture Americans have strangely decided to endow optimism with unqualified favor. Politicians today compete to be the most optimistic, and accuse their opponents of pessimism, as if it were a defect."

This obsession with optimism operates like a kind of cultural Prozac. Shenk suggests that our culture's relentlessly exaggerated cheer interferes with sound political judgment. It's a provocative analysis, based on an imaginative blend of psychology and history. But that approach doesn't work nearly as well when applied to the specifics of Lincoln's life.

In Shenk's eyes, Lincoln went through three stages of depression. The first hit in 1835, when he was 26, and remained through the ups and downs of his early political career in Illinois. "I am now the most miserable man living. . . . I must die or be better," he wrote in 1841. A presumed love affair with a friend who died, Ann Rutledge, has generally been cited as the cause of his first breakdown. But Shenk is skeptical, as he is also skeptical that Lincoln's second breakdown was caused by a temporary breakup with his future wife, Mary Todd.

Depressives overreact to small events as much as to major ones, and Shenk discusses any number of things - including severe political troubles, profound doubts about Mary Todd, feelings for other women and bleak weather (a frequent trigger) - that could have been the cause. More important is what turned Lincoln from thoughts of suicide, and that was a sense of purpose, an "irrepressible desire" to achieve something meaningful.

Lincoln's marriage in 1842 to the emotionally troubled Mary Todd marks the second stage, Shenk writes. Stoic resignation (though not the most auspicious mood for a wedding) replaced the public exhibitions of despair. He maintained that reserve; in 1850, this candid chronicler of emotion barely mentioned the death of his 3-year-old son, Eddie. And though Lincoln remained an unconventional thinker, he increasingly turned to the Bible for solace.

During this period, when he won election to the House of Representatives but lost out on two Senate seats, Lincoln adapted, Shenk says, working frantically and developing the discipline, creativity and perseverance that would later serve him in his political crusade.

Finally, in the mid-1850's, Lincoln transformed his personal struggle into a struggle for universal justice. He responded to the loss of the Senate race to Stephen A. Douglas in 1858 not with suicidal musings but with resolve: "The cause of civil liberty must not be surrendered at the end of one, or even, one hundred defeats." Later, during the dark days of the Civil War, President Lincoln wrote, "I expect to maintain this contest until successful, or till I die." His experience with melancholy provided him with the creative juice that inspired his greatest writings, as well as with the religious feeling that inspired his idea of nationhood and his own role as an "instrument" of a higher power charged with a sacred trust.

At the end comes the hero's triumph: the Emancipation Proclamation fulfills his lifelong dream. Referring to his earlier rejection of suicide, Lincoln told a friend that he had indeed accomplished something meaningful: "I believe in this measure my fondest hopes will be realized."

Shenk provides some fascinating details about Lincoln and offers a sensitive portrait of his emotional state. But in the end, no psychological profile can do justice to Lincoln's life. And the speculative "may haves" and "might haves" don't stretch far enough to connect cause with effect.

For starters, some essential facts don't fit. The qualities that Shenk argues were the direct result of Lincoln's struggle with depression were clearly evident early in life, before the cloud of melancholy cast its shadow. Although Shenk writes that a sense of purpose was "the key that unlocked the gates of a mental prison," Lincoln had that drive from the beginning. "Even in his early days," Lincoln "believed that there was a predestined work for him in the world," his friend O. H. Browning said. In Lincoln's first published political speech, in 1832, he said his greatest ambition was to be "truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem."

Nowhere in the book does Lincoln explicitly say, as Shenk insists, that his own emotional suffering sensitized him to the suffering of slaves. Shenk also overstates his case for Lincoln's melancholy, as when he characterizes perfectly appropriate responses - openly crying at the death of a close friend, disappointment at a political loss - as evidence of depression.

When the specifics don't fit the story line, Shenk is forced to do some patchwork, so that the explanation of Lincoln's "depressive realism" is followed a few pages later by an explanation of why his faith in progress and redemption also makes him a "tragic optimist." And while depressives may be politically acute, creative and spiritual, they don't have a monopoly on these attributes.

It's obvious that the sum total of experience makes someone who he is. Precisely how that alchemy works is the mystery. Shenk's repeated references to Lincoln's gloomy appearance may be telling in a way he did not intend. By drawing attention so frequently to the outermost expression of Lincoln's sadness, he underscores how little we ultimately know about its innermost workings.

Patricia Cohen is the theater editor for The Times.

[Copyright 2005 The New York Times Company](#) | [Home](#) | [Privacy Policy](#) | [Search](#) | [Corrections](#) | [XML](#) | [Help](#) | [Contact](#)





THE Atlantic

OCTOBER 2005

LINCOLN'S GREAT DEPRESSION

TODAY HE'D BE CALLED
"UNFIT FOR OFFICE"—
BUT HIS STRUGGLES WITH
MENTAL ILLNESS GAVE
HIM THE TOOLS TO
BIND A NATION

**BY JOSHUA
WOLF SHENK**

WWW.THEATLANTIC.COM

#BXBBDGG *****CR LOT 0034A**R-001

|||||

#AMY0002591253/5#78 SEP08 AM1010

CALL 800-234-2411 FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE

00010

P000018

LINCOLN'S GREAT DEPRESSION

Abraham Lincoln fought clinical depression all his life, and if he were alive today, his condition would be treated as a "character issue"—that is, as a political liability. His condition was indeed a character issue: it gave him the tools to save the nation

BY JOSHUA WOLF SHENK

.....

When Abraham Lincoln came to the stage of the 1860 state Republican convention in Decatur, Illinois, the crowd roared in approval. Men threw hats and canes into the air, shaking the hall so much that the awning over the stage collapsed; according to an early account, "the roof was literally cheered off the building." Fifty-one years old, Lincoln was at the peak of his political career, with momentum that would soon sweep him to the nomination of the national party and then to the White House.

Yet to the convention audience Lincoln didn't seem euphoric, or triumphant, or even pleased. On the contrary, said a man named Johnson, observing from the convention floor, "I then thought him one of the most diffident and worst plagued men I ever saw."

The next day the convention closed. The crowds dispersed, leaving behind cigar stubs and handbills and the smells of sweat and whiskey. Later the lieutenant governor of Illinois, William J. Bross, walked the floor. He saw Lincoln sitting alone at the end of the hall, his head bowed, his gangly arms bent at the elbows, his hands pressed to his face. As Bross approached, Lincoln noticed him and said, "I'm not very well."

Lincoln's look at that moment—the classic image of gloom—was familiar to everyone who knew him well. Such spells were just one thread in a curious fabric of behavior and thought that his friends called his "melancholy." He often wept in public and recited maudlin poetry. He told jokes and stories at odd times—he needed the laughs, he said, for his survival. As a young man he talked more than once of suicide, and as he grew older he said he saw the world as hard and grim, full of misery, made that way by fate and the forces of God. "No element of Mr. Lincoln's character," declared his colleague Henry Whitney, "was so marked, obvious and ingrained as his mysterious and profound melancholy." His law partner William Herndon said, "His melancholy dripped from him as he walked."

Joshua Wolf Shenk is the author of the forthcoming book Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness (Houghton Mifflin), from which this article is adapted.

In 1998 I chanced upon a reference to Lincoln's melancholy in a sociologist's essay on suicide. I was intrigued enough to investigate the subject and discovered an exciting movement in the field of Lincoln studies. Actually, it was a rediscovery of very old terrain. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Lincoln's melancholy was widely accepted by students of his life, based as the subject was on countless reminiscences by people who knew him. But in the 1940s professional historians—taking what they regarded as a "scientific" approach to the study of the past—began to reject personal memories in favor of "hard" evidence. Their wildly inconsistent application of the rule suggests that they really wanted to toss out evidence they found distasteful. Still, the effect was profound and long-lasting.

Then, in the late 1980s and the 1990s, an emerging group of scholars began, independent of one another, to look anew at original accounts of Lincoln by the men and women who knew him. These historians, including Douglas Wilson, Rodney Davis, Michael Burlingame, and Allen Guelzo, had come of age in an era when the major oral histories of Lincoln were treated, as Davis has described it, "like nuclear waste." But they found to their surprise that such sources were more like rich mines that had been sealed off. They reassessed some accounts, dug up others that had been long forgotten, and began to publish these findings, many for the first time, in lavishly annotated volumes. This work felicitously coincided—post-Richard Nixon—with popular demand for frank portraits of public figures' private lives. Today the combination of basic materials and cultural mood allows us a surprising, and bracing, new view of Abraham Lincoln—one that has a great deal in common with the view of him held by his closest friends and colleagues.

Lincoln did suffer from what we now call depression, as modern clinicians, using the standard diagnostic criteria, uniformly agree. But this diagnosis is only the beginning of a story about

how Lincoln wrestled with mental demons, and where it led him. Diagnosis, after all, seeks to assess a patient at just a moment in time, with the aim of treatment. But Lincoln's melancholy is part of a whole life story; exploring it can help us see that life more clearly, and discern its lessons. In a sense, what needs "treatment" is our own narrow ideas—of depression as an exclusively medical ailment that must be, and will be, squashed; of therapy as a thing dispensed only by professionals and measured only by a reduction of pain; and finally, of mental trials as a flaw in character and a disqualification for leadership.

Throughout its three major stages—which I call fear, engagement, and transcendence—Lincoln's melancholy upends such views. With Lincoln we have a man whose depression spurred him, painfully, to examine the core of his soul; whose hard work to stay alive helped him develop crucial skills and capacities, even as his depression lingered hauntingly; and whose inimitable character took great strength from the piercing insights of depression, the creative responses to it, and a spirit of humble determination forged over decades of deep suffering and earnest longing.

I. FEAR

The word appears in an age-old definition of melancholia: "fear and sadness without cause." To be more precise we could say "without *apparent* cause," or "*disproportionate* to apparent cause." Although this story is about melancholy throughout, the first part illustrates its dark heart, the querulous, dissatisfied, doubting experience often marked by periods of withdrawal and sometimes by utter collapse. With Lincoln it's instructive to see how he collapsed, but even more so to see how his collapses led him to a signal moment of self-understanding.

By 1835 Lincoln had lived for four years in New Salem, a village in central Illinois that backed up to a bluff over the Sangamon River. Twenty-six years old, he had made many friends there. That summer an epidemic of what doctors called "bilious fever"—typhoid, probably—spread through the area. Among those severely afflicted were Lincoln's friends the Rutledges. One of New Salem's founding families, they had run a tavern and boardinghouse where Lincoln stayed and took meals when he first arrived. He became friendly with Ann Rutledge, a bright, pretty young woman with golden hair and large blue eyes. In August of 1835 she took sick. Visiting her at her family's farm, Lincoln seemed deeply distressed, which made people wonder whether the two had a romantic, and not just a friendly, bond. After Lincoln's death such speculation would froth over into a messy controversy—one that cannot be, and need not be, resolved. Regardless of how he felt about Rutledge while she was alive, her sickness and death drew Lincoln to his emotional edge. Around the time of her burial a rainstorm, accompanied by unseasonable cold, shoved him over. "As to the condition of Lincoln's Mind after the death of Miss R.,"

Henry McHenry, a farmer in the area, recalled, "after that Event he seemed quite *changed*, he seemed *Retired*, & loved *Solitude*, he seemed wraped in *profound thought*, *indifferent*, to transpiring Events, had but Little to say, but would take his gun and wander off in the woods by him self, away from the association of even those he most esteemed, this gloom seemed to deepen for some time, so as to give anxiety to his friends in regard to his Mind."

Indeed, the villagers' anxiety was intense, both for Lincoln's immediate safety and for his long-term mental health. Lincoln "told Me that he felt like Committing Suicide often," remembered Mentor Graham, a schoolteacher, and his neighbors mobilized to keep him safe. One friend recalled, "Mr Lincolns friends ... were Compelled to keep watch and ward over Mr Lincoln, he being from the sudden shock somewhat temporarily deranged. We watched during storms—fogs—damp gloomy weather ... for fear of an accident." Some villagers worried that he'd end up insane. After several weeks an older couple in the area took him into their home. Bowling Green, the large, merry justice of the peace, and his wife, Nancy, took care of Lincoln for a week or two. When he had improved somewhat, they let him go, but he was, Mrs. Green said, "quite melancholy for months."

Was Lincoln's melancholy a "clinical depression"? Yes—as far as that concept goes. Certainly his condition in the summer of 1835 matches what the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* labels a major depressive

Modern clinicians agree that Lincoln suffered from depression. It's instructive to see how he collapsed, but even more so to see how his collapses led him to a signal moment of self-understanding.

episode. Such an episode is characterized by depressed mood, a marked decrease in pleasure, or both, for at least two weeks, and symptoms such as agitation, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness, and thoughts of death or suicide. Five and a half years later, in the winter of 1840–1841, Lincoln broke down again, and together these episodes suffice for modern clinicians to make an assessment of recurrent major depression.

Such labels can help us begin to reckon with Lincoln. Most basically, "clinical depression" means it was serious, no mere case of the blues. Someone who has had two episodes of major depression has a 70 percent chance of experiencing a third. And someone who's had three episodes has a 90 percent chance of having a fourth. Indeed, it became clear in Lincoln's late twenties that he had more than a



passing condition. Robert L. Wilson, who was elected to the Illinois state legislature with Lincoln in 1836, found him amiable and fun-loving. But one day Lincoln told him something surprising. Lincoln said "that although he appeared to enjoy life rapturously, Still he was the victim of terrible melancholly," Wilson recalled. "He Sought company, and indulged in fun and hilarity without restraint, or Stint as to time[.] Still when by himself, he told me that he was so overcome with mental depression, that he never dare carry a knife in his pocket."

Yet as we learn about Lincoln, a fixation on modern categories should not distract us from the actual events of his life and the frameworks that he and his contemporaries applied to his condition. In his late twenties Lincoln was developing a distinct reputation as a depressive. At the

same time, he was scrambling up the ladder of success, emerging as a leader of the Illinois Whig Party and a savvy, self-educated young lawyer. Today this juxtaposition may seem surprising, but in the nineteenth-century conception of melancholy, genius and gloom were often part of the same overall picture. True, a person with a melancholy temperament had been fated with an awful burden—but also, in Lord Byron's phrase, with a "fearful gift." The burden was a sadness and despair that could tip into a state of discease. But the gift was a capacity for depth and wisdom.

Both sides of melancholy are evident in a poem on suicide that Lincoln apparently wrote in his twenties. Discussed by his contemporaries but long undiscovered, the poem, unsigned, recently came to light through the efforts of the scholar Richard Lawrence Miller, who was aided by old records that have been made newly available. Without an original manuscript or a letter in which ownership is claimed, no unsigned piece can be attributed definitively to an author. But the evidence points strongly to Lincoln. The poem was published in the year cited by Lincoln's closest friend, Joshua Speed, and its syntax, tone, meter, and other qualities are characteristic of Lincoln.

The poem ran in the August 25, 1838, issue of the *Sangamo Journal*, under the title "The Suicide's Soliloquy." At the top a note explains that the lines of verse were found "near the bones" of an apparent suicide in a deep forest by the Sangamon River. The conceit, in other words, is that this is a suicide note. As the poem begins, the anguished narrator announces his intention.

Here, where the lonely hooting owl
Sends forth his midnight moans,
Fierce wolves shall o'er my carcass growl,
Or buzzards pick my bones.

No fellow-man shall learn my fate,
Or where my ashes lie;
Unless by beasts drawn round their bait,
Or by the ravens' cry.

Yes! I've resolved the deed to do,
And this the place to do it:
This heart I'll rush a dagger through
Though I in hell should rue it!

Often understood as an emotional condition, depression is to those who experience it characterized largely by its cognitive patterns. The novelist William Styron has likened his depression to a storm in his brain, punctuated by thunderclaps of thought—self-critical, fearful, despairing. Lincoln clearly knew these mental strains (he wrote once of “that *intensity* of thought, which will some times wear the sweetest idea thread-bare and turn it to the bitterness of death”); he knew how, oppressed by the clamor, people often become hopeless, and seek the most drastic solution.

To ease me of *this* power to think,
That through my bosom raves,
I'll headlong leap from hell's high brink
And wallow in its waves.

This poem illustrates the complex quality of Lincoln's melancholy in his late twenties. He articulated a sense of himself as degraded and humiliated but also, somehow, as special and grand. And though the character in the poem in the end chooses death by the dagger, the author—using his tool, the pen—showed an impulse toward an artful life. Lincoln's poem expressed both his connection with a morbid state of mind and, to some extent, a mastery over it. But the mastery would be short-lived.

Like the first, Lincoln's second breakdown came after a long period of intense work. In 1835 he had been studying law; in the winter of 1840–1841 he was trying to keep the debt-ridden State of Illinois from collapsing (and his political career with it). On top of this came a profound personal stress. The precipitating causes are hard to identify precisely, in part because cause and effect in depressive episodes can be hard to separate. Ordinarily we insist on a narrative line: factor *x* led to reaction *y*. But in a depressive crisis we might feel bad because something has gone awry. Or we might make things go awry because we feel so bad. Or both.

For Lincoln in this winter many things were awry. Even as he faced the possibility that his political career was sunk, it seemed likely that he was inextricably bound to a woman he didn't love (Mary Todd) and that Joshua Speed was going to either move away to Kentucky or stay in Illinois and marry Matilda Edwards, the young woman whom Lincoln said he really wanted but could not even approach, because of his bond with Todd. Then came a stretch of intensely cold weather, which, Lincoln later wrote, “my experience clearly proves to be very severe on defective nerves.” Once again he began to speak openly about his misery, hopelessness, and thoughts of suicide—alarming his friends. “Lincoln went Crazy,” Speed recalled. “—had to remove razors from his room—take away all Knives and other such dangerous things—&—it was terrible.”

In January of 1841 Lincoln submitted himself to the care of a medical doctor, spending several hours a day with

Dr. Anson Henry, whom he called “necessary to my existence.” Although few details of the treatment are extant, he probably went through what a prominent physician of the time called “the desolating tortures of officious medication.” When he emerged, on January 20, he was “reduced and emaciated in appearance,” wrote a young lawyer in town named James Conkling. On January 23 Lincoln wrote to his law partner in Washington: “I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth. Whether I shall ever be better I can not tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better, it appears to me.”

This spare, direct letter captures the core of depression as forcefully as the Gettysburg Address would distill the essence of the American experiment. It tells what depression is like: to feel not only miserable but the *most* miserable; to feel a strange, muted sense of awful power; to believe plainly that either the misery must end or life will—and yet to fear the misery will not end. The fact that Lincoln spoke thus, not to a counselor or a dear friend but to his law partner, indicates how relentlessly he insisted on acknowledging his fears. Through his late twenties and early thirties he drove deeper and deeper into them, hovering over what, according to Albert Camus, is the only serious question human beings have to deal with. He asked whether he could live, whether he could face life's misery.

Finally he decided that he must. Speed recorded the dramatic exchange that began when he came to Lincoln and told him he would die unless he rallied. Lincoln replied that he *could* kill himself, that he was not afraid to die. Yet, he said, he had an “irrepressible desire” to accomplish something while he lived. He wanted to connect his name with the great events of his generation, and “so impress himself upon them as to link his name with something that would redound to the interest of his fellow man.” This was no mere wish, Lincoln said, but what he “desired to live for.”

II. ENGAGEMENT

In his middle years Lincoln turned from the question of *whether he could* live to *how he would* live. Building bridges out from his tortured self, he engaged with the psychological culture of his time, investigating who he was, how he might change, and what he must endure. Having seen what he wished to live for, Lincoln suffered at the prospect that he might never achieve it. Even so, he worked diligently to improve himself, developing self-understanding, discipline, and strategies for succor that would become the foundation of his character.

The melancholy did not go away during this period but, rather, took a new form. Beginning in his mid-thirties Lincoln began to fall into what a law clerk called his “blue spells.” A decade later the cast of his face and body when in repose suggested deep, abiding gloom to nearly all who

crossed his path. In his memoirs the Illinois lawyer Henry C. Whitney recounted an afternoon at court in Bloomington, Illinois: "I was sitting with John T. Stuart"—Lincoln's first law partner—"while a case was being tried, and our conversation was, at the moment, about Lincoln, when Stuart remarked that he was a hopeless victim of melancholy. I expressed surprise, to which Stuart replied; 'Look at him, now.'" Whitney turned and saw Lincoln sitting by himself in a corner, "wrapped in abstraction and gloom." Whitney watched him for a while. "It appeared," he wrote, "as if he was pursuing in his mind some specific, sad subject, regularly and systematically through various *sinuosities*, and his sad face would assume, at times, deeper phases of grief: but no relief came from dark and despairing melancholy, till he was roused by the breaking up of court, when he emerged from his cave of gloom and came back, like one awakened from sleep, to the world in which he lived, again."

In one sense these spells indicate Lincoln's melancholy. But they may also represent a response to it—the visible end of Lincoln's effort to contain his dark feelings and thoughts, to wrestle privately with his moods until they passed or lightened. "With depression," writes the psychologist David B. Cohen, "recovery may be a matter of shifting from protest to more effective ways of mastering helplessness." Lincoln was effective, to a point. He worked well and consistently at his law practice, always rousing himself from gloom for

work. He and Mary Lincoln (whom he had wed in 1842) had four boys. He was elected to a term in the United States Congress. Yet his reaction to this honor—he wrote, "Though I am very grateful to our friends, for having done it, [it] has not pleased me as much as I expected"—suggested that through booms and busts, Lincoln continued to see life as hard.

Indeed, he developed a philosophical melancholy. "He felt very strongly," said his friend Joseph Gillespie, "that there was more of discomfort than real happiness in human existence under the most favorable circumstances and the general current of his reflections was in that channel." Once a girl named Rosa Haggard, the daughter of a hotel proprietor in Winchester, Illinois, asked Lincoln to sign her autograph album. Lincoln took the book and wrote,

To Rosa
You are young, and I am older;
You are hopeful, I am not—
Enjoy life, ere it grows colder—
Pluck the roses ere they rot.

