



## ILLINOIS AND LINCOLN SET THE BAR FOR POLITICAL SLEAZE: PART 2 OF 2

*By Dennis Constant*

As described in Part 1 of this series, the *Chicago Tribune* was one of Abraham Lincoln's biggest champions during his bid for the presidency. Almost 150 years later, a May 16 *Tribune* editorial outlined the many ways in which Lincoln's men orchestrated his nomination through deception and coercion.

According to the editorial, Lincoln supporters poured into the city for the Republican Presidential Convention courtesy of special cheap rail fares engineered by Lincoln's men. Counterfeit convention tickets were printed on local presses. Lincoln's men also forged signatures for special tickets in the cheering section of Lincoln's chief rival, Sen. William Seward of New York. They then recruited "idlers" who, for a modest fee or just for fun, agreed to be at the Wigwam before Seward's supporters arrived. When Seward's real advocates appeared, they were refused admittance because their places had been taken by the holders of fake tickets.

*Tribune* managing editor and co-owner Joseph Medill pulled what he later called "the meanest trick" of his life. He gerrymandered the Seward-voting New York delegates into a far corner of the convention floor, where they couldn't easily be heard. Lincoln's organizers recruited a thousand of "the loudest shouters in the state" to drown out the competition.

On the third day of the convention, Lincoln needed just 1 ½ votes to win. According to the *Trib*, Medill raced over to the Ohio delegation, which had been supporting favorite son Salmon P. Chase. "If you can throw the Ohio delegation to Lincoln, Chase can have anything he wants," Medill promised. Four votes switched to Lincoln. Chase later became Lincoln's secretary of the treasury.

Less than a year later, the first shots of the War Between the States were fired. The *Tribune* wondered: what if Seward had been nominated? But by then, of course, it was too late.

If one counts civilian dead, total casualties of the war were likely well over 660,000. Ken Burns' Civil War documentary stated casualties were two percent of the population. Today, that would work out to six million dead—a truly horrific figure.

In 1910, a *Tribune* editorial called the day of Lincoln's nomination "the most illustrious" in the city's history. If one measures illustriousness by scandal, intimidation, and fraud, then the *Tribune* got it right.

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