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Lincoln's Dreams: An Analysis of the Sixteenth President's 'Night Terrors' and Other Chimeras

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LINCOLN'S DREAMS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SIXTEENTH PRESIDENT'S
'NIGHT TERRORS' AND OTHER CHIMERAS

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
Western Kentucky University
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In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

By
Lucas R. Somers

August 2015

LINCOLN'S DREAMS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE SIXTEENTH PRESIDENT'S
'NIGHT TERRORS' AND OTHER CHIMERAS

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CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Chapter One: The Cabinet Meeting Dream	9
Chapter Two: The White House Funeral Dream	27
Chapter Three: The Janus-Faced Vision	42
Chapter Four: Other Lincoln Dreams and Visions	53
Conclusion	64
Bibliography.....	71

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Lucas Somers

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Decades before Freud revealed his revolutionary dream theory, Americans became fascinated with the reported dreams of their greatest hero, Abraham Lincoln. Immediately following Lincoln's assassination, accounts of his dreams and visions were recorded and made public by those who were close to him during his presidency. This thesis evaluates the three most famous dreams and visions that have been ascribed to Lincoln, as their legitimacy is often doubted. Five additional dreams that are more easily documented are also discussed, and, when taken together, they reveal a significant aspect of Lincoln's worldview and reflect the complicated nature of belief systems in America during the nineteenth century.

Nineteenth century Americans were largely on their own to interpret the meaning of their dreams, and they ultimately came to conclusions that were based within their fundamental worldview. This thesis shows that Lincoln's dreams are a valuable source for determining his worldview, which was essentially a form of fatalism. While many argued that his recurring dream that preceded important events in the Civil War and a dream about his own funeral in the White House were either evidence of his belief in spiritualism or some divine prophecy, Lincoln's response to those dreams reveals his true nature. This analysis helps us examine Lincoln's interior as well as showing how a pre-Freudian culture responded to the dreams of a national hero.

Introduction

As he awoke on the morning of April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln knew that a significant event would soon take place. Just days before, General Robert E. Lee of the Confederate States of America had surrendered to General Ulysses S. Grant, marking the long awaited end of the tragic civil war that had taken hold of the nation for four years. Grant was present along with many others at Lincoln's Cabinet meeting on that Good Friday, including Assistant Secretary of State Frederick W. Seward, Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, and Secretary of the Navy Gideon Welles. Though the Union had seemingly already won the war, they still awaited word from General William T. Sherman of General Joseph Johnston's Confederate surrender in North Carolina. Lincoln expressed his confidence that this would be the day Sherman would officially end the war, and his notion arose from a dream he had had the night before. He experienced the same dream several times during his presidency, and it seemed to always precede an important moment for the Union war effort. In the dream he was aboard a single indescribable ship sailing rapidly toward a dark and indefinite shore. Lincoln's listeners reacted as would be expected, some calling it a coincidence and others seeking to explain why he repeatedly had the same dream again and again, but the president satisfied himself that this Good Friday would be a day of victory for the Union. Just hours after the meeting, Lincoln and his wife Mary attended a play at Ford's Theatre where John Wilkes Booth shot and killed the Sixteenth President.¹

¹ Gideon Welles, *Diary of Gideon Welles: Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson*, ed. Howard K. Beale (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1960), 2:282-283; Frederick W. Seward, *Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman and Diplomat 1830-1915* (New York: G.P. Putnam's and Sons, 1916), 255; Ward Hill Lamon, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln 1847-1865*, ed. Dorothy Lamon Teillard (Washington, D.C., 1911), 118-120.

Lincoln experienced numerous dreams throughout his life, and particularly during his presidency, that he told to those close to him. Like the one he related to his Cabinet just hours before his assassination, many of the dreams held significant meaning to the president. Whether or not he received prophecies through his dreams—as some would later argue—can never be determined, and it matters little unless Lincoln believed this to be true. From this dream alone it is evident that Lincoln not only thought that dreams had real meaning, but also that he was confident enough in this belief to tell his dream to others and potentially base his actions off a dream. Mainly during his presidency, Lincoln had many dreams and visions that he felt were significant enough to relate to his friends and family. These dreams and visions are important because they appear to have influenced Lincoln’s actions as President and, at the same time, expressed aspects of his worldview. If Lincoln’s dreams and visions held such an important place in his mind, then they are certainly worth analyzing. The implication of believing in dreams, as Lincoln did, involves various aspects of his makeup, including religious beliefs, superstition, and broader philosophies about the world, all of which have been the subject of wider—and sometimes wild—speculation by historians, biographers, and other writers. The dreams and visions compiled here can aid in understanding more deeply the man who led the nation through its darkest years and who has become one of its greatest heroes.

Historian Andrew Burstein has provided an interesting study of dreams experienced by many notable Americans from the colonial period through the end of the nineteenth century, including those of the Sixteenth President.² Tackling dreams in a pre-

² Andrew Burstein, *Lincoln Dreamt He Died: The Midnight Visions of Remarkable Americans from Colonial Times to Freud* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan Trade, 2014).

Freudian world allows us to shed modern scientific studies and focus on how nineteenth century Americans perceived this phenomenon. People during this era were fascinated by dreams, as random dream accounts appeared in newspapers across the nation.

Burstein argues that this focus on dreams helps explain why people of the twentieth century became so fascinated with psychology.³ He also shows that dreams offer clues into the emotions of the dreamers, as they otherwise would not have been revealed.⁴ This holds true with Lincoln as well. His dreams illuminate certain aspects of his personality and character that have been described for 150 years, among the most prominent of which was his fatalism.

Many of Lincoln's contemporaries shared his proclivity for scrutinizing their dreams, and their thoughts on what dreams meant to them provide clues that help explain how the President contemplated his nocturnal visions. Alexander Hamilton Stephens, the Vice President for the Confederacy throughout the Civil War, recorded his dreams in a diary while imprisoned at Fort Warren in the months after the war ended. During his five-month captivity, Stephens recorded over a dozen dreams, often describing them in

³ Sigmund Freud, Austrian physician and the creator of psychoanalysis, released his monumental *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1900 and printed seven subsequent editions over the next three decades. This scientific study rejects previous notions of the divine nature of dreams and that dreams are portents of the future, and is the first successful psychological work on the subject of dreams. Within this work, Freud reveals his theory that all dreams are essentially "wish fulfillments," as well as his theory of the Oedipus complex. Freud inspired many others in the early 20th century to approach dreams psychologically, and it was during this period that psychology developed into a significant field of study. Carl Jung, one of Freud's early followers, developed his own theories on dreams, based on the idea that a collective subconscious of the human species was an important part of the mind and a source of dreams. The collective subconscious had specific archetypes that appeared as symbols in dreams. While Freud's and Jung's dream theories are not always accepted in the modern era, they certainly represent a shift in the way people viewed dreams. Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (Leipzig and Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1900); Carl Jung, *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung*, Bollingen Series, 20 vols. eds. Sir Herbert Read, Michael Fordham, Gerhard Adler, William McGuire (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1950-1979).

⁴ Burstein, xvii-xviii.

great detail. He included significant insight about what he believed his dreams signified, and informed his readers that the dreams he had recorded were not the only ones he experienced. Rather, he wrote that he rarely slept without dreaming, suggesting how important dreams were to his consciousness.⁵ The first of these recorded dreams was accompanied by an insightful depiction of his current state of mind as well as the impact of recent events on his psyche: “Dreamed of home last night. O Dreams! Visions! Shadows of my brain! What are you? My whole consciousness, since I heard of President Lincoln’s assassination, seems nothing but a horrid dream.”⁶

While Lincoln and Stephens led opposing sides during the war, they actually had a close relationship earlier in their political careers. Only three years separated them in age, and, after serving together as young Whigs in the 30th United States Congress, the two men likely would have remained friends through the end of their lives had it not been for the divisive issues that brought on the Civil War. In a December 1860 letter to Stephens, Lincoln expressed that the “only substantial difference between us” was the issue of slavery.⁷ While the war placed these men against each other, they unknowingly shared an intimate aspect of their personality: the weight of dreams on their consciousness.

Since Lincoln never recorded his dreams in a diary, and most of the sources quote him indirectly, Stephens provides an invaluable contextual source for the perception of

⁵ Alexander Hamilton Stephens, *Recollections of Alexander H. Stephens: His Diary Kept at Fort Warren, Boston Harbour, 1865; Giving Incidents and Reflections of His Prison Life and Some Letters and Reminiscences*, ed. Myrta Lockett Avary (1910; repr., Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1998), 346-347.

⁶ Stephens, *Recollections*, 141.

⁷ Abraham Lincoln to Alexander H. Stephens, December 22, 1860, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Richard Basler, 9 vols. (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953-55), 4: 160-161.

dreams in Lincoln's time. While sleeping in his cell at Fort Warren, located in the Boston Harbor, Stephens typically dreamed about his home and family in faraway Georgia. He expressed his anxiety about friends and family members he had not received news about since the fall of the Confederacy, after dreaming of them in poor condition or, as in the case of his brother, having not seen him at all in his dreams. He woke in tears on multiple occasions: once, after dreaming of being at home with his slaves, wishing them a final farewell; and again after a dream about visiting his deceased sister and her family. In both instances, he claimed that the tears were out of pleasure, demonstrating the emotions that his dreams had triggered.⁸ Along with describing specific dreams, Stephens also wrote on several occasions about his thoughts on his dreams and what they meant to him. One of his entries gave a basic description of his dreams: "For the most part my dreams seem nothing but the aberrations of my own mind...they seem special visitations; visitations of two kinds: social or every-day visits, and visits portending something that impress as presentiments."⁹ This shows that some of his dreams at least appear to be indications of future events, which echoed the types of dreams that Lincoln described multiple times. These dreams may have seemed to impress these feelings on Stephens, but he still had to wrestle with how this could coexist with his understanding of logic and reason.

After completing Cicero's "On Divination" and "On Fate," Stephens pondered his own experience with dreams in relation to that classical perspective. He stated that Cicero's view of dreams agreed with reason, as it challenged the idea that dreams are a legitimate form of divination, but it never claimed to reach a conclusive answer to the

⁸ Stephens, *Recollections*, 315, 346.

⁹ Stephens, *Recollections*, 346-347.

debate. Stephens also acknowledged that it was common for dreams to feel like presentiments of coming events, as he observed through his own experience with dreams. He argued that not everything can be explained by reason and that these dreams should not be dismissed as superstition. He also allowed for the possibility that God could communicate with humans through dreams, despite the lack of a reasonable explanation for such occurrences. He ended this discussion by confessing that he extended his argument too far and that it could mistakenly suggest an inference of his own beliefs, but this thoughtful meditation provides a lens through which nineteenth-century Americans viewed their dreams.¹⁰

Though Lincoln did not read the works of Cicero during his lifetime, he certainly structured his life according to logic and reason. Two of Lincoln's earliest speeches as a young Springfield politician demonstrate his belief that the United States needed to rely on reason and rationality in order to maintain its political institutions. His January 1838 address to Springfield's Young Men's Lyceum asserted that passion was necessary to establish their nation in the previous generations, but he urged that it could no longer protect that hard-fought liberty: "Passion has helped us; but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason, must furnish all the materials for our future support and defence."¹¹ Again, in February 1842, at his address before the Springfield Washington Temperance Society, Lincoln expressed his belief that reason should replace passion to ensure the continued progress of society: "Happy day, when, all appetites controlled, all passions subdued, all matters subjected, *mind*, all conquering *mind*, shall live and move the monarch of the world. Glorious

¹⁰ Stephens, *Recollections*, 258-260.

¹¹ Lincoln, "Address Before the Young Man's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois," January 27, 1838, in *Collected Works* ed. Basler, 1:108-115.

consummation! Hail fall of Fury! Reign of Reason, all hail!"¹² While Lincoln did not refer to reason and passion in relation to dreams in these speeches, it revealed his understanding of the world as being governed by reason, logic, and rationalism, likely influenced by his reading of Thomas Paine and Constantin de Volney while living in New Salem as a young man in the mid-1830s.¹³

During his imprisonment, Alexander Stephens reconciled his sense of reason with the likelihood that dreams could be portents of future events. Lincoln's propensity for talking about his dreams with those close to him may have served the same purpose of Stephens recording his dreams in a diary. Both men relied on reason and intellect as prominent American statesmen, but those faculties alone could not explain what their dreams meant or if they were a form of communication with a divine power.

Understanding the nineteenth century context of the source of dreams, before the introduction of Freudian and Jungian theories and countless subsequent scientific studies, is the only appropriate approach for evaluating Lincoln's dreams and determining what they can divulge about the way he perceived the world around him. His dreams did not necessarily undermine his dedication to logic and reason; rather, they ultimately fit within his belief in fatalism. Lincoln repeatedly searched for the meaning of his dreams by telling them to his friends and family. This was likely an effort to understand them reasonably. When reason failed to explain his dreams, as also happened for Stephens, he accepted them because he knew that the universe had its own plan, and his dreams were undoubtedly part of that design and that they must serve a specific purpose. His interest in his dreams, then, should not be simply interpreted as evidence of his superstitious

¹² Lincoln, "Temperance Address," February 22, 1842, in *Collected Works* ed. Basler, 1:271-279.

¹³ Douglas L. Wilson, *Honor's Voice: The Transformation of Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 77-83.

nature. Lincoln eventually reconciled his understanding of the world based on reason and rationalism with presentiments that were not easily explained.