At a time when newspapers were stuffed with ads for substances to cure all manner of ailments, it wouldn't have been unusual for Lincoln to seek help at a pharmacy. He had a charge account at the Corneau and Diller drugstore, at 122 South Sixth Street in Springfield, where he bought a number of medications, including opiates, camphor, and sarsaparilla. On one occasion he bought fifty cents' worth of cocaine, and he sometimes took the "blue mass"—a mercury pill that was believed to clear the body of black bile.

To whatever extent Lincoln used medicines, his essential view of melancholy discounted the possibility of transformation by an external agent. He believed that his suffering proceeded inexorably from his constitution—that, in a phrase he used in connection with a friend, he was "naturally of a nervous temperament." Through no fault of his own, he believed, he suffered more than others.

Some strategies in response were apparent. As noted, work was a first refuge; he advised a friend, "I think if I were you, in case my mind were not exactly right, I would avoid being *idle*." When he was off duty, two things gave him most relief. He told stories and jokes, studiously gathering new material from talented peers and printed sources. And he gave vent to his melancholy by reading, reciting, and composing poetry that dwelled on themes of death, despair, and human futility. Yet, somewhat in the way that insulin allows diabetics to function without eliminating the root problem, this strategy gave Lincoln relief without taking away his need for it.

Consider his favorite poem, which he began

ASIATIC LILIES

The six-foot stalks, like Amazon spears
thrust into the bull's-eye of a barrel sawed in half,
all tilt east. They are javelins
thrown by the rising moon.

Tasseled with three or four crimson blossoms,
they advertise a roadside nursery
the way a school basketball team, waving scarlet varsity jackets
aloft, implores alumni to open their wallets.

I would buy an entire quiver
trimmed so fetchingly, and so accurate.
I would picket my patio with severe blood-blooms
and hide like a mandarin behind my army.

—JOYCE PESEROFF

Joyce Peseroff is the editor of Simply Lasting: Writers on Jane Kenyon. Her new collection of poems, Eastern Mountain Time, will be published early next year.

to recite often in his mid-thirties. It was in one sense, as a colleague observed, "a reflex in poetic form of the deep melancholy of his soul," and in another a way to manage that melancholy. One story of his recitations comes from Lois Newhall, a member of the Newhall Family troupe of singers. During an Illinois tour in the late 1840s the troupe encountered Lincoln and two colleagues, who were traveling the same circuit giving political speeches. They ended up spending eight days together, and on their last they sat up late singing songs.

As the night wore down, Lincoln's colleagues started pressing him to sing. Lincoln was embarrassed and demurred, but he finally said, "I'll tell you what I'll do for you. You girls have been so kind singing for us. I'll repeat to you my favorite poem." Leaning against the doorjamb, which looked small behind his lanky frame, and with his eyes half closed, Lincoln recited from memory.

O[h] why should the spirit of mortal be proud!
Like a swift, fleeting meteor—a fast-flying cloud—
A flash of the lightning—a break of the wave—
He passeth from life to his rest in the grave.

The leaves of the oak and the willow shall fade,
Be scattered around, and together be laid;
And the young and the old, and the low and the high
Shall molder to dust and together shall lie.

Lincoln first came across the poem in the early 1830s. Then, in 1845, he saw it in a newspaper, cut it out, and committed it to memory. He didn't know who wrote it, because it had been published without attribution. He repeated the lines so often that people suspected they were his own. "Beyond all question, I am not the author," he wrote. "I would give all I am worth, and go in debt, to be able to write so fine a piece as I think that is." When he was president Lincoln learned that the poem had been written by William Knox, a Scotsman who died in 1825.

The last two verses of the poem were Lincoln's favorites.

Yea! Hope and despondency, pleasure and pain,
Are mingled together in sun-shine and rain;
And the smile and the tear, and the song and the dirge,
Still follow each other, like surge upon surge.

'Tis the wink of an eye, 'tis the draught of a breath,
From the blossoms of health, to the paleness of death.
From the gilded saloon, to the bier and the shroud
Oh, why should the spirit of mortal be proud!

When Lincoln finished, the room was still. "I know that for myself," Lois Newhall recalled, "I was so impressed with the poem that I felt more like crying than talking." She asked, "Mr. Lincoln, who wrote that?" He told her he didn't know, but that if she liked, he would write out a copy of the poem for her. She was eating pancakes the next morning when she felt something behind her. A great big hand came

around her left side and covered hers. Then, with his other hand, Lincoln laid a long piece of blue paper beside her.

III. TRANSCENDENCE

In his mid-forties the dark soil of Lincoln's melancholy began to yield fruit. When he threw himself into the fight against the extension of slavery, the same qualities that had long brought him so much trouble played a defining role. The suffering he had endured lent him clarity and conviction, creative skills in the face of adversity, and a faithful humility that helped him guide the nation through its greatest peril.

CLARITY. Some people, William Herndon observed, see the world "ornamented with beauty, life, and action; and hence more or less false and inexact." Lincoln, on the other hand, "crushed the unreal, the inexact, the hollow, and the sham"—"Everything came to him in its precise shape and color." Such keen vision often brought Lincoln pain; being able to look troubling reality straight in the eye also proved a great strength.

The hunch of old Romantic poets—that gloom coexists with potential for insight—has been bolstered by modern research. In an influential 1979 experiment two psychologists, Lyn Abramson and Lauren Alloy, set up a game in their lab, putting subjects in front of a console with lights and a button, with instructions to make a particular light flash as often as possible. Afterward, asked how much control they had had, "normal," or nondepressed, subjects gave answers that hinged on their success in the game. If they did well, they tended to say they'd had plenty of control; if they did poorly, very little. In other words, these subjects took credit for good scores and deflected the blame for poor scores.

But the depressed subjects saw things differently. Whether or not they had done well, they tended to believe that they'd had no control. And they were correct: the "game" was a fiction, the lights largely unaffected by the participants' efforts.

According to the dominant model of depression, these findings made no sense. How could a mental disease characterized by errors in thinking confer advantages in perception? Abramson and Alloy pointed to a phenomenon called "depressive realism," or the "sadder but wiser" effect. Though psychiatry had long equated mental health with clear thinking, it turns out that happiness is often characterized by muddy inaccuracies. "Much research suggests," Alloy has written, "that when they are not depressed, people are highly vulnerable to illusions, including unrealistic optimism, overestimation of themselves, and an exaggerated sense of their capacity to control events. The same research indicates that depressed people's perceptions and judgments are often less biased."

Of course, whether such "less biased" judgments are appreciated depends on the circumstances. Take a man

who goes to a picnic, notices only ants and grass stains, and ignores the baskets full of bread and wine. We would call him a pessimist—usually pejoratively. But suppose a danger arises, and the same man proclaims it. In this instance he is surely more valuable than the optimist who sits dreamily admiring the daisies.

In 1850s America an old conflict over slavery began to take on a new intensity, and in 1854 Lincoln joined the fight. That year Senator Stephen A. Douglas engineered the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, which had prohibited slavery in a large swath of the Northwest, and laid down a policy of “popular sovereignty,” which delegated slavery policy to local voters. To Lincoln the new policy was a Trojan horse, an ostensibly benign measure that in fact would stealthily spread slavery through the nation. He thought the conflict must be engaged. “Slavery,” he said, “is founded in the selfishness of man’s nature—opposition to it, is his love of justice. These principles are an eternal antagonism; and when brought into collision so fiercely, as slavery extension brings them, shocks, and throes, and convulsions must ceaselessly follow.”

Lincoln began to speak openly about thoughts of suicide. “Had to remove razors from his room—take away all Knives and other such dangerous things—&—it was terrible,” his closest friend recalled.

In Douglas, whom he battled repeatedly through the 1850s, Lincoln faced a preternatural optimist, who really thought that moral and practical choices about slavery could be put off forever. In October of 1854, in a preview of their epic debates four summers later, Lincoln squared off against him in Springfield, Illinois. The physical contrast between the two men underlined their temperamental differences. Douglas stood five feet four inches, a foot shorter than Lincoln, and seemed packed with charisma. He had penetrating eyes and dark hair that he styled in a pompadour. Lincoln was not just tall and gaunt but a truly odd physical specimen, with cartoonishly long arms and legs; he looked as if he wore stilts under his trousers. He spoke with a kind of high-piping voice, but at the pace of a Kentucky drawl. Before he rose to speak, he looked, wrote a reporter named Horace White, “so overspread with sadness that I thought that Shakespeare’s melancholy Jacques had been translated from the forest of Arden to the capital of Illinois.”

The melancholy mattered because his observers could sense the depth of feeling that infused Lincoln’s oratory.

Others could hit all the right notes and spark thunderous applause, but Lincoln’s eloquence “produced conviction in others because of the conviction of the speaker himself,” White explained. “His listeners felt that he believed every word he said, and that, like Martin Luther, he would go to the stake rather than abate one jot or tittle of it.”

Opposing the *extension* of slavery on moral grounds but conceding its *existence* as a practical necessity, Lincoln found himself in an unenviable spot. To supporters of slavery he was a dangerous radical, to abolitionists an equivocating hack. His political party, the Whigs, was dying off, and a new organization—which eventually took shape as the Republicans—had to be built from scratch out of divergent groups. But Lincoln stayed his course with an argument that reached the primary force of narrative. The United States, he said, had been founded with a great idea and a grave imperfection. The idea was liberty as the natural right of all people. The flaw—the “cancer” in the nation’s body—was the gross violation of liberty by human slavery. The Founders had recognized the evil, Lincoln said, and sought to restrict it, with the aim of its gradual abolition. The spirit of the Declaration of Independence, with its linchpin statement that “all men are created equal,” was meant to be realized, to the greatest extent possible, by each succeeding generation. “They meant to set up a standard maxim for free society,” Lincoln said, “which should be familiar to all, and revered by all; constantly looked to, constantly labored for ... even though never perfectly attained.”

This political vision drew power from personal experience. For Lincoln had long applied the same principle to his own life: that is, continuing struggle to realize an ideal, knowing that it could never be perfectly attained. Individuals, he had learned from his own “severe experience,” could succeed in “the great struggle of life” only by enduring failures and plodding on with a vision of improvement. This attitude sustained Lincoln through his ignominious defeats in the 1850s (he twice lost bids for the U.S. Senate), and it braced him for the trials that lay ahead. Prepared for defeat, and even for humiliation, he insisted on seeing the truth of both his personal circumstances and the national condition. And where the optimists of his time would fail, he would succeed, envisioning and articulating a durable idea of free society.

CREATIVITY. On February 25, 1860, Lincoln stepped off a train in Jersey City, New Jersey. He claimed his trunk, made his way to a crowded pier, and caught a ferry to Manhattan Island, where in two days he would deliver a speech in the Cooper Union’s Great Hall. It was the chance of his career—an audience before the lords of finance and culture in the nation’s media capital. But when Lincoln arrived on the island and called on a Republican colleague, he wore a “woe-begone look” on his face and carried a dour message: he said he feared he’d made a mistake in coming to New

York and that he had to hole up and work on his speech. "Otherwise he was sure he would make a failure."

Lincoln's literary prowess is as well appreciated as any aspect of his life; like so many of his rhetorical efforts, his stand at Cooper Union would be a triumph. On February 27 more than 1,500 people filed into the Great Hall. As soon as Lincoln began to speak they were engrossed, and by his closing line—"Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it"—they were spellbound. "No man ever before made such an impression on his first appeal to a New York audience," said the next day's *New York Tribune*.

Lincoln said that he *could* kill himself; yet he had an "irrepressible desire" to accomplish something. He wanted to link his name with great events—ones that would "redound to the interest of his fellow man."

Yet Lincoln afterward seemed impervious to the praise. "No man in all New York," said Charles Nott, a young Republican who escorted him back to his hotel, "appeared that night more simple, more unassuming, more modest, more unpretentious, more conscious of his own defects." Nott saw Lincoln as a "sad and lonely man."

The link between mental illness and creativity is supported by a bevy of historical examples—Charles Darwin, Emily Dickinson, Benjamin Disraeli, and William T. Sherman, among many others from Lincoln's time alone, suffered from mood disorders—and a wealth of modern research. Many studies have found higher rates of mood disorders among artists, and the qualities associated with art among the tendencies of mentally disordered minds. But the dynamic is a curious one. As the psychologist and scholar Kay Redfield Jamison has written, "There is a great deal of evidence to suggest that, compared to 'normal' individuals, artists, writers, and creative people in general, are both psychologically 'sicker'—that is, they score higher on a wide variety of measures of psychopathology—and psychologically healthier (for example, they show quite elevated scores on measures of self-confidence and ego strength)."

With Lincoln sadness did not just coexist with strength—these qualities ran together. Just as death supports new life in a healthy ecosystem, Lincoln's self-negation fueled his peculiar confidence. His despair lay under a distinct hope; his overwhelming melancholy fed into a supple creative power, which allowed him not merely to see the truth of

his circumstances but to express it in a stirring, meaningful way. The events in New York help illustrate the basic progression: Wariness and doubt led Lincoln into a kind of personal crisis, from which he turned to work. Afterward he largely turned aside acclaim to return to wariness and doubt, and the cycle began again.

After Lincoln's election as president in November of 1860, the troughs of despair became deeper, and the need for creative response became all the more intense. Now his internal questions of self-worth and his abstract feelings of obligation were leavened by direct responsibility for the nation in a crisis of secession, which led soon after his inauguration to war. The trouble fell hard on him. The burdens of his office were so great, he said, "that, could I have anticipated them, I would not have believed it possible to survive."

Observing Lincoln in an hour of trial, Harriet Beecher Stowe wrote that he was unsteady but strong, like a wire cable that sways in storms but holds fast. In this metaphor we can see how Lincoln's weakness connected to a special kind of strength. In 1862, amid one of many military calamities, Senator O. H. Browning came to the White House. The president was in his library, writing, and had left instructions that he was not to be disturbed. Browning went in anyway and found the president looking terrible—"weary, care-worn, and troubled." Browning wrote in his diary, "I remarked that I felt concerned about him—regretted that troubles crowded so heavily upon him, and feared his health was suffering." Lincoln took his friend's hand and said, with a deep cadence of sadness, "Browning I must die sometime." "He looked very sad," Browning wrote. "We parted I believe both of us with tears in our eyes." A clinician reading this passage could easily identify mental pathology in a man who looked haggard and distressed and volunteered morbid thoughts. However, one crucial detail upsets such a simple picture: Browning found Lincoln *writing*—doing the work that not only helped steer his nation through its immediate struggle but also became a compass for future generations.

HUMILITY. Throughout his life Lincoln's response to suffering—for all the success it brought him—led to greater suffering still. When as a young man he stepped back from the brink of suicide, deciding that he must live to do some meaningful work, this sense of purpose sustained him; but it also led him into a wilderness of doubt and dismay, as he asked, with vexation, *what* work he would do and *how* he would do it. This pattern was repeated in the 1850s, when his work against the extension of slavery gave him a sense of purpose but also fueled a nagging sense of failure. Then, finally, political success led him to the White House, where he was tested as few had been before.

Lincoln responded with both humility and determination. The humility came from a sense that whatever ship carried him on life's rough waters, *he* was not the captain

but merely a subject of the divine force—call it fate or God or the “Almighty Architect” of existence. The determination came from a sense that however humble his station, Lincoln was no idle passenger but a sailor on deck with a job to do. In his strange combination of profound deference to divine authority and a willful exercise of his own meager power, Lincoln achieved transcendent wisdom.

Elizabeth Keckley, Mary Lincoln’s dressmaker, once told of watching the president drag himself into the room where she was fitting the First Lady. “His step was slow and heavy, and his face sad,” Keckley recalled. “Like a tired child he threw himself upon a sofa, and shaded his eyes with his hands. He was a complete picture of dejection.” He had just returned from the War Department, he said, where the news was “dark, dark everywhere.” Lincoln then took a small Bible from a stand near the sofa and began to read. “A quarter of an hour passed,” Keckley remembered, “and on glancing at the sofa the face of the president seemed more cheerful. The dejected look was gone; in fact, the countenance was lighted up with new resolution and hope.” Wanting to see what he was reading, Keckley pretended she had dropped something and went behind where Lincoln was sitting so that she could look over his shoulder. It was the Book of Job.

“Everything came to him in its precise shape and color,” Lincoln’s law partner observed. Such keen vision brought Lincoln pain; being able to look troubling reality straight in the eye also proved a great strength.

Throughout history a glance to the divine has often been the first and last impulse of suffering people. “Man is born broken,” the playwright Eugene O’Neill wrote. “He lives by mending. The grace of God is glue!” Today the connection between spiritual and psychological well-being is often passed over by psychologists and psychiatrists, who consider their work a branch of secular medicine and science. But for most of Lincoln’s lifetime scientists assumed there was some relationship between mental and spiritual life.

Lincoln, too, connected his mental well-being to divine forces. As a young man he saw how religion could ameliorate life’s blows, even as he found the consolation of faith elusive. An infidel—a dissenter from orthodox Christianity—he resisted popular dogma. But many of history’s greatest believers have also been its fiercest doubters. Lincoln charted his own theological course to a living vision of how frail, imperfect mortals could turn their suffering selves to

the service of something greater and find solace—not in any personal satisfaction or glory but in dutiful mission.

An original theological thinker, Lincoln discounted the idea, common among evangelicals, that sin could be wiped out through confession or repentance. Rather, he believed, as William Herndon explained, “that God could not forgive; that punishment has to follow the sin.” This view fitted with both the stern, unforgiving God of Calvinism, with which Lincoln had been raised, and the mechanistic notion of a universe governed by fixed laws. But unlike the Calvinists, who disclaimed any possibility of grace for human beings not chosen for that fate, Lincoln did see a chance of improvement. And unlike some fatalists, who renounced any claim to a moral order, Lincoln saw how man’s reason could discern purpose even in the movement of a vast machine that grinds and cuts and mashes all who interfere with it. Just as a child learns to pull his hand from a fire, people can learn when they are doing something that is not in accord with the wider, unseen order. To Lincoln, Herndon explained, “suffering was medicinal & educational.” In other words, it could be an agent of growth.

In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James writes of “sick souls” who turn from a sense of wrongness to a power greater than they. Lincoln showed the simple wisdom of this, as the burden of his work as president brought home a visceral and fundamental connection with something greater than he. He repeatedly called himself an “instrument” of a larger power—which he sometimes identified as the people of the United States, and other times as God—and said that he had been charged with “so vast, and so sacred a trust” that “he felt that he had no moral right to shrink; nor even to count the chances of his own life, in what might follow.” When friends said they feared his assassination, he said, “God’s will be done. I am in His hands.”

The griefs of his presidency furthered this humble sense. He lost friends and colleagues to the war, and in February of 1862 he lost his eleven-year-old son, Willie. In this vulnerable period Lincoln was influenced by the Reverend Phineas D. Gurley, whose Presbyterian church he attended (but never joined). In his eulogy for Willie, Gurley preached that “in the hour of trial” one must look to “Him who sees the end from the beginning and doeth all things well.” With confidence in God, Gurley said, “our sorrows will be sanctified and made a blessing to our souls, and by and by we shall have occasion to say with blended gratitude and rejoicing, ‘It is good for us that we have been afflicted.’” Lincoln asked Gurley to write out a copy of the eulogy. He would hold to this idea as if it were a life raft.

Yet Lincoln never used God to duck responsibility. Every day presented scores of decisions—on personnel, on policy, on the movement of troops and the direction of executive departments. So much of what today is delegated

to political staffs and civil servants then required a direct decision from the president. He controlled patronage, from the envoy to China to the postmaster in St. Louis. His desk was piled high with court-martial cases to review and military dispatches to monitor. In all his choices he had to rely on his own judgment in accordance with law, custom, prudence, and compassion. As much as his attention focused on an unseen realm, Lincoln's emphasis remained strictly on the material world of cause and effect. "These are not ... the days of miracles," he said, "and I suppose it will be granted that I am not to expect a direct revelation." Lincoln did not expect God to take him by the hand. On the contrary, he said, "I must study the plain physical facts of the case, ascertain what is possible and learn what appears to be wise and right."

Lincoln's peculiar vision of the sacred led him to defy the conventions of his day. For centuries settlers in the New World had assured themselves that they were special in God's eyes. They were a "City upon a Hill," in John Winthrop's phrase, decidedly chosen, like the Israelites of old. Lincoln turned this on its head when he said, "I shall be most happy indeed if I shall be an humble instrument in the hands of the Almighty, and of this, his almost chosen people, for perpetuating the object of that great struggle." The country, Lincoln said, was *almost* chosen. Out of that phrase emerged a crucial strain of Lincoln's thinking. As others invoked the favor of God in both the North and the South, Lincoln opened a space between mortal works and divine intention. Among his papers, after his death, his secretaries found this undated statement that has come to be known as the "Meditation on the Divine Will."

The will of God prevails—In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both *may* be, and one *must* be wrong. God can not be *for*, and *against* the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party—and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect this

After this first passage the handwriting grows shakier; the words practically tremble with the thoughts they express. First Lincoln crossed out the last word he had written.

His purpose. I am almost ready to say this is probably true—that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet—By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either *saved*

or *destroyed* the Union without a human contest—
Yet the contest began—And having begun
He could give the final victory to either side
any day—Yet the contest proceeds—

Lincoln's clarity came in part from his uncertainty. It is hard to overestimate just how unusual this was, and how risky and unpopular his views often were. Most religious thinkers of the time, the historian of religion Mark Noll explains, not only assumed God's favor but assumed that they could read his will.

"How was it," Noll asks, "that this man who never joined a church and who read only a little theology could, on occasion, give expression to profound theological interpretations of the War between the States?" Viewing Lincoln through the lens of his melancholy, we see one cogent explanation: he was always inclined to look at the full truth of a situation, assessing both what could be known and what remained in doubt. When faced with uncertainty he had the patience, endurance, and vigor to stay in that place of tension, and the courage to be alone.

