**'Team of Rivals': Friends of Abe**



From left to right: Edward Bates, attorney general; William H. Seward, secretary of state; Edwin M. Stanton, secretary of war; Salmon P. Chase, Treasury secretary.

By JAMES M. McPHERSON

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 president? Surprisingly, the answer is yes. Having previously offered fresh 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 high school history and popular mythology.

"Team of Rivals" (an apt but uninspiring title) opens in May 1860 with four men awaiting news from the national convention of the Republican Party in Chicago. Thousands of supporters were gathered in Auburn, N.Y., where a cannon was primed to fire a salute to the expected nomination of Senator William Henry Seward for president. In Columbus, Ohio, Gov. Salmon P. Chase hoped that if Seward faltered, the mantle would fall on his shoulders. In St. Louis, 66-year-old Edward Bates, a judge who still called himself a Whig, hoped the convention might turn to him as the only candidate who could carry the conservative free states, whose electoral votes were necessary for a Republican victory. In Springfield, Ill., a former one-term congressman who had been twice defeated for election to the Senate waited with resigned expectation that his long-shot candidacy would be flattened by the Seward steamroller.

Although her readers presumably know who won the nomination, Goodwin leaves them in suspense for almost 250 pages as she chronicles the personal stories and political careers of these four men. The unifying theme is the growing sectional polarization over the issues of slavery and its expansion. But each story follows a separate track until they begin to converge with the death of the Whig Party and the birth of the Republican Party in the mid-1850's.

Having served four years as governor of New York and nearly 12 as a senator, Seward emerged as the leader of the new party after 1856, when it fell just short of electing a president on a platform of restricting the expansion of slavery. Next to Seward in prominence was Chase, who had organized the Free Soil Party in 1848, became its first senator in 1849 and represented the cutting edge of the Republican antislavery ideology.

In contrast, Lincoln's career languished in relative obscurity before 1858. In Goodwin's telling, however, his story gradually and subtly takes precedence. His famous debates with Stephen A. Douglas in 1858 gave him national exposure, though Douglas won re-election to the Senate. Lincoln's Cooper Union address in New York and his subsequent tour of New England in early 1860 increased his visibility. Although some newspapers still spelled his first name "Abram," Lincoln appealed to a growing number of Republicans as the strongest potential nominee. Less radical than Chase and more firmly antislavery than Bates, he seemed the one most likely to carry the Lower Northern states of Pennsylvania, Indiana and Illinois that the Republicans had lost in 1856, without alienating the antislavery Northern tier states from New England to Minnesota. Although Lincoln's "house divided" speech in 1858 was as uncompromising as Seward's "irrepressible conflict" address that same year, Seward, as well as Chase, had a more radical reputation than Lincoln. But because they had been in public life much longer than Lincoln, they had also made more enemies.

Having set the stage for the nominating convention, Goodwin recounts the drama of Lincoln's surprising first-ballot strength (102 votes to Seward's 173½, Chase's 49, and Bates's 48). On the second ballot Lincoln pulled almost even with Seward, and amid rising excitement in a convention hall packed with a leather-lunged home-state cheering section, he won a stunning victory on the third ballot. All three of his shocked rivals believed the better man had lost. Lincoln's subsequent election as president did not change their minds.

The Republican victory without a single electoral vote (and scarcely any popular votes) from the 15 slave states provoked seven of them to secede and form the Confederate States of America. In this crisis, Lincoln took the unparalleled step of appointing to his cabinet all three of his rivals plus a fourth, Simon Cameron, Pennsylvania's favorite son. Seward got the top spot as secretary of state; Chase became secretary of the Treasury, Bates attorney general and Cameron secretary of war. Could this "team of rivals," each of them initially convinced of his superiority to the inexperienced president, work together in harmony? Joseph Medill, the editor of The Chicago Tribune and one of Lincoln's most loyal supporters, later asked the president why he had made these appointments. "We needed the strongest men of the party in the cabinet," Lincoln replied. "These were the very strongest men. Then I had no right to deprive the country of their services." They were indeed strong men, Goodwin notes. "But in the end, it was the prairie lawyer from Springfield who would emerge as the strongest of them all."

Seward at first shared the widespread assumption that he would be the "premier" of the administration. During the tense weeks between Lincoln's inauguration on March 4, 1861, and the eruption of war on April 12, when Confederate guns fired on Fort Sumter, Seward recommended that Lincoln withdraw the troops from Sumter and then worked to undermine the president's determination to hold and resupply the fort. This tug of war climaxed with Seward's notorious memorandum to Lincoln complaining that the administration was "without a policy either domestic or foreign." Seward proposed to abandon Fort Sumter while reinforcing Fort Pickens (at Pensacola) to preserve "the symbolism of federal authority." Seward also suggested an ultimatum to provoke war with Spain or France over their violations of the Monroe Doctrine as a way to reunite the country. "Whatever policy we adopt," Seward declared, "either the President must do it himself . . . or devolve it on some member of his Cabinet. . . . I neither seek to evade nor assume responsibility."

Such a bald-faced challenge would have justified Seward's dismissal. But Lincoln did not want to worsen the crisis by breaking up his administration after less than a month in office. So he responded in a manner that would become his hallmark in dealing with recalcitrant but important subordinates, generals or senators: a firm assertion of his own policy and responsibility for it, done in such a way as to avoid a personal rebuff that might create an enemy. Lincoln wrote a response to Seward that reiterated his intention to resupply Sumter, ignored the suggestion of an ultimatum to Spain or France and insisted that whatever policy was decided on, "I must do it." Thinking that this written response might be too cold, Lincoln did not send it but instead spoke personally with Seward.