Chapter One:

The Cabinet Meeting Dream

The dream recounted at the April 14th Cabinet meeting was the most publicized of Lincoln's dreams. It appeared in newspapers just days after the Sixteenth President's assassination.¹⁴ At least two of the Cabinet members in attendance recorded the conversation during the meeting: Frederick Seward (who, as Assistant Secretary of State, attended the meeting for his father, William Seward, the administration's Secretary of State) and Gideon Welles, the Secretary of the Navy. The story of this dream continued to resurface in newspapers in the years after the assassination, and often it contained different details and attached different interpretations depending on the account. The variants of the dream are significant because many sources used it to ascribe a specific personal trait or traits to Lincoln, which became a source of debate for this particular dream. The dreams, especially the one that occurred the night before Lincoln's assassination, can effectively demonstrate important aspects of the president's worldview and beliefs, but many of the sources have misrepresented those characteristics. The different versions, then, have made Lincoln seem to possess different attributes through the way the tellers of these different versions say he responded to the dream. By taking these variants into account, this thesis attempts to determine the president's actual reaction so that his worldview is accurately discerned. Also, the cause for the misrepresentations reflects broader understandings of dreams in post-Civil War America, while not necessarily grasping Lincoln's personal perception.

The story as reported by those in attendance at the Cabinet meeting on April 14, 1865 are the most trustworthy, but other versions managed to grab the attention of

¹⁴ "Interesting Incidents of Mr. Lincoln's Last Days," *New York Herald*, April 18, 1865.

Americans through the print media during the decades after Lincoln's assassination. Gideon Welles recorded a detailed account of the meeting in his diary, including the most cited version of Lincoln's dream story. Welles noted that he wrote down the conversation three days later, and that, had it not been for the assassination of the president, the dream probably would have been forgotten.¹⁵ At the end of his life, Frederick Seward also recollected Lincoln's last Cabinet meeting, including the conversation about the recurring dream.¹⁶ Welles remains the most cited and likely the most reliable source for this dream because his diary entry is the earliest available record of the story, presumably written no later than April 17. The *New York Herald* printed another account of the dream on April 18, the first time it appeared to the public. These are only three of the numerous versions of Lincoln's recurring dream, but they provide a pretty clear picture of what was said during the meeting on that Good Friday.

Accounts of the Cabinet meeting agree that the conversation turned to the awaited news from General Sherman, whom Grant—who had recently arrived in Washington from Appomattox—believed would send a telegram from North Carolina declaring that Confederate general, Joseph Johnston, had surrendered his army. Lincoln agreed the news would come soon and that it would be favorable, because, he said, he had had his usual dream the night before—a dream that had come to him “preceding nearly every great and important event of the war.”¹⁷ When asked about this dream, Lincoln told Welles it pertained to the Navy secretary's domain, featured a ship traveling on the water.

¹⁵ Gideon Welles, *The Civil War Diary of Gideon Welles: Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy*, eds. William E. Gienapp & Erica L. Gienapp (Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: The Knox College Lincoln Studies Center and the University of Illinois Press, 2014), 622-624.

¹⁶ Frederick Seward, *Reminiscences of a War-Time Statesman and Diplomat 1830-1915* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1916), 255.

¹⁷ Welles, *Civil War Diary*, 2014, 623.

He then described that in the dream he “seemed to be in some singular, indescribable vessel, and that he was moving with great rapidity [toward an indefinite shore].”¹⁸ Lincoln asserted his own interpretation of the dream, noting that it had previously preceded “the firing on Fort Sumter, the battles of Bull Run, Antietam, Gettysburg, Stone[s] River, Vicksburg, Wilmington, etc.” Grant quickly interjected that Stones River had been no victory for the Union and that there were no great results afterward. Lincoln, however, repeated his conviction that great news would arrive soon and claimed, “I think it must be from Sherman. My thoughts are in that direction as are most of yours.”¹⁹ This report came from Welles’s diary, and it should serve as the baseline for examining the other versions.

Frederick Seward included additional reactions from the Cabinet members to Lincoln’s dream. Someone present laughed and told Lincoln that it could not foretell a victory or defeat this time because the war had already ended, while another dismissed it simply as a matter of coincidences. Young Seward suggested: “Perhaps at each of these periods there were possibilities of great change or disaster, and the vague feeling of uncertainty may have led to the dim vision in sleep.”²⁰ Unsurprisingly, Lincoln’s listeners dismissed the significance of his dream and were not convinced that it indicated a great event, let alone news of Sherman’s victory. More important is that the dream had an impact on Lincoln; to him the dream carried enormous significance. Welles alone claimed Lincoln expected a victory to occur, as he asserted that the news that had

¹⁸ Welles later added the bracketed phrase to his entry, which, in an article published for *The Galaxy* in 1872, became: “toward a dark and indefinite shore.” Welles, *Civil War Diary*, 2014, 623; Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 547.

¹⁹ Welles, *Civil War Diary*, 2014, 624; John G. Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln: A History* Vol. 10 (New York: The Century Co., 1914), 281-282.

²⁰ Seward, *Reminiscences*, 255.

followed the dream in the past had been generally favorable. Victory or not, the president was certain that whatever happened that day, it would be significant. The *New York Herald* article attributed a phrase to Lincoln that simplified his perception of the dream: “I am sure that it portends to some important national event.”²¹

Ward Hill Lamon, the U.S. Marshall for the District of Columbia and Lincoln’s bodyguard during his presidency, wrote that the president “became unusually cheerful” after the Cabinet meeting. Lamon claimed that Mary Todd Lincoln later said that she never saw Mr. Lincoln look happier than he did on the carriage ride they took that afternoon, a remark echoed by Francis B. Carpenter, the famous painter of the *First Reading of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Lincoln*.²² During the carriage ride President Lincoln reportedly said: “I consider that this day the war has come to a close. Now we must try to be more cheerful in the future, for between this terrible war and the loss of our darling son [Willie Lincoln, who had died in 1862] we have suffered much misery. Let us both try to be happy.” Whether Lincoln actually spoke these words or not will probably never be known with any certainty, but Lincoln’s cheerful mood following the Cabinet meeting suggests that he genuinely believed that his dream meant the war had officially ended. No matter what others thought about the president’s dreams, Lincoln saw them as having real meaning relating to present or future events, especially because his mood evidently had been lifted by the dream.²³ This assertion about Lincoln’s mood also supports Welles’s claim that the dream indicated favorable news from Sherman.

²¹ “Interesting Incidents of Mr. Lincoln’s Last Days,” *New York Herald*, April 18, 1865.

²² F.B. Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1867), 292-293.

²³ Lamon, *Recollections*, 119-120.

Another Cabinet member present at the April 14th meeting, Attorney General James Speed, is credited with retelling the dream, but his recollection was indirectly made public. Charles Dickens, the world-renowned nineteenth-century author, repeated the story of President Lincoln's final Cabinet meeting several times after it had been told to him on his visit to Washington, D.C. in February 1868 by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton. Dickens's famous biographer John Forster printed part of a letter that related the conversation with Stanton. While at dinner with Stanton and Charles Sumner, Dickens heard a "curious little story" from the War Secretary about the Cabinet meeting that took place on the afternoon of Lincoln's assassination. Stanton explained that he had arrived late to the meeting, and when he entered the room, Lincoln broke off his sentence and announced that they should get on with their business. Surprised at the unusual mood of the President, Stanton commented on the change in Lincoln to the Attorney General as they left the meeting. Speed then told Stanton what happened before his late entrance: "While we were waiting for you, he said, with his chin on his breast, 'Gentlemen, something very extraordinary is going to happen, and that very soon.'" Speed responded by asking if it would be something good, to which Lincoln gloomily answered: "I don't know; I don't know. But it will happen, and shortly too!" The Attorney-General continued by asking if the President had received any news, which he had not, but he had a dream the previous night, one that he had now had three times. Dickens recalled that the dream first occurred the night before the Battle of Bull Run and again before a battle that he only remembered as another defeat for the Union. Speed then asked the President about the nature of his dream, and Lincoln explained, "I am on a great broad rolling river—and I am in a boat—and I drift—and I drift!—but this is not business." The

President cut the story short as he noticed Stanton enter the room and announced that they should proceed with business.²⁴

The dream account as remembered by Dickens placed James Speed at the center of the conversation with the President and carried a more ominous tone than the other stories that originated with a member of the Cabinet. This retelling of the dream suggested that Lincoln saw it as a sign of impending danger or unfavorable news. Within weeks of Dickens's death in June 1870, the *New York Herald* reported a nearly identical account included in Forster's 1874 biography of Dickens, but the article ended by commenting on how President Lincoln cut the dream short. Attorney General Speed, while filling Stanton in on what he had missed at the beginning of the 1865 meeting claimed, "we have lost the conclusion of the dream," and the *Herald* continued, "And it was lost forever... We shall never know the end of Mr. Lincoln's dream." Evidently the 1870 reporter writing reminiscences of Charles Dickens did not know that his newspaper had printed an article just four days after Lincoln's final cabinet meeting, in which it described the same dream with some variance in the wording.²⁵ The story retold by Dickens is one example of a dream account implying that Lincoln interpreted it as possibly a portent of his own death. Elsewhere this argument is made more blatantly, and it sparked a public debate about the implications the dream had on Lincoln's worldview. It is also significant that the main anecdotes discussed about Charles Dickens following his death included his knowledge and interest in Abraham Lincoln's dreams.

²⁴ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols. (London: Chapman and Hall, 1874), 3:385-388.

²⁵ "Charles Dickens: Reminiscences of the Man, the Novelist and Parent," *New York Herald*, June 29, 1870, 6.

The dream Lincoln related during his final Cabinet meeting appeared in a more dramatic form during the famous 1867 trial of John Surratt, one of the accused conspirators in the plot to assassinate the president, ignited the interest of many Americans. As the lengthy trial came to a close, the federal prosecutor Edwards Pierrepont used the late President's final dream to support his argument. As the proceedings continued in the afternoon of August 5, 1867, Pierrepont began by describing how God, since ancient times, had sent warnings in the form of presentiments and dreams of the impending disaster of a nation. He then included Lincoln by recounting his last Cabinet meeting and the dream the president shared, though the prosecutor mistakenly said that it took place on April 13th instead of April 14th. Pierrepont described that despite all of the favorable news being received about the end of the war, Lincoln still had "a heavy gloom" on his soul as he called together his Cabinet. The President first announced his anxiety to hear news from General Sherman, to which General Grant and others assured him that the news would be good. Not convinced by this confidence, Lincoln explained his anxiety:

I feel some great disaster is coming upon us. Last night I was visited by a strange dream, the same dream that in the darkness of night, when deep sleep had fallen on men, hath three times before visited me. Before the battle Bull Run, before the battle of Stone[s] [R]iver, before the battle of Chancellorsville, it came to me, and the following day came the news of the disaster. This same dream came to me last night in my sleep, and I feel as if some great calamity is to befall the nation, in which I am to be personally affected.²⁶

Here, again, the dream had previously occurred before major Union defeats, which altered the popular interpretation that Lincoln had expected good news to come on April 14, 1865. More importantly, Pierrepont argued that God sent Lincoln the dream as a

²⁶ *Trial of John H. Surratt in the Criminal court for the District of Columbia, Hon. George P. Fisher presiding* Vol. 2 (Washington D.C.: Govt. Print, Off., 1867), 1303-1304.

warning of a great national disaster. This belief that the dream was a form of communication from a divine power echoed Alexander Stephens's opinion on dreams, which reinforces the meaning of dreams in general to nineteenth century Americans.

Pierrepoint did not include in his argument the details of the president's dream, but in the succeeding days, newspapers described it in detail. On the same day the prosecutor gave his speech, newspapers across the country reported Pierrepoint's reference to the dream and its prophetic nature because the calamity that followed was Lincoln's own assassination. On August 6, another article appeared, credited to the *Washington Chronicle*, and it added a description of the dream as it had apparently still been remembered since the time it had been related over two years before. This description had similar elements of the most known versions, but it also had some new additions:

He seemed to be at sea in a vessel, that was swept along by an irresistible current toward a maelstrom, from which it seemed no power could save her.—Faster and faster the whirling waters swept the fated ship toward the vortex, until, looking down into the black abyss, amid the deafening roar of the waves, and with the sensation of sinking down, down, down an unfathomable depth, the terrified dreamer awoke.²⁷

The article continued to report that Lincoln had this dream preceding three battles that ended in defeat, which were the First and Second Battle of Bull Run and the Battle at Murfreesboro (also called Stones River). These battles differed from those given by Pierrepoint, switching the Battle of Chancellorsville with the Second Battle of Bull Run. The reference in the trial of John Surratt not only made the dream public again, but it also reminded people of what they already knew about it, especially in Washington, D.C.

Other newspapers that carried the story of Pierrepoint's dream reference included interesting comments relating to the possible significance of the story. On August 6,

²⁷ "Mr. Lincoln's Dream," *Alexandria Gazette*, August 6, 1867.

1867, the *New York Tribune* printed a short article commenting on the speech made the previous day, but it began by claiming it would “interest the student of spiritual science.”²⁸ Several other papers, including the *Illinois State Journal* and the *Raleigh Tri-Weekly Standard*, added a conclusion to their article, also attributed to the *Washington Chronicle*, but other papers cut it off. After describing the detailed dream of a ship at sea, it mentioned the dream’s possible superstitious nature: “Whether we attribute it to some supernatural agency or not, it is certainly one of the most interesting of psychological mysteries, and reminds us forcibly that ‘there are more things in heaven and earth than we have dreamed of in our philosophy.’”²⁹ The rise of spiritualism and related beliefs in America during the latter half of the eighteenth century helps explain the speculation of the meaning of Lincoln’s dream, but there were also newspapers that demonstrated a backlash against such views.