As his presidency wore on, his burden grew heavier and heavier, sometimes seeming to threaten Lincoln's sanity. The war consumed a nation, dividing not only the two opposing sections but, increasingly, the northern states of the Union. Emancipation became a reality, which only inflamed the conflict. Lincoln became increasingly isolated. But he continued to turn from his suffering to the lessons it gave him. Throughout his term he faced the prospect of humiliating defeat, but he continued to work for just victory.

Many popular philosophies propose that suffering can be beaten simply, quickly, and clearly. Popular biographies often express the same view. Many writers, faced with the unhappiness of a heroic figure, make sure to find some crucible in which that bad feeling is melted into something new. "Biographies tend conventionally to be structured as crisis-and-recovery narratives," the critic Louis Menand writes, "in which the subject undergoes a period of disillusionment or adversity, and then has a 'breakthrough' or arrives at a 'turning point' before going on to achieve whatever sort of greatness obtains." Lincoln's melancholy doesn't lend itself to such a narrative. No point exists after which the melancholy dissolved—not in January of 1841; not during his middle age; and not at his political resurgence, beginning in 1854. Whatever greatness Lincoln achieved cannot be explained as a triumph over personal suffering. Rather, it must be accounted an outgrowth of the same system that produced that suffering. This is a story not of transformation but of integration. Lincoln didn't do great work because he solved the problem of his melancholy; the problem of his melancholy was all the more fuel for the fire of his great work. ▀

The Washington Times

www.washingtontimes.com

Getting in touch with the inner Abe

By Scott Galupo

THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Published January 13, 2006

When the young circuit lawyer Abraham Lincoln crawled into bed next to his best pal Joshua Speed, he couldn't have known what kind of speculation such sleeping habits, unremarkable in the era before Holiday Inn, would lead to.

The possibility, however remote, that Lincoln was homosexual was a brief rage last year thanks to C.A. Tripp's posthumous book "The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln."

It's under the lights again in "Lincoln," an intriguing if somewhat excitable documentary that airs Monday night at 8 on the History Channel.

While not overly concerned with Lincoln's sexuality, "Lincoln" is consumed by suppositions about the Civil War president's inner life -- his bouts of depression and shyness toward women, his unhappy marriage and seemingly mystical foreknowledge of premature death.

A daytime-TV kind of Lincoln, in other words.

Michael Lind, who last year published the provocative "What Lincoln Believed: The Values and Convictions of America's Greatest President," says Lincoln has long been putty in the hands of various political factions, co-opted by communist sympathizers, civil rights activists and conservative intellectuals alike.

Now it appears he's being molded to suit the needs of modern soap-opera culture.

"If I were to write the book today, I would add the Therapeutic Lincoln," he says. "In the age of the baby boomers, it's Lincoln in therapy that seems to be the most appealing."

Frank Williams, the chief justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court and the founding chairman of the Lincoln Forum, a group that meets annually in Gettysburg to discuss all manner of Lincolniana, is compiling an annotated Lincoln bibliography. The literature is astonishingly vast.

"The only person who's been written about more than Lincoln is Jesus," Mr. Williams says. "I've identified 16,000 books, pamphlets and articles about Lincoln."

Floating in this sea of ink is the risk that, rather like Jesus, Lincoln will become a bendable, personally customizable icon -- all things to all people, in a phrase.

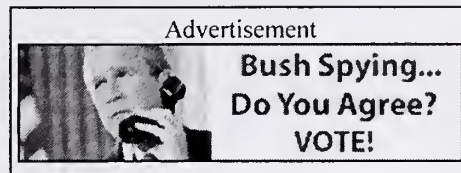
The late Mr. Tripp, as many critics noted at the time, was homosexual, and an aide to controversial sex researcher Alfred Kinsey. This at least implied an internal bias that drove the conclusions of his research, they said.

Similarly, perhaps, Joshua Wolf Shenk discussed his own struggle with depression in his book "Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness," which was featured on the cover of Time magazine.

Several prominent Lincoln historians don't seem dismayed by this trend.

"Each generation has to find the Lincoln with which it's comfortable," says Harold Holzer, co-chairman of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, the federally appointed group that is planning national observances of the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth for 2009.

Historians who put a personal stamp on their studies of Lincoln expand the range of



people who can be inspired by the 16th president, according to Mr. Holzer.

"C.A. Tripp was not 'outing' Lincoln in a malicious way," he says. "He was saying that Lincoln's extraordinary gifts of mercy and tenderness and his poetic nature might be explained by the fact that he was gay. And if Lincoln, through Joshua Shenk, is giving people who are chronically depressed more than a glimmer of hope ... that's terrific."

Jay Winik, historian and best-selling author of "April 1865: The Month that Saved America," says, "I think it's healthy and good to have fresh ideas coming to the fore. As titanic a personality as Abraham Lincoln demands a free marketplace of ideas. Let history sort it out."

Indeed, it's the monumentality of Lincoln, together with his enigmatic personality, that seems to attract an endlessly proliferating historiography.

Historians including Mr. Lind and Yale University's Bruce Ackerman have credited Lincoln with ushering in what was essentially a second American republic -- a newly constituted country that transcended some of the flaws of the original founding.

The stage for such renovation was set at the outset of Lincoln's public life. In the 1830s, the experiment-soaked drama of the early republic had slackened. The Founders had all died, and with them their epochal intellectual ardor. Yet at the same time America was expanding geographically; it was facing, belatedly, a moral crisis -- slavery.

As is now well known, Lincoln's thinking on slavery was somewhere south of progressive. But, as Mr. Winik and others argue, Lincoln hated the "peculiar institution," felt in his gut that it was wrong, but his concern for the perpetuation of the Union trumped such personal aversion.

None of this is likely to satisfy Lincoln critics who see all those potholes on the road from backwoods autodidact to Springfield lawyer to Great Emancipator, and find him wanting even in comparison to contemporaries, let alone us moderns.

But the full, intimately personal picture of Lincoln that is emerging of late is arguably a healthy development. "One sign that our portrait of Lincoln is getting closer to the life he lived is that it is getting more complex and surprising and multifaceted," says Mr. Shenk, the "Lincoln's Melancholy" author. "I tried to look at Lincoln the way those around him looked at him, and the way he saw himself," he continues. "That's the most satisfying kind of history."

In the long run, the new human-scale Lincoln may even end up -- a little counterintuitively -- confirmed again as the historical giant we were always taught he was.

Says Mr. Winik: "To appreciate the genius of Lincoln and the enormity of what he accomplished, it's crucial to appreciate all his problems, weaknesses, foibles and mistakes as well. In doing so, he looms even larger."

The legendary Hollywood director Preston Sturges once wrote, "Of all things in nature, great men alone reverse the law of perspective and grow smaller as one approaches them."

In the case of Lincoln, it would seem, Mr. Sturges was wrong.

Return to the article



Want to use this article? [Click here for options!](#)

Copyright The Washington Times .

Arts

Was Abe's Depression a Boon?

"Lincoln's Melancholy" by Joshua Wolf Shenk '93

Published On 10/13/2005 4:34:39 AM

By **KATHERINE M. GRAY**
Crimson Staff Writer

The next time you handle a \$5 bill, take a look at Abraham Lincoln's face. His expression suggests a gloomy disposition, even depression—an illness that today might be a political liability.

That image of Lincoln is historically accurate, according to Joshua Wolf Shenk '93, author of the new book "Lincoln's Melancholy." But Shenk argues that, instead of being a tragic flaw, the Great Emancipator's depression was a key source of his success.

Shenk, also a Crimson editor, got this idea seven years ago when he saw a reference to Lincoln's melancholy in a sociologist's essay about suicide.

Although Lincoln's "melancholy" was well known among his contemporaries, it has been largely ignored by historians.

"There's never been a book to focus on Lincoln's melancholy and to gather together all of the material related to the melancholy and make sense of it," Shenk says in a phone interview.

Shenk took both a professional and personal interest in the topic of mental illness. "I was used to studying politics and culture and history and was also really depressed myself," he says, adding that since his late teens he has struggled to manage depression. "I thought that I could chart a course for my own self by studying the subject in my professional work."

Shenk's personal experience with depression gives his version of Lincoln an underlying sympathy and sensitivity toward Lincoln's forlorn thinking. But Shenk says that he has no personal agenda with this book other than to present a new view of Lincoln.

"I haven't been using Lincoln to understand myself," he says. "I've learned many things that are helpful to me, but they've all come from setting myself aside and looking at Lincoln on his own terms."

Shenk's ability to weave a compelling narrative is indeed the book's greatest strength. He offers a sort of "E! True Hollywood Story" behind nearly every major event so famously associated with Lincoln.

The character of Lincoln in Shenk's book is one who deprecated himself after his hugely successful speech to financial leaders at Cooper Union's Great Hall in New York in 1860, who wrote dismal verses about death and suicide, who emanated sorrow that at once frightened and attracted people near him.

However, this is also a man who translated his "depressive realism," a term Shenk quotes from psychological literature, into a passion for finding and accomplishing a greater purpose while weathering life's tribulations.

Like this version of the book's hero, Shenk is humble, recognizing his own limits as a historian. Referring to some historians' claims that Lincoln was homosexual, Shenk doesn't rule out such a possibility, but writes that "with people in history, our understanding is limited by available texts. Intuition and common sense can help, but only if they're leavened by an awareness that the world we see 'onstage' is different from the world we live in." The fact that Lincoln and companion Joshua Speed were bedmates was not unusual in the nineteenth century, and "a frank avowal of our ignorance is the first step in honestly dealing with Lincoln's sexuality," Shenk writes.

When he writes of Lincoln's views on slavery, Shenk is just as sensitive to Lincoln's cultural environment. Shenk acknowledges that Lincoln was in no way fighting in favor of equal rights for African-Americans—only for the abolition of slavery as an institution.

But despite the focus on Lincoln's depression, particularly in the discussion of his life before the presidency, Shenk's book becomes more about Lincoln's admirable character traits than his mental illness. Shenk's eloquent explications of Lincoln's speeches—as well as anecdotes of Lincoln's kindness and good sense of humor—become more intriguing than the book's argument that his great asset was his melancholy.

Perhaps this is because Lincoln tempered his depressive episodes as a public figure and older man. But the reader is left with the impression that many qualities separate from Lincoln's depression—including his persistence and his famous lack of malice toward the South—contributed more to his greatness.

Ultimately, Shenk just wrote another book about the Lincoln legend. To his credit, Shenk does bring modern psychological knowledge to bear on our understanding of the sixteenth president.

And his book adds another nuance to our romanticized portrait of the Illinois Rail-Splitter. But the argument that Lincoln's mental condition was central to his greatness loses steam.

That said, Shenk believes that Lincoln's depression cannot be separated from his personality, and that the modern tendency to see depression as distinctly separate from ordinary mental states isn't accurate.

"My sense is that Lincoln came to understand that he had a condition that was somehow organically connected to his constitution—something he was born with that was not going away," says Shenk.

Lincoln's contemporaries, Shenk says, saw melancholy as a temperamental style, as part of someone's character. Those afflicted by melancholy might have been more prone to nervous states or debilitating disease. But melancholy was part of a spectrum.

Shenk says that even if readers see Lincoln's contemporaries' views on mental illness as inferior to modern psychology, "it makes you think that these things are in flux, that our relationship to depression is a relationship of ideas. We're developing and thinking about these things, and they can shift over time."

And so, too, is our view of Lincoln ever-evolving.

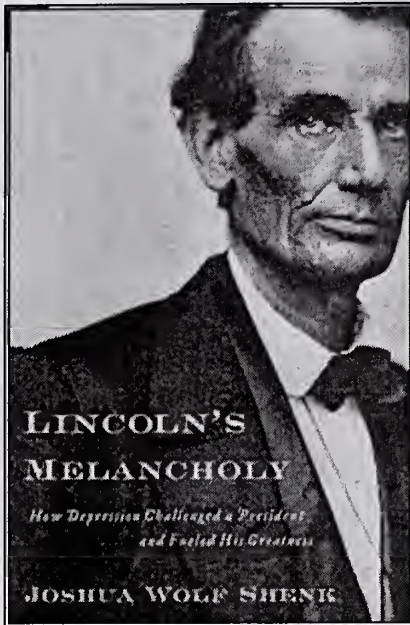
—Staff writer Katherine M. Gray can be reached at kmgray@fas.harvard.edu.



Books

Exploring Abraham Lincoln's 'Melancholy'

by Robert Siegel



Houghton Mifflin

All Things Considered, October 26, 2005 · In January 1841, a young Abraham Lincoln suffered his second breakdown. He collapsed, and was treated by a doctor who may have done him more harm than good. A new book explores how the Illinois lawyer went on to become president despite suffering from lifelong depression.

Robert Siegel talks with Joshua Wolf Shenk, author of *Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness*.

"When you read the reminiscences of Lincoln's friends and you hear him described in their terms, he's always the most depressed person they've ever seen. It's always this radical gloom that they were shocked by," Shenk says.

Read an excerpt from the book's first chapter.

The Community Said He Was Crazy

In three key criteria -- the factors that produce depression, the symptoms of what psychiatrists call major depression, and the typical age of onset -- the case of Abraham Lincoln is perfect. It could be used in a psychiatry textbook to illustrate a typical depression. Yet Lincoln's case is perfect,

too, in a very different sense: it forces us to reckon with the limits of diagnostic categories and raises fundamental questions about the nature of illness and health.

Though great resources in research and clinical science have been devoted to depression in the past few decades, we can neither cure it nor fully explain it. What we can do is describe its general characteristics. The perverse benefit of so much suffering is that we know a great deal about what the sufferers have in common. To start, the principal factors behind depression are biological predisposition and environmental influences. Some people are more susceptible to depression simply by virtue of being born. Depression and other mood disorders run in families, not only because of what happens in those families, but because of the genetic material families share. A person who has one parent or sibling with major depression is one and a half to three times more likely than the general population to experience it.

The standard way to investigate biological predisposition is simply to list the cases of mental illness -- or mental characteristics suggestive of potential illness -- in a family. With Lincoln, such a family history suggests that he came by his depression, at least in part, by old-fashioned inheritance. His parents, Thomas and Nancy Lincoln, came from Virginia families that crossed the Appalachian Mountains into Kentucky in the late eighteenth century. They married in 1806 and had three children: Sarah, born February 10, 1807; Abraham, born February 12, 1809; and Thomas, born about 1811. Though our information is imperfect, to say the least, both parents had characteristics suggestive of melancholy. Nearly all the descriptions of Nancy Lincoln have her as sad. For example, her cousin John Hanks said her nature "was kindness, mildness, tenderness, sadness." And Lincoln himself described his mother as "intellectual, sensitive and somewhat sad."

Tom Lincoln, a farmer and carpenter, was a social man with a talent for jokes and stories, but he, too, had a somber streak. "He seemed to me," said his stepgrandson, "to border on the serious -- reflective." This seriousness

could tip into gloom. According to a neighbor in Kentucky, he "often got the 'blues,' and had some strange sort of spells, and wanted to be alone all he could when he had them." During these spells he would spend as much as half a day alone in the fields or the woods. His behavior was strange enough to make people wonder if Tom Lincoln was losing his mind.

Perhaps the most striking evidence of mental trouble in Abraham Lincoln's family comes from his paternal relations. His great-uncle once told a court of law that he had "a deranged mind." His uncle Mordecai Lincoln had broad mood swings, which were probably intensified by his heavy drinking. And Mordecai's family was thick with mental disease. All three of his sons -- who bore a strong physical resemblance to their first cousin Abraham -- were considered melancholy men. One settler who knew both the future president and his cousins spoke of the two "Lincoln characteristics": "their moody spells and great sense of humor." One of these Lincoln cousins swung wildly between melancholia and mania and at times had a tenuous grip on reality, writing letters and notes that suggest madness. Another first cousin of Lincoln's had a daughter committed to the Illinois State Hospital for the Insane. After a trial, a jury in Hancock County committed thirty-nine-year-old Mary Jane Lincoln to the hospital, noting that "her disease is of thirteen years duration." At the hospital, an attendant observed, "Her father was cousin to Abraham Lincoln, and she has features much like his."

What is striking about the case of Mary Jane Lincoln is that the jury, charged with answering the question of whether insanity ran in her family, concluded that "the disease is with her hereditary." According to a family historian who grew up in the late nineteenth century, the descendants of Mordecai Lincoln "suffered from all the nervous disorders known. Some were on the ragged edge." One family member who had frequent spells of intense mental trouble referred to his condition as "the Lincoln horrors."

Three elements of Lincoln's history -- the deep, pervasive sadness of his mother, the strange spells of his father, and the striking presence of mental illness in the family of his uncle and cousins -- suggest the likelihood of a biological predisposition toward depression. "Predisposition" means an increased risk of developing an illness. As opposed to traditional Mendelian inheritance -- in which one dominant gene or two recessive genes lead to an illness or trait -- genetic factors in psychiatric illnesses are additive and not categorical. "The genes confer only susceptibility in many cases," explains the psychiatrist S. Nassir Ghaemi, in *The Concepts of Psychiatry*, "not the illness. That is, they only increase the likelihood that fewer or less severe environmental factors are required for the illness to develop, compared with someone who has fewer disease-related genes."

What tips a person from tendency to actuality? For centuries, philosophers and physicians emphasized climate and diet. Today's experts focus on harsh life events and conditions, especially in early childhood. Lincoln's early life certainly had its harsh elements. His only brother died in infancy in Kentucky. In 1816, Abraham's eighth year, the family moved to southern Indiana. Two years later, in the fall of 1818, an infectious disease swept through their small rural community. Among those affected were Lincoln's aunt and uncle, Thomas and Elizabeth Sparrow, and his mother, Nancy Lincoln. Eventually, the disease would be traced to a poisonous root, eaten by cattle and then ingested by humans in milk or meat. But when Abraham watched his mother become ill, the disease was a grim mystery that went by various names, from "puking fever" to "river sickness" to "fall poison." Later, it became known as the "milk sick." "No announcement strikes the members of a western community with so much dread as the report of a case," said a newspaper of the time. A physician described the course of the illness: "When the individual is about to be taken down, he feels weary, trembles more or less under exertion, and often experiences pain, numbness and slight cramps." Nausea soon follows, then "a feeling of depression and burning at the pit of the stomach," then retching, twitching, and tossing side to side. Before long, the patient becomes "deathly pale and shrunk up," listless and indifferent, and lies, between fits of retching, in a "mild coma." First the Sparrows -- with whom the Lincolns were close -- took sick and died. Then Nancy Lincoln went to bed with the illness. Ill for about a week, she died on October 5, 1818. She was about thirty-five years old. Her son was nine.

In addition to the loss of his mother, aunt, and uncle, a year or so later Abraham faced the long absence of his father, who returned to Kentucky to court another bride. For two to six months, Tom Lincoln left his children alone with their twenty-year-old cousin, Dennis Hanks. When he returned, the children were dirty and poorly clothed. Lincoln later described himself at this time as "sad, if not pitiful."

The one constant in Abraham's life was his sister, Sarah. She was a thin, strong woman who resembled her father in stature, with brown hair and dark eyes. Like her brother, Sarah Lincoln had a sharp mind. She stayed with the family until 1826, when she married, set up house, and quickly became pregnant. On January 28, 1828, she gave birth to a stillborn child and shortly afterward died herself. "We went out and told Abe," recalled a neighbor. "I never will forget the scene. He sat down in the door of the smoke house and buried his face in his hands. The tears slowly trickled from between his bony fingers and his gaunt frame shook with sobs."

In the emotional development of a child, pervasive tension can be just as influential as loss. Lincoln's relationship with his father -- the only other member of his nuclear family who survived -- was so cool that observers wondered whether there was any love between them. The relationship was strained by a fundamental conflict. From a young age, Abraham showed a strong interest in his own education. At first his father helped him along, paying school fees and procuring books. "Abe read all the books he could lay

his hands on," said his stepmother. "And when he came across a passage that struck him he would write it down . . . then he would re-write it -- look at it -- repeat it." But at some point Tom Lincoln began to oppose the extent of his son's studies. Abraham sometimes neglected his farm work by reading. Tom would beat him for this, and for other infractions.

To men who had been born and expected to die on farms, book learning had limited value. A man ought to be able to read the Bible (for his moral life) and legal documents (for his work life). Writing could help, too, as could basic arithmetic. Anything more was a luxury, and for working folks seemed frivolous. For generations, Lincoln men had cleared land, raised crops, and worked a trade. So when this boy slipped away from feeding livestock and splitting logs to write poetry and read stories, people thought him lazy. "Lincoln was lazy -- a very lazy man," remembered his cousin Dennis Hanks. "He was always reading -- scribbling -- writing -- ciphering -- writing poetry &c. &c."

Later, Lincoln's self-education would become the stuff of legend. Many parents have cited Lincoln's long walks to school and ferocious self-discipline to their children. But Lincoln pursued his interests in defiance of established norms. Far from being praised, he was consistently admonished. He may well have paid an emotional toll. Many studies have linked adult mental health to parental support in childhood. Lower levels of support correlate with increased levels of depressive symptoms, among other health problems, in adulthood. After Lincoln left home in his early twenties, his contact with his father was impersonal and infrequent.

When reviewing the facts of Lincoln's childhood, we should keep in mind some context. For example, in the early nineteenth century, one out of four infants died before their first birthday. And about one fourth of all children lost a mother or father before age fifteen. Of the eighteen American presidents in the nineteenth century, nine lost their mother, father, or both while they were children. None of Lincoln's contemporaries, nor Lincoln himself, mentioned the deaths of his siblings and mother as factors contributing to his melancholy. The melancholy was unusual, but the deaths were not. In the same vein, while we ought not to ignore Lincoln's conflict with his father and discount its possible emotional aftereffects, we risk missing more than we gain if we look at it exclusively through the lens of modern psychology. In fact, such a conflict between ambitious young men and their fathers was not uncommon in the early nineteenth century, a time of broad cultural and economic change.

