Thesis Proposal

Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1860. This election has been seen by historians as one of the watershed moments in American political history. The Republican Party was created in 1854 and in the second Presidential election in which the Party had a candidate they were victorious. The opposition Democratic Party split in two separate parties, one in the Northern states and another in the South, over the issue of slavery. In the previous election the Democratic platform on slavery was that of Popular Sovereignty, which let the residents of a territory or state vote on the legality of slavery in the territory or state. By 1860 the Southern Representatives were not content with Popular Sovereignty. The Northern Democrats disagreed with the Southern Representative's stance. This led to a split within the Party with the two new factions choosing their own representatives for President. The Northern Democrats went with Stephen Douglass and the Southern Democrats went with John Breckenridge. The split in the party was a large reason why the Republican Party's candidate, Abraham Lincoln was able to win the election.

Lincoln's main agenda was responding to the secession of seven states in the Southern United States. Lincoln needed to figure out how to stop a possible civil war but more specifically to make sure no more states seceded from the Union. He needed support from the United States to do this since he was just elected and many questioned is leadership. Lincoln's strategy was to bring in his political opponents to be his cabinet. He brought in men he did not even know really well but trusted them the same. One man, John Gilmer, was invited from a Southern state that had not yet seceded, North Carolina. Lincoln brought in his largest opponents when he was running for the Republican national ticket. This opponents came from all forms of politics including within the Republican Party and in the opposition Democratic
party. This move was very different than any other President had done such as the previous president, James Buchanan. Many believed that the President was only adding a wide range of politicians to his cabinet to secure his stay in office and not to have differing ideas. By adding these politicians from different political backgrounds Lincoln was able to appease the politicians' constituents and get support from their districts. I will shape my research around how Lincoln's choice of cabinet members helped or hurt his Presidency and how cabinet members influenced his decisions in regard to the Civil War. Lincoln's reasoning to put these men as his most trusted advisors could have been either to accommodate voters or to get differing points of view when making his decisions. The first major test came with the question of what to do about Fort Sumter. The Fort was in the middle of Charleston Harbor in South Carolina. South Carolina had seceded from the Union and had immediately moved to capture all federal military posts. Major Anderson, the head of Fort Moultrie, the fort near the mouth of the harbor, decided to move his troops from Fort Moultrie to Fort Sumter. Anderson's forces eventually began to run out of supplies by the way of food. This gave Lincoln a difficult decision to either resupply the Fort or tell Major Anderson to attack from the Fort or give it up. Lincoln asked his cabinet for suggestions to his dilemma. He got many different suggestions such as either resupply or abandon Fort Sumter. Lincoln took into account the opinions of many of the cabinet members and made his decision to resupply the Fort. Lincoln's choice of cabinet members may or may not have altered his final choice.

Much has been discussed over the years about Lincoln's choice of cabinet members and the discussion has remained the same. One particular issue to discuss is how Secretary of State William Seward and President Lincoln battled for the control of the cabinet. Seward was a Whig in the past which led him to be a radical Republican. Abraham Lincoln was more moderate so
they clashed on a lot of issues such as slavery and how to deal with the Southern states. In 1985 James McPherson wrote *Battle Cry of Freedom*. McPherson discusses how Lincoln and Seward battled on different issues especially Fort Sumter. Seward diverted what supplies were going to Fort Sumter and sent them to a neighboring Fort Pinckney to appease Southern leaders. Without Lincoln's permission, Seward sent a letter to Southern leaders promising the abandonment of Fort Sumter. When Lincoln learned of all of this he immediately sent Seward a letter. In the letter, stated that it was not Seward's job to deal directly with Sumter and Southern leaders but that it was Lincoln's job as President. This moment, McPherson argues, is the turning point in the relationship where Lincoln took control of the cabinet. In 2004, Michael Green wrote *Freedom, Union, and Power*. The discussion was very similar to that of McPherson. Seward and Lincoln argued indirectly about who was in control of the cabinet but the Sumter issue cleared it up.

Green does focus on the ideologies of the two. To his constituents, it appeared Lincoln brought in Seward to balance out the cabinet. Seward was a Whig and to the Whig's Secretary of State was the prime position of power where he could be in the President's ear. But Lincoln, as a Republican, believed the President should have the most power. This may also play into the martial law he imposed during the war.

I will be surveying a wide range of sources, both Primary and Secondary. Most of my books will be coming from the J. Murray Atkins library. A couple books will be ordered from Interlibrary Loan and a couple articles are online to read. I will be using JSTOR, Project MUSE, and Historical Abstracts to find scholarly articles and personal accounts from members of the cabinet. I will be looking at Abraham Lincoln's personal papers to see his point of view as he is the center of both the cabinet and my thesis. Those around Lincoln, such as family and friends
and other cabinet members will serve as good references to his reasoning for putting the cabinet the way it was. With my secondary sources I will be looking at different books discussing the time period around when Abraham Lincoln chose his cabinet. *Battle Cry of Freedom* by James McPherson provides an in depth look on the individuals who were selected to Lincoln's cabinet and why they were selected. The Encyclopedia of the United States Cabinet discusses the biographical information of every cabinet member from United States history. From this I plan to figure out motives in the administration and political backgrounds of each cabinet member. *The Dictionary of the American Biography* includes a biography of each cabinet member. I will be using this to get a more complete look at each member.

My hope is that my work will shed more light upon Lincoln's mind and how it transferred to politics and not just specifically the war itself. Lincoln's presidency is marked by the Civil War and many skip over the unique fact that he had a divided cabinet. Looking in-depth at the cabinet will help me be able to understand why and how it did or did not work. This may help today's historians and politicians understand Lincoln's strategy and if it could work today.
Bibliography

Primary Sources


Secondary Sources