Some newspapers avoided the spiritual aspect of the Cabinet meeting dream story by simply leaving out the portion of the *Washington Chronicle* article that discussed it. Other papers were less discrete in their disapproval of such speculation over Lincoln’s dream. The *Daily Eastern Argus* in Portland, Maine quoted and commented on an article printed in the *Journal of Commerce* that criticized the Pierrepont speech. The *Argus* claimed, “the prosecution in the Surratt trial must have been hard up for material when an intelligent lawyer like Mr. Pierrepont resorted to such rubbish as the Lincoln dream to eke out the interest of his case.” The paper then quoted the *Journal of Commerce*, which claimed that the dream had been heard before, soon after the assassination, in reference to the *New York Herald* article of April 18, 1865. The Maine newspaper account then

²⁸ “Mr. Lincoln’s Dream, *New York Tribune*, August 6, 1867, 4.

²⁹ “Mr. Lincoln’s Dream,” *Illinois State Journal*, August 13, 1867, 1; “Mr. Lincoln’s Dream,” *Raleigh Tri-Weekly Standard*, August 10, 1867.

censured Pierrepont for not including the details of the dream and referring to it generally like “Gypsies and soothsayers.” It then referenced another newspaper in New York as supporting Pierrepont’s assertion, which claimed that the “story will interest the students of spiritual science”—likely taken from the *New York Tribune*. The article further mocked belief in dreams by referring to the “poor ignorant negro” who had dream books and believed in the “spiritual science,” all of which was based on “the same worthless evidence.” The article concluded by stating, “persons of a normal, healthy state of body and mind” reject the “spiritual science,” and can accept the “supernatural warnings” as coincidences, and that they can be explained by “recognizing in them a fragment of indigestible pork or cabbage, cases to be treated with pills and not with spiritual philosophy.”³⁰

An Albany, New York newspaper reporting on Pierrepont’s reference to the dream remembered it similarly to the article published in the *Journal of Commerce*, but interpreted it slightly differently. Titled as a telegraph/post from Washington, the article described the dream as a ship with its sails set, but it then attempted to interpret the ship literally, asking, “What was the ship? The Ship of State, the Cataline, the Japanese ship, or some of the vessels in which his officials jobbed? Mr. Lincoln used to consult table-rappers!”³¹ Questioning what the ship represented suggested that the dream meant something, even if it did not portend future events. Perhaps the most interesting part is that last sentence in the section about Lincoln’s dreams, claiming that he consulted “table-rappers,” or spiritualists who held séances to communicate with the dead. The belief in the significance of dreams and the belief in spiritualism are easily connected,

³⁰ “Mr. Lincoln’s Little Dream,” *Daily Eastern Argus*, August 10, 1867.

³¹ “From Washington, by Telegraph and Post,” *Daily Albany Argus*, August 10, 1867.

and there have been numerous sources claiming that both Abraham Lincoln and his wife attended several séances in Washington, especially following the death of their son Willie in February 1862.

The discussion that took place in newspapers about the possible supernatural or spiritualistic nature of Lincoln's Cabinet meeting dream ties into the rise of American spiritualism as well as the numerous sources that have argued that both Abraham and Mary Lincoln were involved with spiritualism during the war. Historians have been long fascinated about Lincoln's apparent belief in spiritualism, a system of belief that upholds the idea that the living can talk to the dead, and vice versa, usually through a facilitator called a medium. The spiritualist movement became very popular across the country during and after the Civil War. It also made its appearance, to a limited extent, in the White House. Several studies have focused on President and Mrs. Lincoln's involvement in spiritualist séances in Washington. Spiritualism began in America as a result of democratic transcendentalism in the late 1840s, and it was popular in Illinois where Lincoln campaigned as a rising politician.³² By the mid-1850s, there were reportedly about 2 million American spiritualists, and those numbers grew dramatically during the 1860s when countless families mourned the loss of loved ones who had fallen in the Civil War. Drew Gilpin Faust explained that spiritualism became increasingly popular to a wider American population because it allowed people to communicate with their fallen kin and ensure the existence of their souls in heaven.³³ The death of 11 year-old Willie

³² Jay Monaghan, "Was Abraham Lincoln Really a Spiritualist?" *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* 34, No. 2 (June, 1941), 210.

³³ Drew Gilpin Faust, *This Republic of Suffering: Death and the American Civil War* (New York: Vintage Books, 2008), 180-185.

Lincoln in February 1862 became the link between the president and First Lady and participation in spiritualist séances.

Many sources have argued, with much success, that Mary Lincoln sought out Washington spiritualists in order to communicate with her dead son. Jean H. Baker, a recent Mary Lincoln biographer, asserted that her first introduction to spiritualism likely occurred in her hometown of Lexington from her family's slaves, and again in Springfield where, during the 1850s, spiritualists began to appear as itinerant speakers or setting up a place where they could practice their unique talents.³⁴ By 1862, Mrs. Lincoln also knew many prominent spiritualists and spoke of them as friends, including Isaac Newton, the commissioner of agriculture; Major General Daniel Sickles; and the wife of James Gordon Bennett, the famous editor of the *New York Herald*. It is likely that Mrs. Lincoln's friend and seamstress, Elizabeth Keckley, advised her to seek out spiritualist séances following Willie's death, as Keckley had done the same after her son had been killed in the war.³⁵ During the spring of 1862, Mrs. Lincoln sought out local spiritualist mediums, including Nettie Colburn Maynard and the Lauries of Georgetown. Nettie Colburn had been visiting her father and brothers in Washington at the same time that Willie Lincoln died, and she became part of the city's spiritualist community after being introduced to Thomas Gales Foster, a clerk in the War Department and ardent spiritualist speaker. After Mrs. Lincoln witnessed young Colburn as a medium, she obtained a position for her in the Department of Agriculture with the help of Isaac Newton.³⁶ Mary

³⁴ Jean H. Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln: A Biography* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), 218.

³⁵ Baker, *Mary Todd Lincoln*, 219.

³⁶ Monaghan, 216; Monaghan claims that Colburn received a position in the Department of the Interior with the help of Jesse Newton, but this was likely a confusion with the spiritualist Isaac Newton of the Department of Agriculture.

Lincoln probably became involved in spiritualist séances through Nettie Colburn and Cranston Laurie's daughter, Mrs. Belle Miller. Eventually, according to some sources, the president attended either one or more séances.

Along with her attendance at spiritualist séances, there is evidence that Mary Lincoln described her communications with Willie and other fallen loved ones. Mary Lincoln's half-sister, Emilie Todd Helm, came to stay at the White House in December 1863 following the death of her husband, Confederate Brigadier General Ben Hardin Helm. Emilie Helm's daughter Katherine later recorded her mother's account of her stay at the White House, which included many conversations with Mary and President Lincoln. Along with mourning the loss of her husband, Emilie and Mary had also lost their younger brother, Confederate soldier Alexander Todd. Emilie Helm described Mary coming to her room at the White House one night explaining how young Willie as well as others had visited her:

He comes to me every night, and stands at the foot of my bed with the same sweet, adorable smile he has always had; he does not always come alone; little Eddie is sometimes with him and twice he has come with our brother Alec, he tells me he loves his Uncle Alec and is with him most of the time. You cannot dream of the comfort this gives me.³⁷

Mary Lincoln discussed with others her communications with her deceased sons (Eddie refers to the second Lincoln son who died in 1850 at the age of 3) as well as her younger half-brother, Alexander, but she also expressed the comfort this gave her. She continued to tell Emilie that her heart broke when she thought of young Willie being alone, and the presence of his older brother and his uncle seemed to ease that heartache. Mary

³⁷ Katherine Helm, *The True Story of Mary, Wife of Lincoln: Containing the Recollections of Mary Lincoln's Sister Emilie (Mrs. Ben Hardin Helm), Extracts from her War-Time Diary, Numerous Letters and Other Documents now First Published* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1928), 224-228.

Lincoln's expression of comfort after "seeing" her son in the afterlife and in the presence of other loved ones reflected the typical response for grieving families that turned to spiritualism during this period.

The most famous accounts of president Lincoln's presence at séances include Nettie Colburn Maynard's *Was Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist?* and a lecture given by Mrs. M.E. Williams entitled, *Abraham Lincoln a Spiritualist*, both published in 1891. These books have undergone scrutiny by Jay Monaghan and other scholars who have evaluated the validity of the claims that Lincoln was a spiritualist, but earlier accounts resembling the books by Maynard and Williams began to appear as early as the mid-1880s. Books linking Lincoln and spiritualism most likely had been in circulation going back to just after his assassination. Monaghan's study showed that there is meager evidence that Lincoln believed in spiritualism as a philosophy, though there is enough evidence to suggest that he attended at least one or two séances during his presidency. When Jesse Weik, one of Lincoln's early biographers, inquired John Nicolay regarding this topic, the well-known private secretary and biographer claimed that he never knew of the President attending séances in Washington. Nicolay then resorted to a caveat that if Lincoln had attended such events, "it was out of mere curiosity, and as a matter of pastime, just as you or I would do."³⁸ While many of the popular accounts of the president's involvement in séances were published years after the debate in the newspapers about the Cabinet meeting dream, it is evident that the public had already been made aware of it. While attending séances was by no means uncommon by the late

³⁸ "Lincoln's Attendance at Spiritualist Séances," *Lincoln Lore*, No. 2 (Fort Wayne: Lincoln National Life Foundation, January 1963).

1860s, spiritualists across the country sought to count Lincoln among their ranks at the same time that various religious sects also claimed him as their own.

The dream that President Lincoln described to his Cabinet on April 14, 1865 is still the most recognized of the many that are attributed to him. Many repeated it in the years following the assassination, including eyewitnesses who attended the meeting, newspaper reporters that printed the story on various occasions, and others who likely heard the dream indirectly, like Edwards Pierrepont, but remembered it as a significant part of the life of their national hero. Although the version of the dream recorded by Welles is likely the most accurate, the others should not be ignored, if only to determine why people remembered it in so many different ways. All of these versions were exposed to the American public, and the different accounts presented a variety of implications about why the dream was important to the president or why it appeared to him at all. It is not surprising that the references to spiritualism and the supernatural were attached to the dream, and even modern texts have made similar assertions. It is necessary, however, to determine Lincoln's response to the dream and what it reveals about his worldview, in the context of his actual belief system.

President Lincoln accepted that his recurring dream portended an event or a battle that carried significance, but that does not necessarily denote an overly superstitious worldview or that he believed in spiritualistic philosophy. In his own introspection about the meaning of dreams, Alexander Stephens grappled with the discord between reason and the presentiments that appear in dreams. He discussed the role of spiritual matters in his examination, and claimed:

I am no disciple of the modern school of Spiritualists; I neither affirm nor disaffirm belief in their teachings...All I affirm is, that reason in its pride should

not reject all spiritual operations, convictions and manifestations, barely because they are beyond its power of understanding or accounting for.³⁹

Those who attempted to claim Lincoln as member of the spiritualists represented the same school that Stephens referred to. There is no evidence that Lincoln belonged to that school either, but the president probably also experienced the same internal struggle shown in Stephens's diary about reconciling reason with the seemingly spiritual aspects of dreams. The nature of the Cabinet meeting dream and Lincoln's reaction to it also reflects an important aspect of his worldview that fit within his understanding of reason.

Lincoln demonstrated throughout his life that he believed everything in the world could be explained by reason and logic. With the dream he experienced the night before his assassination, the president seemed to not question what it meant or why it kept recurring, even though his listeners offered various interpretations of their own. Lincoln explained the dream on his own because his reasonable and logical worldview largely relied on fatalism. There is substantial evidence supporting his fatalistic perception, which basically told him that everything in the world had already been determined and that he could do nothing to change what was to be. This philosophy is very similar to predeterminism and predestination, which he probably inherited from his parents. While viewing the world through fatalism often contains a negative implication, Lincoln's opinion of his last dream did not seem to suggest to him a negative outcome. Lincoln remained rational by asserting that his dream probably portended news from Sherman, and his confidence in the outcome also derived from observing how events of the war were unfolding. This shows that Lincoln's belief in fatalism is more sufficient in explaining what his Cabinet meeting dream meant to him than the purported claims of

³⁹ Stephens, *Recollections*, 259.

spiritualism or a supernatural warning. Lincoln still could have seen the dream as a sign from a divine power, as Stephens allowed for his own dreams, but that communication would have fit within the knowledge that future events had already been determined by some higher power.

The debate that this dream sparked about Lincoln's worldview—as well as the numerous debates that exist today over Lincoln's various views and beliefs—point out how complicated it was to define a specific belief system during the Civil War era. Abraham Lincoln was raised on the American frontier during a period when Protestant Christianity split into numerous sects with varying beliefs, including a form Calvinist predestination that was likely a part of his parents' religious practice. In New Salem, however, he was apparently influenced by religious skepticism from eighteenth century Enlightenment writers. Those two factors could be argued as having significant influence in the development of Lincoln's fatalism, suggesting that his worldview included some aspects of Christianity while rejecting others. Spiritualism, as explained by Faust, could not be completely separated from mainstream Christian denominations, as they shared many of the same tenets by the end of the Civil War.⁴⁰ Many of Lincoln's dreams, especially his Cabinet meeting dream, provided an opportunity for spiritualists to claim the Sixteenth President as a fellow disciple, but they failed to understand his complicated worldview. A careful analysis of Lincoln's dreams reveal that his fatalism was a dominant trait in his worldview and one that was not exclusive of the various belief systems that he was exposed to throughout his life, including aspects of Calvinist predestination and spiritualism.