Abraham was not evidently a wounded child, but signs point to his being sensitive. He spent a lot of time alone. He was serious about his studies and reading, and uncommonly eager to explore imaginative realms, which psychologists often observe in sensitive children. He also took up a popular cause among sensitive people, the welfare of animals. Some boys found it fun to set turtles on fire or throw them against trees. "Lincoln would Chide us -- tell us it was wrong -- would write against it," remembered one of his neighbors. His stepsister remembered him once "contending that an ants life was to it, as sweet as ours to us."

At the same time, Lincoln was a winsome child. Others sought him out, followed him in games, and applauded him when he mounted a stump and performed for them, pretending to be a preacher or a statesman. By the time he was a teenager, grown men would flock around him, eager to hear his jokes and stories. He was well liked.

Lincoln was not depressed in his late teens and early twenties -- at least not so far as anyone could see. When he

left his family, at age twenty-one, he had no money or connections. His chief asset -- perhaps his only real asset -- was his golden character. Settling as a stranger in New Salem, a small village on a river bluff in central Illinois, he soon was among the best-liked men around. A gang of rough boys developed a fierce attachment to him after he made a stellar showing in a wrestling match, displaying not only physical strength but a sense of fairness. Others were impressed with Lincoln's wit and intelligence, noticing, for example, how when he recited the poetry of Robert Burns, he nailed the Scottish accent, the fierce emotion, and the devilish humor. Though Lincoln looked like a yokel -- tall and gangly, he had thick, black, unruly hair and he wore pants that ended above his ankles -- he had good ideas and a good manner. "He became popular with all classes," said Jason Duncan, a physician in New Salem.

After less than a year in New Salem, Lincoln declared himself as a candidate for the Illinois General Assembly. He was twenty-three years old. He lost the race but got nearly every vote in his precinct, which, said another candidate, was "mainly due to his personal popularity." When he volunteered for a state militia campaign against a band of Native Americans under Chief Black Hawk, a part of the bloody Black Hawk War, his company elected Lincoln captain. Nearly three decades later -- as a veteran of Congress and his party's nominee for president of the United States -- Lincoln wrote that this was "a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since."

In his first four years in New Salem, Lincoln struck his new friends and neighbors as sunny and indefatigable. "I never saw Mr Lincoln angry or desponding," said a fellow soldier in the Black Hawk War, "but always cheerful." Indeed, "the whole company, even amid trouble and suffering, received Strength & fortitude, by his bouancy and elasticity." Once Lincoln stopped at the house of a neighbor, Elizabeth Abell, after working in the fields. He was scratched all over from briar thorns. Abell fussed over him, but Lincoln laughed about it and said it was the poor man's lot. "Certainly," she said years later, "he was the best natured man I ever got acquainted with." Asked by a biographer whether the Lincoln she knew was a "sad man," Abell answered, "I never considered him so. He was always social and lively and had great aspirations." Crucially, his liveliness and sociability served him well in politics. Campaigning again for the state legislature in 1834, he went out to a field where a group of about thirty men were working the harvest. A friend of Lincoln's, J. R. Herndon, introduced him. The men said that they couldn't vote for a man who didn't know how to do field work. "Boys," Lincoln said, "if that is all I am sure of your votes." "He picked up a scythe and went to work. "I dont think he Lost a vote in the Croud," Herndon wrote.

Lincoln won the election easily. When a mentor in the legislature recommended that he study law, he took the challenge. It would be a good profession to accompany politics, in particular the politics of the Whig party, which drew its strength from the growing number of urban and industrial professionals. In the early nineteenth century, attorneys commanded a kind of awe, embodying the stately Anglo-Saxon tradition of common law and domestic order. Gaining "the secrets of that science," explained the poet-author William Allen Butler, would give a person a perpetual glow, for the law, "more than all other human forces, directs the progress of events."

It is a mark of Lincoln's soaring ambition that, four years from the fields, he sought to join such ranks, at a time when all but five percent of the men in his area did manual work for a living. It was a sign of his pluck that he did it virtually all on his own. While other young men learned the law at universities -- or, more commonly, under the tutelage of an established attorney -- Lincoln, as he noted in his memoir, "studied with nobody." This was hardly the only mark of his ambition. A lawyer named Lynn McNulty Greene remembered Lincoln telling him that "all his folks seemed to have good sense but none of them had become distinguished, and he believed it was for him to become so." This language suggests that Lincoln had, more than a personal desire, a sense of calling. "Mr. Lincoln," explained his friend O. H. Browning, "believed that there was a predestined work for him in the world . . . Even in his early days he had a strong conviction that he was born for better things than then seemed likely or even possible . . . While I think he was a man of very strong ambition, I think it had its origin in this sentiment, that he was destined for something nobler than he was for the time engaged in." In his first published political speech, Lincoln wrote, "Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem."

But there were cracks in Lincoln's sunny disposition. "If the good people in their wisdom shall see fit to keep me in the background," he said in that same speech, "I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined." At times, his faith in personal progress gave way and his familiarity with disappointments shone

through. Back from the militia campaign, Lincoln and a partner opened their own store, buying the stock on credit. When the store failed, Lincoln was in serious financial jeopardy. Seeing him despondent, his new friends got him a crucial political appointment, as New Salem's postmaster. Later, he was made deputy surveyor, too. These jobs, Lincoln noted, "procured bread, and kept soul and body together." Nevertheless, his debt soon caught up with him: a creditor seized his surveying equipment -- including his horse, his compass, and his chain -- and put it up for auction. An older man named James Short saw Lincoln moping about and heard him say he might "let the whole thing go." Short tried to cheer him up. Then he went and bought the equipment for \$120 (about \$2,500 in modern dollars) and returned it to Lincoln.

These streaks of sadness and worry may have been minor depressions. But it wasn't until 1835 that serious concern emerged about Lincoln's mental health. That summer, remembered the schoolteacher Mentor Graham, Lincoln "somewhat injured his health and Constitution." The first sign of trouble came with his intense study of law. He "read hard -- day and night -- terribly hard," remembered Isaac Cogdal, a stonemason. At times, Lincoln seemed oblivious to his friends and surroundings. "He became emaciated," said Henry McHenry, a farmer in the area, "and his best friends were afraid that he would craze himself -- make himself derange."

Around the same time, an epidemic of what doctors called "bilious fever" -- typhoid, probably -- spread through the area. Doctors administered heroic doses of mercury, quinine, and jalap, a powerful purgative. According to one recollection, Lincoln helped tend to the sick, build coffins for the dead, and assist in the burials -- despite the fact that he was "suffering himself with the chills and fever on alternate days." He was probably affected mentally, too, by the waves of death washing across his new home -- reminiscent, perhaps, of the "milk sick" that had devastated his family in his youth.

Among the severely afflicted families were Lincoln's friends the Rutledges. Originally from South Carolina, they had been among the first to settle in New Salem, opening a tavern and boarding house, where Lincoln stayed and took meals when he first arrived. He knew the family well and had become friends with Anna Mayes Rutledge, a bright, pretty young woman with flowing blond hair and large blue eyes. In August 1835, Ann took sick. As she lay in bed in her family's cabin, Lincoln visited her often. "It was very evident that he was much distressed," remembered a neighbor named John Jones. She died on August 25. Around the time of her funeral, the weather turned cold and wet. Lincoln said he couldn't bear the idea of rain falling on Ann's grave -- and this was the first sign people had that he was in the midst of an emotional collapse. "As to the condition of Lincoln's Mind after the death of Miss R., "Henry McHenry recalled, "after that Event he seemed quite changed, he seemed Retired, & loved Solitude, he seemed wrapped in profound thought, indifferent, to transpiring Events, had but Little to say, but would take his gun and wander off in the woods by him self, away from the association of even those he most esteemed, this gloom seemed to deepen for some time, so as to give anxiety to his friends in regard to his Mind."

Indeed, the anxiety was widespread, both for Lincoln's immediate safety and for his long-term mental health. Lincoln "told Me that he felt like Committing Suicide often," remembered Mentor Graham, and his neighbors mobilized to keep him safe. One friend recalled, "Mr Lincolns friends . . . were Compelled to keep watch and ward over Mr Lincoln, he being from the sudden shock somewhat temporarily deranged. We watched during storms -- fogs -- damp gloomy weather . . . for fear of an accident." Another villager said, "Lincoln was locked up by his friends . . . to prevent derangement or suicide." People wondered whether Lincoln had fallen off the deep end. "That was the time the community said he was crazy," remembered Elizabeth Abell.

The fact that Lincoln broke down after Rutledge's death, of course, doesn't necessarily mean that her death produced his breakdown. This is an important point, because from the very earliest writings on Lincoln, his relationship with Ann Rutledge has been controversial. Questions about whether he loved her and whether they were engaged have been debated fiercely, and still are. The myths and countermyths about this young woman played a big role in the early historiography of Lincoln -- and, amazingly, played a large role in pushing Lincoln's melancholy to the margins of history. More on this in the Afterword, but for now the essential point is that leading scholars have long said that what we think about Lincoln's first breakdown must hinge on what we think about his relationship with Ann Rutledge. If his love for her is a myth, this thinking goes, then the breakdown must be a myth, too.

In fact, in the eyes of the New Salem villagers, questions of a love affair followed hard and irrefutable knowledge

of an emotional collapse. As the original accounts make clear, his breakdown was impossible to miss. Nearly everyone in the community who gave testimony spoke of it, remembering its contours even decades later. Lincoln, after all, had become immensely popular, loved by young ruffians and old families alike. Now, all of a sudden he was openly moping and threatening to kill himself. Why? people asked. What accounted for the great change?

It was in an attempt to answer this question that people turned to his relationship with Rutledge. He had obviously been upset by her illness. And after her funeral he had fallen off an emotional cliff. "The effect upon Mr Lincoln's mind was terrible," said Ann's brother, Robert Rutledge. "He became plunged in despair, and many of his friends feared that reason would desert her throne. His extraordinary emotions were regarded as strong evidence of the existence of the tenderest relations between himself and the deceased." Notice the careful progression from fact (Lincoln's breakdown after Ann's death) to inference (they must have been tenderly involved). James Short, who was the Rutledges' neighbor, came to a similar conclusion. "I did not know of any engagement or tender passages between Mr L and Miss R at the time," Short said. "But after her death . . . he seemed to be so much affected and grieved so hardly that I then supposed there must have been something of the kind." Because Lincoln "grieved so hardly" and became "plunged in despair," it seemed reasonable to his friends that there must have been some proximate cause.

In fact, major depression, in people who are vulnerable to it, can be set off by all manner of circumstances. What would appear to a non-depressed person to be an ordinary or insignificant stimulus can through a depressive's eyes look rather profound. "It's not the large things that send a man to the madhouse, "Charles Bukowski has written. "No, it's the continuing series of small tragedies . . . a shoelace that snaps, with no time left." In this light, it is worth noting that, according to reminiscences, the pivotal moment for Lincoln wasn't Rutledge's death but the dismal weather that followed. After the death, wrote John Hill, the son of Lincoln's friend Samuel Hill, "Lincoln bore up under it very well until some days afterwards a heavy rain fell, which unnerved him and -- (the balance you know)." The intonation here suggests an understanding among Lincoln's friends that there was something precarious about him, and that -- like Bukowski's shoelace -- a factor as ordinary as poor weather could send him reeling. As we will see, cold temperatures would contribute to Lincoln's second breakdown. Lincoln himself would write that "exposure to bad weather" had proved by his experience "to be verry severe on defective nerves."

For whatever reason, or combination of reasons, in the late summer of 1835 Lincoln's depression was pushed out into the open. After several weeks of worrisome behavior -- talking about suicide, wandering alone in the woods with his gun -- an older couple in the area took him into their home. Bowling Green, a large, merry man who was the justice of the peace -- and who became, other villagers said, a kind of second father to Lincoln -- and his wife, Nancy, took care of Lincoln for one or two weeks. When he had improved somewhat, they let him go, but he was, Mrs. Green said, "quite melancholy for months."

Lincoln's behavior matches what the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, the handbook of mental health professionals, labels a major depressive episode. Such an episode is characterized by depressed mood and/or a marked decrease in pleasure for at least two weeks. Other symptoms may include a change in appetite or weight, excessive or insufficient sleep, agitation or lethargy, fatigue or loss of energy, feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt, indecisiveness or trouble thinking or concentrating, and thoughts of death and/or suicide. To be classified as major depression, at least five of these symptoms must be present, marking a definite change from usual functioning and with significant distress or impaired functioning. If the symptoms follow the death of a loved one by less than two months, it might be considered mourning unless, as in Lincoln's case, there is "suicidal ideation" -- to ideate is to form an idea about something -- or other equally severe symptoms. "What helps make the case for the diagnosis of depression," says Kay Redfield Jamison, a professor of psychiatry at Johns Hopkins University, "is Lincoln's suicidal behavior and the fact that it provoked a 'suicide watch.' Today people are much more sophisticated about suicide, but it's pretty unusual to do that. It speaks to the seriousness of what was happening with Lincoln."

Lincoln's breakdown also fits with the typical age for a first episode of major depression. Most serious psychiatric illnesses emerge at a particular time in life. For example, in males, schizophrenia usually surfaces in the late teenage years; manic depression in the late teens to early twenties. Unipolar depression, which Lincoln would struggle with his whole life, typically breaks into the open in the mid- to late twenties. Lincoln was twenty-six.

From *Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness*
Copyright © 2005 by Joshua Wolf Shenk. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.

Related NPR Stories

- Feb. 12, 2005
'The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln'
- June 8, 2004
The Speech That Made Lincoln President
- Feb. 16, 2003
'Mr. Lincoln's Wars'

U.S. Newswire

Medialink Worldwide

The History Channel(r) Partners with NMHA, the Nation's Largest Mental Health Organization, to Promote Lincoln Program; Lincoln Special Provides Insight into the President's Personal Setbacks and Lifelong Struggles That Would Drive His Many Achievements

12/27/2005 2:37:00 PM

To: National Desk

Contact: Heather Cobb, 703-797-2588, hcobb@nmha.org or Eileen Sexton, 703-837-4783, eileens@nmha.org, both of the National Mental Health Association

NEW YORK, Dec. 27 /U.S. Newswire/ -- The History Channel and the National Mental Health Association are pleased to announce a national partnership in promotion of the January 2006 special presentation of Lincoln. The program, scheduled to air Monday, Jan. 16, at 8 p.m. /7 p.m. (central), honors the remarkable accomplishments of our 16th president despite his life-long struggle with depression, which the film argues was the driving force behind his ultimate transcendence from modest origins to the American Presidency. THC and NMHA collaboration will focus on educating Americans on mental health through Abraham Lincoln's experiences and work to dispel the stigma surrounding mental health problems and treatments.

"Lincoln is a powerful and telling story of one of America's greatest leaders who used his own personal turmoil to fuel grand achievements," said Judy Klein Frimer, director of Brand Enhancement at The History Channel. "The NMHA partnership provides the opportunity to advance the importance of proper mental health care and the acceptance of the 54 million Americans who struggle with mental illnesses."

The program, which includes interviews with experts fully-versed on Lincoln's multi-faced persona, brings a fresh perspective and an even greater appreciation of what a special achievement his life truly was. Americans know Abraham Lincoln as the emancipator of slaves, the man who held America together in its darkest days. But few know the Lincoln who battled suicidal thoughts and at times called himself "The loneliest man in the world."

"It is hard for many to imagine that one of the greatest world leaders faced such personal struggles," said Cynthia Wainscott, board chair of NMHA. "Lincoln's life serves as an example to us all. Like Lincoln, many of us will experience hardship and setbacks at some point in our lives. It may be due to an illness, divorce, loss of a loved one, financial problems, discrimination or natural disaster. No matter the cause, how we meet the adversity determines how we move forward in our own lives."

The History Channel is also partnering with Book Sense, a national chain of independent bookstores, to promote the upcoming Lincoln special. Each bookstore will feature donation containers for individuals to support NMHA programs to increase understanding of mental health and mental illness and decrease the barriers to wellness Americans often face.

Learning from Lincoln:

Here are some of the common threads that enabled Lincoln to face and overcome his obstacles:

Positive outlook: Staying hopeful and positive is key to recovery from any setback. In fact, hardships may help us become stronger and wiser. As British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli once said, "What appear to be calamities are often the sources of fortune."

Perseverance: To bounce back from adversity, it's vital to stay focused and firm. We often need to fight for ourselves to get what we need to recover.

Service to others: By helping others, we can in turn help ourselves. We can gain perspective on our own plight as well as feel a sense of purpose.

Sense of humor: There is nothing more important than a healthy sense of humor in dealing with adversity. The ability to laugh helps us to get through the most difficult times. Winston Churchill, another leader who experienced depression, once said "If you are going through hell, keep going."

Self-knowledge: The more we inform ourselves about our situation, the better we can handle the ups and downs we face. Without knowledge, we have less control over our own future.

Staying connected: Hardships are not times to go through alone. Support from friends and family is an important part of overcoming any adversity. As Lincoln once said, "I am a success today because I had a friend who believed in me and I didn't have the heart to let him down."

"If a person's personal battles - whether health-related or situational - become too overwhelming, he or she should always seek help from a mental health professional. There is nothing shameful in reaching out for help. Lincoln did. And there is no reason to forge through it alone. We have better treatments than Lincoln did - treatments that can help all of us rise above our challenges," said Wainscott.

For free information and referrals, individuals can contact their local Mental Health Association or the National Mental Health Association at 800-969-NMHA (6642) or visit <http://www.nmha.org>.

The History Channel

Now reaching more than 88 million Nielsen subscribers, The History Channel(r), "Where the Past Comes Alive(r)," brings history to life in a powerful manner and provides an inviting place where people experience history personally and connect their own lives to the great lives and events of the past. The History Channel has earned six News and Documentary Emmy(r) Awards and received the prestigious Governor's Award from the Academy of Television Arts & Sciences for the network's "Save Our History(r)" campaign dedicated to historic preservation and history education. The History Channel web site is located at <http://www.history.com>. Press Only: For more information and photography, visit <http://www.historychannelpress.com>.

The National Mental Health Association

The National Mental Health Association is the country's oldest and largest nonprofit organization addressing all aspects of mental health and mental illness. With more than 340 affiliates nationwide, NMHA works to improve the mental health of all Americans through advocacy, education, research and service.

Book Sense

Book Sense(tm) is a national marketing effort of the American Booksellers Association that communicates the passion, personality, character, community, and knowledge of independent bookstores. The four main components of Book Sense are the Book Sense Picks fliers (monthly recommendations from independent booksellers nationwide), the Book Sense Bestseller List (a weekly list of bestselling books in independent bookstores nationwide), the consumer website BookSense.com, and the national electronic Book Sense Gift Card program. As a partner of The History Channel, Book Sense has asked its participating stores to promote "Lincoln" with in-store displays and community events. For more about the Book Sense program, to shop online, or to find a store near, visit <http://www.BookSense.com>. For information about the American Booksellers Association, the trade group for independent bookstores, visit <http://www.BookWeb.org>.

<http://www.usnewswire.com/>

-0-

[Print this Page](#)[Return to story](#)

Faces of ABE

February 10, 2006 12:00 am

By MICHAEL ZITZ
The Free Lance-Star

AFTER UNION DEFEATS at the battles of Chancellorsville and Fredericksburg, President Abraham Lincoln told friends he wanted to hang himself.

"If there is a worse place than hell, I am in it," he said. And when Edward D. Baker, a Lincoln political ally from Illinois, was killed fighting for the Union at Balls Bluff in Loudoun County in 1861, President Lincoln sobbed openly and inconsolably as shocked bystanders—including at least one journalist—watched.

As attitudes about mental illness begin to change, some historians are concluding not only that Lincoln, whose birthday is tomorrow, suffered from depression, but that the disease helped forge his strength of character and an indomitable determination.

Learning to deal with the depression that dogged him virtually his entire life helped Lincoln endure the emotional pain and self-doubt of personal tragedies and a national crisis without parallel in American history, some experts say.

The 2006 History Channel program "Lincoln" focuses largely on this premise.

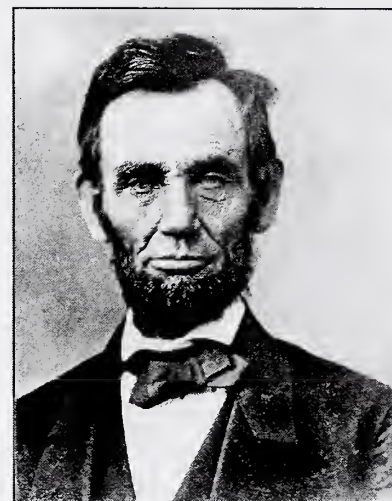
According to Joshua Wolf Shenk's 2005 book "Lincoln's Melancholy: How Depression Challenged a President and Fueled His Greatness" (Houghton Mifflin), newspaper reporter Charles Carlton Coffin wrote that when Lincoln left the White House after learning of Baker's death, his head was down and "his chest was heaving with emotion."

The Shenk book says Coffin wrote that Lincoln "almost fell as he stepped into the street." Coffin said onlookers "sprang involuntarily from our seats to render assistance, but he did not fall."

Lincoln wept openly at Baker's funeral, Shenk writes.

"It's not contradictory that this great man also suffered tremendously—and that these two things can be seen as part of a complex whole," Shenk said during a telephone interview with The Free Lance-Star.

"It's part of what you see in Lincoln's life," Shenk said.



President Abraham Lincoln, whose birthday is tomorrow, suffered from depression most of his life. Some historians believe that was the fire that forged the steel of his character in coping with the Civil War.
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

[Click for larger photo and to order reprints](#)

Faces of ABE

“The sources of suffering were also sources of strength.”

And, Shenk said, “his strength was in part drawn from the strategies that he used to live with his melancholy.”

In his prelude, Shenk relates a story Leo Tolstoy told of visiting the Caucasus region and finding the natives full of questions about Lincoln, whom they called “the greatest general and greatest warrior in the world.”

When Tolstoy showed a young man Lincoln’s picture, his eyes filled with tears.

“Don’t you find,” the young man said to Tolstoy, “judging from his picture, that his eyes are full of tears and that his lips are sad with a secret sorrow?”

