

KENNEDY LIBRARY FORUMS
“THE POLITICAL GENIUS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN”
DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 18, 2005
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JOHN SHATTUCK: Good afternoon. I’m John Shattuck, CEO of the Kennedy Library Foundation and on behalf of myself and Deborah Leff, the Director of the Library, I want to welcome you to the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. As you can see, our guest of honor has packed the house and thanks to her and our distinguished moderator we have a real treat in store for you this afternoon.

Before introducing both of our guests, I’d like to recognize the institutions that make these Kennedy Library Forums possible. A special thanks to Bank of America, a lead sponsor of our Forum series. We’re also grateful to our other sponsors, Boston Capital, the Lowell Institute, and the Corcoran Jennison Companies, as well as our media sponsors, the *Boston Globe*, Boston.com, and WBUR, which broadcasts all Kennedy Library Forums on Sunday evenings at eight.

Abraham Lincoln is perhaps the most studied of all American presidents, and also the president perhaps most admired by his successors. President Kennedy was certainly no exception to that, and he referred frequently to Lincoln as a model for what presidents should aspire to be. In the 1960 campaign at the National Press Club speech, Senator Kennedy then pointed out with his characteristic wry humor that, “While many presidents were good men with good intentions, there’s a Lincoln Room in the White House but no Buchanan Room.” Kennedy was fascinated by Lincoln’s relationship to his cabinet, which he observed had been carefully chosen to reflect the many elements dividing the country. He was

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impressed by the fact that Lincoln had summoned the cabinet to a meeting on the Emancipation Proclamation and then told them, “I have gathered you together to hear what I have written down. I do not wish your advice about the main matter that I have determined for myself.” Kennedy characterized this moment as the essence of great presidential leadership and then invoked Lincoln’s legacy in proclaiming, as other presidential candidates have done, “The time has come to demand that kind of leadership again.”

Now, at a time when the quality and character of presidential leadership are being very closely examined and critics are claiming that the incumbents may be asserting powers that go beyond the Constitution, it is well worth looking back at Lincoln’s presidency to understand better the quality of great presidential leadership. What was the secret to Lincoln’s leadership? Only a great historian can unlock it for us, and this afternoon we are very fortunate to be in the presence of a great presidential historian. Doris Kearns Goodwin has outdone herself in an extraordinary new book, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, which is on sale at our bookstore and which Doris will be delighted to sign after our forum today.

Doris takes us into the political world of President Lincoln in a way few other historians have done. The dean of Lincoln scholars, James McPherson, wrote a glowing review of Doris’s book in the *New York Times* last month that summarizes her achievement. “More books about Abraham Lincoln line the shelves of libraries than about any other American. Can there be anything new to say about our 16th

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President? Surprisingly, the answer is yes. Having previously offered insights into Lyndon Johnson, the Kennedys, and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Doris Kearns Goodwin has written an elegant, incisive study of Lincoln and leading members of his cabinet that will appeal to experts, as well as to those whose knowledge of Lincoln is an amalgam of history and mythology.”

Doris Goodwin published her first book *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream* in 1977. Highly acclaimed by reviewers, the book became a *New York Times* bestseller and a standard against which other Johnson biographies would be measured. Her second book, *Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, was published in 1986 and received similar praise, spending five months on the *New York Times* best seller list and later forming the basis for an ABC Television miniseries.

In 1995, Doris received the Pulitzer Prize in history for her monumental work *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The Home Front in World War II*, which solidified her role as one of America’s favorite historians. Then in 1997 she turned her eye toward America’s favorite past time and wrote a memoir, *Next Year* about growing up in Brooklyn as a Dodger’s fan which also climbed quickly onto the *New York Times* best seller list. Doris is a frequent television and radio commentator on politics, history and baseball. And I can attest from personal experience that she’s also a terrific tennis player and the person whose partner you want to be if you're playing doubles. [laughter]

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To engage Doris as a partner in conversation here on the Kennedy Library stage, we're very fortunate to have one of America's best known and most respected radio journalists, Scott Simon. Scott is the host of National Public Radio's award-winning *Weekend Edition*. He joined NPR as Chicago bureau chief in 1977 and since then he's reported from all 50 states, covered every presidential campaign, served as a correspondent in eight wars, and taken his listeners all over the world.

Scott has been showered with awards for his reporting including two DuPont Awards, a Peabody Award, and a Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award. And like Doris Goodwin, Scott is a rabid baseball fan. In his case, for the Chicago Cubs, the team that even manages to outdo the Red Sox and the Dodgers in breaking hearts with fans. His 2000 book about the Cubs, *Home and Away: Memoir of a Fan*, topped the *L.A. Times* best seller list for several weeks and endeared him even more to his radio listeners, particularly in Chicago. Please join me in giving a warm Kennedy Library welcome to Doris Kearns Goodwin and Scott Simon.
[applause]

SCOTT SIMON: I can't tell if they're worried that we'll talk about baseball or worried that we won't talk about it.

DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN: Somehow I think it will come up anyway.

MR. SIMON: I think it'll come up.

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MS. GOODWIN: Lincoln would have been for the underdog team no matter what.

MR. SIMON: Yes, okay. Well, let's get into an aspect of Mr. Lincoln's character.

AUDIENCE: Louder.

MR. SIMON: Louder? (booming voice) Let's get into an aspect of... [laughter] Many of us, as we learn about Abraham Lincoln really from grade school, might have some immaculate idea that the country was going through torturous, restive events in 1860 and suddenly there was this man that was utterly perfect for the job of President of the United States. He was from the Illinois prairies; he was famously eloquent. The great issue of the time, slavery, had been something that he had run in and out of his mind, and out of his moral and emotional character and he had a rare ability to communicate with the American people and to reduce his ideas to words and to convey them to the American people. But in 1860 that wasn't apparent at all, was it?

MS. GOODWIN: So true. I mean, his external resume was probably as thin as one could imagine running for the Presidency. Only one single term in Congress, a decade before, two failed Senate races, no administrative experience. In fact, they teased that the only thing he knew how to do in his office was to keep the notes of what to do in his big stovepipe hat. He didn't even have an organized scheme in

his office as a lawyer. When he won the nomination they weren't even sure his name was Abraham. Some of the journalists called him Abram. They called him a fourth rate lawyer. They said he couldn't speak good grammar, and they were stunned that he had actually become the Republican nominee for the President of the United States. So it's only, you're absolutely right, us looking back and thinking he emerged from the prairie full blown as Abraham Lincoln.

MR. SIMON: He was, of the people who were running for President then, he was the least worldly, the least sophisticated, perhaps the most eloquent, certainly the most eloquent we would say with the advantage of hindsight now. Might have been nominated because he was the least offensive and he packed the hall. He had the virtue of the convention being in his home state.

MS. GOODWIN: You're so right. I think part of it was that he was in the middle of the party, Seward and Chase, Seward having been the Governor and Senator from New York, Chase the Governor and Senator from Ohio, they were on the left, they were liberals on the left; and Bates, who was an elder statesman from Missouri, is on the right. So Lincoln is in the middle of the party, so in that sense they thought he was a safe choice for the general election. But also, unlike the other three, he had made no enemies along the way. Each one of them had made enemies, each one had people that didn't want him as the President, and Lincoln's strategy was brilliant. He said to them, to the supporters of each one of those men, "If you can't get your first love, come to me as your second love." And he didn't

attack any one of the other three guys. They were all busy attacking one another. And he also did, as you say, he packed the hall.

What happened is there was a Republican National Committee meeting, and each one of these other guys wanted it in their home state, the convention, so Lincoln's guy just said, "Well, you know, we have the State of Illinois, there's no frontrunner there at all, why not that as a compromise choice?" Once he knew it was in Chicago, he gave everybody discounted train seats to come to Chicago. And the day that the balloting took place, Seward's people were so sure he was going to win they had stayed up drinking champagne the night before, they were somewhat drunk the next morning. They had this huge parade going to the convention hall, and they stayed outside in the street too long. And meanwhile, Lincoln's supporters had issued duplicate tickets to come into the hall to all their guys. So Seward's guys are out parading in the hall, they never could get in the convention hall. Which meant that every time Lincoln's name was mentioned, huge, "Yea, Lincoln," and Seward was supposed to be the frontrunner, and his people weren't there to yell quite as loudly for him. So he was very shrewd, very canny and knew what he was doing.

MR. SIMON: First thing I loved about your book was the way you, in a sense, revivify people like William Seward and Salmon P. Chase and Edward Bates and Simon Cameron, and even Edwin Stanton. People, those of us who have read a lot about Lincoln, sort of in a sense we acquire the idea that they were merely acolytes to his career, or they were the stars that sort of orbited around him. But you

revivify them as people who were considerable personages in their own right, each of whom really thought that he was—And the argument could be made—They would have been very fine presidents on their own.