⁴⁰ Faust, *This Republic of Suffering*, 185.

Chapter Two:

The White House Funeral Dream

President Lincoln allegedly had another dream in the weeks before his assassination that he retold soon after it occurred in the White House. The dream involved Lincoln walking in on a funeral in the White House only to discover that the deceased was the president who had been killed by an assassin. Some writers and historians have accepted this disturbing dream while others have dismissed it based on its unreliable sources and questionable details. The most widely referenced source for the dream is Ward Hill Lamon's *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln 1847-1865*, first published in 1895 by his daughter Dorothy Lamon Teillard, but a newspaper in the small Pennsylvania town of Waynesboro first published the story twenty-one years earlier.⁴¹ The story of the dream appeared numerous times in magazines and newspapers in the interim, but Lamon's more detailed recollection remains its most recognized source. Because historians have often doubted Lamon as a reliable source for facts on Lincoln's life, the White House funeral dream remains on shaky ground. Newly discovered Lamon writings might help revitalize the legitimacy of this thrilling dream as well as Ward Lamon's work in general. Once the dream is accepted and presented as it likely occurred to the president, the story's details demonstrate Lincoln's search for reason and logic in relation to his presentiments, while his ultimate response to seeing his own funeral exemplifies his fatalism.

The *Waynesboro Village Record* printed the White House funeral dream on the anniversary of Lincoln's birthday, February 12th 1874 as a much smaller story than its

⁴¹ Ward Hill Lamon, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln 1847-1865*, ed. Dorothy Lamon Teillard (Chicago: A.C. McClurg and Company, 1895). 110-122.

later versions. The dream appeared again with more detail in *Gleason's Monthly Companion* in March 1880.⁴² Using these early pieces and Lamon's account in *Recollections*, historian Jonathan White has argued, "the dream is an utter fabrication."⁴³ White claims that the Waynesboro paper printed it as a fictional piece that was later expanded upon and carried in *Gleason's Monthly Companion*, and then adopted again by Lamon's daughter when she edited and published *Recollections*. This argument first laid out the unreliability of Lamon's *Recollections* based on the fact that Dorothy Lamon Teillard added her own writing to her father's, meaning that Lamon's words did not make up the entire book. White also pointed out the flawed chronology proposed by Lamon's account. Additionally, there were several differences in the details of the 1880 *Gleason's* article and Lamon's *Recollections* account, including the lack of any chronology in the 1880 version when Lamon claimed that Lincoln retold the dream just a few days before his assassination; also, Lincoln told the story to his wife and children in the 1880 story, while Lamon included himself as one of two or three listeners to the story; and that Lamon is absent from the 1880 account.⁴⁴ The provenance for the White House funeral dream as presented by White is certainly less than convincing for placing it among the genuine presentiments that appeared to Lincoln during his life.

Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, whose study evaluated the legitimacy of the stories that have been attributed to Lincoln, also doubt Lamon's account of the funeral dream. They argue, "Lamon's confused chronology well suits the fantastic quality of the whole story, which has nevertheless been accepted by a number of

⁴² "President Lincoln's Dream," *Waynesboro Village Record*, February 12, 1874, 1; "President Lincoln's Dream," *Gleason's Monthly Companion*, No. 3 (March 1880), 140-141.

⁴³ Jonathan W. White, "Did Lincoln Dream He Died?" *For the People: A Newsletter of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 16, No. 3 (Fall 2014), 1-5.

⁴⁴ White, "Did Lincoln Dream He Died?" 5.

biographers and other writers.”⁴⁵ This refers to Lamon claiming that the dream occurred “only a few days before his assassination,” which the Fehrenbachers discredited because, when Lincoln narrated the story, he said that he had returned home from waiting on dispatches from the front. But, based on that chronology, Lincoln would have actually been at the front, as we know he was from March 24 to April 9 and not in the White House, where the dream allegedly occurred.⁴⁶ White also mentioned this chronological issue in his argument. Further research into the dream story, however, has revealed additional clues that shed new light on its validity and address the problems that scholars have examined.

White and others have thus far neglected an article written by Lamon, printed on August 27, 1887 in the *Chicago Daily News*, containing essentially what would become the dream chapter in *Recollections*.⁴⁷ This means that Ward Lamon at least authored the dream accounts in his *Recollections*, including the White House funeral dream, and that his daughter basically copied that article and republished it in 1895. The existence of the 1887 article does not resolve the differences between Lamon’s version of the dream and the one published in 1880 and the lack of connection between them. Bob O’Connor recently edited and published a relatively unknown manuscript written by Lamon sometime in the decade of the 1880s that contained a different account of Lincoln’s dreams than the one Lamon published in 1887.⁴⁸ This manuscript, intended to be the second volume of Lamon’s biography of Lincoln, was, for whatever reasons, never

⁴⁵ Don E. Fehrenbacher and Virginia Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Abraham Lincoln* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 293.

⁴⁶ Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words*, 535.

⁴⁷ Ward Hill Lamon, “Abraham Lincoln’s Strange Dreams: His Singular Philosophy in Regard to Dreams and Presentiments,” *Chicago Daily News* (morning edition), August 27, 1887.

⁴⁸ Ward Hill Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln: As President*, ed. Bob O’Connor, (West Conshohocken, PA: Mont Clair Press, 2010).

published. It is, then, the third book about Lincoln written over Lamon's name, but because Chauncey Black ghostwrote the first *Life of Lincoln*, attributed to Lamon, and Dorothy Lamon Teillard gets the credit for either editing or writing the *Recollections*, the manuscript edited by O'Connor is, in fact, the only book that Lamon actually wrote himself. In addition, Lamon's manuscript version of the White House funeral dream could be connected to the 1880 account, as they contain nearly identical recitations of the dream by Lincoln. Before analyzing the similarities and differences between these dream accounts, it is necessary to understand the role Ward Hill Lamon has played in Lincoln scholarship and his resulting legacy.

Nearly twenty years younger than Lincoln, Lamon became friends with the Sixteenth President as early as 1847, working as Illinois lawyers, riding the old Eighth Circuit. Following the 1860 election, Lincoln asked Lamon—who was said to be just as tall as Lincoln at about 6 feet 4 inches, but much more imposing at nearly 260 pounds—to accompany him to Washington where he received the appointment of U.S. Marshal and unofficially served as the President's bodyguard. Lamon remained intimate with President Lincoln and the First Lady throughout the presidency, and, according to many, more intimate than anyone during those years.⁴⁹ After Lincoln's assassination, Lamon resigned his position as U.S. Marshal of the District of Columbia and entered a law partnership in Washington with Jeremiah S. Black, former Attorney General and Secretary of State under President Buchanan. Lamon became friends with his partner's son, Chauncey F. Black, and by December 1869 they had signed a contract, which set out

⁴⁹ J.P. Usher to Ward Hill Lamon, May 20, 1885, in *Recollections* ed. Dorothy Lamon, v-vi.

in detail their agreement to create a biography of Lincoln.⁵⁰ That biography, which covered Lincoln's life up to his first inauguration, was largely considered a failure. Much of the information included in the 1872 biography came from Lincoln's Springfield law partner, William H. Herndon, who had collected reminiscences of former neighbors and lawyers, most of whom had known Lincoln personally during his early life in Kentucky, Indiana, and Illinois. In 1869 Lamon purchased a carefully prepared copy of Herndon's "Lincoln Record" and then entered into a partnership with Chauncey Black to produce a "just, full, and impartial biography of Abraham Lincoln."⁵¹

This contract specified the role each man would play in this project. Lamon agreed to provide the papers he purchased from Herndon as well as any other materials he had collected over time, and Black agreed to "write the text of the book and arrange the materials for publication." Lamon's name would appear on the title page of the book, but they would share the copyright and profits.⁵² The draft manuscript had its share of problems. Black, whose father served in the Buchanan administration, wrote a glowing chapter on the fifteenth president's single term in office. That chapter was cut before the manuscript was sent to the publisher. After publication, critics responded to the book with scathing words, most of which condemned Lamon for publishing details of Lincoln's private life, including the possibility of the president's illegitimacy, his love affair with Ann Rutledge, and his religious infidelity—all of which had been gleaned from the materials Lamon had bought from Herndon. Vilified in the press, Lamon and

⁵⁰ James A. Rawley, *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln, 1847-1865* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1994), xix-xxiv; Albert V. House Jr., "The Trials of a Ghost-Writer of Lincoln Biography: Chauncey F. Black's Authorship of Lamon's Lincoln," *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society*, 31, No. 3 (September 1938), 262-269; David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln's Herndon: A Biography* (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1948), 250-253.

⁵¹ House, "Trials of a Ghost-Writer," 268.

⁵² House, "Trials of a Ghost-Writer," 268-269.

Black then fell out with one another, thus halting the production of a second volume.⁵³ By the mid-1880s, evidence now reveals that Lamon wrote the entire second volume on his own around the same time when a new wave of Lincoln biographies began to appear, including the joint effort of John Hay and John Nicolay, and Herndon's partnership with young Jesse Weik, which resulted in a Lincoln biography published in 1888. This heavy competition to produce a definitive life of Lincoln likely prevented Lamon's own work from being published, as most people wanted no part of another controversial biography like the one that had appeared in 1872. Because of the manifestation of Lamon's manuscript of a book that would have constituted a second volume to accompany his poorly received biography of 1872, one may argue with greater authority that his chapter on Lincoln's dreams and visions may now be regarded by historians as a trusted, credible source for this personal aspect of Lincoln's life.

By the mid-1880s, Lamon's preparation of his second volume for publication became generally known. In July 1884, a St. Paul, Minnesota newspaper reported a story about Lamon that circulated across the country relating to his health and a dangerous case of gangrene. At the close of this short article, it was mentioned that Lamon had been recently busy working on his second volume and that it remained unknown how much progress had been made on it.⁵⁴ In October 1886, the *Chicago Tribune* interviewed Lamon for an article, and it also mentioned his second volume of his Lincoln biography. When Lamon first commented on the early chapters of the Lincoln biography, written by John G. Nicolay and John Hay and serialized in *Century* magazine, he largely praised their work, but he also mentioned off-handedly that he had "just completed his second

⁵³ William Herndon to Horace White, April 28, 1890, Horace White Papers.

⁵⁴ "Current Comments," *St. Paul Daily Globe*, July 13, 1884.

volume of his history of Lincoln.” But because the publishers of the first volume had gone out of business, Lamon did not know who would become his new publisher. He also indicated that his new volume dealt with Lincoln’s life from his first inauguration as President until his death.⁵⁵ It is apparent that Lamon had been working on his second volume during the 1880s and had it completed by the end of October 1886. Less than a year later, Lamon began printing his reminiscences of Lincoln as syndicated articles that later became part of the *Recollections* published after his death, including the dream article of August 27, 1887.

The earliest versions of the dream, before Lamon published his own account, described Lincoln reading Scripture to his family on a Sunday evening; he then came across and read aloud several passages on dreams. If these early versions of the dream are to be believed, Lincoln told his family that it is “strange how much there is in the Bible about dreams,” estimating that dreams were mentioned in sixteen chapters in the Old Testament and four in the New Testament. He added that dreams in his own time were mostly regarded “foolish.” Mary asked if he believed in dreams, to which he replied that he did not, but he claimed “I had one the other night that has haunted me ever since.” As his young son Tad asked his father to describe his dream, Mary Lincoln commented that her husband’s solemn look frightened her. Lincoln then narrated the dream, which had taken place about ten days earlier. He had retired late one night after waiting for dispatches from the front, and he soon fell asleep and began to dream. He felt stillness around him and heard nothing but weeping, which made him go downstairs, searching room-to-room, hearing nothing but the same moaning and weeping. He then

⁵⁵ “Abe’s Old Law Partner: A Chat with Him Concerning His Book on the Great Martyr,” *Chicago Tribune*, October 30, 1886.

entered a room at the end of the White House that had a catafalque with a corpse upon it. “Here,” said Lincoln, “there were sentries and a crowd of people. I said to one of the soldiers: ‘Who is dead in the White House,’ he answered ‘The President,’ ‘How did he die?’ I asked. ‘By the hand of an assassin,’ was the reply.” Lincoln then heard loud wailing that woke him up and he could not sleep the rest of the night. Later accounts of the dream always insisted that his wife, immediately following his assassination in 1865, said “his dream was prophetic.”⁵⁶

Ward Lamon’s 1887 article contained a version of this dream that added some important details that conflicted with other accounts, which are essentially the same mentioned in Jonathan White’s argument. Lamon made clear that only two or three people were present when Lincoln recounted the dream, including Mrs. Lincoln and himself, and he claimed that he used Lincoln’s own words describing the dream, based on notes he made soon after its recital. The story then picked up, like the earlier versions with Lincoln commenting on the strangeness of the presence of dreams in the Bible. When, according to Lamon, his wife asked if he believed in dreams, he said he did not, just as other versions of the dream had asserted. But in Lamon’s version, Lincoln revealed that when he awoke from the dream, he opened the Bible and every page he randomly turned to mentioned dreams or visions of some sort. Lamon also mentioned conversations that he had with Lincoln about the dream after its narration. Clearly Lamon’s rendition of the dream contained details that the other published accounts did

⁵⁶ “President Lincoln’s Dream,” *Waynesboro Village Record* (February 12, 1874); “President Lincoln’s Dream,” *Gleason’s Monthly Companion*, 140-141; James Monroe, *The Dreamer’s Teacher and Oneirocritica* (Peoria, Illinois: J.W. Franks & Sons, Printers and Binders, 1887), 217-220.

not.⁵⁷ Perhaps the most important detail that Lamon disclosed was the date of Lincoln's death dream, which represents a major problem for White and the Fehrenbachers.

