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The Legal Career of Abraham Lincoln [Annotated Bibliography]

Steven Fioretti

Western Kentucky University, steven.fioretti391@topper.wku.edu

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Steven Fioretti
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Paula Trafton
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Annotated Bibliography

Topic and Brief Description

The Legal Career of Abraham Lincoln:

Throughout American History, there has been a misconception that Abraham Lincoln was just the sixteenth President of the United States, and only followed behind the footsteps of politicians. In reality though, his first love was to practice Law, from which he made his everyday living on, and became popular as a political figure to the public. Mostly known as the “Whig Lawyer,” Lincoln ran for state legislature in 1832, but unfortunately lost by 92% of the vote. He then ran repeatedly again in 1836, 1838, and 1840 and finally won, further becoming a member of the “Long Nine” Whig Legislation. Here, he represented clients equally, defending them regardless of their personal and religious beliefs. The only ones he wouldn’t defend were clients that he believed to be guilty. Although Lincoln never formally studied at an accredited law school, he was influenced by longtime friend and Springfield lawyer John T. Stuart. In 1837 however, Lincoln moved to Springfield, Illinois to become partners with Stewart, as well as other prominent attorneys Stephen Logan and William Herndon.

Abraham Lincoln practiced Law roughly for twenty-five (25) years, mostly of which were within the courts of Illinois and Washington. He mostly became popular working on cases affiliated with property, debts, crop damage, and divorce. Lincoln represented a multitude of cases in which he defended Rock Island from getting into a lawsuit with a shipping company, where a steamboat hit a bridge on the Mississippi River, represented a law firm from infringement from the McCormack Reaper Company, and most importantly represented slaves. Lincoln believed that slavery was “founded on both injustice and public policy.” Lincoln’s involvement with slavery cases ultimately led him to declare the Kansas Nebraska Act in 1854, ceasing state slavery in Missouri, and forwarding the Emancipation Proclamation, ending slavery completely. When Abraham Lincoln became a lawyer, he achieved an average yearly salary of \$5,000, mostly of which he earned by representing railroad construction cases in the early 1850s. Abraham Lincoln is still recognized as a prominent figure in the legal world, from which there is an institution dedicated to him entitled Abraham Lincoln University, which includes a school of law, and programs structured around Criminal Justice and Administration.

Information Resources

Two Books:

Ed. Billings, Roger and Williams, Frank J. 2010. *Abraham Lincoln, Esq.: The Legal Career of America’s Greatest President*. The University Press of Kentucky.

This book illustrates Abraham Lincoln as a lawyer through a summation of information dealing with Lincoln's legal profession, from the ways in which he handled cases dealing with debts, moral issues, and conflicts within the legal system. Throughout, Lincoln gives suggestions to contemporary lawyers, from past experiences he had himself. Lincoln also offers colorful insights of how the law influenced presidential and political decisions.

Dirck, Brian. 2007. *Lincoln the Lawyer*. Board of Trustees: University of Illinois.

This book provides a brief synopsis of the level of passion Lincoln had for law and justice in America. Dirck describes in depth his legal education background and his partnership with other prominent firms throughout Illinois and Washington. Dirck also observes the ethical issues concerning the expansion of law throughout Lincoln's life. More importantly, he offers insightful views of the law from Lincoln himself.

Two Internet Sources:

Weider History Group. 2012. "Abraham Lincoln." www.historynet.com/abraham-lincoln.

This wonderful internet source provides very descriptive information of Abraham Lincoln, from the personal struggles he encountered as a child, to the political and legal successes he achieved throughout his life. Weider History Group provides a detailed description of Abraham Lincoln's career as a lawyer, through the perspective of Charles M. Hubbard, associate professor of History at Lincoln Memorial University. Viewers can also access photographs, fun facts, and quotes regarding his career and life.

John Gorga. 2011. "Abraham Lincoln Legal Papers." www.lincolnlegalpapers.org

This internet source provides outstanding information, through the perspective of John Gorga, lawyer, fan of Abraham Lincoln, and creator of this website. Gorga provides a brief summary of Lincoln, and also has self-written "blogs" specifically pertaining to Lincoln as a lawyer, and short summaries of the cases he was involved in, including "Fleming vs. Rogers and Crothers," and "The Dalby Case." He also provides specific information of Abraham Lincoln's advice to future lawyers. There are also some very useful legal resources that viewers may access for their own pleasure.

One Reference Source:

Garraty, John, Carnes, Mark, ed. 1999. *American National Biography Volume 13* New York: Oxford University Press.

This reference source is over 800 pages long, but information on Abraham Lincoln spans from pages 662-673. It provides essential information concerning Abraham Lincoln in general, including information on his career path, childhood, proclamations and acts passed, and basic ideology. This source gives readers a general synopsis of the life style in America during the 1800s.

One Scholarly Journal Article:

Steiner, Mark E. Northern Illinois University Press 2006. "An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln." *Civil War History Vol. LIV* 176-193.

This article observes the way in which lawyers have been educated in the United States within the past century, focusing particularly on Abraham Lincoln. The author

provides an analysis of Lincoln's career, specifically as a Whig Lawyer, abiding personal and religious belief in a case. Steiner also explains the prevalence to Lincoln's defense to slaves recovering lost property. He also describes the how legal trends back in the early 1800s are affecting legal trends in today's American Judicial System.