MS. GOODWIN: You know, they're so much bigger. Each one of them is bigger than anyone on our current scene today, that's the honest truth, which shows how big Lincoln was to have mastered them all. And I found each of them quite affecting, their own arc of their story. I mean, Seward, for example, so irrecoverably disappointed, it seemed, that he was not nominated, everybody thought that he should have been; the founder of the Republican Party, the anti-slavery order of the decade. And yet, once he gets into Lincoln's cabinet... Oh, at first he thinks he'll be prime minister and controlling him. He understands within a couple of months that Lincoln is unlike anyone he's known. They not only become allies and partners, they become great friends. I mean, Lincoln loves nothing more than going to Seward's house at night, putting his long legs up on a chair. And Seward was like Churchill in my judgment. He would drink all day long and somehow manage to work at the same time. [laughter] He would smoke his Havana cigars, he took snuff, he was a big character. Even in the 1850s, it was said he had dinner parties at his house where the northerners and the southerners would come and he would serve 17 courses and 5 different wines, at the end of which they'd be hugging one another, purple with the grape of the wine. So Lincoln loved him, they used to tell stories together. They both had a great sense of humor. He loved to go to the theater, as Lincoln did, and they went to the

theater a hundred times during the presidency to be able to escape and relax in a way that some of these other characters couldn't.

And then almost opposite to Seward is Chase who thinks that any kind of liquor or any kind of theater or novels are evil and sinful, and he goes at night and writes in his diary his ambitions to be President. And he tells jokes in his diary that he can't deliver with ease when he actually does it in front of an audience. And yet, I think in some ways, his relentless drive for the Presidency, which never ends, unlike Seward's, is in part because he had such a sad private life. I mean, death stalks all of these people and in his case, his first wife died at 22, whom he loved so much, at childbirth. The next wife at 25; the next one at 32. And then he never marries again, has this one daughter who he wants to become his surrogate wife, really, but more importantly his first lady. Sends her to boarding school for ten years in New York, she emerges as the most beautiful woman of her age, loves conversation, she is what Princess Diana was for us to Washington. Mary Lincoln hates her, needless to say, because she has a rival court. And he never does quite come to understand Lincoln's greatness because he wants to run against him. But he's an incredibly large character.

And then Bates, on the opposite from Chase, he is very ambitious as a young man, goes to Congress as a young man, state legislature. But then falls so deeply in love with his wife that his family ambitions diminish his political ambitions because he can't bear being away from her.

MR. SIMON: Prolific father.

MS. GOODWIN: Rather prolific, they had 17 children. So he's not away from her very long. [laughter] So each one...

MR. SIMON: They didn't have orthodontia in those days, so.

MS. GOODWIN: And he has that horrible beard, which makes it hard to imagine them even being in bed together. [laughter] I don't know why I said that, I just...

MR. SIMON: And it's not been ... (inaudible). I'll buy the book for you. Didn't want to talk Doris out of a sale, I beg pardon.

[laughter]

MS. GOODWIN: Go on sir.

MR. SIMON: Oh, I forget where we were. And a family that was divided between the Union and the Confederacy.

MS. GOODWIN: You mean within the Lincoln family, yes.

MR. SIMON: No, Bates.

MS. GOODWIN: Oh, Bates. Oh, yes, Bates had grown up in Virginia and owned slaves. Came to Missouri and obviously was in a border state in Missouri, and one of his sons was in the Confederate Army, and many of his relatives were in the Confederate Army, as were Mary Lincoln’s relatives as well. So that's one of the incredible, tortuous parts of this war that it does, as we all know, divide brother and brother.

MR. SIMON: In one of the really strange circumstances of history, if I could get you to tell the story of when Stanton and Lincoln met when they were both lawyers?

MS. GOODWIN: This is one of the most remarkable transformations in a relationship that one can imagine. Edwin Stanton came from Ohio and was a nationally celebrated lawyer and was making quite a lot of money as a lawyer when Lincoln was still only known in Illinois. And it happened that Stanton got a huge patent case in 1855 that would have made him a very wealthy man. But the case was going to be tried in Illinois, so they thought they needed someone of counsel who might know the judges in Illinois. So the partner comes to interview Lincoln, is a little disconcerted because Lincoln looks a little disheveled. They go to Lincoln’s house and Mary hails down from the window, “Is it business or politics, which one?” And then sends Lincoln down in his slippers. But they talked to him and they figured that he’d be pretty good.

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And Lincoln is so excited, he knows who Stanton is, it'll be a huge case where he's given a big retainer. He works all summer on his brief, but then it turns out that the case gets moved back to Ohio and they don't need him anymore. But they don't tell Lincoln, so he continues to work on his brief. He goes to Cincinnati, so excited. He goes up to Stanton right away and in his typically affable way, Lincoln is such a genial, good natured person. We'll talk later about his temperament, which is so different from the one I thought was going to be there. And he goes up to him and says, "Let's go up to the courthouse together." And evidently, Stanton takes one look at Lincoln who's got a stain on his shirt, his hair's disheveled, his trousers are too short and his sleeves are too short and his hands are hanging out. And he says to his partner, "We've got to get rid of this long-armed ape, he will hurt our cause." They don't let him go to the courthouse with him, they never open the brief, they never allow him to sit with them in the boarding house.

And Lincoln leaves Cincinnati so sad that he says he never even wants to come back to the city again. Yet, unimaginably, six years later when his first Secretary of War Cameron fails, everybody comes to him and says, "We know who you've got to appoint as Secretary of War. Stanton's your man, he's brilliant, he's tough, he's passionate. There's no question, he is your best man." He is able to put that past hurt behind him, give Stanton the job; and the two become so close that Stanton ends up loving him more than anyone outside of his family. So it's incredible what this man was able to do to have that internal self confidence to not allow his ego, which could have been hurt by smaller things, to prevent him from looking in the

long-term at what was best for the country, and thereby best for him and his legacy.

MR. SIMON: Did Mr. Lincoln put all these rivals in his cabinet, to use an old—I think it was a Lyndon Johnson phrase, you would know—Because he wanted them on the inside of tent pissing out? [laughter]

MS. GOODWIN: That's exactly right. I mean, what Lyndon Johnson said, “You'd rather have them on the inside of the tent pissing out than on the outside of the tent pissing in.” Lyndon Johnson knew how to say these things in a colorful way. [laughter]

MR. SIMON: We're trying to keep this at a scholarly level here.

MS. GOODWIN: We are in a library, after all.

MR. SIMON: Yes, absolutely.

MS. GOODWIN: But he also understood, he said at the time, the country was in peril. He knew as soon as he was elected that the states had started seceding from the South. And so he said, “These are the strongest men in the country, and I need to have the strongest men. I can't let my personal worry about whether they're going to supersede me take precedence over the fact that I need them there.” It was such a smart thing to do because they were not only his rivals, but they

represented, as John said early on, people from different parts of the party. Some had been former Democrats, some had been former Whigs, former Free Soilers, former Liberty Party guys, which meant that every day in the White House, he’s confronting a range of opinion. It’s not like a current White House where you may have somebody just mirroring your own opinions because you’re so likeminded. And it meant he had to sharpen his thinking, he had to question his own decisions. And it was a brilliant thing to do.

Now, they hated each other, some of them wouldn’t even go into each other’s offices. They would call each other liar, scoundrel, thief, but somehow he got them all working toward saving the Union.

MR. SIMON: Did they all begin with the idea that they could somehow use Mr. Lincoln to their own purposes?

MS. GOODWIN: I think they all did. Yes, I think it took each one of them— Seward was the first to come around, and then I think I would say that Bates was probably the second. Chase never did; in fact, Chase tried to run against Lincoln in 1864, said terrible things about him, was using the Treasury where he did a great job as Treasury Secretary, and Lincoln keeps him on even though he knows that he’s trying to undermine him. So long as he’s doing a good job raising the funds that are needed for the war. And then again, unimaginably, even after Lincoln outmaneuvers him, clearly Chase doesn’t even get close to getting the nomination, when a vacancy arises in the Supreme Court after Lincoln wins the election in

1864 and everybody comes to him and says-- It's the Chief Justiceship, actually, that post is opened up-- “You should put Bates there, he's been loyal to you. You should put Stanton there, this is what he's always wanted. You should put Blair, your postmaster general there.” And he said, “No, I'm going to appoint Salmon P. Chase.” And they said, “How can you do that? Don't you know all these things he's been saying about you?” And Lincoln said, “I know meaner things that he said about me than any of you do.” Lincoln knew everything. He loved talking to reporters, getting gossip. He was so curious about everything that was going on.

And he said, “In fact, I'd rather swallow a chair than appoint Chase to that post. But he will be the best man for the rights of the emancipated slaves.” Chase had been an honorable abolitionist, had an honorable record with regard to African-Americans, and he said, “I would despise myself if I allowed my personal dislike for him to prevent me from putting him there.” He puts him in as Chief Justice, and just as Lincoln hoped, he swears in the first African-American to practice before the court, does protect the rights of the slaves so that Lincoln's legacy is protected. Much more important than whether you like the guy with the robes sitting there.

MR. SIMON: Can we forget how unpopular the Civil War was in much of the North, with many people?

MS. GOODWIN: You know, I don't think I had fully realized until I got back into it how much division opinion there was in the North. I mean, first of all on the

part of the merchants and a lot of the people in the big cities. New York City was terrible. I mean, if you say terrible... If you want the North to win. I guess I'm not being objective in saying New York...

MR. SIMON: You won't go wrong calling New York City terrible in Boston, a Boston crowd. [laughter]

MS. GOODWIN: What I mean by that is there were a lot of people in New York who really did not want to have the war happen. Once it happened, they weren't even sure whether or not the Union should win. They certainly didn't want emancipation to take place, and that was in part because the trade with the cotton was being disrupted. It was in part because there were a lot of Irish immigrants and a lot of immigrants in New York who were part of the Democratic Party. And the Democratic Party still kept a stronghold, even when the Republicans won the election, and were more willing early on to potentially compromise to bring an earlier end to the war.