Lamon's 1887 article, as well the *Recollections* that his daughter published in the 1890s, specified that Lincoln had this dream "only a few days before his assassination." But if Lamon was correct in saying that Lincoln's dream occurred about ten days prior to his description of it, it could not have happened, as Lamon claimed, more than a few days before the assassination, and it has been proven that the president traveled to City Point during that time period.

Lamon's manuscript for his second volume of a Lincoln biography contained a dream chapter that described the same three dreams and visions as his syndicated article, but each are significantly different in the unpublished manuscript. The three included presentiments were a Janus-faced vision, the White House funeral dream, and the recurring dream that Lincoln shared with his Cabinet on the afternoon of his assassination. Lamon's manuscript version of Lincoln's White House funeral dream helps resolve many of the questions that have been raised. Most notably, this chapter did not include Lamon in the story of Lincoln narrating the dream and there is no specific reference to the date it took place. Also, Lincoln seemed to be telling the story of the dream to his family in the manuscript chapter because Tad and Mary were both included in the conversation. Lamon did appear in the manuscript account, but only in conversations with Lincoln about the dream that occurred after its original recitation. While it did not specify that Lincoln read Scripture to his family as he did in the 1874 and 1880 versions, the presence of Tad and absence of Lamon is another direct link to the

⁵⁷ Ward H. Lamon, "Abraham Lincoln's Strange Dreams," *Chicago Daily News*, August 27, 1887; Lamon, *Recollections*, 114-117.

earlier accounts. With Lamon attached to this account that he wrote before his 1887 article and which seems to have resolved the major issues historians have addressed about the dream, there is now sufficient evidence to argue that Lamon is a credible source for the White House funeral dream.

The details that Lamon's manuscript chapter shared with the 1880 *Gleason's* article and Lamon's 1887 syndicated article show how Lamon is connected to both accounts and may provide clues to the original source for the dream. The manuscript version is much shorter than Lamon's published accounts of the dream. It started with Lincoln commenting on how many references to dreams there were in the Bible, as he did in all versions. But here, Lamon's manuscript included a detail shared in part by both the *Gleason's* article and the 1887 piece. Lamon's manuscript included that Lincoln explained when he woke up from the dream, "the first time I opened the Bible and strange as it may appear, it was at the passage relating to Jacob's dream."⁵⁸ *Gleason's* account also had Lincoln mention turning to Jacob's dream, but he specified that it happened that same evening he told his family about the dream as he had been reading them Scripture.⁵⁹ Lamon's 1887 article had Lincoln turning to Jacob's dream when he awoke from his own, but it continued:

I turned to other passages and seemed to encounter a dream or a vision wherever I looked. I kept on turning the leaves of the old book and everywhere my eye fell upon passages recording matters strangely in keeping with my own thoughts—supernatural visitations, dreams, visions, &c.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln As President*, 465-466.

⁵⁹ "President Lincoln's Dream," *Gleason's Monthly Companion*, 140-141.

⁶⁰ Lamon, "Abraham Lincoln's Strange Dreams."

The role of the Bible is important in all versions of the story, and it is significant that there is a connection between Lamon's manuscript and the other versions with these details in order to show that it could be the original source for the story.

While every account essentially tells the same story of Lincoln dreaming of his own funeral in the White House, the texts of the president's recitation demonstrate that some are more similar to each other than others. Lamon's unpublished manuscript chapter contained a nearly identical quotation of Lincoln that was published in the 1880 *Gleason's* article and was also similar to the 1874 story. These three versions all contained between 160 and 190 words within Lincoln's recitation, while the 1887 article and *Recollections* contain about 290 words. In this long quotation, some of the wording is different in the published Lamon accounts. For example, the early articles and Lamon's manuscript have Lincoln walking from room to room of the White House searching for the weeping, when he finally came to the end room or end of the room, which was not necessarily referring to a specific room. The 1887 article called this room the 'End Room,' including the quotation marks, suggesting that was the name of the room. Then, in *Recollections*, this was changed to the 'East Room,' which was a specific room in the White House. Also, the wording when Lincoln actually saw what was in the room was identical in Lamon's manuscript and the *Gleason's* article: "At length I came to the end room which I entered and there before me was a magnificent dais on which was a corpse."⁶¹ This can be compared to what Lincoln said in Lamon's 1887 article: "I kept on until I arrived at the 'End Room,' which I entered. There I met with a sickening surprise. Before me was a catafalque, on which rested a corpse wrapped in funeral

⁶¹ "President Lincoln's Dream," *Gleason's Monthly Companion*, 140-141; Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln: As President*, 466.

vestments.”⁶² This phrase also appeared in *Recollections*, with only the change in the name of the room he entered.

While Lincoln’s discussion about the Bible’s references to dreams and his recitation of the dream demonstrate connections and differences between these sources, Lamon’s participation in the story is also significant. It was in his 1887 article that Lamon specified himself as one of the few listeners to the story, but his manuscript chapter did not include that detail and suggested that Lincoln told the story to his family. Lamon only claimed that Lincoln referred to the dream in a later conversation that related to the president’s personal safety in reality, as his faithful bodyguard had been constantly concerned with an assassination attempt. That conversation also appeared in Lamon’s 1887 article, but it elaborated more. In Lamon’s manuscript, Lincoln stated, “Although I do not believe in any danger yet seeing means adopted for my protection has impressed me so that I actually dreamed the other night that the president was assassinated at the White House, but it seems fortunately that I was not the fellow that was killed.” He continued to explain, with the help of an anecdote about an Illinois farmer’s family, that the “imaginary assassin” of his dream killed someone else, meaning that he was in no real danger. The conversation concluded with Lincoln making a statement that directly reflected his fatalism: “I think the Lord in his own good time and way will work out this thing all right. We must trust in his wisdom and protection.”⁶³

Jonathan White has argued that one of the important differences between Lamon’s *Recollections* account of the dream and the 1880 version was that Lamon portrayed Lincoln as unconcerned with assassinations while the *Gleason*’s article claimed

⁶² Lamon, “Abraham Lincoln’s Strange Dreams,” *Chicago Daily News*.

⁶³ Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln As President*, 466-467.

that he “had an ever-present dread of the assassin’s hand.”⁶⁴ Immediately after this quote from the 1880 version, however, it claimed, “. . .but he breathed this to but one person. At the same time he said: It is a mere dream.”⁶⁵ It is unclear to whom he breathed his dread of the assassin, but the *Gleason’s* account seemed to also reflect the sentiment shown by Lamon’s conversation about the “imaginary assassin.” That conversation contained an important similarity between the two differing Lamon accounts of the dream, suggesting that he legitimately authored them both. Lamon’s manuscript dream chapter has significant similarities with the 1880 version and with his own published article, which attracted criticism when it was reprinted in *Recollections*. Based on this evidence, Lamon’s dream chapter in the manuscript for his second volume of a Lincoln biography is the most credible source for Lincoln’s White House funeral dream.

There are several details included in the dream story that reflect important aspects of Lincoln’s character and worldview. Lincoln made various comments about his dream that help explain his reaction to such a disturbing presentiment. Before reciting his dream, Mary Lincoln expressed her concern about her husband’s “solemn looks,” to which he responded, “I fear I have done wrong to mention the subject at all, but somehow or other the thing has gotten possession of me.” This shows that the president had been thinking about his dream a great deal and it evidently worried him to an extent, since he apparently had a solemn look about him when discussing it. After telling the disturbing details of the dream, young Tad asked his father if it meant anything. Lincoln told him, “No, no, my son. . .it is only a dream.” Mary Lincoln then commented that it was a “horrid” dream, and the president finally told them that they should “try and forget all

⁶⁴ White, “Did Lincoln Dream He Died?” 5.

⁶⁵ “President Lincoln’s Dream,” *Gleason’s Monthly Companion*, 141.

about it.”⁶⁶ Abraham Lincoln’s consoling words to his family do not entirely capture what he thought about the dream. It is evident that he considered it important enough to have occupied his mind for over a week (the dream took place about ten days before), and he likely sought out answers for the real meaning of the dream by retelling it. However, when he realized how it affected his wife and son, he decided to dismiss it for their sake.

Lincoln’s conversation about the dream with Lamon reveals how the president ultimately accepted the dream even though it had taken hold of his mind for some time. Like his other dreams, and essentially everything in his life, Lincoln sought to explain his vision of his own funeral through reason and logic. It is possible that he retold the dream and had further conversations about it because he sought a reasonable explanation from those around him or even through their reactions to the dream. The subject of this particular dream, however, alarmed his family and even Lamon (who had been worried about keeping Lincoln safe from any plots against his life) too much. Lincoln’s belief in fatalism probably allowed him not to worry about the possibility that his dream was a sign of his own assassination because he could do nothing to prevent it if it was meant to be. The end of his conversation with Lamon directly reflected this sentiment, ensuring his friend that the Lord will work it out in his own time. This “Lord” did not necessarily refer to God in the Christian sense, but rather to the divine power that gave the universe order and had already determined the fate of everything. Because of the additional Lamon writings, especially his manuscript for his second volume of a Lincoln biography, he deserves to be revitalized as an important and legitimate source in Lincoln scholarship. The conversation included in that manuscript volume following the account of the White

⁶⁶ Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln As President*, 466.

House funeral dream is a valuable expression of Lincoln's fatalism, and Lamon's other chapters could include other information that only he knew about the president. The White House funeral dream helps illuminate both Lincoln's worldview and Lamon's status in Lincoln scholarship.

Chapter Three:

The Janus-Faced Vision

Along with the Cabinet meeting dream and the White House funeral dream, a third presentiment has been attributed to Lincoln that captured public attention immediately following his assassination, and many people used it to demonstrate the president's supposedly supernatural character. The story's sources disagree on the exact chronology of the vision, but soon after Lincoln was either nominated or elected in 1860 he saw a reflection of himself in a looking glass. Instead of seeing his face as it actually looked, however, he saw two images looking back at him. One of his faces appeared noticeably paler than the other, which caused Lincoln to remember the incident years later, and, it may have alarmed his wife out of fear that it represented an omen of some sort. Lincoln told this story to at least two or three different people during his presidency, and the various accounts appeared in newspapers in the weeks and months after the assassination. A public debate took place over differing opinions regarding the President and/or First Lady's belief that the vision symbolized an omen relating to Lincoln's second term in office or even to his assassination. Francis B. Carpenter and Noah Brooks provided two firsthand accounts of hearing the story from the president, and their versions, as well as other indirect accounts, are similar enough to each other that the vision is likely genuine. Again, the details of this experience divulge important aspects of Lincoln's character that make it worth analyzing.

Several different people reported the story in the weeks, months, and years following the assassination, and by observing the way it evolved among the various sources and looking at who said what and when they said it, one can determine which

version, if any, is accurate, and what likely happened to inspire these stories. The earliest public account of this vision appeared in an Albany, New York journal on May 4, 1865, in part of a private letter written on April 23. It is unclear who wrote the letter, but he evidently had a friend who was intimate with Lincoln, someone who told the letter's author about this story. Supposedly it happened when Lincoln returned home to tell his wife the news of his election in 1860, and he went upstairs to the bedroom. After informing Mary Lincoln of the latest news, he saw a bureau glass and then lay down on a lounge and "told Mrs. Lincoln he thought he must be ill, for he saw a second reflection of his face in the glass, which he could not account for." The second image was the same as the other except, he said, that he was "very pale." His wife responded, "That means you will be reelected—but I don't like its looking pale...that looks as if you would not live through your second term."⁶⁷ The author of this earliest account of the vision heard the story three years earlier from someone who heard it from Lincoln, and there are some details that later became the subject of contention in the subsequent public debate over the vision. Although the source that appeared on May 4 is unknown, there are later clues to his identity during a public debate over the story.

About a month after the first account appeared, Francis B. Carpenter, in one of his many printed recollections of Lincoln, directly addressed the double-faced vision article that received national circulation in the newspapers. Carpenter later published this account in his book, *Six Months at the White House with Abraham Lincoln*, and it is one of the best-known sources for this story. This article by Carpenter made the rounds of the newspapers during early June 1865; in it, the artist argued that the earlier version of the apparition story was "quite incorrect," and that it was "made to appear very mysterious."

⁶⁷ "The Death of President Lincoln," *The Country Gentleman*, No. 18 (May 4, 1865), 25.

Carpenter then told the story as the President had told it to John Hay and him on the evening of the 1864 Republican National Convention at Baltimore. Lincoln began his story by describing how he had heard the news of his renomination that same day, finding out about the nomination of the vice president before his own, which, in turn, caused some confusion but he laughed about it when he regaled the story to Hay and Carpenter.