‘I’m not very well’

The day after Lincoln was nominated as the Republican Party’s candidate for president, he was seen sitting alone at the convention site, filled with gloom, Shenk writes.

“Lincoln’s head was bowed, his arms bent at the elbows, his hands pressed to his face,” Shenk writes. When another politician approached, the future president said, “I’m not very well.”

Richard Striner, author of the 2005 book “Father Abraham: Lincoln’s Relentless Struggle to End Slavery” (Oxford University Press), said, “His emotions are extremely important, and have to be understood to make sense out of his life trajectory.”

But, Striner stressed, Lincoln combined great intellect with sensitivity spawned by depression to become the man he was.

“Lots of people are depressed, and the outcome can be vastly different,” he said, “depending on intellect and character.”

Richard Carwardine, author of the 2005 book “Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power” (Albert A. Knopf) and the Rhodes professor of American history at Oxford University, said in a telephone interview with The Free Lance–Star:

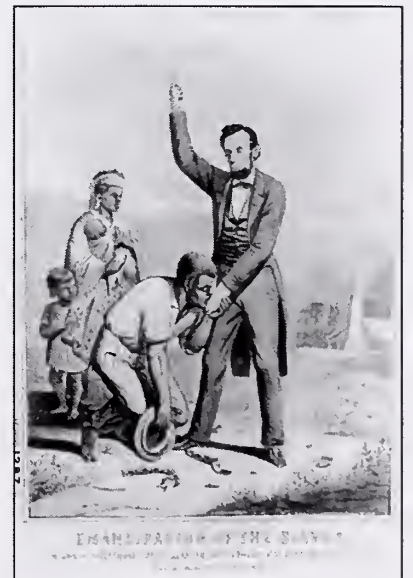
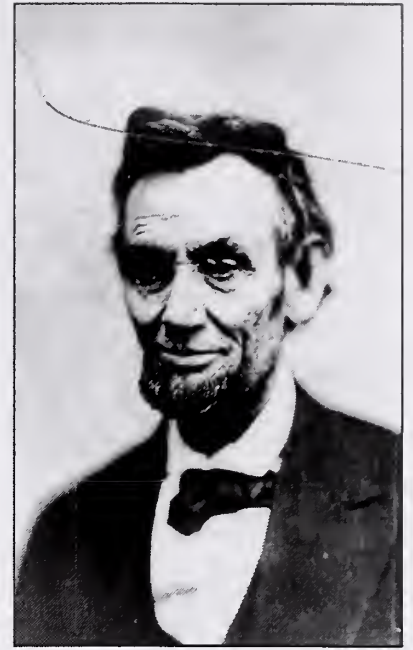
“I think the depression was important. I have no doubt at all he had serious bouts of what he called ‘the hypo,’ and certainly, as a younger man, it was quite disabling.

“What strikes me is how President Lincoln continued to function—and function amazingly.”

When Lincoln was a boy, his mother, Nancy Hanks Lincoln, died before his eyes of a sudden and frightening illness.

When he was a young man, the love of his life, Ann Rutledge, died.

Later, his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, had her own serious mental health issues that he had to deal with again and again.



Faces of ABE

When his young son Willie died in the White House, Lincoln was so grief-stricken that he repeatedly visited and uncovered the tomb to look upon the boy's face and weep, some historians say.

"With the death of Willie and the growing slaughter of the war—in particular, the final summer of the war—the anxiety and the sense of responsibility he felt could have been absolutely crushing," Carwardine said.

"What strikes me is just how extraordinarily mentally resilient and tough he was," he said.

"He had strategies for coping—one of those, an obvious one, was in humor, in storytelling," Carwardine said.

'Life-affirming sense of humor'

Doris Kearns Goodwin, author of the 2005 book "Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln" (Simon & Schuster), prefers to focus on how the president used humor to deal with "melancholy." She said in a written statement that during her research, she was surprised by Lincoln's resiliency.

"The vitality of the man, the magnetism of his personality, and the life-affirming sense of humor was much greater than I had realized," Kearns said in the statement. "His face seemed so sorrowful in all his pictures that I was delighted to find that he possessed a marvelous sense of humor, a great ability to tell stories. Indeed, he was the one—time and again—who sustained the spirits of his colleagues during the darkest days of the war."

Despite that, Lincoln's law partner William Herndon once said, "His melancholy dripped from him as he walked."

Shenk notes that Lincoln himself wrote in 1859, "If I be in pain, I wish to let you know it, and to ask your sympathy and assistance; and my pleasurable emotions also, I wish to communicate to, and share with you."

But that kind of honesty, Shenk said, may be impossible for today's leaders.

He noted that Sen. Edmund Muskie's political career went into a downward spiral when he appeared to shed tears during the 1972 New Hampshire presidential primary campaign. Muskie later claimed they were snowflakes.

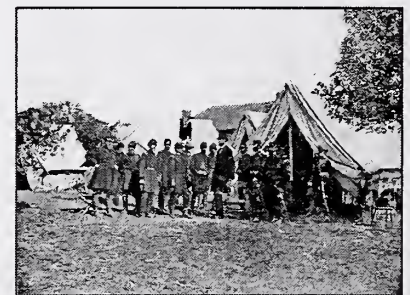
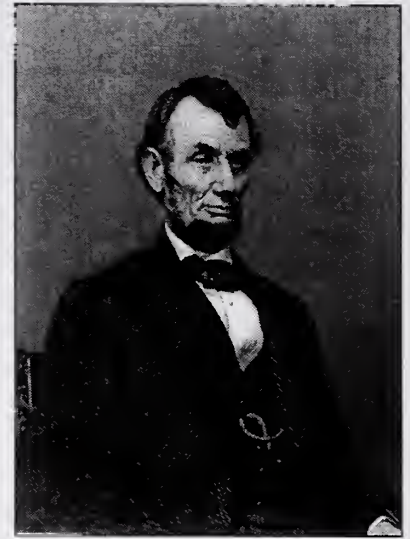
Shenk said that in modern times, a leader openly displaying the slightest self-doubt or pain over a decision "is evidence of some kind of flawed character."

All human beings experience profound pain, he said, but we as a culture are requiring our leaders to hide that—and even lie about it.

'As fundamental as walking'

"We all ask fundamental questions at moments of great pain," Shenk said.

"Somehow these qualities we see in Lincoln's life have come to be seen as inappropriate in modern politics. Today's politicians are punished for that.



"Shedding tears is as fundamental to human life as walking," Shenk said.

"It's part of who we are. How do we come up with an idea of political leadership that's not consistent with human qualities? Are we getting better leadership by asking [politicians] to avoid these very human expressions? We see in Lincoln's case, there's another way."

He said Lincoln's depth of capacity for self-evaluation was "not inconsistent with decisive and powerful action," and his "depth and uncertainty" allowed him to closely examine all sides of every situation carefully without being paralyzed.

"He would wrestle with the consequences of his actions and their effects on the world around him and that gave him so much moral depth," Shenk said.

Of the requirements placed on leaders today, he said: "Putting on a mask might be helpful in the short term, but it may be that ultimately it will come to be seen as a mask. If you look across human history, the things and people we appreciate are the ones that get into the depths of real human life. We remember Emily Dickinson. We remember Herman Melville. We remember Lincoln. These were people who really plumbed the depths of who they were with a lot of engagement—and a lot of pain."

Shenk said today's culture doesn't appreciate "depth and authenticity and engagement."

Mark J. Rozell, an expert on the presidency and the media, said it isn't fair to expect Lincoln's kind of naked emotional honesty from current leaders such as President George W. Bush.

"Of course the contexts are very different," said Rozell, who is director of the Master of Public Policy Program at George Mason University in Fairfax. "Everything that presidents do today is broadcast around the world and scrutinized. It's hard to imagine a president today showing emotions the same way Lincoln did. Most likely, few at the time were aware of Lincoln's emotional reaction. If a president did that today, every psychoanalyst-pundit would be on cable TV programs assessing his state of mind and emotional stability."

"Presidents today are expected to give the appearance of strength, and sometimes this means masking real emotions," Rozell said.

Carwardine, who also has written the book "Evangelicals and Politics in Antebellum America," noted that something in Lincoln's makeup kept him from the self-righteousness displayed by some political leaders in America today, in spite of the righteousness of his cause in saving the Union and freeing the slaves.

In Lincoln's second inaugural address, rather than gloating over the South's impending defeat, he said that perhaps the war was God's punishment to all of America for 250 years of slavery.

In his immortal "With malice toward none; with charity for all" 1865 inaugural speech, Lincoln said, "Let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes."

Striner, a professor of history at Washington College in Maryland, said sensitivity to others' pain created by Lincoln's depression may well have been the tipping point in freeing the slaves.

"That's very likely," he said. "People have often talked about the compassion that came out of Franklin D. Roosevelt's polio. The suffering Lincoln went through did make him more sympathetic."

Striner recounted an anecdote from Lincoln's youth in which he stopped to pick up a small, injured bird.

"His rollicking comrades found it quite amusing," Striner said. "But Lincoln said he had to do something."

"Lincoln felt a tremendous amount of sorrow over the suffering of little animals," he said.

"Later, he felt he had to do something about the issue of slavery," Striner said.

Striner said that in 1841, Lincoln saw slaves being transported on a riverboat and observed to friends that "it was like so many fish on a trout line.

"Years later, he was still tormented by that image. Yes, indeed, I think [depression-related sensitivity to others] is extremely important," he said.

Carwardine agreed, calling Lincoln "a man vulnerable, as it were, to humanitarian entreaties.

"I'm sympathetic to the idea that, maybe generally, severe depression makes you more sensitive to the vulnerability of others," Carwardine said.

That, combined with political genius, Striner said, fundamentally changed America.

"People like Lincoln don't come along very often," he said. "One remarkable individual can make all the difference. Without Lincoln in the White House during the Civil War, things could have gone horribly wrong. Look at the contrast after Lincoln's assassination. Things deteriorated with terrible speed."

The ultimate sacrifice

He said a combination of depression, feelings of guilt about the war and increasing religious fervor led to Lincoln's repeatedly placing himself at personal risk—ultimately with disastrous results for the country. Striner pointed to the story of Lincoln going to Fort Stevens (near Silver Spring, Md.) during a battle in 1864 and standing upright on a parapet, wearing his famous stovepipe hat, making him recognizable—and easily shot dead.

"Lincoln was offering himself as the ultimate sacrifice," Striner said.

"It was the Golden Rule. He was willing to show God, 'I am willing to prepare to pay the same price [as dying soldiers]. If that's your will, if that's your pleasure, God, strike me down.'

"I cannot prove that," Striner said. "But he listened to advice about his personal security and he was very intelligent. I think it was the tremendous sense of sorrow and responsibility for the bloodshed and the loss of life.

Not that he would do it differently. And I do think it's possible that the depressive side of his character was associated with that."

That pain and guilt ended up seriously damaging America when Lincoln was assassinated, Striner argued.

"However much I admire the loftiness of Lincoln's religious sense, it was really a damn shame that he did not take better care," Striner said. "We could have had the civil rights revolution 100 years sooner."

MICHAEL ZITZ is a staff writer with The Free Lance-Star. Contact him at 540/374-5408, or mikez@freelancestar.com.

Copyright 2006 The Free Lance-Star Publishing Company.

DEVELOP TARGETED MARKETING STRATEGIES THAT RESONATE.

4 Notable Trends in Marketing Strategy

> Download now

FAI
Training

Dow Jones Reprints: This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. To order presentation-ready copies for distribution to your colleagues, clients or customers, use the Order Reprints tool at the bottom of any article or visit www.djreprints.com

See a sample reprint in PDF format.

Order a reprint of this article now

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

WSJ.com

LIFE & CULTURE | JULY 30, 2011

Depression in Command

In times of crisis, mentally ill leaders can see what others don't

By NASSIR GHAEMI



Getty Images

Winston Churchill

When times are good and the ship of state only needs to sail straight, mentally healthy people function well as political leaders. But in times of crisis and tumult, those who are mentally abnormal, even ill, become the greatest leaders. We might call this the Inverse Law of Sanity.

Consider Neville Chamberlain. Before the Second World War, he was a highly respected businessman from Birmingham, a popular mayor and an esteemed chancellor of the exchequer. He was charming, sober, smart—sane.

Winston Churchill, by contrast, rose to prominence during the Boer War and the first World War. Temperamental, cranky, talkative, bombastic—he bothered many people. During the "wilderness" years of the 1930s, while the suave Chamberlain got all the plaudits, Churchill's own party rejected him.

When not irritably manic in his temperament, Churchill experienced recurrent severe depressive episodes, during many of which he was suicidal. Even into his later years, he would complain about his "black dog" and avoided ledges and railway platforms, for fear of an impulsive jump. "All it takes is an instant," he said.

When not irritably manic in his temperament, Churchill experienced recurrent severe depressive episodes, during many of which he

Related Video

Abraham Lincoln famously had many depressive episodes, once even needing a suicide





People who are chronically a little depressed -- gloomy, grumpy, low energy -- have "dysthymic disorder," a condition with its own risks of job and family problems, as well as episodes of major depression. Melinda Beck has details.

watch, and was treated for melancholy by physicians. Mental illness has touched even saintly icons like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., both of whom made suicide attempts in adolescence and had at least three severe depressive episodes in adulthood.

Aristotle was the first to point out the link between madness and genius, including not just poets and artists but also political leaders. I would argue that the Inverse Law of Sanity also applies to more ordinary endeavors. In business, for instance, the sanest of CEOs may be just

right during prosperous times, allowing the past to predict the future. But during a period of change, a different kind of leader—quirky, odd, even mentally ill—is more likely to see business opportunities that others cannot imagine.



Getty Images

Abraham Lincoln

In looking back at historical figures, I do not speculate about their relationships with their mothers or their dark sexual secrets, the usual stuff of "psychohistory." Instead, I base my diagnoses on the most widely accepted sources of psychiatric evidence: symptoms, family history, course of illness, and treatment. How, then, might the leadership of these extraordinary men have been enhanced by mental illness?

An obvious place to start is with depression, which has been shown to encourage traits of both realism and empathy (though not necessarily in the same individual at the same time).

"Normal" nondepressed persons have what psychologists call "positive illusion"—that is, they possess a mildly high self-regard, a slightly inflated sense of how much they control the world around them.

Mildly depressed people, by contrast, tend to see the world more clearly, more as it is. In one classic study, subjects pressed a button and observed whether it turned on a green light, which was actually controlled by the researchers. Those who had no depressive symptoms consistently overestimated their control over the light; those who had some depressive symptoms realized they had little control.

For Lincoln, realism bordering on political ruthlessness was central to his success as a war leader. Few recall that Lincoln was not a consistent abolitionist. He always opposed slavery, but until 1863 he also opposed abolishing it, which is why he was the compromise Republican candidate in 1860. Lincoln preferred a containment strategy. He simply wanted to prevent slavery's expansion to the West, after which, he believed, it would die out gradually.



Getty Images

Rev. Martin Luther King

saner, more stable men.

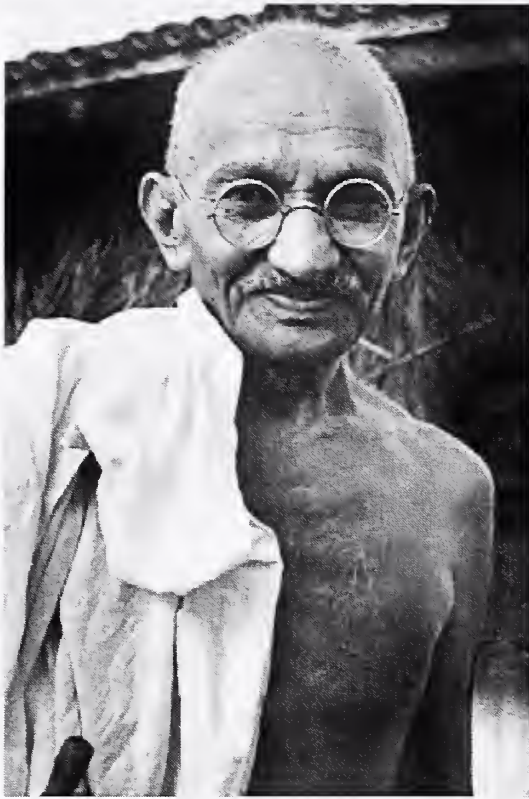
Depression also has been found to correlate with high degrees of empathy, a greater concern for how others think and feel. In one study, severely depressed patients had much higher scores on the standard measures of empathy than did a control group of college students; the more depressed they were, the higher their empathy scores. This was the case even when patients were not currently depressed but had experienced depression in the past. Depression seems to prepare the mind for a long-term habit of appreciating others' point of view.

When the Civil War came, Lincoln showed himself to be flexible and pragmatic as a strategist, willing to admit error and to change generals as the situation demanded. He was not the stereotypical decisive executive, picking a course of action and sticking with it. He adapted to a changing reality and, in the end, prevailed.

As for Churchill, during his severely depressed years in the political wilderness, he saw the Nazi menace long before others did. His exhortations to increase military spending were rejected by Prime Minister Baldwin and his second-in-command, Chamberlain. When Chamberlain returned from signing the Munich agreement with Hitler in 1938, only Churchill and a small coterie refused to stand and cheer in parliament, eliciting boos and hisses from other honorable members.

At dinner that night, Churchill brooded: How could men of such honor do such a dishonorable thing? The depressive leader saw the events of his day with a clarity and realism lacking in

In this we can see part of the motivation behind the radical politics of Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Their goal was not to defeat their opponents but to heal them of their false beliefs. Nonviolent resistance, King believed, was psychiatry for the American soul; it was a psychological cure for racism, not just a political program. And the active ingredient was empathy.



Getty Images

Mohandas Gandhi

Gandhi and King succeeded to a degree, of course, but they also failed: India was fatally divided because Hindus and Muslims could not accept each other; segregation ended in the U.S., but it happened slowly and at the cost of social traumas whose consequences still afflict us. The politics of radical empathy proved, in the end, to be beyond the capacity of the normal, mentally healthy public.

Great crisis leaders are not like the rest of us; nor are they like mentally healthy leaders. When society is happy, they toil in sadness, seeking help from friends and family and doctors as they cope with an illness that can be debilitating, even deadly. Sometimes they are up, sometimes they are down, but they are never quite well.

When traditional approaches begin to fail, however, great crisis leaders see new opportunities. When the past no longer guides the future, they invent a new future. When old questions are unanswerable and new questions unrecognized, they create new solutions. They

are realistic enough to see painful truths, and when calamity occurs, they can lift up the rest of us.

Their weakness is the secret of their strength.

—Dr. Ghaemi is a professor of psychiatry at Tufts University School of Medicine and director of the Mood Disorders Program at Tufts Medical Center. This essay is adapted from his new book, "A First-Rate Madness: Uncovering the Links Between Leadership and Mental Illness."

Copyright 2011 Dow Jones & Company, Inc. All Rights Reserved

This copy is for your personal, non-commercial use only. Distribution and use of this material are governed by our Subscriber Agreement and by copyright law. For non-personal use or to order multiple copies, please contact Dow Jones Reprints at 1-800-843-0008 or visit www.djreprints.com



Published on *American Heritage Magazine* (<http://www.americanheritage.com>)

[Home](#) > [Printer-friendly](#) > [Printer-friendly](#)

“What Is Hell To One Like Me...?”

By *Richard Lawrence Miller*

Created 01/21/2011 - 07:04

[Richard Lawrence Miller](#) ^[1]

August/September 2004 | Volume 55, Issue 4

[Richard Lawrence Miller](#) ^[1]

[August/September 2004](#) ^[2]

Lincoln's melancholy is famous. Less well known is that he not only penned thoughts about suicide but published them in a newspaper. Scholars have long believed that the only copy in the newspaper's files was mutilated to hide those thoughts from posterity. But the composition has apparently always been in plain sight—and unrecognized.

How did such a thing come to be written? How was it lost? Why should we think it has been found? And what does it reveal about its author?

Both of Lincoln's parents suffered periods of bleakness often enough to attract comment from their Kentucky neighbors. Said one: “Thomas Lincoln was a real nice, agreeable man, who often got the ‘blues,’ and had some strange sort of spell, and wanted to be alone all he could when he had them. I le would walk away out on the barrens alone, and stay out sometimes half a day. . . . Some of us was afear’d he was losin’ his mind.” Similar behavior was observed in his young son. In 1862 an elderly woman told a visitor to his boyhood home: “Abe moped round an’ had spells, an’ we all got mighty feared that he was losin’ hisself, but he did n’t. I le was all right agin in a day or two, and peart as ever.”

Abraham Lincoln's vacillation between gaiety and gloom continued to be noticed throughout his life. Someone who saw him in his forties telling stories while attending court in Bloomington, Illinois, recollected that “his eyes would sparkle with fun,... and nobody's enjoyment was greater than his. An hour later he might be seen in the same place or in some law office nearby, but alas, how different! His chair, no longer in the center of the room, would be leaning back against the wall; his feet drawn up and resting on the front rounds so that his knees and chin were about on a level; his hat tipped slightly forward, as if to shield or hide his face; his eyes no longer sparkling with fun and merriment, but sad and downcast, and his hands clasped around his knees. There, drawn up within himself, as it were, he would sit, the very picture of dejection and gloom. Thus absorbed, have I seen him sit for hours at a time, defying the interruptions of even his closest friends. . . . By his

moody silence and abstraction, he had thrown about him a barrier so dense and impenetrable that no one dared to break through. It was a strange picture, and one I have never forgotten.” Leonard Swett, a colleague of Lincoln in law and politics, asked: “What gave him that peculiar melancholy? What cancer had he inside?”

Lincoln “told me that he was so overcome with mental depression that he never dare carry a knife in his pocket. And as long as I was intimately acquainted with him... he never carried a pocket knife.”