So Lincoln had to keep track of these enormous people. There were some people who were actually traitors in the north. There were others that were copperheads who really were willing to have a compromise earlier on. There were Democrats who were loyal to the Union but didn't want emancipation. And then the Republicans who are with Lincoln on Union and emancipation. Then there's radical Republicans who think emancipation is more important than even the Union. And those viewpoints were so different.

MR. SIMON: How did Mr. Lincoln begin to establish his authority, maybe even less his authority, than able in the minds of these men to establish himself as a leader?

MS. GOODWIN: You know, I think what he did was they saw on a day-by-day basis that he had an extraordinary array of emotional strength and they could see that. It meant that when he was dealing with them, for example, if he made a mistake... And early on in the war, he made a number of mistakes... He would acknowledge it right away. I mean, he had no problem. He said, “I don’t have time for personal contention, for trying to square what I said today with what I said before.” If he had to change his mind on something, he would say, “Yes, I changed my mind.” Not like our current politicians who somehow when they’re in races try to pretend that they’re saying the same thing they said 20 years ago. He said, “Yes, I changed my mind. I’d like to believe I’m smarter today than I was yesterday.” And just so simple.

And then, for example, when something went well in the administration, they saw that he shared credit with them all, out of his way to share credit. If something went wrong, he shouldered blame for them. And nothing can make them love him more than that. They see, for example, when his first Secretary of War Cameron was about to be censured by the Congress because in the early days of the war as War Secretary he had lent contracts to middlemen who made off with scandalous profits in the early days of the war for weapons that didn't work. And no analogies

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are meant. [laughter] Nonetheless, he was about to be censured by the Congress. And Lincoln stood up and said, “If anyone’s to blame, it’s me and the entire cabinet. It was the chaos of the early days of the war.” And as a result, the censure didn't happen, and he was forever grateful, Cameron was. He said no one else would have been with him when he was down like that.

And at the same time, one time when Stanton was about to be drummed out of office by all of the newspapers because McClellan was blaming him for the failure of the peninsula campaign, gold old General McClellan, completely unlike Lincoln, would never acknowledge a mistake, would blame everybody else. And he claimed that Stanton had deliberately, traitorously, prevented troops from coming to him and that's why he lost in the peninsula campaign. In fact, he said Stanton was such a traitor that if he had lived in the time of Christ, Judas would have been a respected member of the Apostles. [laughter] So these guys talked pretty rough about each other.

So meanwhile, there's a huge drumbeat to get Stanton out of the Secretary of Warship. Lincoln gives a huge speech at a Union rally completely defending Stanton and again taking responsibility that there were no troops to send. When he got mad at any of them, instead of berating them in public, he would write a hot letter and then put it aside until his emotions had cooled and then he never usually needed to send it.

MR. SIMON: He put written but never sent—

MS. GOODWIN: Exactly. No, that's the famous one that he wrote to General Meade after Gettysburg, and Meade failed to follow up with General Lee. And Lincoln was so depressed because he thought the war might have come to an end if Meade had done that. So he writes him a letter saying, “I’m immeasurably distressed. This is going to mean the war is going to go on months and months more.” But then he knows how much it’ll hurt Meade’s feelings. He puts it aside and it’s found decades later in his papers saying, exactly as you say, never sent, never signed.

So I think all of these emotional strengths that they saw, they couldn’t help but feel an enormous affection for him. And then it just took a little more time before they realized how much he was in authority, because that authority took a longer time to develop. But the affection came first in some ways, and then the authority and the respect came second.

MR. SIMON: I want to draw you out a little bit to talk about Lincoln’s relationship with General McClellan, who was the most popular soldier of his time, wildly popular among the members of the Army of the Potomac in part because he didn't ask them to fight a lot. It being a war that ostensibly seems to be the reason why they were there. But in any event, this caused Lincoln great frustration. And McClellan was openly contemptuous of him, and even at the personal social level was impudent. And there were people who kept urging Lincoln to do something about that.

MS. GOODWIN: Yeah, I think this is one case where Lincoln’s kindness and sensitivity and desire to give somebody a second and third chance was too much. I mean, he was too patient with McClellan. He should have instinctively understood, just as you suggested, that McClellan was a brilliant organizer of the troops, but he didn't ever really want to... He didn't have the courage to take them into battle. He one time wrote his wife saying that, “The problem with going into battle is if anything ever happens to me, what will happen to my troops? They love me so much.” [laughter] You know, he thought he should have been... He one time said that God had placed him where he was and that he could become a dictator if he wanted, the country loved him so much.

And somehow, Lincoln finally, finally came to understand because I think Lincoln respected that the troops loved him so much. He went to visit the soldiers all the time, Lincoln did, he saw that they loved this man, McClellan, and I think he over-respected that. But finally he said, “He’s created a brilliant engine, but it’s a stationary engine. It just never goes anywhere.” And he finally made himself a promise that if McClellan didn't move the troops, this was after Antietam, if he didn't move the troops by a certain date... This is one of the things Lincoln did, interestingly, as a leader. He would make promises to himself. “I'm going to tell myself if this doesn't happen by such and such a date, then I'm going to change my mind, I'm going to do something, I'll get rid of him.” And then he did.

And then the great thing is, though, for Lincoln, is that McClellan then runs against Lincoln in 1864 and everybody thinks McClellan will win the soldiers' vote because he had been so beloved. And also, McClellan is promising, really, a compromised peace because he was very much against the Emancipation Proclamation, thought it was prolonging the war, and the thought was if McClellan could tell the soldiers, as he would, “If you vote for me and I win, this war is going to be over more quickly because I'll compromise with the South.” And Lincoln said at the time that he would rather win the soldiers' vote and lose the election than the other way around. And incredibly, eight out of ten of the soldiers—Nine out of ten of the general soldiers, eight out of ten even of the Potomac soldiers who had been McClellan's—voted for Lincoln.

And it was partly, I think, because he had formed a bond with them. After every battlefield loss, he went immediately to the battlefield. It was the only way he could get over his own sadness, by visiting his soldiers. He would visit the wounded in the hospital. He would walk amongst the soldiers in the field telling them... He was a great storyteller. I mean, that was my favorite thing to find out. He's just fantastically gifted as a storyteller. Funny, crude, wonderful, Lyndon Johnsesque kind of stories. And he would tell them their stories, they would then tell them a hundredfold more. And they ended up loving him, and a bond had been formed, which meant that they were willing to vote him into the Presidency the second time, knowing the war would go on longer and their lives would be at risk because he had made them believe in the cause for which they were fighting, and they believed in him.

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MR. SIMON: I guess in about 20 minutes, we’re going to invite questions from you folks here, so someone will direct you up to those microphones, but you might want to start forming them.

Let me ask you about a couple of instances, or a couple of lines of inquiry that have been raised in other books in recent years, and which at least once you take up in yours. Was Lincoln, after your ten years of study, given to fits of melancholy that would edge into what people would now identify as depression?

MS. GOODWIN: You know, this is one of the things that I think was most interesting to find out. Which is I came away feeling that he had been born with a melancholy temperament. There's a professor at Harvard, Jerome Kagan, who argues that children are born... You can see from the time they're zero, he studied children from zero to twenty, whether they have a melancholy or an optimistic temperament. And I think he had this melancholy temperament, and he had so many losses as a child. I mean, his mother died when he was ten years old. And she said to him when she was dying, “Abraham, I'm going away from you now and I shall never return,” not giving him that hope that they would meet again in Heaven some day, which was so prevalent at that time. Then his sister dies in childbirth a few years after that. His first love, Ann Rutledge, dies.

And I think what happened to him at that time is he was obsessed by the idea that when you die, you simply become dust in a grave. So he steam rolled his reading,

and everything he'd done was self taught. I mean, that's what's so amazing about him. He had one year of formal schooling, but he read Shakespeare, he read poetry, he read the *King James Bible* and he seemed to adopt somewhere from some of his reading this ancient Greek notion that the one way you could live on would be in the memory of others if you accomplished deeds that were worthy, and your name would then be told after you died.

And my own sense of it is that when he was younger and he was never sure that his talents were going to be realized, and he has genius qualities in him and he was obviously a brilliant writer and had huge ambitions. His ambition was never simply for office or power, but for this larger thing, to accomplish something that he could be remembered for. When he was younger and was never sure that that would be realized, it did lead to, as you say, fits of melancholy. And there's one moment when he really does have a very serious depression, when he's in his 30s. Three things have combined. He's broken his engagement to Mary Todd Lincoln, not sure he's ready to be married. His best friend, Joshua Speed, is leaving Illinois to go back to Kentucky because his father has died and this is the only intimate friend that he's ever really had. And his political career is on a downward slide. And Speed... They're so worried about him, that they take all knives and razors from his room and they go to him and they say, "Lincoln, if you don't rally, you will die," Speed says to him. And Lincoln said, "I would just as soon die, but I have not yet done anything to have anyone remember that I have lived."