The president then told a story of what happened the day of his nomination at Chicago in 1860. He had returned home from downtown, went upstairs to Mrs. Lincoln's room, and lay down on a couch, directly across the room from a bureau upon which rested a looking glass. As he did so, he saw in the glass two images of himself that were identical, but one appeared paler than the other. He then stood up and lay down again, seeing the same thing. He was initially concerned about it, but soon forgot about it as his friends arrived to celebrate at his house. The next day, while walking on the street, Lincoln remembered the incident and again worried because he had never seen such a vision before and did not know how to explain it. He went home to lie down as he had the day before, and since the same result appeared, he determined that "it was the natural result of some principle of refraction or optics" that he did not completely understand, and he then stopped worrying about it. Lincoln ended by saying that "some time ago I tried to produce the same result here[at the White House], by arranging a glass and couch in the same position without success."⁶⁸ Carpenter concluded his article by further arguing against the implications provided in the earlier version of the story. He claimed that Lincoln "did not say, as is asserted in the story as printed, that either he or Mrs. Lincoln attached any omen to it whatever." Since he only saw the image from a certain

⁶⁸ Francis Bicknell Carpenter, "Reminiscences of President Lincoln," *New Orleans Times*, June 27, 1865.

angle and position, Carpenter argued that Lincoln believed that it could be explained by scientific principles. Carpenter's purpose for retelling this story was to "show upon what a slender foundation a marvelous account may be built."⁶⁹

A rebuttal to Carpenter's article appeared on June 15, 1865, in the *Springfield Daily Republican*, a Massachusetts newspaper, in a letter from a Washington correspondent. The correspondent appeared to have been David V.G. Bartlett, a reporter for the *Republican* and the *New York Evening Post* during the Civil War, under his pseudonym, "Van." In fact, Bartlett probably authored the original story printed on May 4.⁷⁰ Bartlett wrote that Carpenter did not report Lincoln mentioning his wife's interpretation of the vision, and the painter thus argued that there was no foundation for it. The newspaperman claimed that Carpenter "jumps too far," and that "I happen to know that the original story is true. An intimate friend of Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln told the facts to me three years ago, and I chance to know that the morning after his re-election the president recurred to the story in all its particulars."⁷¹ Bartlett concluded by saying that the anecdote would be printed in an article in the July issue of *Harper's* magazine, written by the man to whom Lincoln told the story after his re-election. In his original account of the story, Bartlett mentioned that the man who told it to him did so soon after the First Battle of Bull Run, so from that reference we can conclude that Lincoln must have related it to the mysterious source no later than July 1861. Ultimately, Bartlett knew that Lincoln related the vision story to two different men on two occasions: the unknown source for his own story and the author of the popular *Harper's* article.

⁶⁹ Carpenter, "Reminiscences," *New Orleans Times*, June 27, 1865.

⁷⁰ J. Cutler Andrews, *The North Reports the Civil War*, (University of Pittsburg Press, 1955), 45.

⁷¹ David V.G. Bartlett, "The Double Reflection Story," *Springfield Republican*, June 15, 1865.

The July 1865 edition of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* did include an article that explained the vision in detail. It is written by Noah Brooks, the Washington correspondent for the *Sacramento Daily Union*. Brooks had a close relationship with the Lincolns during his time in Washington, and he expected to replace John G. Nicolay, who had been appointed a diplomat to France shortly before the assassination. Brooks's "Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln" discussed many aspects of Lincoln's life based on his close friendship with the president during his time in Washington. While very similar to Bartlett's version of the Janus-faced vision story in content, Brooks claimed that Lincoln related it to him shortly after his reelection in 1864. Lincoln described the afternoon he was elected in 1860, when he had been hearing news coming in all day, and he went home to rest. He laid down on a lounge in his room, and across from him stood a bureau with a swinging glass on it, and Brooks added that at this point in the story, Lincoln got up and placed the furniture as it had been in his room four years ago. Lincoln then, according to Brooks, described how he saw himself reflected in the glass with two images, with the tips of his noses being about three inches away from each other. This bothered him, so he stood up and the vision vanished, but when he lay back down he saw the double-image again, but then he noticed, "That one of the faces was a little paler, say five shades, than the other." He then got up and went on to enjoy the excitement of his election, but the thing occasionally bothered him over the next few days. Brooks continued quoting Lincoln,

When I went home I told my wife about it, and a few days after I tried the experiment again, when [with a laugh], sure enough, the thing came again; but I never succeeded in bringing the ghost back after that, though I once tried very industriously to show it to my wife, who was worried about it somewhat. She thought it was a 'sign' that I was to be elected to a second term of office, and that

the paleness of one of the faces was an omen that I should not see life through the last term.⁷²

Brooks followed the quotation by asserting that Lincoln did not see anything in the occurrence than an optical illusion, but some superstition inside him made it bother him. He also added that there are people who believe the vision was “a warning” to Lincoln.

When Carpenter’s *Six Months at the White House* appeared in 1866, it included his account of the vision as it appeared in the newspapers the previous June, but he did not mention the Bartlett account that he had earlier attempted to disprove. The story contained the same details as before, but Carpenter included a footnote, addressing the version told by Brooks. The footnote reads:

Mr. Lincoln’s friend Brooks, of the *Sacramento Union*, has given to the public a somewhat different version of this story, placing its occurrence on the day of the election in 1860. The account, as I have given it, was written before I had seen that by Mr. Brooks, and is very nearly as Hay and myself heard it,—the incident making a powerful impression upon my mind. I am quite confident that Mr. Lincoln said it occurred the day he was first nominated; for he related it to us a few hours after having received intelligence of his renomination, saying, “I am reminded of it to-night.” It is possible, however, that I am mistaken in the date. Mr. Brooks’s statement that “Mrs. Lincoln” was “troubled” about it, regarding it as a “sign that Mr. Lincoln would be reelected, but would not live through his second term,” is undoubtedly correct.

Carpenter seemed to recognize that Lincoln could have included different details of the story to Brooks than he told to Hay and himself, for, in the text, he stated, “He did not say, at this time, that either he or Mrs. Lincoln attached any omen to the phenomenon.”⁷³

Since Carpenter knew about Lincoln’s close friendship with Brooks, accepting the journalist’s version of the story would not have been difficult for him, despite his earlier argument against Bartlett’s similar account.

⁷² Noah Brooks, “Personal Recollections of Abraham Lincoln,” *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine*, 30, No. 182 (July, 1865), 225.

⁷³ Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House*, 164-165.

Ward Hill Lamon wrote another account of the Janus-faced apparition. It appeared in the manuscript for the second volume of his biography of Lincoln and his 1887 syndicated dream newspaper article that later became the famous dream chapter in *Recollections of Abraham Lincoln*. As he did with the White House funeral dream, Lamon wrote two different accounts of the Janus-faced vision in those two works. Since we have already seen that Lamon's manuscript dream chapter from his second volume is a more credible source than his other writings, that version is worth analyzing in comparison to the others. Lamon's manuscript account of the 1860 vision is actually very similar to Carpenter's, with different phrasing and a few additional details within their quotations of Lincoln. The significant portion of this account is a comment Lamon made regarding Lincoln's opinion of the occurrence: "From conversations with him there can be little doubt that he as well as Mrs. Lincoln regarded this circumstance first spoken of as an omen of his re-election."⁷⁴ This connected Lamon to the story with later conversations he had with the president, which he also included after his version of the White House funeral dream. The conversations about the vision revealed to Lamon that both Abraham and Mary Lincoln believed it was an omen, not of his impending death, but rather of his re-election. While Lincoln apparently never told Carpenter about a belief in an omen, he told Brooks that Mrs. Lincoln believed in a more menacing omen than Lamon reported.

Between the variants of the vision story, it appears that Lincoln related it to at least three or four people between 1861 and late 1864. There are problems with all of these sources, which is why some historians do not completely trust this story. The Fehrenbachers questioned the vision's legitimacy based on Carpenter, Brooks, and

⁷⁴ Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln: As President*, 464-465.

Lamon (*Recollections*) as its sources, and they argue, “The effect of the three recollections is partly corroboration and partly contradiction.” They also mentioned that Hay, who supposedly heard the story at the same time Lincoln narrated it to Carpenter, never brought up the vision in his detailed Civil War diary.⁷⁵ Parts of the story are likely false, based on the reasons argued by the Fehrenbachers, but the addition of Bartlett’s version and the likely more reliable Lamon manuscript should enhance its provenance.

Despite some questionable details, there are common aspects with all of the sources for the double-faced reflection from which the truth is likely to be found. As an aggregate, here is what the different versions tell us: Sometime in 1860—during or immediately after Lincoln’s campaign for the presidency—he saw a double reflection of himself in a looking glass at his home in Springfield. This illusion has always been attached to his terms as president; he reported the occurrence to at least one or two friends in the White House following either his 1864 nomination or election. Lincoln may have also recounted the story as early as the summer of 1861, within a year after the event (1860). Even the earliest version of the vision included that either the President or Mrs. Lincoln believed it represented an omen of some sort relating to his second term in office. Although Carpenter initially denied this superstitious aspect of the story, he later agreed that Mary Lincoln saw it as an omen. The different versions all also agreed that one of the reflections Lincoln saw looked paler than the other, but the problem is in accepting that either he or his wife thought it portended his assassination, and that this made him remember the event in 1864.

It is more likely that Lincoln believed the vision resulted from a scientific principle relating to refraction or optics, as Carpenter’s version and Lamon’s manuscript

⁷⁵ Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words*, 88.

chapter both asserted. Unfortunately, even though these two versions claimed that he dismissed it on these grounds, both eventually attached an omen to the double-reflection. Because most of the accounts overlap with each other, likely from corroboration; it is possible the omen—first made popular by Brooks and to a lesser extent by Bartlett—was later adopted by the other sources and accepted as truth. If we remove the notion that the Lincolns saw it as an omen, then the story holds up quite well using the details that appear in all of the accounts. Among those details are clues to the nature of the vision's significance to the president, and certain aspects of his personality are also reinforced by the story.

Carpenter, Brooks, and Lamon all included in their accounts that Lincoln attempted to bring back the vision, either in the days after its original appearance or years later in the White House, because it caused him to feel uncomfortable or bothered.⁷⁶ Lincoln's attempts at making it reappear were efforts to explain a phenomenon that he had never experienced before. This detail is another valuable example showing that Lincoln always sought out a reasonable and rational explanation for his presentiments that were not easily explained. The sources agreed that Lincoln succeeded at making the vision reappear in the days following its original occurrence, which caused him to dismiss it as the result of some optic or refraction principle. The fact that he retold the story to multiple people over a period of about four years could suggest that it concerned him enough to believe it portended something, possibly a warning or omen of some sort. But it is more probable that he either sought explanations from his friends or that he simply enjoyed telling the bizarre story. Additionally, Carpenter and Lamon asserted that

⁷⁶ Lamon, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln: As President*, 465; Carpenter, *Six Months at the White House*, 163-165.

soon before Lincoln told them the story—shortly after his 1864 nomination—the vision once again bothered the president, and he rearranged furniture in the White House trying to make it reappear. This time, however, he was unsuccessful. This later attempt might indicate that the president did believe the vision portended an omen, but, based on his desire for a logical explanation, it is more likely that he remained curious about the vision for more scientific reasons.

Lincoln’s Janus-faced vision has been one of the leading examples used to show his superstitious nature. While there is some substance to this argument as a whole, there is another explanation that fits more accurately within Lincoln’s worldview. At least once during his life, Lincoln described himself as superstitious. Nearly two decades before moving into the White House, Lincoln confessed to his intimate friend, Joshua Speed, that he had always been superstitious. Writing to Speed, Lincoln addressed his friend’s recent marriage stating, “I always was superstitious; and as part of my superstition, I believe God made me one of the instruments of bringing your Fanny and you together, which union, I have no doubt He had fore-ordained.”⁷⁷ Here, at the age of 33, Lincoln confessed his superstitious nature, but he also suggested an element of his fatalism. Commenting that God had foreordained Speed’s marriage also revealed the deep-seeded predestination that he likely inherited from his parents’ Calvinist upbringing. This overlapping in Lincoln’s belief in fatalism and what he described as superstition shows that his double-faced vision could also reflect his fatalism as much as superstition. Lincoln’s response to his Janus-faced vision is not entirely clear beyond his search for an explanation, but he ultimately dealt with it as he did his other mysterious presentiments—he put his trust in the wisdom of the divine power that already decided his fate.

⁷⁷ Lincoln to Joshua Fry Speed, July 4, 1842, in *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 289-290.

Chapter Four:

Other Lincoln Dreams and Visions

The three dreams/visions presented above have demanded the most attention among the numerous presentiments that Lincoln experienced during his life. Each of them have consistently reappeared to the public, not only through historical scholarship, but, to possibly a greater extent, as popular stories that describe a side of Lincoln that is highly relatable. He reported several other dreams that are less known, but they also reveal important aspects of Lincoln's worldview. Many of these dreams are more easily documented than the ones already discussed, and they demonstrate the types of dreams that probably occurred most often to Lincoln. He also took action based on some of his dreams, or reacted in a way that exposed his concern over what he had seen in his dreams. Lincoln repeatedly dreamed about his sons, which reflected his important role as a father even while navigating his country through a tragic war. His reactions to those particular dreams could have been typical of a father, but Lincoln's fatalism was never completely absent. Taken together, these less controversial dreams provide perhaps the clearest insight into Lincoln's internal world, allowing observers to perceive the sort of images that appeared to him while he slept. Dreams were like historical artifacts: they connected Lincoln to a large number of people who had never met him; a dream made the president resemble ordinary people, for even those of the most humble backgrounds dreamed when they slept.

