

Interpreting Intentions

Candidate Lincoln's view of the American "house"

1858

Vocabulary

initiated: to begin or originate

avowed: to acknowledge openly, confess

agitation: to arouse public interest, to disturb

ceased: to bring to an end, to stop

augmented: to make greater, enlarge, increase

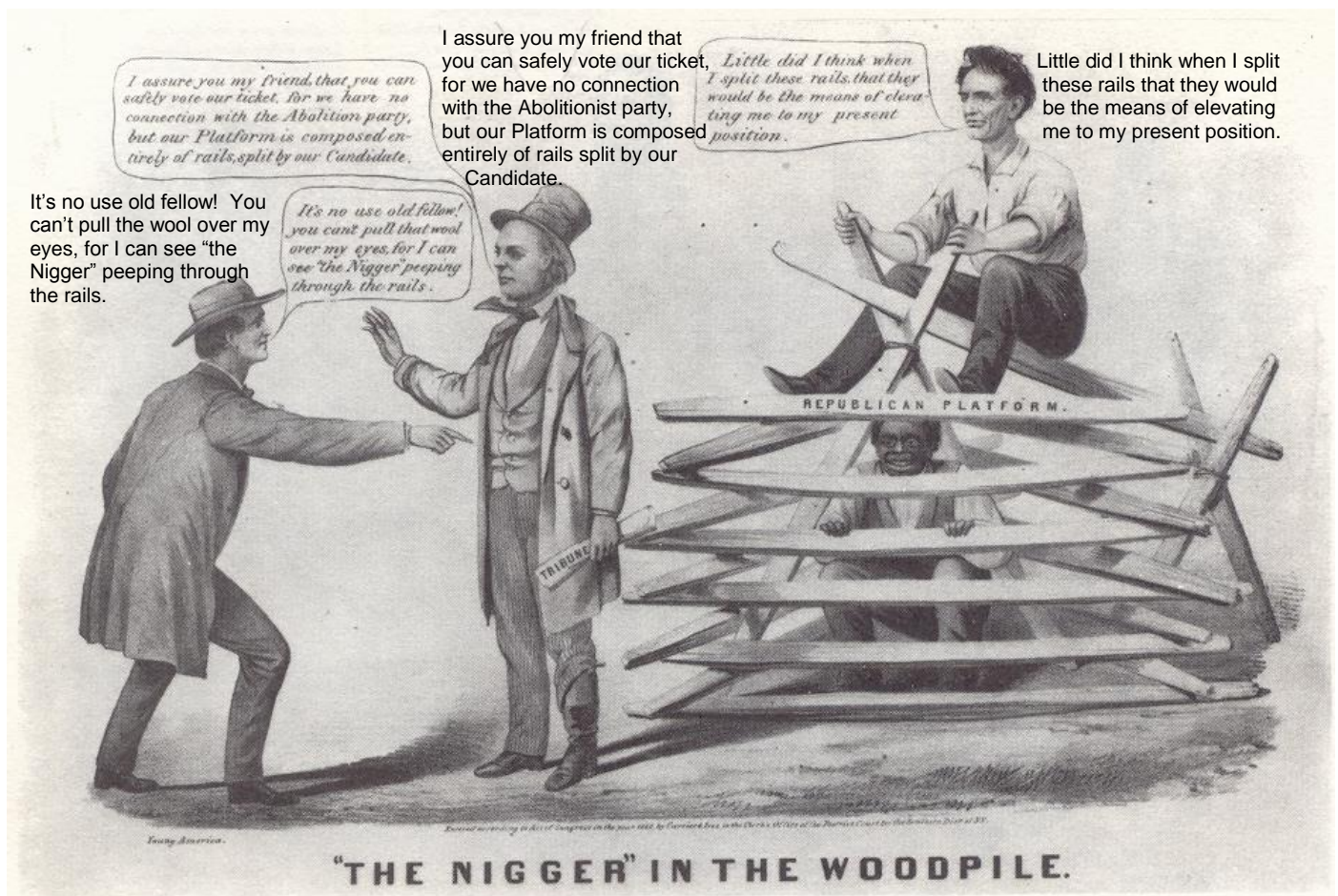
endured: to tolerate, to put up with

arrest: to stop or hold in check

If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it. We are now far into the fifth year since the policy was initiated with the avowed object and confident promise of putting an end to slavery agitation. Under the operation of that policy that agitation has not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. "A house divided against itself can not stand." I believe this Government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all of the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.

1. Lincoln refers to the "fifth year since the policy" of *popular sovereignty* was established by the passing of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in 1854. This policy allowed voters to decide for themselves whether to allow slavery in the new western territories. Explain Lincoln's view of this policy of popular sovereignty.
2. What does Lincoln mean when he refers to "a house divided against itself"?
3. In 1858, the United States was divided between "free states" and "slave states". The fate of the new western lands was to be decided by the policy of *popular sovereignty*. Explain what Lincoln believes will happen to this "divided" system.
4. Summarize what you believe presidential *candidate* Abraham Lincoln's plan is to solve the slavery crisis in America. How is he going to keep "the house" from falling?
5. If you were an *abolitionist*, would you vote for Lincoln based on what he said in this speech? Explain why or why not.
6. If you were a southerner, would you vote for Lincoln based on what he said in this speech? Explain why or why not.

Below is a cartoon published prior to the presidential election of 1860. Remember that the term “nigger”, offensive to us in modern times, was commonly used in Lincoln’s time by people throughout the North and South. Since slavery and state’s rights were at the heart of the presidential election in 1860, it should not be surprising that this term shows up in the highly charged political cartoons of the time.



1. Does this cartoon support Lincoln’s candidacy for the White House? Explain why or why not.
2. The man to the left in the cartoon represents the “average” American male. What does his quote seem to say about what most Americans thought about Abraham Lincoln’s view of slavery? Explain.
3. The man in the middle represents Horace Greeley, the editor of the New York Tribune and a strong supporter of Lincoln. Explain why he would want to distance Lincoln from being associated with the abolitionist movement.
4. Abraham Lincoln was promoted by many as a strong and energetic “rail splitter” from the West – someone who cut wooden rails from larger logs – who earned his position through hard work and determination. Does the image of Lincoln in this cartoon promote this belief? Explain why or why not.
5. Would you expect to find this cartoon in an *abolitionist* or a southern newspaper? Is there any evidence of bias in the words or images? Explain.