And somehow that, I think, got him through that depression, gets him back into the legislature and on his upward political climb. And then once he gets into the Presidency, when his talents are being fully realized and he's got this huge challenge in front of him, as hard as it is, he knows he has a chance to do this dream of his, to be accomplished after... To accomplish something so that he can be remembered. And when Speed comes to his side again, his old friend, right after the Emancipation Proclamation has been signed, and he remembers back to this time when he was so depressed, he said, “Remember our conversation?” “Of course,” Speed says. “Well,” he said, “At last I think my fondest dream has been realized. Maybe with this act I will be remembered after I die.” And how he could have ever realized how far his name would travel, it's just a wonderful thing to know that that's your goal.

And I think because that was his goal, during the Presidency, I don't find any indication that he's depressed, in bed. He's the one who sustains everybody else's spirits, and he's the one who starts off the cabinet meeting with a funny story. He's the one that's replenishing his energies by relaxing. He's the one who's dragging them out to relax at nights when they don't want to. So I think once he got to that place where his talents were being realized that the depression did not take hold anymore.

MR. SIMON: But an extraordinary thing, isn't it, to be a shopkeeper in New Salem, Illinois and to see yourself as having a life that will contribute to history?

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MS. GOODWIN: It is extraordinary. It's got to mean, I guess, somehow that early on... People have asked me, “Well, where did his confidence come from?” And all I can imagine is... And we know so little about his early life, it's only from oral histories that we really know it. And I think part of it is that his mother loved him. He later said everything he owed in life was to his mother. And she must have given him confidence. Luckily, when the father remarried again, the stepmother was very loving toward Lincoln. His father was tough for him, his father thought that his reading was lazy and indolent. His father would lend him out at times to other farmers to repay debts that he owed, taking him out of school. Which was the one thing Lincoln wanted, was that burning desire to learn. And in the end, books allowed him to transcend his surroundings. I mean, it's just such a wonderful thing about literature.

You know, Emily Dickinson once said, “There's no frigate like a book to take us lands away.” And in some ways, that's what happened to Lincoln. He never would travel to Europe, but he went with Shakespeare's kings to England, he went with Byron's poetry to Spain and Portugal. I mean, literature allowed him to move beyond those crude surroundings. So I think the books he read helped him to do that, but it had to be something internal. Maybe when you've got that talent, maybe when you have some genius quality that he seemed to have had, those dreams become large.

But it is extraordinary that you can sit... You're right, you're a shopkeeper and you're trying to read at night, you're reading law at night and you somehow dream that you're going to be remembered by people after you die. Thank God he did.

MR. SIMON: And the sadness in his life in the White House. Because as you know, he followed the war, he did not insulate himself from bad news, he visited soldiers, he identified with the deaths of individual soldiers. And, of course, there was death in his own family.

MS. GOODWIN: I think in some ways his ability to connect to the other people in the country whose family circles had been broken by death in the soldier's world was reinforced by losing his son, Willy, during the war. He had four children, he and Mary. One child had died much earlier at three years old; their oldest son Robert was at Harvard during the war. And then two little boys were in the White House; Willy who was ten and Tad who was eight. And Tad had a speech defect so that no one outside the family could understand what he was saying, and Willy was his protector. Willy, everybody said, had the qualities of Lincoln. He was writing poetry at ten years old, incredibly sensitive, so kind. And the two little boys were the light and the life of the White House.

And then Willy got sick, typhoid. These diseases would come through the town and huge numbers would die with no ability to have any antibiotics. And he died, and Mary was never the same again. And she could hardly come out of her bed after Willy's death. She couldn't even bear being with little Tad because he

reminded her of Willy. So Lincoln had to become both mother and father to this little boy and had no longer solace from Mary. I must say, I think sometimes the male historians have been too unkind to Mary, though. They remember her at the end of her life when she's lost three of her four children, because Tad later dies at 18 years old. And she's seen her husband killed by her side, and she does then become unstable and her son Robert puts her into an insane asylum.

But in the early days of their life I'm absolutely convinced they were well suited. Mary was so smart. She had a very good education. She came from a wealthy family in Kentucky and she loved poetry and loved politics. And she tells a wonderful story when they first met. She's at her sister's house in this mansion on a hill in Springfield, and Lincoln comes up to her in his gangly way and says, "Mary, I want to dance with you in the very worst way." And Mary laughingly later said, "He certainly did." [laughter] But somehow, I think they became partners and it all worked well until the White House years. And then there was no footing for her to stand on when she got there because the Northerners thought she was a traitor because she had these four Confederate brothers in the Confederate Army. The Southerners think she's a traitor because she's married to him. And the eastern establishment condescends toward her because she comes from the west. And so she had no way of knowing what to do, and he's spending all his time married to my guys, these other guys, Seward and Stanton and Chase and Bates more than with her. And so her own instability, then, became deeper and deeper.

MR. SIMON: And to get this out of the way, his sexual orientation?

MS. GOODWIN: Well, the argument has been made—And this is where it’s so great to have this comparative perspective. Some of you may know, there's been a book recently that argued that Lincoln was gay.

MR. SIMON: C. A. Tripp, who was a researcher at Kinsey Institute for years.

MS. GOODWIN: Exactly. And he put Lincoln on a scale from heterosexual to homosexual and had him way down on the homosexual line because he argued two things: that he slept in the same bed with his friend Joshua Speed for three years. And secondly, that he wrote affectionate letters to Speed. Well, the thing is that you have to understand what the context of the time is. First of all, none of us fully know what's going on in anybody’s bed nowadays, much less 200 years ago.

But what I came away feeling was, that there was not the same sense of privacy then that we have now. That sleeping in the same bed with same sexes was quite common. In fact, when Lincoln was on the circuit in Illinois, when the lawyers and the judges and the bailiffs and the sheriffs and the prisoners would all travel from one county courthouse to the other, staying in the same tavern or boarding house, they would often sleep three lawyers to a bed, not even just two. The only one who got his own bed was the judge, David Davis, because he weighed over 300 pounds so no one else could fit in the bed. [laughter]

So I don't think that alone tells us... (inaudible) Chase, as I said, had lost three wives. Stanton had lost his first wife whom he loved passionately. And Stanton writes to Chase in much more affectionate language than anything Lincoln wrote to Speed. He writes to him, “Ever since our pleasant intercourse last summer, no one is in my mind more waking or sleeping. I dream of being with you at night, I want to hold you by the hand and tell you I love you.” No one even began to suggest that either of them were gay, that is the way they wrote to one another. Seward, when he's in the state senate in New York, an older state senator writes to him and says, “I feel positively womanish about you. Ever since I've been away, I miss you so much.” And Seward writes back saying, “I feel a rapturous joy that you feel like I do.” But then the next year their friendship breaks up because this older state senator tries to seduce Seward's wife, who almost falls in love with him. [laughter] And nobody ever suggested Seward was gay.

So I think unless we assume that all of the guys in the cabinet are gay, it's more likely that...

MR. SIMON: That's an interesting idea. [laughter]

MS. GOODWIN: It's more likely that I think men had really close friendships then, and I think it's wonderful that they could talk to each other in that open, romantic, even loving way. And it's just that men and women couldn't be friendly then in the same way, there's so much chaperoning for women. So you find in women's history, too, that women write to each other this way in the same time. I

think it's our putting our own sexual understandings back on a time when there was romance, there was love, but I don't necessarily think there was sex.

MR. SIMON: What were the many elements of the genius that Lincoln had to be able to communicate so powerfully with the American people?

MS. GOODWIN: You know, I think in part it was that he understood them. I mean, the same with Roosevelt. How do you communicate? It's not just the rhetoric you use, it's not the words only. It's that you have to have a feeling for the mood of the people. You have to know where they are. And I think Lincoln kept that White House as open as it could possibly be in the midst of the Civil War. You know, anybody could come in the White House in those days. If you wanted a job, actually, you could line up in the hallway of the second floor of the White House and you could knock on Lincoln's door and tell him your life's story and why you needed a particular job. And his secretaries, Nicolay and Hay, would say, "Lincoln, we don't have time with these people." And he said, "These are my public opinion baths. I must talk to the people and understand where they're coming from in their lives." And then every other week or so, he would have a reception at the White House where anybody could come in. So back woodsmen were there standing side by side with diplomats, and he would shake everybody's hand. And again, Nicolay and Hay would say, "You don't have time for this." He said, "I must remember the popular assemblage from which I have come."

And interestingly, there's a wonderful moment when he does sign the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1st, 1863. He has shaken so many hands that day that when he goes to sign the Emancipation Proclamation later that afternoon, his own hand is shaking. So he said, “Stop, I can't do it yet. I cannot let posterity think I had any hesitation about signing this act when I'm so certain I'm doing the right thing.” And he waits for a while until he can finally sign it with a bold hand.

So he said, as I said, again, he said, “I never can forget the popular assemblage from which I've come.” So it meant that his language, while it was very beautiful, it also used folksy talk to it. It had sort of truisms that people could understand. He knew exactly when to go to the public. When the war was going badly, he would issue a public letter, which would then be read by everybody. He would make a speech at a certain moment. So it was timing that was critical for him.

And then, I guess, because he read the best literature as a child and didn't have access to all the other stuff that we fill our heads with because he's got the *King James Bible* and he's got Shakespeare and poetry, he had these beautiful cadences inside his soul, and he had the soul of a poet, so the language itself. But I guess the most important thing, and I hadn't really thought of this fully until you said it, but I think underneath the other part of his language that's so beautiful is that he had a remarkable empathy. I think his great quality was that he could feel what other people were absorbing and feeling, and he understood them.