Lincoln mentioned one of the easily documented dreams in an 1863 letter he mailed his wife about their youngest son "Tad." Sent on June 9th from the White House to Mary in Philadelphia, the letter contained two short sentences: "Think you better put

“Tad’s” pistol away. I had an ugly dream about him.” A month earlier, Lincoln had written to a colonel commanding the Washington Arsenal asking the officer to “let Tad have the pistol, big enough to snap caps—but no cartridges or powder.” Taken together, these two letters tell a fairly clear story. Mr. Lincoln allowed his ten-year-old son to have a pistol to play with but made sure that it would only be able make a gun-like noise and not harm himself or anyone else. Only weeks later he had a dream that convinced him to have the pistol taken away. The nature of the dream is unknown, other than Lincoln’s description of it as “ugly,” which leaves room for countless disturbing possibilities. Since the dream took place within about a month of him allowing Tad to have the pistol, he may have had second thoughts about that decision and became increasingly concerned about his son’s safety.⁷⁸

Julia Taft Bayne witnessed the Lincoln family at the White House early in the presidency when she and her younger brothers spent time with the Lincoln boys, until the time of Willie’s death. She later reported her experiences at the White House, including the events that led to Tad receiving the pistol and, as a result, the president’s disturbing dream. Tad and the two Taft boys, Bud and Holly, pretended to raise their own company of soldiers, as if they were fighting in the war. This made young Tad want to have a “real revolver,” as in one that could shoot, and Julia Taft let him see her revolver one day, after she had made sure it was unloaded. Tad then aimed it at Bud Taft and pulled the trigger, causing the elder Taft to take the gun away and scold Tad for pointing a gun at someone.

⁷⁸ Abraham Lincoln to Mary Lincoln, June 9, 1863, in *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 6:256; Abraham Lincoln to [George D. Ramsay], “A Pistol for ‘Tad,’” May 5, 1863, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln Supplement 1832-1865* ed. Basler, (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1974), 187.

Tad begged Julia not to tell his mother about this incident, and he continued to beg his parents to allow him to have a pistol.⁷⁹

The pistol dream can tell us much about what dreams meant to Lincoln and it shows that he dreamed about quotidian matters, like his family's welfare and safety, even while he was occupied with the overwhelming Union war effort in 1863. His dream was significant enough for him to change his mind about his son having the pistol, which proved that he believed that dreams could contain menacing omens of events yet to come. For example, his recurring dream of an indescribable ship sailing toward an indefinite shore convinced him that he would receive news of Sherman's victory on the day of his assassination. His dream about Tad and the pistol, however, influenced an action, one that countered a decision he had recently made. This dream was also important enough for him to halt during his busy schedule to write a letter of warning to his wife about Tad and the boy's well being. Thus at least some dreams were considered by Lincoln to contain pregnant significance, even to the point of him acting upon them.

The "pistol" dream was not the only time President Lincoln's role as a parent influenced dreams or visions during the Civil War. In the weeks following Lincoln's assassination, countless ministers across the country eulogized the fallen hero. At least three of these related a story that demonstrated the president's love for his family and his general tenderness. President Lincoln visited Fort Monroe in Virginia during the spring of 1862, just months after the tragic death of his 11 year-old son, Willie. During his stay, Lincoln conversed with Colonel LeGrand B. Cannon, who served on General John Wool's staff, and shared with him an intimate aspect of his grieving. Cannon apparently related this with Reverend Joseph P. Thompson, who included it in his eulogy for the

⁷⁹ Julia Taft Bayne, *Tad Lincoln's Father* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1931), 128-132.

president that he preached on April 30, 1865 at the Broadway Tabernacle Church in New York. Bishop Matthew Simpson included it in his sermon at Lincoln's burial in Springfield on May 4, as well as earlier by Rev. John McClintock on April 19 at St. Paul's Church in New York. Thompson is the only eulogizer to identify the name of the officer that heard Lincoln's story, but Col. Cannon later shared the account in his own words.⁸⁰

Writing to William Herndon in October 1889, Col. Cannon described his impression of the President and explained their interaction that had attracted much attention.⁸¹ By 1895, Cannon had published his own recollections of the Civil War, including a detailed account of his assignment at Fortress Monroe and the time he spent with President Lincoln during the spring of 1862.⁸² The presidential party arrived on the night of May 6, 1862 at Fort Monroe, and Cannon served as the aide-in-waiting to Lincoln, acting essentially as a secretary. This meant that the president slept in Cannon's room, while the colonel rested in the hall.⁸³ The day after Lincoln's arrival, he asked Cannon if he had a copy of Shakespeare and the Bible to borrow. The colonel loaned the president his Bible and General Wool's copy of Shakespeare's works. The following day, presumably May 8, the colonel was left in charge of the camp headquarters and stayed busy sending and receiving dispatches. Meanwhile, the president spent the

⁸⁰ John McClintock, Matthew Simpson, George Bancroft, and Richard S. Storrs eds., *Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln: Voices from the Pulpit of New York and Brooklyn* (New York: Tibbals and Whiting, 1865), 133-134; Joseph P. Thompson, *Our Martyr President, Abraham Lincoln*, 193-195.

⁸¹ LeGrand B. Cannon to William H. Herndon, October 7, 1889, in *Herndon's Informants: Letters, Interviews, and Statements About Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 678-680.

⁸² LeGrand B. Cannon, *Personal Reminiscences of the Rebellion: 1861-1866* (New York: Burr Printing House, 1895), 156-175.

⁸³ Cannon, *Reminiscences*, 156-157.

morning nearby in Cannon's office reading Shakespeare. After a few hours passed, Lincoln invited Cannon to join him while the president read aloud some passages. Sitting opposite of each other at a small table, Lincoln recited lines from "Macbeth," followed by "King Lear" and "King John." Cannon reported being impressed by the president's ability to portray the characters, taking special notice of the passage from "King John" in which Constance spoke of her lost son. Being moved by those lines, Lincoln closed the book and said to his companion, "Did you ever dream of some lost friend, and feel that you were having a sweet communion with him, and yet have a consciousness that it was not a reality?" Cannon replied sympathetically, "I think we all of us have some such experiences." Lincoln added, "That is the way I dream of my lost boy Willie." This was followed by weeping—first by the president and then the colonel in sympathy.⁸⁴

It is likely that the story circulated throughout much of the nation shortly after the assassination, when everyone was eager to learn new stories about Lincoln's life. Thompson described the same details in 1865 as Cannon did thirty years later. Lincoln's dreams about Willie reveal part of what he experienced in spring 1862, having to bury his young son while leading the nation through its most trying years. It also fit with the nature of his other dreams that he told his friends and family. But there are versions of this story that have the president revealing that he had been having visions of Willie instead of dreams. Bishop Simpson referenced an unidentified officer (not Col. Cannon), but he attributed to Lincoln the words, "Do you ever find yourself talking with the dead?...Since Willie's death I catch myself every day involuntarily talking with him, as if he were with me."⁸⁵ This version gives the story a new meaning, and could imply an

⁸⁴ Cannon, *Reminiscences*, 172-175.

⁸⁵ Simpson, *Our Martyr President*, 406.

element of Spiritualism. Cannon's version specified that Lincoln was aware that the dreams of Willie were not reality, but Simpson suggested that he might have been actually trying to communicate with his son.

The different versions of the account describing President Lincoln admitting to either dreaming about or communicating with Willie are for the most part very similar. When Lincoln allegedly claimed to have dreamed about his son, he also added that he was aware that it was not real. It is not unusual to hear of a grieving parent having their lost child constantly on their mind. Mary Lincoln's spiritualistic interaction with Willie that she reported to her sister Emilie in the winter of 1863 is one relevant example. If Lincoln told Col. Cannon that he talked to Willie and he talked back, then this may be an example of his Spiritualism. However, the documentation for this is simply nonexistent. What is clear is that Lincoln mourned the loss of a second son, and he likely saw him in his dreams, or had been thinking of him so much that it seemed as if he were talking to him.

While countless people down through time have found themselves speaking out loud to lost loved ones, Lincoln's personal melancholia—something numerous observers of the man mentioned frequently in discussing all aspects of Lincoln's life, but especially during the time of his presidency—fit the gloom of his communications with Willie and his visions of pale faces in a glass and morbid dreams about his own funeral. In January 1886 William Herndon told C.O. Poole that Lincoln's sorrowful demeanor and dark melancholy were accompanied by "spectral illusions" as well as irritability and despair, and that they in turn contributed to his superstitious nature.⁸⁶ But Lincoln's superstition

⁸⁶ William H. Herndon to C.O. Poole, January 5, 1886, Herndon-Weik Collection, Library of Congress.

manifested itself in such a way that makes it difficult to separate his dreams and night terrors from his beliefs in signs and omens. If we can believe Herndon, and some scholars tend to doubt the veracity of his recollections of Lincoln, spectral illusions—similar perhaps to Hamlet’s confrontation with his father’s ghost—contributed to his sense that inexplicable sights and sounds existed in a kind of netherworld that dwelled inside and outside of him, beyond one’s reach but open to interpretation as tangible tokens of symbolic significance.

Lincoln also shared a dream with his wife much earlier, well before his presidency that involved another beloved son. This occurred during Lincoln’s term in the House of Representatives in the late 1840s, and he briefly mentioned it in a letter to his wife on April 16, 1848. The letter largely addressed personal and family matters, but Lincoln also wrote that he “did not get rid of the impression of that foolish dream about dear Bobby till I got your letter written the same day.”⁸⁷ He had apparently previously told Mrs. Lincoln about this dream, in person or in a letter, although he did not provide additional details other than that it was “foolish” and that it involved his oldest son Robert, whom he called “Bobby.” While the precise nature of the dream is unknown, it is clear that it caused Lincoln to worry about his son’s welfare. Only Mary’s letter eased his anxiety.

In March 1865 Lincoln shared another dream with his wife while they visited City Point, Virginia, where General Grant maintained his headquarters. The dream made each of them anxious. Mary Lincoln first told the dream to William H. Herndon, Lincoln’s former law partner who, following the president’s assassination, spent the remainder of

⁸⁷ Abraham Lincoln to Mary Todd Lincoln, April 16, 1848, in *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 1:465-466.

his life locating eyewitnesses who could testify about events, great and small, that Lincoln had experienced from his birth to his untimely death. Both of the Lincolns took pains, based on the president's dream, to make sure the White House was safe—that the dream, in fact, had not been an awful premonition. During an interview in September 1866 at the St. Nicholas Hotel in Springfield, Mrs. Lincoln reported that “Mr. Lincoln had a dream when down the river at city point after Richmond was taken: he dreamed that the White House burned up—sent me up the River—went—met Stanton & c[ompany]. Mr. Lincoln told me to get a party and come back. I did so.”⁸⁸

Mary Lincoln's telegrams to Washington reveal her efforts to confirm that no tragedy had befallen the Executive Mansion. On March 24 she sent a message to Mary Anne Cuthbert, a housekeeper at the White House, urging the servant to “send a telegram, directed to City Point, so soon as you receive this & say, if all is right at the house.” The editors of Mary Lincoln's collected letters include a footnote affirming that she later declared that her husband had dreamed of the White House burning down the night before.⁸⁹ This telegram also included a header requesting Cuthbert to “Answer immediately.” The next day, Mary sent another telegram to a White House guard and doorkeeper directing him to ask Cuthbert why she had not responded to her telegram from the day before and to “reply immediately.” A few days later, on April 2, after she departed early from City Point, Mary sent Lincoln a letter from the White House informing him that all was well. Dreams, so far as the president and First Lady were concerned, deserved to be taken seriously. As in the case of Tad's pistol, dreams were

⁸⁸ William H. Herndon, “Mary Todd Lincoln (WHH interview),” September 1866, in *Herndon's Informants*, ed. Wilson and Davis, 357-361.

⁸⁹ Mary Todd Lincoln, *Mary Todd Lincoln: Her Life and Letters*, ed. Justin G. Turner and Linda Levitt Turner (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1972), 210.

real enough to arouse the Lincolns to take preventative measures or seek reassurances that dreams were not conveyors of bad news.⁹⁰

Many of Lincoln's reported dreams seemingly involve an ominous or tragic event that might take place in the future, giving him reason to dwell on what they meant. One dream, however, dealt with something that could have actually taken place or what seemed an ordinary occurrence, but it also likely reflected an aspect of his personality observed by others. John Hay recorded on December 23, 1863 the President's dream from that night:

He was in a party of plain people and as it became known who he was they began to comment on his appearance. One of them said, 'He is a very common-looking man.' The President replied 'The Lord prefers Common-looking people: that is the reason he makes so many of them.'⁹¹

Hay's recollection of this dream is very similar to comments that others had heard from the President. Alexander McClure claimed to hear Lincoln say, "I have always felt that God must love common people, or he wouldn't have made so many of them."⁹² James Grant Wilson similarly recalled hearing the President say, "I think the Lord must love plain people, he has made so many of them."⁹³ The Fehrenbachers state that Hay's version had not been published when McClure printed this story, suggesting independent

⁹⁰ Herndon, "Mary Todd Lincoln's Statement"; Mary Todd Lincoln to Mary Ann Cuthbert, March 24, 1865, in *Mary Todd Lincoln*, ed. Turner and Turner, 210; Mary Lincoln to Alphonso Dunn, March 25, 1865, in *ibid.*; Mary Lincoln to Abraham Lincoln, April 2, 1865 in *ibid.*, 211.

⁹¹ John Hay, *Inside Lincoln's White House: The Complete Civil War Diary of John Hay* ed. Michael Burlingame and John R. Turner Ettliger (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1997), 132.

⁹² Alexander McClure, February 1904, quoted in Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words*, 319.

⁹³ James Grant Wilson, "Recollections of Lincoln," *Putnam's Monthly* (February 1909), 516, quoted in Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Lincoln*, 502.

corroboration.⁹⁴ They also discounted Wilson's version because by the time of its publication the other two had already been printed.⁹⁵

The dream recorded by Hay contained that comment that others later repeated, and it may have been a commonly known aspect of Lincoln's character. Hay wrote that Lincoln's dream referred to common-looking people and not necessarily common or plain people in general, though it is not much of a stretch. During the nineteenth century, especially when Lincoln matured into a politician, promoting the "common man" as part of the American Dream was very popular. Lincoln had proven, as had others before him, that common men could rise to the highest position in the nation's government. Herndon wrote in a letter to the editor of the Chicago's *Religio-Philosophical Journal* in 1885 that common people were extremely important. He argued, "[Lincoln] believed that the common people had truths that philosophers never dreamed of; and often appealed to that common judgment of the common people over the shoulders of scientists."⁹⁶ If Hay correctly recalled that Lincoln dreamed about this claim in favor of common people, then these dreams reflected specific characteristics of his ideology.