Lincoln’s sadness probably had multiple causes. Given the occasional dejection observed in his parents and in himself as a child, genetic predisposition may have intertwined with blows dealt by life. The deaths of his mother, his sister, and two of his children challenged his resilience, and for years he struggled to pay debts generated by his store. And then there was illness. A nineteenth-century chronicler of Lincoln’s Illinois wrote that the *ague*, which usually meant malarial fever, “was a disease to be dreaded because of its effect upon the mind as well as upon the physical system. It induced a feeling of despondency, and took away that spirit of enterprise and that strong will, which bore up the settlers under misfortune. For many years the fever and *ague* was the scourge of the West.” Malaria, chronic eyestrain, low blood pressure, trouble with teeth and feet, and constipation and drug doses taken to combat it all have been suggested as contributing factors. Moreover, in addition to experiencing depression, Lincoln denied himself a common means of masking it—drinking.

Whatever the causes of his despondency, his acquaintances knew it well. “Lincoln often thought of committing suicide,” declared his law partner William H. Herndon. We don’t know whether Herndon was extrapolating from Lincoln’s actions or actually heard him speak on the subject, but another friend reported explicit conversation. Robert L. Wilson, who served with Lincoln in the Illinois legislature, wrote that in the mid-1830s “he told me that although he appeared to enjoy life rapturously, Still he was the victim of terrible melancholly.... He told me that he was so overcome with mental depression that he never dare carry a knife in his pocket. And as long as I was intimately acquainted with him... he never carried a pocket knife.”

Regardless of his personal demons, Lincoln functioned well as a lawyer, legislator, and politician. One black period, however, began on January 1, 1841, which he called the “fatal first,” when he abruptly broke his engagement to Mary Todd. And around the same time, he discovered that his best friend, Joshua Speed, was leaving town forever. “Poor fellow, he is in rather a bad way,” said one Springfield resident at the time. “The Doctors say he came within an inch of being a perfect lunatic for life. He was perfectly crazy for some time, not able to attend to his business at all.” His friend Orville H. Browning declared, “He was so much affected as to talk incoherently, and to be delirious to the extent of not knowing what he was doing.” During the 1880s Joshua Speed stated: “In the winter of 1841 a gloom came over him till his friends were alarmed for his life. Though a member of the legislature he rarely attended its sessions. In his deepest gloom, and when I told him he would die unless he rallied, he said, ‘I am not afraid, and would be more than willing.’” Lincoln instantly added, however, that he wanted to accomplish more before he died.

Still, not long thereafter his friend and political associate James H. Matheny remembered that he expected Lincoln to die by his own hand. Lincoln’s law partner during this acute depression, Congressman John T. Stuart, received a letter from him in January 1841. “I

have, within the last few days, been making a most discreditable exhibition of myself in the way of hypochondriaism,” Lincoln said, then added, “Pardon me for not writing more; I have not sufficient composure to write a long letter.” Three days later he wrote Stuart: “I am now the most miserable man living.... Whether I shall ever be better I can not tell; I awfully forebode I shall not. To remain as I am is impossible; I must die or be better.”

According to Herndon’s biography of Lincoln (which was ghostwritten by his collaborator Jesse Weik), some weeks after the worst of this episode Lincoln “sent to the Sangamo Journal a few lines under the gloomy title of ‘Suicide.’ They were published in the paper, and a few years since I [Herndon] hunted over the files, and coming across the number containing them, was astonished to find that some one had cut them out. I have always supposed it was done by Lincoln or by some one at his instigation.”

Those few lines were a poem. We know this because Speed told Herndon about it after Lincoln’s death.

Lincoln early developed a reputation among his neighbors as a poet. According to Herndon’s notes, an Indiana relative remembered that he “wrote Poetry while he was going to School.... Essays & poetry were not taught in the school—Abe took it up of his own accord.” Another Indiana acquaintance agreed: “Abe wrote Poetry, a good deal, but I can’t recollect what about Except one piece which was entitled ‘The Neighborhood Broil.’ Abe always brought his pieces—prose or Poetry to me straight.” Lincoln’s cousin Dennis Hanks recalled, “In 1825 or 1826 [when he was in his teens] he then Exhibited a love for Poetry and wrote a piece of humorous Rhyme on his friend Josiah Crawford that made all the neighbors, Crawford included, burst their sides with laughter.”

Somber poetry also had a strong appeal. Lincoln cherished William Knox’s “Mortality.” Speaking of this meditation on the evanescence of life and the permanence of death, a law colleague said, “I have heard him, as he sat by the decaying embers of an old-fashioned fire-place, when the day’s merriment and business were over and the night’s stillness had assumed dominion, quote at length his favorite poem.”

Lincoln’s desire to share his poetry with the public had declined by the mid-1840s. His law student Gibson Harris reported that he “scribbled verses; and so far as I was capable of judging, their quality was above the average. It was accidentally that I learned this. In arranging the books and papers in the office, I found two or three quires of letter-paper stitched together in book form, and nearly filled with poetical effusions in Mr. Lincoln’s handwriting, and evidently original. I looked through them somewhat hurriedly, and when Mr. Lincoln came in, showed him the manuscript, asking him if it was his. His response was, ‘Where did you find it?’ and rolling it up put it in his coat-tail pocket; and I saw it no more. Afterwards, in speaking of the matter to Mr. Lincoln’s partner, he [Herndon] said, ‘I believe he has at times scribbled some verses; but he is, I think, somewhat unwilling to have it known.’”

One more thing should be mentioned before we turn to the suicide poem itself. In the late 1830s, not long after Lincoln confided suicidal fears to his friend Robert Wilson, some young men in Springfield formed a writers’ club in which the participants composed poetry and shared it with one another. Lincoln was a member. So was a co-publisher of the Sangamo Journal, Newton Francis.

What if Herndon and Weik's assumption that the suicide poem had been written in response to Lincoln's despondency of early 1841 was wrong? If so, 1841 may very well be an incorrect publication date. In 1866 Speed told Herndon: "My recollection is that the Poem on Suicide was written in the Spring of 1840 or Summer of 1841. It was published in the Sangamo Journal soon after it was written." In an earlier conversation Speed told Herndon that the poem was written and published "about 1840." So Speed was not at all certain that the poem was connected with the January 1841 episode of depression. Indeed, Herndon once privately denied that the 1841 date had any connection at all to that year's troubles: "As to the Lincoln poem on suicide I found out from Speed that it was written [in] 1838, and I hunted up the Journal and found where the poem was, what day published, etc., etc., but someone had cut it out—supposed to be Lincoln. I could never find another copy."

How did Herndon know the poem had been removed from the Journal's file of back issues? He never claimed to have seen the poem, never even claimed to have known about it except through Speed's own imprecise recollection. The existing run of the Journal does have mutilations, but how could Herndon have known that any specific blank spot in a newspaper had once been occupied by a poem that apparently he had never read and that had been printed in a year he seemed unsure about?

The only authority for the poem's disappearance is Herndon. If we accept that he could have been mistaken about that, an anonymous poem entitled "The Suicide's Soliloquy" from the August 25, 1838, Sangamo Journal commands our attention. Did Lincoln write it?

Basic requirements for his authorship are met: The time frame fits, it was published in the Sangamo Journal, and it deals with suicide.

This last factor is important. Illinois newspapers in that era commonly printed verse about the inevitability of death and its associated griefs—but not about suicide.

But why would Lincoln have a poem about suicide published? The assumption has been that it came from his severe depression of 1841 and, by implication, that putting it in print somehow helped with his internal struggle. But Lincoln was never known for the public confession of intimate thoughts. In 1838, however, as part of a poetry writers' club whose members included the co-publisher of the Journal, the young man may simply have produced a powerful item in which he felt pride and that his literary friends admired. The emotion in the piece may have been inspired by his own experiences, but the poem should probably be viewed more as a literary exercise than self-therapy.

Regardless of whether such a piece might have come out of his writers' group, the "literary exercise" interpretation goes far in explaining why the Sangamo Journal would publish a suicide poem submitted by Lincoln. The Journal's editor, Simeon Francis, was known for allowing him access to the newspaper's columns. Moreover, since Lincoln and Francis were personal friends and political colleagues, it is unthinkable that Francis would have published anything likely to produce doubts about Lincoln's steadiness. Francis would have viewed an 1838 submission from a member of his brother's poetry club in a far different light from an 1841 submission from a political ally whose recent despondent conduct had become a matter of public comment. An anonymous author's identity could not have been kept secret for long in the hothouse atmosphere of Springfield social and political gossip, and such a revelation would have exposed an elected official to never-ending local scrutiny.

Lack of any such Springfield memory about a Lincoln suicide poem argues against the 1841 therapeutic interpretation.

Lincoln's secretary and biographer John G. Nicolay observed: "The music of Lincoln's thought was always in the minor key. His favorite poems, such as 'Oh, Why Should the Spirit of Mortal Be Proud?' and Holmes's 'Last Leaf' specially emphasize this mood; they are distinctively poems of sadness. So also among Shakespeare's plays he found his chief fascination in *Macbeth*, full of the same undercurrent of the great problems of life and destiny with which his own slight attempts at versification are in harmony."

He wrote another poem that contains musings about madness and about choosing to seek death and delves into the interplay of rationality and insanity, suggesting that some circumstances can make death preferable to life.

Nicolay's observations raise more points relevant to associating Lincoln with "The Suicide's Soliloquy." The poem echoes themes in Shakespearean tragedy that almost never appear in its own era's mortality verse. The protagonist debates whether to be or not to be, reflects on desertion or betrayal by friends, uses death to put an end to conflict. The author can easily be envisioned as a lover of Shakespeare; indeed, Shakespearean influence can be suspected even in the fine points, such as the term dagger, a word seldom used in Illinois newspaper stories about violence in the 1830s and 1840s but surely familiar to admirers of *Macbeth*. The soliloquist's choice of weapon is also the same one that Lincoln confided to Robert Wilson in the 1830s and that concerned Lincoln's friends in 1841.

Given the attraction that poems about mortality had for Lincoln, it hardly seems unlikely that by 1838 he might try producing one of his own, especially since themes in "The Suicide's Soliloquy" also emerge in a long poem he wrote evoking memories of his youth, "My Childhood-Home I See Again." It contains musings about madness and about choosing to seek death and delves into the interplay of rationality and insanity, suggesting that some circumstances can make death preferable to life. The suicide soliloquist's appeal to cold reason for justification of his action is especially Lincolnian.

Lincoln's 1838 address to the Young Men's Lyceum, a speech intensely studied for revelations about his personality, has the same kind of oratorical flourish found in the suicide poem from that year. Moreover, the poem has stylistic elements duplicated in Lincoln's serious poetic compositions. For example, the suicide poem and Lincoln's poems about his childhood memories, among them a vigorous, closely observed description called "The Bear Hunt," all have fourline stanzas, usually in iambic meter, a rhythm typical of Shakespeare. The first and third lines in stanzas have eight beats; the second and fourth lines typically have six. The first lines rhyme with the third lines; the second lines, with the fourth. Not only is such scansion and rhyme typical of Lincoln the poet, it is highly unusual in other Sangamo Journal poetry (in a long run of issues from 1841, only one poem maintained those characteristics throughout). The style did not belong solely to Lincoln, of course, but it is so typical of him that its lack has been used by scholars to argue against his authorship of other poetry.

Are we justified in believing that the mystery of Lincoln's suicide poem has been solved? I think so. Here is the poem itself, with the original introductory sentence that preceded it when it appeared in Abraham Lincoln's local newspaper on an August day 166 years ago.

THE SUICIDE'S SOLILOQUY.

The following lines were said to have been found near the bones of a man supposed to have committed suicide, in a deep forest, on the Flat Branch of the Sangamon, some time ago.

Here, where the lonely hooting owl Sends forth his midnight moans, Pierce wolves shall o'er my carcase growl, Or buzzards pick my bones. No fellow-man shall learn my fate, Or where my ashes lie; Unless by beasts drawn round their bait, Or by the ravens' cry. Yes! I've resolved the deed to do, And this the place to do it: This heart I'll rush a dagger through, Though I in hell should rue it! Hell! What is hell to one like me Who pleasures never knew; By friends consigned to misery, By hope deserted too? To ease me of this power to think, That through my bosom raves, I'll headlong leap from hell's high brink, And wallow in its waves. Though devils yells, and burning chains May waken long regret; Their frightful screams, and piercing pains, Will help me to forget. Yes! I'm prepared, through endless night, To take that fiery berth! Think not with tales of hell to fright Me, who am damn'd on earth! Sweet steel! come forth from out your sheath, And glist'ning, speak your powers; Rip up the organs of my breath, And draw my blood in showers! I strike! It quivers in that heart Which drives me to this end; I draw and kiss the bloody dart, My last—my only friend!

Featured

[Abraham Lincoln](#) ^[3] [Depression \(Mental Health\)](#) ^[4] [Joshua Speed](#) ^[5] [Sangamo Journal](#) ^[6]
[Thomas Lincoln](#) ^[7] [William H. Herndon](#) ^[8]

[Abraham Lincoln](#) [Depression \(Mental Health\)](#) [Joshua Speed](#) [Sangamo Journal](#)
[Thomas Lincoln](#) [William H. Herndon](#)

© Copyright 2011 American Heritage Publishing Company. All Rights Reserved.

- [Subscriber Services](#)
- [Invention & Technology](#)
- [Contact Us](#)
- [Advertise With Us](#)
- [Site Map](#)
- [Search](#)
- [Terms of Use](#)
- [Privacy Policy](#)

Source URL: <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/%E2%80%9Cwhat-hell-one-me%E2%80%9D>

Links:

- [1] <http://www.americanheritage.com/users/richard-lawrence-miller>
- [2] <http://www.americanheritage.com/content/augustseptember-2004>
- [3] <http://www.americanheritage.com/category/article-keywords/abraham-lincolns>
- [4] <http://www.americanheritage.com/category/article-keywords/depression>
- [5] <http://www.americanheritage.com/category/article-keywords/joshua-speed>
- [6] <http://www.americanheritage.com/category/article-keywords/sangamo-journal>
- [7] <http://www.americanheritage.com/category/article-keywords/thomas-lincoln>
- [8] <http://www.americanheritage.com/category/article-keywords/william-h-herndon>

Why Lincoln Was Sad

Because Melancholy Was a Family Trait

It Is Here Offered as an Explanation of
By WILLIAM E. B.

MANY attempts have been made at explanation of the abysmal sadness which sometimes engulfed the soul of Abraham Lincoln. Three explanations are familiar. One which has been popularized by a noted dietitian attributes it to Lincoln's habitual indigestion. If he had eschewed hog and hominy and subsisted on a vegetable diet with plenty of bran, he might have been, according to this physician, a cheerful man.

Sentimental writers in no considerable number suppose that Lincoln was never a happy man after the death of Ann Rutledge and that all through his life his alleged habitual sorrow for this sweetheart of his youth came upon him periodically with insupportable weight of woe.

A third explanation, and one which William H. Herndon, Lincoln's law partner, believed, is that Lincoln's domestic infelicity made it impossible for him to be happy excepting when he forgot the nagging disposition, unreasonable spirit, hot temper and stubborn will of Mary Todd Lincoln.

I believe that none of these explanations sufficiently explain this trait in Lincoln's character, and I am sure that one important source of knowledge has been wholly overlooked. Melancholy, as Lincoln knew it, was a family trait inherited from the Lincolns.

The discovery of this fact carries with it some measure of knowledge concerning Lincoln's relations with women, especially that hesitation with which he more than once approached matrimony and shrank from its experience. This also was native to the Lincoln temperament and was a trait possessed by others of the Lincoln family.

Abraham Lincoln grew up among the Hankses, relatives of his mother, but from them we know little of the Lincoln family traits. Of that family the most intelligent and best educated member was Dennis Hanks, a first cousin of Abraham Lincoln's mother. Dennis was

Abraham Lincoln was a man of many moods. At times he was boisterously mirthful, at other times placidly and almost lazily content. There were periods when he had a brooding, depressive sadness, and yet others when he was plunged into the very depths of woe. His law partner, William H. Herndon, who studied him more closely and for a longer period than any other man, said that 'melancholy dripped from him as he walked.'

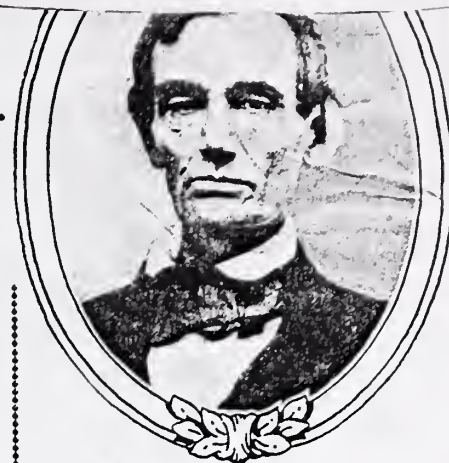
a much abler and better educated man than John Hanks, also a first cousin of Lincoln's mother, child of her eldest uncle, William Hanks. Lincoln had more respect for John, but enjoyed a much longer companionship with Dennis.

In 1829 certain of the children of Mordecai Lincoln, eldest brother of Abraham Lincoln's father, Thomas, migrated from Kentucky to Illinois and made their home at the head of the Mississippi rapids nearly opposite Keokuk, Iowa. These members of the family carried on a more or less active correspondence with their brothers and sisters and cousins in Kentucky. A considerable portion of this correspondence has been preserved and is now in my possession.

Mordecai Lincoln himself came to visit his children in 1830, the winter of the deep snow, the very winter when Abraham Lincoln was near Decatur prior to his residence in New Salem.

Mordecai Lincoln himself was overtaken in the storm and lost his life as a result of this same terrific snowfall and blizzard. His widow, Mary Mudd Lincoln, subsequently removed to Illinois and many years later died among her

children. One of her daughters married a cousin by the name of Ben Mudd, and the Mudds also removed to this County of Hancock, whose county seat is Carthage. The descendants of this family of Lincolns are still there, and their records and traditions go back,



An ambrotype, said to have been made by Pearson, 1858.

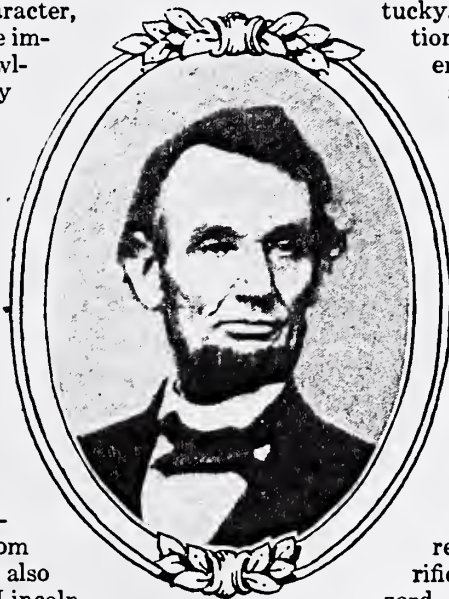
not only to the beginning of this branch of the Lincoln family in Illinois, but also through correspondence and other records to their earlier life in Kentucky.

For our present purpose the most interesting fact about these Lincolns is that they were all subject to the same depression and melancholy which was so characteristic of Abraham Lincoln.

Here, then, is our entirely new answer to a question so many times asked and so variously and often wrongly replied to: Abraham Lincoln was a man of moods because that trait was congenital; it belonged to the Lincoln family. The Mudds, also, after their intermarriage with the Lincolns, inherited the same trait and knew from which side of the family they got it; they spoke of it as 'the Lincoln horrors.'

This answer is as interesting as it is novel. It is rather striking that no one has sought it out before. John Hay spent his boyhood in that same general part of Illinois, and he records in his diary his meeting with a representative of this same family. His name was Robert, a son of Abraham Lincoln's first cousin, Abraham. Robert died in Carthage, Illinois, September 5, 1868. Of him John Hay wrote: 'Rode to Carthage in the same seat with Robert Lincoln, a second cousin of the late President. He is forty-one years old, looks much older. The same eyes and hair the President had—the same tall stature, and shambling gait, less exaggerated. Drinks hard, chews ravenously. Rather rough, farmer-looking man. He says the family is about run out. "We are not a very marrying set." He is dying of consumption, he said very coolly. There was something startling in the resemblance of the straight thicket of hair and the gray cavernous eyes, framed in black brows and lashes, to the features of the great dead man.'

I have a particularly large body of material concerning (Concluded on page 27)



The Brady portrait of the President, made in 1861.

Abraham Lincoln's first cousin, the younger Mordecai. In many respects he strongly resembles Abraham Lincoln. He had the same kind of mind. His handwriting was strikingly similar. He had a marked inclination to satire which Abraham Lincoln had and learned to control, and Mordecai unfortunately never learned to keep in check. He had the same love of humor, and he had the same type of melancholy. He had a musical gift which Abraham aspired to but did not possess.

Mordecai played the violin. It moved him to such moods that he gave it up. He left his violin in Kentucky, though whether this was because he foreswore music then and there or because of the haste of his departure may be uncertain. He never owned a violin afterward, but whenever he went to the home of relatives or friends where there was a violin his fingers were restless till he had it in his hands, and he would walk the floor playing the fiddle till tears streamed down his cheeks and his emotions grew beyond his control. There were days when Mordecai was too profoundly sunk in melancholy to speak to anyone, days when he would go off in the woods and return at night, perhaps in his usual frame of mind, perhaps rather mirthful.

Mordecai Lincoln was a friendly man, kind-hearted, sympathetic and on occasion generous, but he was sarcastic; he was belligerent; he had an acid temper and a sharp tongue. All these qualities were possessed by his cousin, Abraham, but Abraham learned in some degree to control them. Mordecai serves well to show what were the native qualities of Abraham Lincoln. Nearly all of Abraham's cardinal traits we find writ large in Mordecai and manifest also in other members of the family.

This is wholly new psychology and it is both legitimate and important. It gives us the basis of an understanding such as no study of Abraham Lincoln has hitherto afforded. In the light of this sketch we know some things about the mind of Lincoln which have hitherto been obscure, and the door is ajar for future study.

It remains to add something about Abraham Lincoln's relations to women as they may be interpreted in the light of this present knowledge. The statement of Abraham's cousin, Robert Lincoln, to John Hay, 'We are not a very marrying family,' is confirmed by such acquaintance as we now have with this branch of the Lincolns. This does not mean, however, that either the men or the women of this family were unaware of, or unmoved by, the attractions of the opposite sex. Most of them married and married but once. In the case of the death of a husband or a wife, remarriage was infrequent.