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So his first great speech that he made, when he was young, was to a temperance society. And the temperance people were as passionate as the abortion people are today. But he went before them and gave what could have been a very popular speech saying to them, “You know, you constantly talk about people who drink too much as evil and the cause of all the misery in the land. You're never going to change their minds if you talk that way. It's the nature of man to retreat within himself if he is so shunned.” And then he said, “Denunciation leads to denunciation, anathema to anathema. You're going to have to penetrate their heart through the use of reason.” And that becomes the template for all of the great speeches that we remember; most notably, of course, the second inaugural where the North is on the eve of winning the Civil War and instead of celebrating he says, “The sin of slavery is shared by both sides. Both sides read the same *Bible*, have prayed to the same God, have invoked his aid against the other, and neither's prayers have been fully answered.” And then, of course, the beautiful ending, “With malice toward none and charity for all, let us bind up the nation's wounds.” So I think the brilliance of his language came from that emotional strength that allowed him to feel his people in a country that needed to be spoken to.

MR. SIMON: We perhaps should have mentioned this earlier. There's a small world story involving Doris and myself. My stepfather was a man named Ralph Newman who was a Lincoln scholar and...

MS. GOODWIN: Great Lincoln scholar, a collector.

MR. SIMON: I happened to call him for, I guess, advice on what to read a couple of months before he died. And my stepfather was very proud to receive that call. And one of the things he used to point out is his great letters were written on one page so you didn't have to flip them over. But he seemed to have a sense of history, that those great letters were something that people would pass around. And he had a sense that they were documents that he was writing.

MS. GOODWIN: All the people in that generation, it seems, they practiced writing so much more maybe than we do now. I mean, one of the great sources I had for this book were the diaries and the letters that all the other people had written. Even in the Seward family archives, for example, there were 5,000 letters that the family members had written to one another. And Fanny Seward, the daughter of Seward, and his brilliant wife Frances, when she was 16 wanted to be a writer. So she had a great diary that she keeps, a dazzling diary through the Civil War and it lasts until the war comes to an end, she reaches 21 years old and she dies of tuberculosis.

Chase kept a diary for three decades. Bates kept a diary. And Lincoln, every time he had something important that he wanted to write, he'd write it on a slip of paper, put it in his desk to be used for a later speech. So I think it's not only that they're thinking about history, I think it's that writing is the main means of communication for all these people when they're separated from one another, so they're just so much... Even the soldiers letters. I remember in Ken Burns' documentary those brilliant, ordinary soldiers letters, better than we might imagine

from a college educated kid today because writing was valued so much at that time.

MR. SIMON: For most of Lincoln’s time in office and most of the time of the Civil War, a rational man or woman would have concluded that the North would lose. Or at any rate there would be a stalemate that would have essentially allowed the Confederacy and slavery to continue. What was there in Lincoln’s character that gave him the resolve to see that through?

MS. GOODWIN: I think there's two things. I mean, one was practical. At some level, he understood that the North had more people, more supplies, more resources than the South did. So the real challenge was if the North could just persevere, and if battle after battle could be fought—I mean, he one time said even when the North had lost an excruciating number of people in a battle, and the South might have even lost less, it didn't matter because the South didn't have enough people to last in the Army. So that if you just kept going and kept going, the mathematics would eventually be on the side of the North. But it meant that deeper than that, you have to have sort of the internal resolve that he knew what he was fighting for was so large that it had to somehow turn out all right. He wasn't even simply fighting just for Union, it wasn't just for emancipation. What it was is he thought if the South succeeded in getting out of the Union, that it would mean that the whole experiment that the Founding Fathers had created would be undone, the idea that ordinary people could govern themselves.

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This thing that he used to say was a beacon of hope to people all over the world, that you're not born in a class and you can't move beyond that class. And somehow he believed so much in what democracy was, what America stood for, that he had to believe somehow it would win out in the end. And the one thing that gives me some solace, it was so hard to write those last chapters when he was about ready to die, and he knew that he only had like ten days to experience that the war had come to a successful conclusion before he is killed by John Wilkes Booth. But he knew at least in that short period of time that the Union had been preserved and this experiment that the Founding Fathers had created probably would endure.

MR. SIMON: We've talked so much about his sensitivity and his feeling for people. For much of his term he was derided as a butcher, as someone who was willing to countenance great human bloodshed in the interest of a cause that a lot of people didn't share, at least in the same way.

MS. GOODWIN: It is hard to imagine what it must have been like to hear the criticisms that he would hear, that he was a butcher, that Stanton was a butcher. And for the two of them to have to be at times in the telegraph office waiting for the news from the battlefield, not able to sleep or trying to sleep on a couch, and hearing 10,000 people had been killed, 20,000 people had been killed. Six hundred thousand, I've been told, would represent five million people today if it were in similar population statistics. And yet what they had to keep believing was that it was necessary because freedom and what America represented was at issue here.

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As I say, not simply just bringing a bunch of Southern... Because some people might have said, “Oh, let the Southern states go. You know, at some point, maybe slavery will die out there anyway. And is it really worth all of this?” And he obviously believed it was.

That's why the Gettysburg Address matters so much, because he's able to say to all the families whose children have died in this war that these young men have not died in vain because they were fighting so that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth. You had to have that larger goal because I don't know how you could have stood it otherwise. And even so, when he went to visit the soldiers, he'd have to see their bodies on the field, he'd have to absorb that they had been killed and that he was their Commander in Chief. So it took an enormous internal strength and spirituality, I think, to allow that to go on.

MR. SIMON: And after this question, we're going to invite your questions. But what was, or is, there about the imperfect American democracy in 1860 that allowed Abraham Lincoln to be elected, or resulted in Lincoln's election? And a very tough election in 1864, which in many ways unexpectedly ratified the war, ratified the Emancipation Proclamation. And since then, what is there about this system or imperfections of American democracy? Because I don't think any President, Republican or Democratic, with the most positive self image has the effrontery these days to compare himself to Lincoln. Roosevelt would maybe

come the closest in the minds of others, but what is there that results in a character like Lincoln being able to climb to the top and persist?

MS. GOODWIN: You know, I guess what Lincoln himself would say is that for a President to be great, he has to have the challenge. It's not just the person appearing at a certain moment, but there has to be that supreme challenge. In fact, when he was a young man, he worried that his whole generation did not have the challenges that the Founding Fathers had faced, that they had harvested the whole glory and that all that was left for his generation were modest ambitions. And maybe he'd go to Congress, maybe he'd even become President, but nothing great would happen. He could not have foreseen then, of course, that the slavery issue would create this enormous crisis, the secession, and the Civil War that created a challenge for his generation that was equal to or even greater than that of the Founding Fathers. Obviously, the Depression and World War II, I think, created it for Franklin Roosevelt; and the Civil Rights Movement, I think, opened up possibilities for John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson domestically. And I would have thought, actually, September 11th had created that kind of a crisis that allowed for great leadership to potentially emerge. And I still keep hoping that under the radar screen, there are young people who have responded to September 11th. And maybe part of the hope of what you're saying is that America has seemed to have, when it needed to, some great leaders have arisen at certain moments in time. And I don't know whether there's anything sure about that. In fact, we may be very worried about it right now.

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But I know that, as I say, from young people, I was talking to Eli Segal at lunch time, and so many more people have joined AmeriCorps as a result of wanting to do something for the country, as a result, I suspect of September 11th. I know in my own family, my son, Joey Goodwin, who graduated from Harvard College in June of '01 in history and lit., after September 11th, instead of going to law school joined the Army. He went as a basic training, officers candidate school, and then served as a platoon leader in a slum sector of Baghdad for a year, almost as if his service mirrored the fortunes of the war. Because when he first got there mission was presumably accomplished and he had a peaceful reconstruction mission. He was so excited, he had an Iraqi translator, he went into their homes at night. They were having these huge discussions about free will and determinism. He was telling them, “You really can change your lives like most Americans always feel you can.”

Within days, of course, that was all undone. No more translators, no more dinner. The security had broken down, the insurgents were coming in, the looting had taken place, and he had three major duties there: checkpoint duty, weapon searches and eventually bringing his platoon out at night as a target, hoping they could be shot at so they could get the insurgents. And even with all of that, as he left Iraq, he never second-guessed his decision to join the Army. I mean, it's shown him a world. Those kids in his platoon were high school graduates only. He'd grown up in affluent Concord and in Harvard College, and he's become a much bigger man than he would have been to start. And I just wish that President Bush had called on more people to join that army, had that been so, had there been Congressmen

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and Senators sons there, the whole course of the war might have been different, I think. [applause] But I'm happy. He then went to, after Iraq, he was chosen as a personal aide to go to Germany with the first armored division, and he worked for the general there. And his four years are exactly up and he is coming home this afternoon. [applause]

MR. SIMON: Which will not prevent Doris from signing books until the cows come home. Nothing says Christmas like a book about Abraham Lincoln. Am I wrong? [laughter] Let's invite your questions now. Just advance on the microphone.