Abraham Lincoln allowed his dreams to occupy his mind while carrying out his role as commander in chief, as evidenced by his discussion with Colonel Cannon regarding his dreams about Willie while visiting Fort Monroe in 1863 and his concern over a dream about the White House burning during his final trip to City Point in the closing weeks of the war. These instances demonstrate Lincoln's search for a reasonable explanation to his dreams, as he did with most of his reported dreams. He exhibited his

⁹⁴ Fehrenbacher and Fehrenbacher, *Recollected Words of Lincoln*, 319.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 502.

⁹⁶ William Herndon to the Editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, December 4, 1885, in Emanuel Hertz ed., *The Hidden Lincoln: From the Letters and Papers of William H. Herndon* (New York: The Viking Press, 1938), 110-111.

need to explain the irrational during his Gettysburg Address. The terrible war that resulted in the death of countless young Americans was difficult for anyone to comprehend, and that speech remains relevant today because he explained why the nation went to war itself by declaring “a new birth of freedom.”⁹⁷ Similarly, he struggled to place his dreams and visions within a rational explanation. They represented a profound challenge to his reason and rationality. He kept retelling many of them as if by doing so somehow their meaning would be made plain—or perhaps the people he told the stories to would provide him with a reasonable explanation of what his dreams or visions meant. Just as Alexander Stephens forced himself to do, Lincoln had to find a way to reconcile the meaning of dreams with his reasonable understanding of life. A further examination of the most prominent aspect of his personal philosophy will illuminate Lincoln’s ultimate conclusion of what his dreams must have meant.

⁹⁷ Abraham Lincoln, “Address Delivered at the Dedication of the Cemetery at Gettysburg,” in *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 7:23.

Conclusion

Abraham Lincoln's dreams reveal instances in his life when he struggled to find a reasonable explanation or meaning for his experiences. Today, people turn to modern dream theories and studies to interpret what their dreams signify, helping them cope with disturbing nightmares or visions. Lincoln could not consult Sigmund Freud or Carl Jung when he saw his own funeral in the White House or dreamed of his beloved Willie in the months after he died. The existing accounts of many of his dreams were a result of Lincoln searching for their meaning by telling them to his friends and family. He did not seem sure of the source of dreams, though his discussion of dreams in the Bible, in the story of the White House funeral dream suggested that he allowed for the possibility that God sent them as messages. Whether or not he believed this to be true, it is evident that he eventually dealt with his dreams the same way he did everything else in his life—they must devolve into a fatalistic conclusion of one kind or another.

Scholars have long recognized Abraham Lincoln's fatalism, but it has only recently been proposed as having a major influence on his way of thinking.⁹⁸ William H. Herndon is the best source for Lincoln's fatalism, as he repeated his argument to many with whom he corresponded in the roughly twenty-five years he spent studying the life of his former law partner's life. In a letter to Jesse Weik, Herndon laid out how the two should describe Lincoln's philosophy in their pending biography:

First, he believed that what was to be would be and that no prayers of ours could arrest or reverse the decree. Secondly, he was a fatalist and believed that fatalism ruled the world. Thirdly, he believed that conditions made and do make and will forever continue to make the man and not man the conditions. Fourthly, he believed there was no freedom of the human mind; and fifthly, he believed that

⁹⁸ Douglas Wilson, "William H. Herndon on Lincoln's Fatalism," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association* 35, No. 2 (2014), 1.

universal, absolute, and eternal laws ruled the universe of matter and mind, everywhere and always.⁹⁹

Many of those whom Herndon consulted for his extensive Lincoln Record also explained Lincoln's fatalism. Notably, fatalism was perhaps the only element of Lincoln's life that Herndon and Mary Todd Lincoln agreed upon. She described in her September 1866 interview with Herndon that Lincoln's "maxim and philosophy was—'What is to be will be and no cares of ours can arrest the decree.'"¹⁰⁰

Elsewhere, Herndon explained the philosophy more clearly: "Mr. Lincoln to use a Christian word believed in preordination—that is that all things are preordained—decreed beforehand. To use a somewhat classical word, he believed that fate ruled and doomed everything."¹⁰¹ His friend and fellow Illinois politician Isaac Arnold quoted Lincoln stating: "I have all my life been a fatalist. What is to be will be, or rather, I have found all my life as Hamlet says: 'There's a divinity that shapes our ends/Rough-hew them how we will.'" Many have used this declaration to describe Lincoln's fatalism, but he also manifested it in various ways throughout his life. Lincoln also showed fatalism in his own words on several occasions, and now it can be seen clearly through his dreams.

The degree to which scholars accept Herndon's depiction of Lincoln's fatalism varies. David Herbert Donald, who contributed to Herndon's diminished standing in Lincoln scholarship, used fatalism to explain a characteristic that Lincoln demonstrated throughout his life: "the essential passivity of his nature." Allen C. Guelzo disagreed with the assertion of passivity and closely studied Lincoln's fatalism using the Doctrine

⁹⁹ William H. Herndon to Jesse Weik, February 25, 1887, in *Hidden Lincoln*, 179.

¹⁰⁰ William H. Herndon, "Mary Todd Lincoln (WHH interview)" September 1866, *Herndon's Informants*, ed. Wilson and Davis, 357-361.

¹⁰¹ William H. Herndon to John J. Lindman, December 3, 1886, Herndon-Weik Collection, Library of Congress.

of Necessity to show a connection with Herndon's description of Lincoln's philosophy. The Doctrine of Necessity appeared during Lincoln's campaign for Congress in 1846. Peter Cartwright, a political rival and popular Methodist preacher, charged Lincoln with religious infidelity, to which he responded with a handbill. In this response, Lincoln explained that he had previously argued in favor of the "Doctrine of Necessity." Guelzo pointed out that Lincoln then described the doctrine "in terms very close to those used by Herndon in describing Lincoln's idea of motives: 'that is, that the human mind is impelled to action, or held in rest by some power, over which the mind itself has no control.'"¹⁰² While scholars are not in complete agreement about the implications of Lincoln's fatalism, it has consistently been considered a fundamental aspect of his makeup, with the Doctrine of Necessity at its core and Herndon as the best source for its definition.

Lincoln proclaimed perhaps the best example of his fatalism during the Second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865. Before announcing "malice toward none" and "charity for all," the president explained that despite everyone's hopes and prayers for the war to end, it would not end "if God wills that it continue."¹⁰³ Whether Lincoln referred to God in a Christian sense or not, he clearly understood that a divine power willed the war and it would only continue or end when it was so willed. This explanation directly reflects the philosophy described by Herndon and others. The president allowed fatalism to define and explain the nature of the Civil War, as it appears to have been a dominating characteristic through the end of his life.

¹⁰² Lincoln, "Handbill Replying to Charges of Infidelity," in Basler ed., *Collected Works*, 1:382; Allen C. Guelzo, "Abraham Lincoln and the Doctrine of Necessity," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 18, no. 1 (Winter 1997), 64-65.

¹⁰³ Lincoln, "Second Inaugural Address," in *Collected Works*, ed. Basler, 8:332-333.

As seen in Lincoln's 1842 letter to Joshua Speed, Herndon also attached superstition to fatalism. The former Springfield lawyer wrote that Lincoln's superstition might have caused him to call upon "the spirits of the dead to reveal to him the cause of his states of gloom, sadness, fear, and despair."¹⁰⁴ Elsewhere, Herndon claimed that the superstition could have arisen from not taking stimulants, causing him to have "a nervous morbidity and spectral illusions, irritability, melancholy, and despair."¹⁰⁵ In Lincoln's fatalism, he also revealed his superstitious nature to Herndon claiming many times, "I feel as if I should meet with some terrible end."¹⁰⁶ This sort of superstition suggests that Lincoln believed that dreams held real meaning, even that they could be portents of the future. Herndon's 1889 biography directly addressed Lincoln's view of dreams: "There was more or less superstition in his nature, and, although he may not have believed implicitly in the signs of his many dreams, he was constantly endeavoring to unravel them."¹⁰⁷ The effort to unravel his dreams has been demonstrated in the previous chapters, and it helps connect fatalism directly to Lincoln's response to dreams.

Lincoln understood that laws controlled the universe, and that there were forces, whether God or another power, that controlled everything that happened. Whether it was the death of his mother and sister when he was a boy, the death of Ann Rutledge, the death of his own sons Eddie and Willie, or the tragic war that divided the nation and killed countless Americans, those forces controlled everything and men had no means to change their outcomes. When Lincoln had dreams or visions that seemed as if they might

¹⁰⁴ William Herndon to the Editor of the *Religio-Philosophical Journal*, December 4, 1885, in *Hidden Lincoln*, 110-111.

¹⁰⁵ Herndon to C.O. Poole, January 5, 1886, in *Hidden Lincoln*, 120.

¹⁰⁶ William Herndon to Jesse Weik, February 6, 1887, in *Hidden Lincoln*, 167.

¹⁰⁷ Douglas L. Wilson and Rodney O. Davis eds., *Herndon's Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 264.

portend something in the future, his nature prompted him to “unravel” what they might mean. He found that many of his dreams were beyond a reasonable explanation, so his ultimate conclusion remained consistent with his approach to everything else. Despite the numerous arguments that Lincoln had a supernatural character or belonged to the popular spiritualist movement of his time, he accepted that whatever his dreams might portend was out of his control. However, he seemed to show more concern over possible portents when he had an “ugly” or “foolish” dream about his son, which caused him to worry or take action.

Modern theories and perceptions of dreams have been greatly influenced by early twentieth century psychologists, particularly Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung whose work is still regarded as the foundation of modern psychological dream analysis. But to a great extent, Freud and Jung stand in the way of determining what dreams meant to people living in the nineteenth century. If it can be determined how dreams were perceived in a pre-Freudian age, then Lincoln’s dreams can be better understood within a cultural context that combined deep religious belief with powerful folk superstitions that made Americans marvel at God’s wonders and caused Abraham Lincoln to believe that dreams and illusions spoke directly to him as warnings of where his commanding fatalism and his Calvinistic understanding of predestination might lead him along the path of his life.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ On Lincoln’s religion see: William E. Barton, *The Soul of Abraham Lincoln* (New York, 1920); Harlan Hoyt Horner, *The Growth of Lincoln’s Faith* (New York, 1939); David C. Hein, “The Calvinistic Tenor of Abraham Lincoln’s Religious Thought,” *Lincoln Herald*, 85 (Winter 1983), 212-220; David C. Hein, “Lincoln’s Theology and Political Ethics,” in Kenneth W. Thompson, ed., *Essays on Lincoln’s Faith and Politics* (Lanham, Md., 1983), 103-179; Glen E. Thurow, “Abraham Lincoln and American Political Religion,” in Gabor S. Boritt and Norman O. Forness, eds., *The Historian’s Lincoln: Pseudohistory, Psychohistory, and History* (Urbana, Ill., 125-143; Wayne C. Temple, *Abraham Lincoln: From Skeptic to Prophet* (Mahomet, Ill., 1995);

Nineteenth-century dreamers were largely left to determine how to interpret their nocturnal visions on their own. Some people saw dreams as spiritual communications with their dead loved ones, while others credited unexplainable dreams to something in their diet that disagreed with them. Alexander Stephens accepted that dreams were often presentiments that portended something in reality, and he reconciled the unexplainable nature of dreams with his understanding of reason. In other words, people ultimately came to their own conclusions about their dreams based on their fundamental worldview. Abraham Lincoln was no different. With scholarship now accepting a significant role for fatalism within Lincoln's way of thinking throughout his life, it should also be the framework for how dreams and visions had an impact on him. Scholars have challenged some of the dreams and visions, but, when the sources are taken together and evaluated, there are recurring elements in the accounts that directly reflect Lincoln's fatalism in his reaction to the presentiments. In fact, Lincoln's dreams and visions are a valuable source for documenting and analyzing his fatalism. The dreams and visions also reflect the complex nature of nineteenth century American belief systems by demonstrating a nexus between such philosophies as spiritualism, Calvinist predestination, and an Enlightenment form of rationalism that existed not only in the Sixteenth President, but also in society during that period.

Abraham Lincoln is widely regarded as one of the most important figures in American history, and for that reason, aspects of his personality and beliefs are hotly

Allen C. Guelzo, "Abraham Lincoln and the Doctrine of Necessity," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, 18 (Winter 1997), 57-81; Guelzo, *Abraham Lincoln*; Lucas E. Morel, *Lincoln's Sacred Effort: Defining Religion's Role in American Self-Government* (Lanham, Md., 2000); Joseph R. Fornieri, *Abraham Lincoln's Political Faith* (DeKalb, Ill., 2003); Mary Todd Lincoln, Interview, ca. September 1866, in Wilson and Davis, eds., *Herndon's Informants*, 360.

contested. He is unique because he often shared intimate details of himself, including accounts of his dreams—something that made this common man of the people an uncommonly candid president. Through his dreams and visions we can see a more vivid and personal Lincoln, whose greatness should be measured not only by his words and deeds, but also by his own understanding of what dreams and visions meant to him.

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