So far as I have been able to learn there was not a single divorce among them. If they were not wholly happy in their married life, at least they were true. Broadly speaking, they were too much given to moods ever to be wholly happy for a considerable length of time. They were happier married, however, than unmarried. While both sexes were afflicted with melancholy, the men seemed to have suffered rather more than the women. Nor did I learn that among the women this trait was unusually pronounced at any given period of their life. The Lincoln women wanted husbands, the Lincoln men wanted wives; yet few of them wed to matrimony without some

hesitation and deep searching of heart.

We do not know that Lincoln had any period of hesitation in his relations with Ann Rutledge, but that may be because we know almost nothing of the Ann Rutledge love affair. We do know that in his courtship of Mary Owens he showed an astonishing instability of inclination and choice. We know that his little love affair with Sarah Rickard, whatever there was of that, brought him alternating feelings of satisfaction and self-reproach. We know that his engagement was broken, and that by his own act, and that he suffered so keenly in memory of 'the fatal first of January,' 1841, that he believed himself to be losing his mind. We are not to account for this trait in Lincoln's character wholly by



Countenance of Lincoln on the day he commissioned Grant Commander-in-Chief of the Union Armies.

our knowledge of the disposition and temperament of the three women. We have some reason to suspect that Lincoln would have acted somewhat similarly if engaged to any woman.

At this point we have remarkably interesting information about his cousin, Mordecai.

Mordecai Lincoln lived in Leitchfield, Grayson County, Kentucky, prior to his removal to Illinois. There he made shoes and clothes and did his carpenter work and played his violin. There, too, he fell in love with a girl of good family whose first name was Patsy. There is no reason whatever to think that a serious quarrel occurred between Mordecai Lincoln and his lady-love. He went to visit her one night in 1836 and on his return left Leitchfield that very night and never went back again. I have two letters from Patsy's father. They are well written, dignified letters, written by reason of Patsy's grief, an ineffectual effort either to bring Mordecai back or to obtain an explanation from him. He wrote of the painful circumstances of Mordecai's departure and the deep sorrow which that departure caused Patsy. He says: 'What makes it the more strange is that I cannot learn that anything happened.' Mordecai did not betray and desert Patsy. He does not appear to have left as a result of a lover's quarrel.

There is no reason to think he did not love her, but as the time for marriage approached he simply ran away from it. It is not the only instance of the kind in the Lincoln family.

He never married. He retained to the end of his life the reputation of having been a woman-hater.

And yet, with his private papers now in my hand, I find that at least twice afterward he was deeply in love with women and wrote letters proposing marriage, letters which so far as I am aware he never sent. One of them was written to a girl named Elizabeth; the other to a young woman named Catherine, a school-teacher whose name had been slandered and he had risen to defend her. To both these women he wrote offers of marriage. They are well written and ardent. He yearned for Elizabeth's company in his cheerless cabin, but when he looked around she was not there. He longed for the love of Catherine, he wanted it 'the worst of anything.' If she could not love him he hoped she would think of him now and then, because he thought always of her. These letters were not written on his ordinary paper. He went to Nouvoo or Carthage to obtain paper for his letter to Elizabeth and copied his letter on an extravagant sheet tinted in robin's egg blue.

I should like to have been present in the cabin of Mordecai Lincoln on Sunday, October 24, 1858, for on that day Mordecai entertained his cousin, Abraham Lincoln. That was the autumn of Lincoln's seven debates with Stephen A. Douglas and the seven were all finished, the last having taken place at Alton, Friday, October fifteenth. The cousins had not met very often and they were men of just about the same age, being at that time near fifty. Abraham had been married sixteen years and had three sons living and one dead. Mordecai's mother, Mary Mudd Lincoln, who had lived with him the later years of her widowhood, was dead, and he was alone. I wonder what these two men talked about in the light of their domestic experience. I can imagine Abraham's asking Mordecai if he did not find it very lonely as he approached old age, for a man of fifty was no longer counted young. I can believe that Mordecai answered that he was indeed a very lonely man and had often thought of marriage, but that women were such unreasonable creatures he had decided to remain as he was. Abraham, in the light of all his experience, was hardly in a position to deny that women were, at least might be, unreasonable, but I can imagine his saying to Mordecai that even if married life brought with it some discomforts it had more than compensating joys: that he had an attractive, ambitious and aspiring wife who supplemented him at many points, and that he was very happy with his three boys and the memory of dear little Eddie who was dead.

I would give much for a shorthand report of their conversation and a snapshot of the two cousins as they sat and talked together. They were men of such kindred tastes and traits, so like in stature, appearance and temperament, it would be good to know what they talked about that quiet Sunday and what Mordecai thought about it afterward. This we may not now ascertain, but what we do know is that Abraham Lincoln in his characteristic moods and his attitude toward marriage was not alone in his family.

MELANCHOLIA AND ITS GREAT HARM.

THERE is a peculiar mental condition that goes by the name of melancholia and which is of broad interest. If one reads the statistics from state institutions, he will not think it so important, for not many of the inmates are in such institutions with that diagnosis on their record sheets. It seems more important when one considers the inmates of private institutions. But not even that study indicates the importance of the subject.

Melancholia is a disease of the emotions, and as such is almost outside the field of the mental. At least one foot is outside that field. A large part of those with melancholia are not insane and are not headed that way. Some profound and even helpless melancholics are clear mentally, have good judgment, and other excellent mental qualities.

President Lincoln inherited the Lincoln blues. He was given to spells of melancholy. By the exercise of his good, common sense and making constant use of his humor, story telling ability and capacity for mixing with the people, he kept his head above the waters of melancholy. There is no better example of a man's ability to overcome this variety of disordered moods by self-training and self-control than Abraham Lincoln furnishes.

MANIFEST IN WIT

Dr. Brill says there are "many authorities" for the existence of these moods described variously as the blues, melancholy, abstraction and mental depression.

"To any psychiatrist," Dr. Brill says, "the above-mentioned descriptions are quite plain. We know that in the ordinary case of manic-depressive psychosis the depressions are often followed by a phase of elation. As far as my investigations go, no distinct manic attacks were ever observed in Lincoln.

"There were no doubt numerous mild euphoric rises (general spirit of elation) which showed themselves in his incessant story telling and in his fluent wit.

CONTRASTING NATURES

"Judging by all the descriptions given of Lincoln's depressions, I feel that all one can say is that he was a schizoid-manic personality, now and then harassed by schizoid-manic moods. These moods never reached to that degree of profundity to justify the diagnosis of insanity. At all times Lincoln remained in touch with reality, his ego never sought refuge in insanity.

"Those who study the deeper recesses of the mind will readily understand the nature of this emotional surging. Two contrasting natures struggled with him—the inheritance from an untutored, roving and unstable father, who treated him brutally, and from a cheerful, fine, affectionate mother, from whom Lincoln claimed to have inherited his power of analysis, his logic, his mental activity and his ambition.

"His mental regressions were shallow and transient in comparison to the pathological escapes one sees in the psychoses and intoxications. But humor does furnish an escape from pain."

Why Lincoln Was Melancholy

By DR. W. A. EVANS

Questions pertinent to hygiene, sanitation and prevention of disease or matters of general interest, will be answered in this column. Where space will not permit, or the subject is not suitable, letters will be personally answered, subject to proper limitations and when a stamped addressed envelope is enclosed. Dr. Evans will not make diagnosis or prescribe for individual disease. Requests for such service cannot be answered.

R. S. writes: The inclosed article on intestinal poisoning seems to fit my case so well that I would be glad to have your opinion about it, together with a remedy or course of dieting that will overcome the trouble.

REPLY.

The article you inclosed is a clipping from The Literary Digest, which quoted Good Health. The title was, "Why Lincoln Was Melancholy." Good Health quoted from Herndon's "Life" as follows:

"John T. Stuart said Lincoln's melancholy was due to his abnormal digestion. His liver did not work properly, did not secrete bile; and his bowels were equally inactive. 'I used to advise him to take blue mass pills,' related Stuart and he did take them before he went to Washington and for five months while he was President, but when I came into Congress he told me he had ceased using them because they made him cross."

Good Health agrees with Stuart as to the cause of President Lincoln's melancholy, but does not agree as to the remedy. They quote Herndon as saying, "His skin was sallow, wrinkled, dry, and leathery," which, they say, proved "that he was toxic to an extraordinary degree."

Blue mass gave him temporary relief because it overcame his constipation. He quit using it because

it irritated, and after a time caused colitis. According to Herndon, "the great Lincoln's whole life was overshadowed by melancholy which was plainly the result of auto-intoxication." Good Health would have overcome all this by changing his bowel habits. This would have been accomplished principally by a change in diet. Instead of foods rich in protein they would have given lactose and dextrin, in addition to bread, cereals, vegetables. They might have given a culture of bacillus acidophilous as well. However, they hold that change in the diet is more important than giving the bacillus. This bacillus or some of its close relatives are all around us. They multiply in the intestines when there is enough sugar and starch there for them to thrive on.

Reduced to simpler terms, these authorities contend that President Lincoln got spells of melancholy when he became constipated. If, while President, he had ridden horseback and jumped fences, as President Roosevelt did, or spilt rails, as he himself had done in his youth, he might have escaped his troublesome disorder. Had he lived on wheat bran cereal, wheat bran bread, vegetables, fruit, and some milk, he might never have had constipation and possibly his complexion would not have been sallow.

This answers your question, I think.

How God Made Abraham Lincoln

Seeking a deliverer and a Saviour, the great God in His own purpose passed by the palace, and its silken delights.

He took a little babe in His arms and called to His side His favorite angel, the angel of sorrow.

Stooping He whispered, "O Sorrow, thou well beloved teacher, take thou this child of mine and make him great.

"Take him yonder cabin in the wilderness; make his home a poor man's home; plant his narrow path thick with thorns; cut his little feet with sharp rocks as he climbs the hill of difficulty.

"Make each footprint red with his own life blood; load his little back with burdens; give to him days of toil and nights of study and sleeplessness.

"Wrest from his arms whatever he loves; make his heart, through sorrow, as sensitive to the sigh of a slave as a thread of silk in a window is sensitive to the slightest wind that blows; and when you have digged lines of pain in his cheek and made his face more marred than the face of any man of his time, bring him back to me, and with him I will free 4,000,000 slaves."

That is how God made Abraham Lincoln.

Found: the Key to Lincoln's Strange Spells of Gloom

Chicago Scientist Discovers Sudden Changes in Weather Were to Blame

IF YOU suddenly start believing that you shouldn't marry the girl you're engaged to, don't rush over and tell her till you've looked at the thermometer.

If you pick up a dinner plate and draw back to let fly at your husband's head, hold it till you've peeped out at the weather.

Abraham Lincoln and his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, might have been spared just such crises in their lives had medical science a hundred years ago been able to tell them what it now knows.

Studying the relation of physical and mental health to sudden changes in the weather, Dr. William F. Petersen, Professor of Pathology at the University of Illinois, has been able, by comparing the dates in Lincoln's life with weather charts preserved by the United States Army in pioneer forts of the West, to chart the effect of violent temperature and barometric changes on Lincoln's life.

On Jan. 1, 1841, when Lincoln broke his engagement to Mary Todd, the temperature fell from well above freezing to 10 below zero, as shown in graph 1. When, after a few days, Lincoln's spirits began to improve, the temperature had again risen to above freezing. On the 17th, however, it began to fall abruptly, and Lincoln, despondent once more, talked of suicide. When Lincoln and Mary Todd were finally married, Nov. 4, 1842, the temperatures and barometric pressures, as shown in graph 2, were in a period of stability, and Lincoln, presumably, felt more secure.

Dr. Petersen has established that thin people, like Lincoln, enjoy warm weather, and react unfavorably to a cold wave. When the temperature drops violently, their blood pressure will first rise, then fall, plunging them into a state of mental depression and self-doubt. With stout people, like Mary Todd, the process is in general reversed. They do not enjoy hot weather, but cold weather may at times make them belligerent.

In January, 1857, when the temperature had dropped suddenly to subzero levels (graph 3), Lincoln was again depressed, but Mary Todd, true to her type, became sufficiently overenergetic to throw some kindling wood at her husband. This was the famous Stovewood Episode.

On May 10, 1860, Lincoln received the votes of the Illinois delegation as their presidential candidate. For the first few days of the month temperatures had been up around 70, but by the 10th they had dropped to the low 40's (graph 4). The afternoon of that same day, at a time when he had every reason to be elated, Lincoln was found sitting disconsolate in the back of the convention hall.

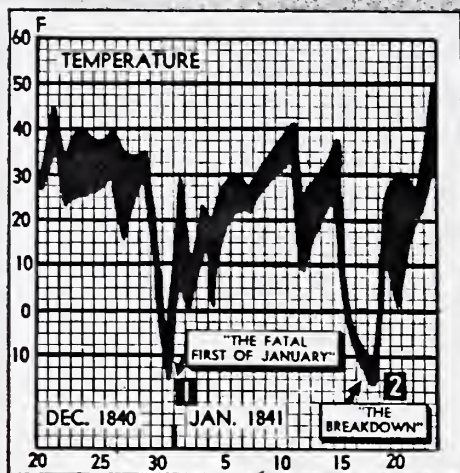
"Because weather is such an everyday affair," says Dr. Petersen, "possibly because of our preoccupation with detail and our interest in the particularistic rather than the general phenomena of disease, we have quite ignored this major factor, namely the weather, in its relation to mental and physical health. But more than a thousand years ago Hippocrates, the father of medicine, wrote, 'With the seasons men's diseases, like their digestive organs, suffer change'."



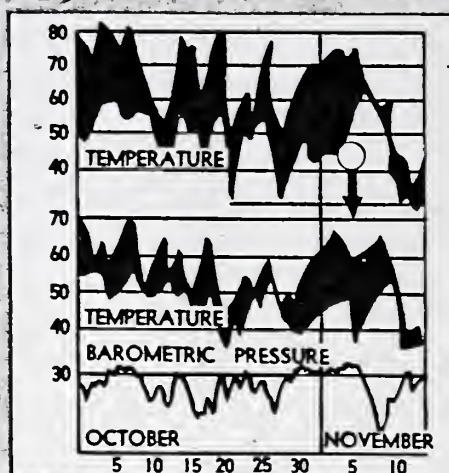
Like most plump persons, Mrs. Lincoln grew overenergetic when temperatures went down.
(Photos From Illinois State Historical Society)



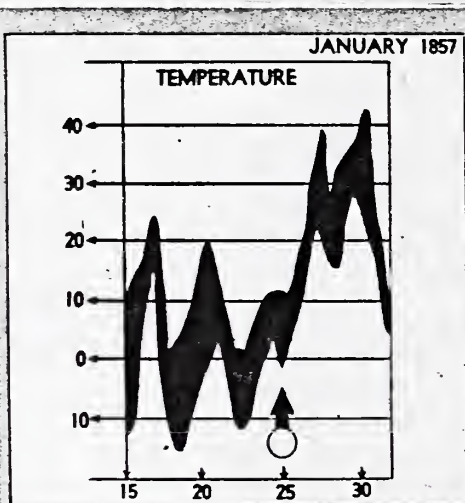
William F. Petersen, M.D., Professor of Pathology at University of Illinois, who has charted the effects of temperature and barometric pressures on Lincoln's life.



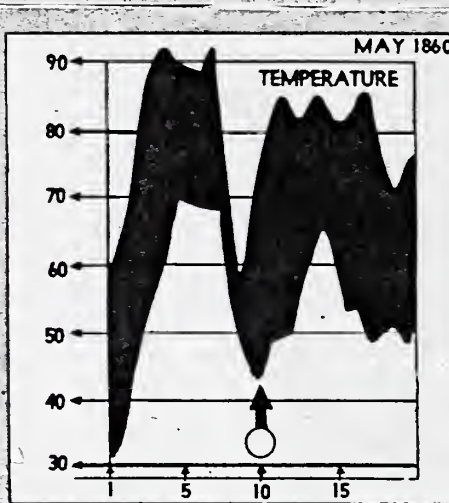
Graph 1 illustrates relation between temperature declines and (1) the breaking of Lincoln's engagement, and (2) his severe mental breakdown shortly after.



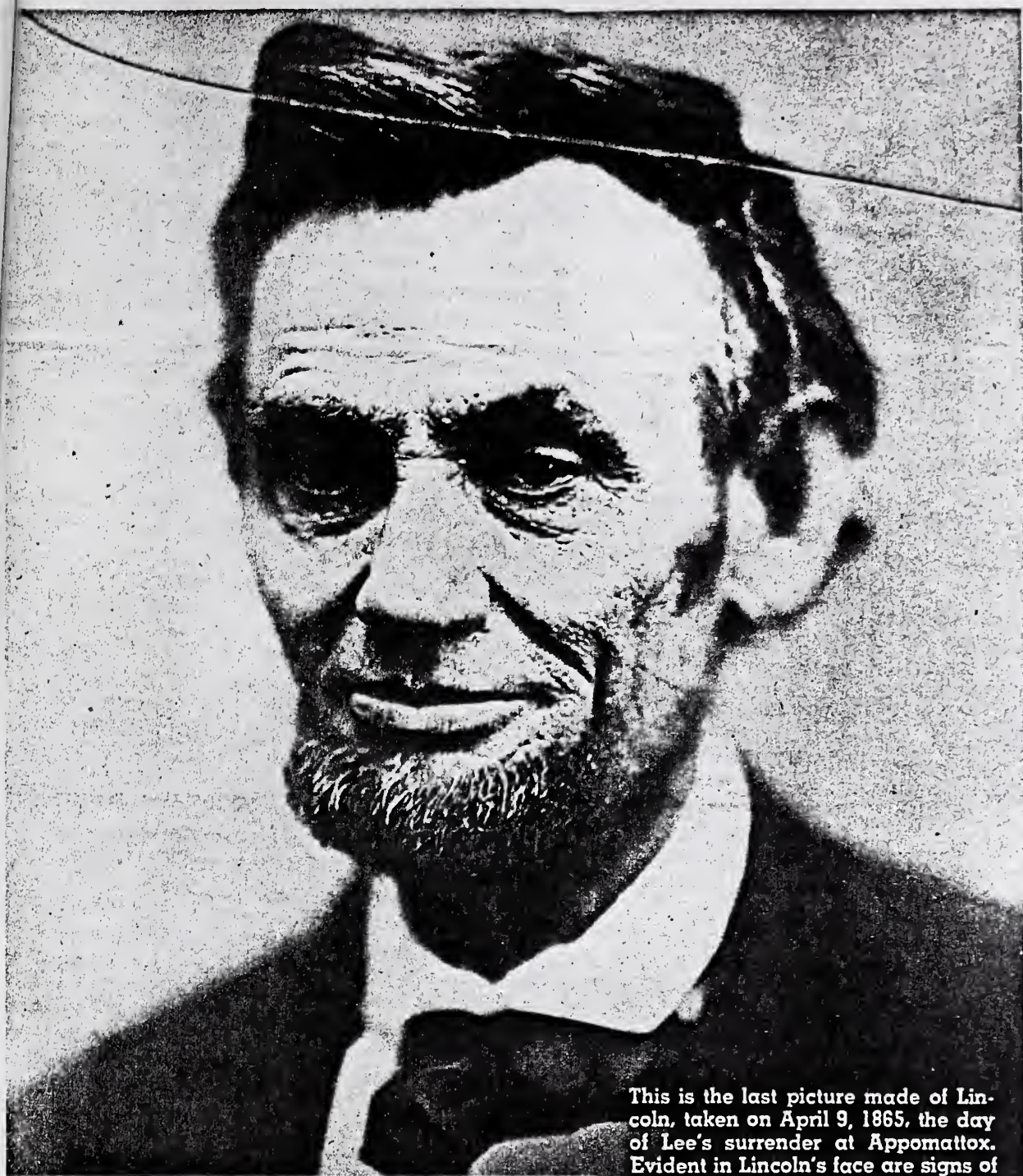
Graph 2 shows the stable barometric pressure and temperature which made Lincoln feel optimistic enough and secure enough to embark on matrimony.



Graph 3. Arrow points to the time when Mary threw kindling wood at Lincoln. It happened during the coldest January Illinois had experienced in many years.



Graph 4 shows how sudden drop in temperature in May, 1860, made Lincoln unhappy even though Illinois delegation had just chosen him as presidential candidate.



This is the last picture made of Lincoln, taken on April 9, 1865, the day of Lee's surrender at Appomattox. Evident in Lincoln's face are signs of the "spring fatigue" from which he was suffering, due to the unsettled weather conditions of the time. Note line across top of picture where original negative was cracked.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN AND DEPRESSION.

by

Roy R. Grinker, Sr.

The term depression has several meanings: moods varying in degree and duration, a symptom existing behind several clinical entities especially the psychopathies and a specific syndrome sometimes associated with mania. Is the syndrome genetically and physiologically based or is it psychogenetic and reactive? This unfortunate dichotomy has resulted in false terms such as endogenous and exogenous. The combination of mania and depression (at different times) has created bipolar and unipolar concepts. Among the modern adherents to a systems theory several of us have involved cognitive, behavioral and physiological components as well as depressive affects to avoid the concept of independent disorders⁽³⁾. These matters will be discussed in further detail later.

Concepts of depression as an hereditary disease based on its multiple occurrences in families, its chronic form, and alternation with mania occupied Kraepelin's attention for decades. Neuropathological studies were unsuccessful in finding essential lesions. Kraepelin also described some depressions with ^{Cognitive} deteriorations. Only recently has depression been linked with schizophrenia, affecting diagnoses

From the Psychosomatic and Psychiatric Institute of Michael Reese Hospital (PPI) and Medical Center, Chicago.

and resulting in the hedging term of schizo-affective schizophrenia. Also, depression occurs in pseudoneurotic schizophrenia and in one of the phases of recovery from schizophrenic psychoses. Furthermore, depression is difficult to separate from the loneliness of the Borderline syndrome.