MS. GOODWIN: Advance. [laughter]

AUDIENCE: First of all, thank you very much for being here, this has just been delightful. Congratulations on your family member coming home. Today's headlines are all about the NSA spying on United States citizens. It reminded me of Abraham Lincoln suspending habeas corpus. And I wondered if you would remind us what that was all about, what factored into Lincoln's decision and then how his cabinet also reacted to that?

MS. GOODWIN: I'd be glad to. I mean, what happened is that in the early days of the war, Maryland obviously stood between the North and Washington, D.C., and the troops had to come to protect the capital in Washington from the north. And there was very great fear that the first target of the Confederate Army would

be to take over Washington, take over the seat of government, and potentially that might have brought the war to an early end for the Confederate side.

And there were secessionists in Maryland who were obstructing the troops. They were attacking the trains that were coming down and they were rioting and preventing the troops from getting to Washington. So Lincoln did at that point issue an order that habeas corpus would not be honored, and that in this narrow place, at first, that you could bring people under arrest without having to justify it in the normal way. He made a speech in which he said, to rationalize it, that sometimes you have to cut off an arm or a leg to save a body. And the body, therefore, was the Constitution and the country; the arm and the leg was this legal protection that was being offered normally to people under habeas corpus.

And he did issue it several other times in narrow ways. But nevertheless, it still is one of those things that he is criticized for, and probably rightly so because those protections... I remember Justice Marshall once said, Thurgood Marshall, that it's in times of greatest crisis that you have to be most careful about the legal protections that are built into the Constitution, because that's what they're there for. So I think as we look at this recent situation with President Bush, obviously he was feeling under strain after September 11th, maybe much as Lincoln was. But again, we've been talking about this, people know more about this than I do, I'm so caught in 1860 I don't know enough about what's going on right now. But I gather that there were legal rights that he would have had to have done some of the protections he thought he needed to for the American people by the spying, but he

went outside that legal framework and said now he had a prerogative as President to do this. And it seems to me that that's going to produce a lot of controversy in these days ahead.

MR. SIMON: Yes, please?

AUDIENCE: After spending so many years researching Abraham Lincoln, if you had the opportunity to sit with him today, is there anything that you would want to ask him or say to him?

MS. GOODWIN: You know, it's a funny thing. I've tried to think about that myself, and I know that the answer should be, if I'm a serious historian, that I'd want to talk to him about what he would have done for reconstruction, because that's the big “if” of history. Had he lived longer, would he have been able to bring the South back in more gently as he wanted to, but still protect the rights of the emancipated slaves?

But I think if I really did have only a certain period of time with Lincoln, that I'd have to just say to him, “Mr. Lincoln, tell me one of your stories.” I mean, then he would come alive, his eyes would sparkle. One of my favorite stories that he loved telling, which will show you what kind of stories he told and make you understand why you would want to laugh when you hear these stories, he used to tell this story... And when he was on the legal circuit in Illinois, people would come from miles around to listen to him tell stories because he was so legendary.

And so one of his favorite stories had to do with the Revolutionary War hero Ethan Allen, who went to Britain, Lincoln said, after the war and the British people were still upset about losing the war. So they decided to embarrass him by putting a picture of General Washington in the outhouse where he would have to encounter it. But he goes in the outhouse, and instead of coming out grumpily, he comes out smiling. And so they say to him, “Well, didn't you see George Washington there?” “Oh yes,” he said, “I think it's the perfectly appropriate place for him.” “What do you mean?” they said. “Well,” he said, “there's nothing to make an Englishman shit faster than the sight of General George Washington.” [laughter] So I think that's what I'd do. “Tell me your stories, Mr. Lincoln.”

MR. SIMON: Did a thousand people just hear Doris Kearns Goodwin say shit?
[laughter]

MS. GOODWIN: It was bleeped.

MR. SIMON: It was bleeped. It will be.

AUDIENCE: About a year before Lincoln was elected, specifically in 1859, John Brown was tried, executed. His trial captured the American conscience like the O. J. trial did a number of years later. And Brown was called the most influential non-government person in the history of the United States. My question is to what extent, if any, was Lincoln influenced by or even noted the activities of the first

abolitionist that was John Brown, and his troops marched into war singing “John Brown’s Body”?

MS. GOODWIN: Right. No, in fact, it’s very interesting. At the time, Lincoln had to feel compelled, and most of the Republican candidates did, to say that while they may have agreed with the ends that John Brown was fighting for, they could not agree with the violent means because that was necessary if you were going to be involved in an election. But so interestingly, when Lincoln meets with Frederick Douglass, Frederick Douglass becomes his great friend, Frederick Douglass, of course, being the black abolitionist and the great slavery orator and writer. And at first, Douglass is very critical of Lincoln being too slow on emancipation, not bringing black troops easily enough into the Union troops until he finally did.

But once they get together, the first meeting, Douglass says later that it was the first great man he ever sat with who did not condescend at all. There was no sense of color between them. And he had met with Wendell Phillips and William Lord Garrison. It would show that on a personal level, Lincoln did not have that prejudice.

But anyway, in the summer of 1864, Lincoln is in very, very low spirits about the war, even though Vicksburg and Gettysburg have been won the year before, the war is going on and on, Grant isn’t making much progress on Richmond. And Sherman still hasn’t gotten very far toward Atlanta, and the North is losing its

morale. And there's very clear understanding that Lincoln's probably not going to win that second election again, that McClellan will probably win. So he calls Douglass in to see him, and he has actually worked out a John Brown scheme for Douglass and he says that he's worried that if he does lose the election, that not enough slaves have been coming into the free lines after the Emancipation Proclamation. And Douglass says to him, "It's partly because they don't even know that the Emancipation Proclamation has been issued. The plantation owners have a way of keeping it from them."

So he asks Douglass, because he's afraid that if McClellan wins, everything will stop, you want to get as many slaves out between then and McClellan's victory. If he will organize a group, a band of scouts much like John Brown, who will go into the South, somehow spread the word and try to capture, bring the slaves out of slavery into the Union lines. And Douglass says he will do it. But then what happens is within days of that meeting, Atlanta falls and the whole mood and morale of the North changes, and it's clear Lincoln's probably going to win the election and they don't need to do this act. But that's where John Brown stayed in his head all the way through that time, and it would have been his own scheme to do something, in presumably a less violent way, but nonetheless to bring the slaves out of captivity.

MR. SIMON: And to follow up a bit on the, forgive me, the Lincoln who was a shrewd Illinois political manipulator, he made it easier for soldiers to vote for him too, didn't he?

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MS. GOODWIN: Oh, absolutely. He knew... When he finally did have confidence that the soldiers would vote for him, he made sure they could absentee vote. He made sure he told the generals to let them go home to their own home states. If the states didn't allow them to absentee vote, and some didn't, then he gave them leave to go home and make sure they would be happy to go home and then they'd be happy to vote at the same time.

Now, that's what's so great. I mean, especially being here in the Kennedy Library. I mean, what John Kennedy was hoping was that politics would be an honorable vocation, and he talks so much about that for young people to feel it. And that's why I was so glad to realize that I didn't have to just deal with Lincoln as a great emancipator and a great statesman, that he's a brilliant politician. And that's a good thing and not a bad thing. In fact, I think his qualities show that in the hands of a truly great politician, the qualities that we normally associate with decency, things like honesty and sensitivity and kindness and empathy and compassion, can be great political resources because politics is all about human relationships, and he understood that right from the beginning. By treating the people the way he did, and having his own ego sometimes submerged for this larger goal that he was going after, it meant that he was a great politician. And I think it's important for us to remember that in this country, you can be a great politician and remembered perhaps as the greatest President.

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AUDIENCE: Hi, my name is Maria, and I speak on behalf of the O’Brien students because we all can’t ask questions, though we all decided on one. But our question is if there was no war between the Confederates and the Union, would President Lincoln have stopped slavery? If yes, why is it when he signed the Emancipation Act the Union still had slaves while the South didn’t?

MS. GOODWIN: That's a wonderful question. I think if there had not been a war between the North and the South, Lincoln would have felt he had no power to stop slavery. And that was why the Emancipation Proclamation was written exactly as it was. The problem was that the Constitution protected property in the states of the South where slavery already existed and property was ridiculously, but nonetheless defined, in part, as the slaves. And so as President, he did not feel that unless you could get a change in the Constitution, which eventually he does with a Constitutional amendment, but not until 1865, that he had the power to undo slavery until the war was going badly in those early months. And so what he figured he could do was he saw that the slaves were being used by the Southerners to their advantage. They were digging trenches, they were cooking, they were protecting the home front so that the soldiers could come to fight in the battlefields. And if he then could use his war powers as Commander in Chief to say that he was going to emancipate the slaves in the South as a war measure, because if he could bring them into the Union lines, it might shift the balance toward the North and allow the North to win the war.

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He couldn't free the slaves in the border states because they weren't at war with him, so he didn't have the power to do that. So that's why he only freed the slaves, presumably in the South, who were part of a war measure. But he knew that that was only a temporary thing, and that's why he used every Lyndon Johnson tactic he had in 1864 and 1865 to push through the Congress the Constitutional Amendment to eradicate slavery. It got through the Congress, it was on its way to the states when he was killed. So that's the reason why. It wasn't that he was just doing it in the places where he couldn't really get at it, it was the only place he had the power to do something about it.

AUDIENCE: Lincoln was very tall, I think he was 6'4", and I was wondering if you could talk just about his tallness and maybe how it affected his ability to keep his administration together?

