



# Eight Weeks in Washington, 1861: Abraham Lincoln and the Hazards of Transition

*Richard J. Toffel*

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As we celebrate 150 years since Lincoln first took the oath of office on March 4, 1861, a reappraisal of Lincoln's first eight weeks in office is in order. A close look at those weeks, our most hazardous transition, reveals a time when the fate of the nation's capital, certainly of the Lincoln Administration, and perhaps of the nation itself, seemed very much in doubt.

This is a story of a president uncertain and sometimes amateurish, of a man not yet fully recognized as a legitimate leader, of an executive anxious to the point of illness, of a beleaguered figure, occasionally despairing, but also starting to find his footing. Lincoln himself soon remembered it as the most troubled and anxious time of his life, one that might actually have threatened his physical survival. In a sense, it is a story of Abraham Lincoln the human being beginning to become the Abraham Lincoln we now recall.

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