Several weeks later Lincoln again overruled Seward by softening the tone of what Goodwin accurately describes as a "surly" and "abrasive" dispatch warning Britain against recognition of the Confederacy. By this time Seward had begun to see the light. "It is due to the president to say, that his magnanimity is almost superhuman," he wrote. "The president is the best of us."

Lincoln grew closer to Seward than to any other member of his administration. They spent many relaxing hours together (Seward lived a block from the White House) swapping political anecdotes and other stories, and Seward became one of the president's most loyal and effective supporters. He frequently praised Lincoln publicly as "the best and wisest man he [had] ever known."

Attorney General Bates, who initially underestimated Lincoln, soon echoed Seward's favorable opinions. Not so Chase, who never quite got over his conviction that the wrong man was nominated in 1860 and that he should receive the nomination in 1864. Lincoln valued his Treasury secretary's abilities as a finance minister, but he recognized Chase's lack of loyalty and poorly concealed ambition to replace him. Chase also became a lightning rod for the radical Republicans' dissatisfaction with the pace of Lincoln's actions against slavery.

On several occasions Chase offered his resignation in a calculated effort to force Lincoln's hand on a policy or patronage dispute. Each time Lincoln parried Chase's tactic, refusing to accept his resignation, reasserting his own authority and maintaining the balance among radicals, moderates and conservatives in the administration. When Chase tried this ploy a fourth time in June 1864, after Lincoln had been safely renominated, the president astonished him by accepting the resignation. To redress the cabinet balance, Lincoln subsequently requested the resignation of Postmaster General Montgomery Blair, Chase's most bitter enemy in the cabinet and a member of the powerful Blair family, which represented the most conservative element in the party. And Lincoln further defused radical opposition by appointing the deposed Chase as chief justice of the United States.

AS these internal Republican feuds suggest, the party in the 1860's was a coalition of politicians who only a few years earlier had been Whigs (Lincoln, Seward, Bates), Democrats (Blair, Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles and Vice President Hannibal Hamlin), Free Soilers (Chase), or had flirted with the short-lived anti-immigrant American Party, or Know Nothings (Cameron and Bates). In addition, several cabinet members personally disliked each other: Blair and Chase, Seward and Welles, Chase and Seward, Blair and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, who replaced Cameron in January 1862. Lincoln's "political genius" enabled him to herd these political cats and keep them driving toward ultimate victory.

How did he do it? Goodwin deals with this question better than any other writer. Part of the answer lay in Lincoln's steadfastness of purpose, which inspired subordinates to overcome their petty rivalries. Part of it lay in his superb sense of timing and his sensitivity to the pulse of public opinion as he moved to bring along a divided people to the support of "a new birth of freedom." And part of it lay in Lincoln's ability to rise above personal slights, his talent for getting along with men of clashing ideologies and personalities who could not get along with each other.

This temperament was best illustrated by Lincoln's relationship with Stanton, which Goodwin analyzes with great insight. In 1855 Lincoln had been retained as one of the attorneys for the defense in a patent-infringement suit brought by the McCormick reaper company. Because the case was initially scheduled to be tried in Chicago, the defense team needed an Illinois lawyer. But when the trial was moved to Cincinnati, the defense retained Stanton, one of the country's foremost attorneys, without bothering to inform Lincoln. When he arrived in Cincinnati after careful preparation, Stanton and his colleagues ignored him; Stanton was even heard to speak contemptuously of Lincoln as a backwoods bumpkin. Lincoln was hurt by the snub but stayed to watch the trial and was impressed by Stanton's courtroom brilliance. Six years later Stanton, a Democrat, was practicing in Washington during the war's first year and referred disdainfully to Lincoln in conversations with friends. Lincoln was aware of Stanton's opinions, but when he decided to get rid of the incompetent Cameron, who had made a hash of military mobilization, he appointed none other than Stanton as secretary of war.

Stanton soon justified the appointment. He worked 15-hour days at his stand-up desk and proved to be one of the best war secretaries the country has ever had. And like Seward, he soon changed his opinion of Lincoln, forging a close relationship with the president second only to Seward's. "No men were ever so deceived as we at Cincinnati," Stanton confessed to his former associate on the reaper case. No one was more grief-stricken by Lincoln's assassination than Stanton, who spoke the imperishable words as the president breathed his last: "Now he belongs to the ages." Lincoln's private secretary and confidant John Hay subsequently wrote to Stanton: "Not everyone knows, as I do, how close you stood to our lost leader, how he loved you and trusted you, and how vain were all the efforts to shake that trust and confidence."

"Team of Rivals" invites comparison with Goodwin's prize-winning account of another wartime president and his associates, "No Ordinary Time." Both portray the extraordinary leadership qualities of the commanders in chief in America's biggest wars. But "No Ordinary Time" is really a book about two leaders, Eleanor as well as [Franklin Roosevelt](http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/people/r/franklin_delano_roosevelt/index.html?inline=nyt-per), and about their complicated personal as well as official relationships with the women and men who were close to them. The only women conspicuous in "Team of Rivals" are Mary Lincoln and Salmon Chase's beautiful daughter Kate, who rivaled Mary Lincoln for status in Washington social circles. But they appear only occasionally and are not essential to the story. Goodwin depicts the sometimes splenetic Mary Lincoln with more sympathy than many historians have done, but cannot turn her into an Eleanor Roosevelt.

"Team of Rivals" is about men, not men and women. It does not range over the home front of factories and farms in the manner of "No Ordinary Time." It focuses on Washington and on the men who ran the war, chiefly Lincoln, Seward, Chase and Stanton. Within that sphere Goodwin has brilliantly described how Lincoln forged a team that preserved a nation and freed America from the curse of slavery.

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