MS. GOODWIN: Well, you know, it's probably true that being tall did allow him to have a certain kind of physical commanding stature, especially at a time when 6'4" was huge compared to what most of the... I mean, Seward was 5'6", I think Stanton was maybe 5'8". And then he also had that stovepipe hat, which made him another foot taller, or so it seemed. But the interesting thing is that... So I do think that to some extent he had a physical commanding stature. But I'd like to believe, maybe as a short person, that that doesn't matter. [laughter] And we've had other presidents that have been short, and they've been just fine, Harry Truman being one, James Madison being another. And interestingly, it's said also about Lincoln that he had a thin, high-pitched voice and maybe would that work today?

But his voice evidently had enormous resonance so he could carry really far. When he was in those debates with Stephen Douglas, Stephen Douglas had a much more loud, bombastic voice but he would lose his voice halfway through the debates because he was screaming and yelling so much. Lincoln steadily would just keep his voice from beginning to end.

So I think those physical qualities do have something to do with leadership, but I'd like to believe that it's much more the internal qualities that he had that shown through. It's also said that he had a not very handsome face, and the people who...

AUDIENCE: He was gangly, right.

MS. GOODWIN: Yes, he had very long arms and long limbs. And he had... I was about to say that unfortunate beard, and I think someone's really going to kill me who has these beards... [laughter] But the reason I say that about Lincoln...

MR. SIMON: Handsome, well tended.

MS. GOODWIN: Well, no, there's a big... [laughter]

MR. SIMON: It adds distinction, right?

MS. GOODWIN: That's exactly right, they add distinction. But anyway, in his case, there's a picture of him before the beard. I think the beard just makes him

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feel more imposing, more stiff to us. But all those pictures in the 19th century, they have a clamp at the back of their heads when they're sitting by a chair so they don't move, so no wonder none of them ever smiled. They look half dead anyway.

[laughter] But there is one picture of him before the beard where I mistakenly said early in my book tour that he looked sexy, so I've been teased about that forever more. But nonetheless, he did, he was very strong. One time he goes on a trip to the battlefield and he's with all these young sailors and he has a contest with them of who can hold an axe out, from the handle of the axe, longest, which means that you're holding out this very heavy thing like this. He beat all of them hands down. So his strength, his physical stamina mattered.

And maybe to get back to your question, I think energy matters enormously in a President, or in any political leader, leader at all. He had enormous energy. He could stay up late, get up early. He had seemingly... Could outwork all these other people in his administration, and that's a quality we don't always look at that I think is critical in leadership.

MR. SIMON: If I might intervene with a question that occurs to me, there was a book then a number of years ago about what would have happened if Lincoln had lost the election of 1864. And it's fascinating, describes what they thought was the... Would have been the dissolution of the United States as we know it, that would have extended... Obviously, the transcontinental railway, there would have been no reason to build it, go on and on. And even extending to World War I and World War II, there would have been no democracy in the western hemisphere to

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kind of venture forth to be in America, like to take things up. But the book was, I thought, notably, for one reason or another, didn't take up the question of how would we have seen Lincoln if he had lost that election of 1864?

MS. GOODWIN: Oh, I mean obviously, if Lincoln had lost that election, it would have meant that maybe the war wouldn't have been successful and he would have probably gone down badly in history. I mean, you'd like to believe that the qualities he had... Somebody said about him that even if he had not become a great President, he would have been a good man. And that's absolutely true. Nothing will take away that quality that he possessed. What's very rare is to be both a good man and a great President. But we wouldn't have known that. We wouldn't have known that he was a great President, probably, if that had happened. We would have only known later, memoirists and people would have written about a good man, but he would have been a failed President. Wow, that's...

MR. SIMON: And people might have said he was a great storyteller. What a shame he wasn't a better President.

MS. GOODWIN: Right, exactly so. Wow.

AUDIENCE: I'm looking forward...

MR. SIMON: By the way, that's a very distinguished beard you have. [laughter]

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AUDIENCE: As soon as I can arrange a shave, I'll be losing the mustache.
[laughter] I looked forward to reading the account of Lincoln as a very active and forward-thinking politician. But when I think of Lincoln, and in fact I teach a course on the political thought of Lincoln, I often focus on the doctrine of necessity, the idea that the mind is compelled to action or held in check by a power greater than itself. Or the Lincoln of the... Even during the war, “I have not controlled events, I confess plainly that events have controlled me.” How do you resolve those aspects of his character, one that seems almost fatalistic or providential, and the other, the very active politician that is so successful?

MS. GOODWIN: Yeah, you know, I think what happens is I do think that he did believe that there were certain kinds of fates that governed the country, governed what was going to happen in the war. But he also knew that man had to do everything he could to understand what those fates were. And that's what he would say about God. I mean, he knew that God's will was somehow there during the Civil War, but it was incumbent on man to figure out what it was, not to say, “God is on my side.” So I think we've also somewhat overdone the idea of inevitability and fate and “Events have controlled me, I haven't controlled them.” I think what he meant by that was that you have to have an event, as he said even in that Lyceum speech, “You have to have a challenge in order to be able to do things and that gives you the platform on which you're going to walk.” But then it's up to you to either be worthy of walking on that platform or not.

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And it never meant that he didn't work hard at what he did, it didn't mean that he didn't try to do whatever he could, that he didn't exercise every political skill that he had, even if there's something out there that he's not able to control he'll control everything that was within his power. So he is a very active force. I don't agree that he's a passive force, which some people might think those comments that he makes would suggest. And I think the opposite is true. I think he's as active a force as he can be within the parameters that he's being given to work.

And maybe that's what we all feel in a certain sense. I mean, there are certain things we can't control; how long we're going to live, what's going to happen to us, some sort of natural event that might undo us. But you still try and live as full a life you can within those parameters, and that's probably the greatest challenge of being a human being.

AUDIENCE: Yes, thank you. You've made some references to Lincoln's tactics and habits and how they differ from the politicians of the day, particularly in how you treat your rivals and former enemies. Would you like to comment on what Lincoln lessons that the politicians in both parties today could learn, particularly in this partisan time, that would help for the citizens and the country?

MS. GOODWIN: Oh, surely. I'd like to try, anyway. I think what we seem to be missing so much in our political system today are the rewards that should go to a politician who can understand both sides of an issue. No, it seems like the primaries reward people who stand on one side or the other of the political

spectrum. Television loves the people who can come on and be point/counterpoint. And the system itself seems not to reward, as I say, that kind of empathy. And that's one of the reasons why we have that red state/blue state phenomenon right now. But I think what Lincoln would say is that in a country where... Lincoln had no problem recognizing that public opinion was central. I mean, right now you have modern politicians say, “I never look at public opinion polls.” Lincoln would, I think, say that's foolish. You've got to know where the public is, but you're not going to be constrained by that. You're going to simply then see that's where they are now, and then my job is to educate and shape public opinion, to move it to where I want it to go. And I think he would say, which is obvious from what Scott and I have been talking about, is that if you can bring into your cabinet people of different points of view, you're going to have a much stronger cell inside that White House.

I mean, Roosevelt brought two Republicans into his cabinet during World War II, Stimson and Knox, and they weren't just tokens, they were powerful people. And he had lots of contending people inside his cabinet who would fight with one another, and that allowed Roosevelt, I think, to have a much more robust understanding. And if I were recommending something for President Bush right now, if he's going to try to do something about the second term difficulties that he's running into, he's going to have to start over, bringing some more people into that cabinet who represent broader points of view and really listening to them, not just having a token there every now and then. I think Lincoln would be able to say, as I said earlier, when you make a mistake, the easiest thing is not to wait for three

years to acknowledge it. If you acknowledge, you can learn from the mistake. And when you learn from the mistake, you can get bigger and broader. If you don't acknowledge it, you're not going to learn anything.

And I just wish that if Lincoln could just walk amidst our ranks for one day, I think maybe he could solve a few things in Washington. But the worrisome thing, to be more serious, is people have said do you think he could win election today? I do think he still could win today. I still have enough faith in the American people that if they saw Lincoln in their ranks, they would make him into the President. The question is, would he run for office today? Politics in his day and age was the abiding passion of the day. All the best people wanted to be in public life. You know those debates he'd have with Stephen Douglas, 10,000 people would come, listening to four hours of speeches. And the speeches were literary and historic and arguments, they weren't sound bites. And people with much less education than we have today listened enraptured. They would read the entire speech in the newspaper the next day. The speeches would be put in pamphlets that would then go to the neighbor's houses and they would read these speeches as if they were their daily fare, as newspapers are today. Politics was entertainment. It was like sports was for us today. They loved their politics.

You know, when you listened to the debates, actually, people from the audience would be yelling back, just like we do in football today. “Hit him again, hit him again, harder, harder.” [laughter] So politics was really part of being an American at that point. And I worry now that politics has lost some of that glamour, that

hope, that magic. And because of what we put our politicians through, making their private lives public fodder, the fundraising they have to go through, the egregious fundraising they have to go through, the long time they have to run into office, the kind of attacks that they're going to endure because of the spin people on either side, that our best people, like Lincoln, might not join political life today.
[applause]

AUDIENCE: I'm James Garland, I'm a native born Charlestonian, so I'd kind of like to ask you a question about what my grandmother referred to as the War of Northern Aggression. [laughter] Being on Sherman's route from Atlanta to Charleston and Sherman being such a malicious man at the time and Lincoln being such a peaceful man, how did he feel about his tactics during the Civil War?