- There have been many books written about Lincoln's life and experiences, and countless articles repeat over and over again the same information all difficult to verify. In fact when I visited Lincoln's home, now a shrine in Springfield, Illinois, and walked through the reconstituted village of New Salem, it was difficult to avoid becoming a Lincoln "buff". Unfortunately the authenticity of many statements by W.H. Herndon⁽⁴⁾ Lincoln's last law partner accepted at face value by some historians are considered by the citizens of southern Illinois as lies contrived by an envious dissolute man.

Lincoln's genealogy is confused because the family ^{had} moved many times from state to state⁽¹⁰⁾. There was evidence that his mother Nancy was illegitimate, but no evidence of genetic depressions exist. Herndon considered that Abe was also illegitimate and syphilitic. It seems clear, ^{however} that he inherited a fortunate set of genes from his mother. Mother furnished a happy childhood for him but with over-long nursing and dependency. He was adequately housed and fed for the times, from his birth on February 12, 1809

until the death of his mother from "milk sickness" in 1818 when Lincoln was 9 years old. ^{His} happy childhood with a background of common sense, stability, good will and patience ~~was then over~~.

Lincoln's world ^{than} became sad with his beloved mother's death. There remained only father with whom he was in conflict ^{receiving} many whippings and much cruelty. Lincoln's drive to read and learn was in conflict with his father's "axe and plough" philosophy. Father taught him "to work but not to love it". Although even his mother noted an inner reserve, Lincoln searched for a maternal love-object in all women. In 1819 father remarried a fine woman who as Lincoln's stepmother became his ally in furthering his studies and was good to him and became his "best friend in all the world", but Abe could never call her Mama ⁽²⁾.

At Puberty (age 12) signs of inner turmoil appeared. With his rapid growth, imbalance in the length of his arms and legs, ^(later recognized as a genetic disease) Lincoln turned to deep thoughtfulness, sought solitude, introspected and read everything he could find. He was very shy in the presence of girls. Although modest he had great physical courage. He reported several frightening dreams involving blood and ashes and envy of the dead. He also dreamed of eloping on horseback but always finding himself at home again - several times in the same dream. There seemed to be no escape.

Dr. Shutes⁽⁹⁾ ^{20 years ago} who wrote about Lincoln's emotional life stated that Lincoln had a depressive type of psychoneurosis within the bounds of so-called normality. In our recent research we have found that many depressives begin in adolescence just as did Lincoln's.

But this was not the end of Lincoln's mental troubles because he soon developed a full-fledged attack of depression or melancholia. He was in love with Ann Rutledge and fell apart after she died of "milk sickness" in 1885. Lincoln's symptoms were characteristic of depressive suffering. He tried to marry Mary ^{Avena}, an imperious psychopath, but her family rejected him. He ^{or a Re(?)}

broke off his engagement in 1837 after which he felt somewhat better. His friend and doctor, Dr. Henry diagnosed hypochondria brought on by depression. His symptoms were anxiety, preceded by overwork, exhaustion and insomnia, (he remained in bed all day long for six days in a severe "nervous breakdown"). Dr. Henry, his only friend, said "Lincoln had social and personal inadequacies and other guilt." At his worst he contemplated suicide, had fatigue, insomnia, mental suffering and great weight loss. In another attack he could not speak above a whisper for weeks.

At age 10, he suffered a head injury with subsequent symptoms of concussion. In 1828 his sister died in childbirth which upset him greatly. In 1860 Lincoln had another

depression with fatigue, constipation, double vision and isolation with a wish to die.

In young manhood, although he rarely was angry and his absorption lead people to think that he was crazy, he developed melancholia when Ann Rutledge whom he ^{really} loved died at the time when he had malaria. He wrote to Mary Owens with whom he later broke off: "My spirits are so low". He was lonesome in Springfield as expressed by ^{his} voice and facial appearance. Lincoln threatened to go through bankruptcy (his law practice suffered because of his depression) and knew that he was emotionally immature and therefore unsuccessful.

We have evidence that he was enraged with Mary Owens from a letter he wrote after they broke off. It was a vicious denunciation⁽⁷⁾. He was chronically angry at his father who had become internalized as his sadistic superego, in many ways responsible for his terrible depressions. Lincoln refused to see his dying father and did not attend his funeral. With "malice toward none" is not a correct statement.

Mary Todd Lincoln, whom Lincoln married on Nov. 4, 1842, was later to reveal her imperious psychopathy and Abe was depressed because he did not love her. He couldn't eat or sleep, lamented with gloomy forebodings. His apathy, gloom and suicidal thoughts indicated that he needed to be loved like a narcissistic child. He couldn't make decisions such as ^{discharging} his inept generals, thereby prolonging the war.

He spoke slowly and sat helpless in silence with his "soul filled with sadness". He had a strong sense of guilt with self-reproaches which were the introjected voices of his sadistic father. There was a constant conflict between his sex drives and his christian conscience resulting in psychosexual fears.

Lincoln was elected to Congress in 1847 for two years but was defeated for a second term and failed to win the senatorial race. People could not understand whether he was lost in thought or gloom. When aroused and in the company of men he told coarse stories with obscene allusions. His main defenses against depression were obsessive and compulsive uncertainty about his worth and as Mr. Goodhart in Vaillant's⁽¹²⁾ study of adaptation, he wore a mask to hide his feelings: "You could turn aside many a shaft if you could be clever". (Lincoln's jokes and anecdotes). These also gratified ^{his} ego's aggressive impulse.

Although Lincoln was more aggressive in politics than in courtship neither was extreme. For example he refused to invade Mexico and he transferred the power to declare war from the President to Congress which has only lately been revived⁽¹¹⁾.

Lincoln's experiences during the Civil War were based in general on the Country's lack of preparation for war even though wise men knew that it was inevitable, but only

the South made some preparations. Lincoln's ⁽¹⁴⁾generals were sadly inept and repeatedly blundered. Any beginning victory was negated by their need to regroup, rest, accumulate supplies, etc., permitting the enemy to slip out of their grasp. Lincoln had excellent plans and made good decisions which were erased by his ignorant generals who resented his "interference". Not until General Grant appeared on the scene did this unkempt heavy drinker succeed by his instinctive grasp of the fact that wars are not won by capturing territory but by killing the enemy. Our current Generals, as in World War II, seemed not to have profited by Grant's skill.

Violence disturbed Lincoln, especially ^{civil violence} in 1838, as it does to all of us now. The Civil War was horrible to Lincoln who wanted to die during the war, and he had many prophetic dreams of assassination. He did not want to abolish slavery although he hated it, but to prevent its extension. The war was an attempt to hold the country together, and defeats such as Bull Run were shattering to him and he became a "chronic melancholic". The deaths of his two sons, Eddie and Willie, almost flattened him as they did Mary who became a shocked nagging hysterical. As a result Lincoln spent more and more time away from home and spoiled Todd his only remaining son hopelessly.

Lincoln's absence of self-respect: "No one will remember me" and the Owens' accusation that his mother was "baseborn" added to his hate against injustice. His honesty was overly excessive and as a lawyer (Honest Abe) he could not defend the guilty. He was emotionally juvenile and a very poor loser. Much of his uncertainty stemmed from his fear of his own aggressive impulses. Although the truth was different he considered that his cabinet was above suspicion. What gave rise to the Proclamation of Emancipation when, although he hated slavery, he did not consider that the goal of the war was to free the slaves? It seems that this great document was in truth a political solution for the countless disturbing military defeats and to honor the dead. Correct or not it took over 100 years to implement fully.

As we have stated before, he was shy with women but he always searched for a full bosomed woman from whom he *sought* maternal solace. But he added to his guilt when he married Mary Todd whom he never loved. He "reasoned himself" into marriage and both he and his friend ^{Mr.} Speed had forebodings regarding marriage.

Although his childhood was happy with much excessive gratification from mother and step-mother, his early adult life was filled with excesses of study in legal training, futile wooing and final marriage and many disillusion, disappointments and depression (the syndrome of the 3 D's).

As far as we know there were no obvious biogenetic precursors to his depressive syndrome, but many and repeated experiential factors. A modern psychiatrist would diagnose him as a depressed character with severe depressive breakdowns.

After Lincoln's death, Mary became "hopelessly" psychotic and Todd or Tad ^{as he was called} with the help of friends railroaded her into an Illinois State Hospital for the Insane. She was quickly released but this affair resulted in a change in Illinois laws to the end that commitment could only be accomplished by due process of law. In this respect Mary Lincoln without intention performed a great service to the Country as contrasted with the current Russian "Psychiatric Terror".

Here are a few of the summarized etiological concepts. Abraham⁽¹⁾ wrote of repressed hostility in oral characters but currently we see many angry depressives of which Lincoln was one. Bowlby contends that during the early phases of development it is not the disappointment of oral supplies that is important, but the frustration of affectional needs. Really Lincoln had too much ^{early} affection. Freud wrote that loss of object-relations by means of introjection results in the shadow of the object falling on the ego, which becomes the target of internally directed hostility ^{originally} to the object.

Throughout the various theoretical formulations about depression, a number of terms are more or less universal. These include repressed aggression, guilt, atonement, orality, introjection, identification, and self-esteem. The subtle differences in the ^{re}theoretical formulations are less significant

than their adherence to the reification of concepts.

Rado⁽³⁾ wrote about the despairing cry for love and narcissistic needs creating guilt, atonement, and forgiveness. Gero considered anxiety about genitality a source of regression to the oral stage. Klein wrote about the universal depressive position of all infants, and those who could not introject good objects could not retain their self-esteem. Bibring also wrote about loss of self-esteem when the ego is helpless to achieve success.

Jacobson⁽¹⁵⁾ considered the depressed subject to be intolerant of disappointment so that the self becomes the loved object with withdrawal from reality, loss of self-esteem based on pathological development of the ego and superego. Aaron Beck pointed out, as did Grinker, that proneness to defeat, devaluation of the self, and a negative view of the future constitutes more than an affective process but includes physiological and behavioral changes. Bowlby contends that attachment to the mother is a social bond the loss of which results in weeping, anger and apathetic mourning in the infant⁽⁸⁾.

Depressions are common among most people at sometime in the universal wake of frustrations and disappointments. But, these are usually mild and short-lasting. Severe depressions requiring hospitalization constitute 15% of state hospital admissions and 50% of private hospitalizations.

The ratio of females to males has been 2 to 1. Among them hopelessness, sadness, and boredom appear as their roles as mothers or housekeepers for the females, and for the males when goal-seeking creative ambitions, fail, and sexual and procreative functions, cease or diminish.

On the other hand, depression may be the first sign of an undiscovered fatal illness, such as malignancy; or the first indication in a young person of an impending schizophrenic breakdown. In the elderly, removal from jobs, old neighborhoods, and death of relatives may give rise to depression as a reaction to "giving up."

Insomnia, hypochondriasis, alcoholism, hopelessness suggest the possibility of hidden suicidal ideas. They can be brought out into the open by direct questioning and treated with adequate medication. Patients who are not willing to discuss suicidal intent (such open questions are not harmful) are determined to kill themselves and cannot be prevented. An open expression of determination or promise not to suicide within a specified time gives the therapist a reasonable opportunity to treat the primary cause.

Depressions have been described even in ancient writings as far back as the first century A.D. with little difference from current descriptions. In the Bible, Job's description of his depression vividly portrays the severe depressions of today. In varying degrees, patients are sad,

dejected, and apprehensive. They are overwhelmed by doubts, fears, and self-accusations, even referring to misdeeds of decades before. They also hypochondrically complain of numerous physical symptoms. But, they are sleepless, awakening in the morning to feel at their worst, improving at night as the day of uselessness is at an end. Appetite is diminished, and many lose much weight. Depressives express hopelessness and helplessness, lose faith and optimism for any improvement. Some are agitated pacing up and down asking the same questions over and over as if wanting reassurance, but not listening to the answers.

There is no question that some depressions run in families and thus have a significant biogenetic (hereditary) factor. Nevertheless, other members of the family with depressions may serve as a source of identification and become a model for the developing child. Common to the early premorbid signs are the sulk-prone reactions of the child to early disappointments with which healthy children easily cope. However, we are increasingly recognizing that overt typical depressive syndromes do occur in young children.

The familial incidence of depression and mania suggest a strong biogenetic factor related to the cyclicity of the illness. The catecholamines (secreted by the adrenal medulla) have been implicated. It has been suggested that low concentrations of nonrepinephrin in the brain are related to depression and high concentrations to mania.

These hypotheses determine our choice of drug treatment. But, manic depressives also show an abnormal diabetic-like blood sugar. Thus, they are variable in mood, in glucose metabolism, and in response to psychotropic drugs. This suggests that the basic component is an inherited hormonal variability that requires shifts in mode of treatment during the patient's lifetime⁽⁶⁾.

At the present time, we know that many neurotics are depressed and that other depressives are psychotic. Some are unipolar and other bipolar (mania plus depression).

Progress towards more accurate clinical definition of the depressive syndrome (as well as other entities) and isolation of subcategories of this global construct has been slow. It is only from empirically sound subdivisions⁽³⁾ of depression that meaningful correlation with nonpsychological data could further our knowledge of etiology, course, prognosis, and therapy.

For a phenomenological study at my Institute I set up two major objectives; an improvement in the clinical definition of depressions and the establishment of meaningful subgroups. Furthermore over a period of 6 years we attempted to determine why patients became depressed⁽³⁾.

Winokur⁽¹³⁾ has adopted the theoretical etiological "spectrum" idea. In the family history of depressions are alcoholism, sociopathy, blood dyscrasias and color blindness.

Unfortunately the definition of alcoholism and sociopathy are vague and different with various ethnic groups.

Theoretical neuropharmacology holds that depressed patients have a decreased availability of *norepinephrin* and therefore the administration of MAO inhibits the oxygenation of *norepinephrin*. Beck's triad of psychological processes includes defect, decrease in self-esteem, loss of confidence in the future, all leading to cognitive distortion.

The use of outcome or counting the number of precipitating factor does not contribute much to the development of depression although early repetitive disappointments, sulk-prone personalities, and obsessional neurotic backgrounds seem to play roles as precursors.

Mendelson ⁽⁶⁾ states that depressions are multifaceted syndromes or disorders involving cognitive, behavioral and physiological components as well as depressive affect.

There is some suggestion that a shift in central control is involved in that higher level cortical physiological functions are weakened prior to suicide of depressed patients. Tabachnick's studies of 15 suicides revealed that 12 had been drinking heavily before the end, contrasted with 9 of 15 accidental deaths. Barbiturates or other medication to promote sleep are frequently ingested chronically or in excess before the suicide. On the other hand sleeplessness due to anxiety associated, with or without depression, may

also be the final pre-suicidal precipitant. If this hypothesis were correct the task becomes one of control of cortical vigilance without sacrificing sleep.

In our study of depressions a single precipitating event was rarely isolated. Instead, a number of severe - personal disappointments or stresses occurred. Likewise the psychodynamic constellations evidenced during depressed episodes were varied in their behavioral expressions.

This leads to the suggestion that the various dynamic formulations involved during psychoanalytic investigations of depressives are not representative of causes except as stressors long before the onset and that later they are augmented as the results of the depressive process. I postulate the following circle of events. (1) Through a series of variable precipitating events the inner conflicts and unresolved problems or unrealistic techniques of problem-solving weaken a susceptible ego. (2) The ego-depletion weakens the ego's problem-solving functions, still further narrows its span of control, and exposes the conflicts which were intensified by external problems and which contributed in the first place to weakening a susceptible ego. (3) The ego-depletion and regression is documented by the loss of esteem, the felt-hopeless regarding the attainment of goals, and the acceptance of personal defect as the responsibility for failure. Secondarily the use of stereotyped

tasks and the blocking out of change are defenses adopted to avoid greater responsibility, more failure and hopelessness. These defenses are facilitated by the nonacceptance of communication and information.

Ego depletion, lack of self-esteem, regressed behavior - and felt-hopelessness, and the concomitant exposure of severe intrapsychic conflicts prepare the patient for suicide providing the sufficient and final precipitant is present.

I do not know - despite lengthy clinical experience which included an average expectable suicide rate - what the dynamics are that pushes the patient from thought to action just as I do not know the final precipitating factors for depression itself. Perhaps we would find it easier and possibly more satisfying if we discussed suicide from philosophic, existential or moral points of view. Unfortunately, these considerations of the meaning or worth of life leave unsolved the question of the ontogenesis of hope and its accompanying illusions, which every man needs to maintain value and purpose, and to let natural events take care of the dying.

In our large series of 120 depressed patients we have established the existence of five factors, which are patterns of traits descriptive of the "feelings and concerns" of these patients. These factors illustrate aspects of

patients, and, although they indicate what may be predominate for some, any single patient may show evidence of more than one factor. They are not mutually exclusive; nor do they attempt to illustrate all aspects of any single patient. These factors may be roughly characterized as follows:

- (I) A factor exemplified by Lincoln describing characteristics of hopelessness, helplessness, failure, sadness, unworthiness, guilt, and internal suffering. There is self-concept of "badness."
- (II) A factor describing characteristics of concern with material loss and an inner conviction that this feeling state (and the illness) could be changed if only the outside world would provide something.
- (III) A factor describing characteristics of guilt over wrong-doing, wishes to make restitution, and a feeling that the illness was brought on by the patient himself and is deserved.
- (IV) A factor describing characteristics of "free anxiety."
- (V) A factor describing characteristics of envy, loneliness, martyred affliction, secondary gain with gratification from the illness, and attempts by provoking guilt to force the world into making redress.

Factor patterns were developed from the combination of 15 factors of trait lists of feelings and concerns and overt behaviors. As a result four factor patterns were elicited from which clinical profiles can be described to serve as fairly sharp hypotheses for future testing. The factor

patterns are as follows:

(A) Feelings: dismal, hopeless, loss of self-esteem, slight guilt feelings, Behaviour: isolated, withdrawn, apathetic, speech and thinking slowed with some cognitive disturbances (Lincoln). (B) Feelings: hopeless with low self-esteem, - considerable guilt feelings, much anxiety. Behaviour: agitation and clinging demands for attention. (C) Feelings: abandonment and loss of love. Behaviour: agitated, demanding hypochondriacal. (D) Feelings: gloom, hopelessness, and anxiety. Behaviour: demanding, angry, provocative.

Our experience when careful psychiatric work-ups were done and discussed in conference, was that rarely was there a depression with a single, clear-cut, participating event or experience. We found almost invariably a series of events, such as in Lincoln's life, that led up to the clinical illness.

I object to the dichotomy between "exogenous" and "endogenous" depression. This is a reversion to the nature-nurture reductionist-humanist concept. If there is a genetic basis, then it is present to some degree in all individuals with depression. Likewise, the so-called "involutional melancholia" makes no sense⁽⁵⁾. There's no evidence for it being related to the menopause, although barrels of hormones have been injected into depressed middle-aged women.

There seems to be a reciprocal relationship between biochemical (pharmacological), and psychological factors. Starting at either arc of the cycle, any transaction may initiate the whole process. It can start with a biochemical alteration, or a psychological alteration, and the ^{end} process can be the same no matter where its beginning. The difficulty is in separating the indices from the more basic elements of the process (up to now we feel that they must be studied simultaneously). The levels of complexity are equal on both sides. Exact biochemical and rough clinical estimates are really not correlatable. The biochemist has the responsibility for using the clinical phenomenon, as we now know it.

Finally it is amazing that with all of his handicaps and disappointments, with his insecurity and feelings of inferiority and his subsequent bad marriage, childrens' death and subsequent severe depressions, Lincoln became one of if not the greatest of our Presidents. What would he have accomplished if he had not suffered so much? To this question there is no answer except the vague cliché that creativity may arise even from the mentally disturbed!

REFERENCES.

1. Abraham, K.: Notes on the Psychoanalytic Investigations of Manic Depressive Insanity and Allied Conditions in Selected Papers on Psychoanalysis. London, Hogarth Press, 1911.
2. Clark, L. Pierce: Lincoln: A Psycho-Biography. New York, Chas. Scribners Sons, 1933.
3. Grinker, R.R. Sr., Miller, J., Sabshin, M., Nunn, R., and Nunnally J: The Phenomena of Depression. New York, Paul C. Hoeber, 1961.
4. Herndon, W.H.: Life of Lincoln. N.Y. 10 Volumes, 1930.
Robt. Todd Lincoln's papers were given to the Library of Congress in 1947.
5. Klerman, G. L.: Affective Disorders in (A.M. Nicholi, Jr. editor) The Harvard Guide to Modern Psychiatry. Cambridge, Mass. Harvard Press, 1977 pages 253-281
6. Mendelson, M.: Psychoanalytic Concepts of Depression 2nd Ed. Flushing, N.Y. Spectrum Press, 1974.
7. Oates, S.B.: With Malice Toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln. New York, Harper & Row, 1977.
8. Offer, D and Freedman, D.X. (editors): Modern Psychiatry and Clinical Research. N.Y. Basic Books, 1972.
9. Shutes, M.H.: Lincoln's Emotional Life Philadelphia, Dorrence & Co., Inc. 1957.

10. Thomas, B.P.: Abraham Lincoln. A Biography.
New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1952.
11. The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln.
Rutgers University Press, Rutgers, N.J., 1953.
12. Vaillant, G.E.: Adaptation to Life
Boston, Little Brown & Co., 1977.
13. Winokur, G.: Genetic Patterns As They Affect
Psychiatric Diagnoses in Psychiatric Diagnosis
edited by W.M. Rackoff, H. C. Staner and
H.B. Kedward. New York, Brunner/Mazel, 1977
pages 128-152.
14. Williams, T.H.: Lincoln and His Generals
New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1952.
15. Wolpert, E. A.: (editor) Manic-Depressive Illness:
History of a Syndrome. New York, Int. Universities
Press, 1977.

THE
LIBRARY
OF THE
MUSEUM
OF
COMPARATIVE ZOOLOGY
AT
HARVARD UNIVERSITY

