

## Democrat for Lincoln (1908)

*John Q. Barrett\**

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In November 1908, Robert H. Jackson, age 16 and a high school senior in Frewsburg, New York, was elected to chair, probably for the first time in his life, a political meeting. It was the election eve rally of the Chautauqua County, New York, Democratic Party Committee. Young Jackson, as chair, introduced speakers with remarks that he had typed out in advance (with his imperfect spelling and punctuation skills) and then edited (perhaps with a mentor's assistance). The principal speaker was leading Democrat and New York State Deputy Attorney General Frank H. Mott, who also was Jackson's very distant cousin by marriage and who would be, two years hence, a Jamestown lawyer for whom Jackson would begin to work as an apprentice.

Before introducing Mott, Jackson in his opening remarks spoke about the Democratic Party and the top of its 1908 national ticket. He demonstrated partisan exuberance, poor prognostication skills and, interestingly given his politics and the setting, admiration for Abraham Lincoln:

Ladies and Gentlemen;- I desire to express my appreciation of the honor conferred upon me by my selection as chairman of this meeting. It is an honor to preside at any meeting, much more a democratic meeting, upon this eve of a great democratic victory. While I regret that I am not of an age to cast a strait democratic vote this fall I would not let that prevent me from allying myself with the party of the people, the party which pledges and the only one which pledges to secure to me my birthright as a free born American ~~with out my forsaking the cause of my own kind, the common people.~~ The party which recognises as our forefathers recognized, that the sovereign

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For a selected archive of Jackson List posts, see my homepage at [www.law.stjohns.edu](http://www.law.stjohns.edu). To subscribe to the Jackson List, which does not display recipient identities or distribute their email addresses, send a note to [barrettj@stjohns.edu](mailto:barrettj@stjohns.edu).

power of this sovereign nation of the earth is primarily vested in its people and which proposes that they shall have the free and unrestricted right to exercise that power. Without the pride of ~~power, the laurels of victories which deprive citizens of their citizenship,~~ *official position* the Democratic party is championing the cause of the people. Under its valiant leader it has carried its case to the court of last resort, The people and tomorrow they they render the decision. I believe that the American people are intelligent and will do the intelligent and patriotic thing. I believe that in the veins of Americans still ~~runs~~ *circulates* the blood of freedom and that tomorrow with a voice heard round the world, they will declare with Bryan and Lincoln, that government ~~for~~ *of* the people, ~~by~~ *for* the people and by the people shall not perish from the earth. And I venture the prediction that they will choose as thier next President our leading statesman our greatest commoner, that sterling Democrat WILLIAM JENNINGS BRYAN.<sup>1</sup>

Oh well. Bryan, who Robert Jackson at this young age had met and heard speak a number of times, was a hero to him, but that primacy would fade with time. Lincoln, by contrast, was an icon who came to be more significant to Jackson across his life.<sup>2</sup>

And Jackson's writing, in time, improved.

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<sup>1</sup> An image of Jackson's typescript follows this text. In it, the handwriting is not obviously Jackson's—the editor might have been someone, such as Frank Mott, with whom Jackson shared the text he had typed.

<sup>2</sup> During Jackson's lifetime and since, many have recognized similarities between him and Lincoln. These comparisons begin with their adjacent birthdates—Lincoln (in 1809) on February 12, Jackson (in 1892) on February 13—but include substantive parallels in their backgrounds, upbringings, interests, skills, temperaments and thoughts. My Jackson List essay *Lincolnian Jackson*, which addresses this topic and includes the text and image of Justice Felix Frankfurter's February 1955 letter drawing this connection, is available in the Jackson List Archive, [www.stjohns.edu/academics/graduate/law/faculty/Profiles/Barrett/JacksonList.stj](http://www.stjohns.edu/academics/graduate/law/faculty/Profiles/Barrett/JacksonList.stj) (2/13/2008 item).



Ladies and Gentlemen;- I desire to express my appreciation of the honor conferred upon me by my selection as chairman of this meeting. It is an honor to preside at any meeting, much more a democratic meeting, upon this eve of a great democratic victory. While I regret that I am not of an age to cast a strait democratic vote this fall I would not let that prevent me from allying myself with the party of the people, the party which pledges and the only one which pledges to secure to me my birthright as a free born American ~~with out my forsaking the cause of my own kind, the common people.~~

The party which recognises as our forefathers recognised, that the sovereign power of this sovereign nation of the earth is primarily vested in its people and which proposes that they shall have the free and unrestricted right to exercise that power. Without the ~~pride of power, the laurels of victories which deprive citizens of their citizenship,~~ the Democratic party is championing the cause of the people. Under its valient leader it has carried its case to the court of last resort, The people and tomorrow they they render the decision. I beleive that the American people are intelligent and will do the intelligent and patriotic thing. I beleive that in the veins of Americans still ~~runs~~ the blood of freedom and that tomorrow with a voice headd round the world, they will declare with Bryan and Lincoln, that government ~~of~~ the people ~~by~~ the people and by the people shall not perish from the earth. And I venture the prediction that they will choose as thier next President our lead-statesman our greatest commoner, that sterling Democrat WILLIAM JENNI NGS BRYAN.

I have the privelege of presenting to you as the first speaker this evening, the man who needs no introduction, upon whose ~~virtues~~ unquestioned virtues as a party leader and as one who has proven loyal to public trust, I need not dwell, and whose talents and abilities he will demonstrate to you more eloquently than I can explain, DEPUTY ATTY. GEN. MOTT.

Before I introduce the second speaker I wish to mention the name of one of his fellow citizens. A word to the wise is sufficient and before you cast a ballot for assemblyman I ask you to carefully consider the qualifications, of one well fitted to represent us a man of ability, integrity and honor, a democrat of the old stock, Dr ANDREW J. BENNETT. It is a pleasure to introduce to you Busti's other destinguished citisen, the chairman of the county committee J. Wm. SANDBURY.

We have with us to-night one well qualified to discuss the issues of the campaign. Because of his devotion to the cause of the Democracy and the people, his high standing in his profession and as a citizen, I take pleasure in introducing to you WALTER ED SON.