MS. GOODWIN: That's a great question, how did Lincoln feel about Sherman's tactics during the Civil War? Lincoln understood, as painful as it was to him at the time, that the only way the war would come to an end would be to take away the Southerner's capacity to wage war. And that meant you had to undo their cotton crops, you had to be able to take away the army's capacity to get food, which was keeping them going. And you had to take... Not necessarily civilian lives. I mean that I don't think he would have countenanced... But that the idea that Sherman was foraging through the countryside and undoing the resources that the South had to keep the war going was the only way that Lincoln thought the war would come to an end. And if he's assuming that all these people are dying every day in the war, and you bring the war to an earlier end, then you are actually, he could argue,

saving lives in the long run, even if you're destroying property and you're destroying crops and you're destroying a livelihood along the way.

But there's no question but that those tactics have created a permanent resentment on the part of people in the South that I think still lead today to some of the outcroppings of bitterness and a feeling that the war has never really come to an end.

MR. SIMON: I'll point out that in my hometown of Chicago, there's a Sherman Avenue, and they didn't name it because they were apologetic about it. But I want to follow up on what he said. Because Lincoln was such a peaceful man, was he somehow horrified by Sherman? Was Lincoln really a peaceful man when it got to that? Was his anguish merely personal, even a little theatrical? Because in the end, he was the author of a lot of actions that led to the loss of life.

MS. GOODWIN: You know, by the time the war got going and he saw the numbers of people that were dying, he was absolutely steeled to have to continue the war until the purpose was reached. And by that, it means he's not peaceful anymore. He gave them permission to do what they did, even as he hated having to do it, he didn't hesitate that what had to be done to win that war had to be done. And he one time said how weird it was—I don't think he used the word weird, he was probably more dazzling than that—But how strange it was that he who couldn't stand the sight of blood, who couldn't even chop off a chicken's head

when he was young, who couldn't bear hunting animals, which was so unusual in the frontier, was waging the largest war in American history.

MR. SIMON: And he'd been a very diffident soldier when he was on the guards.

MS. GOODWIN: When he was in the Blackhawk War, he later teased that the only action he saw was swatting mosquitoes, that he was not a great soldier himself. No, that's exactly right.

AUDIENCE: Hi, as a high school student, I'm only just embarking on my study of Abraham Lincoln, but I know enough about history to know that history's most revered figures have all made mistakes. So I was wondering what you would say was the greatest mistake of Lincoln's political career as President?

MS. GOODWIN: Okay. I think if he would take something back, it would probably be his earlier support for sending the blacks to the colonies abroad rather than keeping them in America once they got freed. He didn't believe earlier on that blacks could really have a moment of quality here in America because he thought that prejudice was so deeply ingrained in the American character, in the North as well as the South, that he thought that African-Americans would much rather be sent back, allowed to be sent back, not deported but voluntarily go back, to the Africa from which they had been taken, where they could start out on a plane of equality.

And it took, really, his friendship with Frederick Douglass and his understanding of the black troops courage, to understand that this was their homeland. They wanted to go nowhere else, that they had to make the equality here. And earlier on he even wondered himself whether blacks could serve on juries, whether they could vote, and those words have been used now against him; and somewhat rightly so, to show that he didn't have that spacious understanding of equality that one would have wished from this man that became Abraham Lincoln. I think, sadly, what his attitudes at that time show was how deep the prejudice was throughout the North, because his attitudes were what most people in the North felt at that time. And it just shows... Even when de Tocqueville came to America, he said that prejudice was the abiding sin of this otherwise democratic experiment. And when you think about it, it took a hundred years more before segregation was ended in the South, the Voting Rights Act came in 1965, a hundred years after Lincoln's death. So his worry that America would not easily grant equality to black citizens was not misplaced.

But I think if he were to look back on that time... In fact, the interesting thing is, on that last speech that he gives before John Wilkes Booth kills him, he does finally call for black voting for the soldiers who'd fought in the war or blacks who had been somewhat educated to be able to vote. Wilkes Booth hears him say that and turns to his partner and says, “That means Negro citizenship, we must kill him.” And so that's partly the provocation that brought about Lincoln's death.

And if I may just say something about the assassination, which is that I don't think I had fully absorbed how broad that plot was that Wilkes Booth had hatched. That not only was he going to target Lincoln, but he had two co-assassins. One was supposed to kill Andrew Johnson, the Vice President. But luckily for Johnson, he went to a hotel, got drunk and then never got to his target. But the third assassin was to kill Seward, and he left a bloody massacre in Seward's house. In fact, he came to Seward's house pretending to bring medicine for Seward. Seward had been in a carriage accident the week before and his jaw had been broken. So he brings the medicine, he gets to the... Incredibly, there's a dozen people—As always, Seward's house is full of people—A dozen people in this mansion, Lafayette Park across from the White House. He somehow gets to the top of the stairs, Seward's son stops him and says his father's asleep, he'll bring the medicine in. He takes his revolver, hits Seward's son on the head with such force, his brain is exposed, he's rendered unconscious, he doesn't come to for days. Goes into the bedroom, he then uses his huge Bowie knife to slash Seward's other son and the soldier nurse who's taking care of Seward.

Gets to Seward's bedside and plunges the knife into Seward's face with such force that his entire cheek is sheared off. He loses so much blood that he becomes unconscious. He, too, somehow, however, months, months later, finally does recover. He slashes two more people going outside the house and somehow escapes until he's later caught. And the incredible thing is, though, they don't want to tell Seward that Lincoln has died, knowing how close they are, because they were afraid that the shock would prevent the recovery from taking place. But

finally Seward looks out the window at some point and sees the flag at half mast and turns to his family and said, “I know he’s dead.” And they tried to pretend otherwise, and he said, “I know he’s dead. He’s my friend. He would have been the first person here to see me when he heard of my attack.” And then great tears came down his cheeks.

AUDIENCE: I know every adult in this room votes and takes their political obligation seriously, but I'm 20 and most of my peers don't. How during the Civil War was Lincoln able to sort of rally young in America, the teenagers, preteens, even the college students?

MS. GOODWIN: You know, when you think about it, it was probably not just Lincoln rallying them, but the circumstances of the times called for it.

MR. SIMON: The draft.

MS. GOODWIN: Well, the draft, oh yeah. [laughter] The draft rallied, that is true.

MR. SIMON: That more than college, college students were kind of unusual...

MS. GOODWIN: Although to be fair, early on it was volunteering until 1863, and it was only when they weren't sure that they had enough people that they finally did have the draft. And then there were draft riots and then the people

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participated. But I think the answer is that sometimes, as we were saying earlier, the times bring out participation. You know, Arthur Schlesinger has argued that there are cycles in history and that the cycles when people are active occurred like in the early part of the 20th century and that whole progressive movement; and then World War I so disillusioned people that the '20s was one of those periods of private life taking precedence over public life. And then the Depression and World War II came and that whole generation. Young people, as well as old people, were active in public life. And then the '50s was a time again after the exhaustion of World War II, people really went back into private life again.

And then the combination of John Kennedy and the Civil Rights Movement and the Great Society and Lyndon Johnson, young people got so involved in public life in the '60s, and then somehow the disillusionment of the war and then Watergate brought us back into a private life. And I remember that Schlesinger had predicted that the '90s were going to be one of those other times again. So maybe we're just a little delayed. Maybe there'll be another movement where young people... Because in a certain sense, it's so exciting when young people feel that they have something to say, that they want to be involved in public life, that they want to be involved in service to their country, if they want to be doing something to make their country better because it's going to be on their shoulders eventually that the country's fate will be determined.

AUDIENCE: Hi, would you say in your professional opinion Buchanan's passive reactions to the first few secessions affected Lincoln's choice to go to war?

MS. GOODWIN: I think there's no question that Buchanan's seeming paralysis in those months between Lincoln's election and his inauguration... In those days, you're elected in November and you're not inaugurated until March. And it was very hard for Lincoln sitting back in Illinois and watching the secessions occur from the various states and Buchanan not knowing what to do about it. And then by the time Lincoln becomes President, the forts that he needs to hold what had happened, of course as I'm sure some of you know, is there were only a few forts that were left in federal hands because Buchanan had let a lot of the other ones be taken by the Confederates. And Lincoln had pledged in his inaugural that he would preserve those forts that were still in our hands. And then the next day--He doesn't have any honeymoon--The very next day, in fact that night, he gets a memo saying Fort Sumter's guys are running out of supplies and unless he resupplies Fort Sumter, then the fort will fall to the Confederates, which means that his promise made in the inauguration would be undone, and it would look like he was as weak as Buchanan. So that's why your question is really on target.

And so he decides to resupply Fort Sumter, not necessarily assuming that it will bring about a war, but knowing that it might provoke a war. He decides to not send a warship there, he sends a peaceful ship to go in with supplies and bread, but followed by a warship that never gets there, it's another long story. But I think it's clear that he knew by that time that if he kept up that passive quality that Buchanan had that the Confederacy would not only have all the forts, but they would have

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taken up the armies, they would have taken up the resources, they were already gathering all the weapons that were in federal hands.