

## Getting Curious with Jonathan Van Ness, Shaun Peterson & Thomas Balcerski

JVN: Hi, curious people. I'm Jonathan Van Ness and welcome back to Getting Curious. Honey! Abraham Lincoln is really having a moment and apparently he was a homosexual. There's a new book, uh, or not new book. There's a new movie. It's called *Lover of Men*. I've seen it. I've seen some articles come out about it, uh, because there's this, there's this new movie. And so once I read the articles I was like, oh my God, we've got to get a historian and hopefully the director of the movie to come on and talk to us about it and lo and behold, we got both. We got the director and this gorgeous historian who worked on the movie. So we're obsessed. I'm from Illinois. I'm from the land of Lincoln. It says it on all of our license plates. Was he really gay? Like, was he really, like, feeling? Was he gay? Was he a homosexual? Was he bi, was he polly? What was he? Are we even allowed to do that after someone's gone? Like, are like, are we allowed to? I just have so many questions. Um, I'm excited to find out about *Lover of Men*. I'm excited to find out more about Lincoln's gay history. And so today we're asking was Abraham Lincoln? Really? Abraham Lincoln slash was Abraham Lincoln gay? But before we find out how gay Abraham Lincoln was, let's get into these guest bios. Thomas Balcerski is a scholar of early American history. He is the author of *Bosom Friends, The Intimate World of James Buchanan and William Rufus King*. Ayee! I made that part of the bio myself that noises you guys, that was just, I got excited. That was printed by Oxford University Press in 2019. Thomas is also one of the most sighed Abraham Lincoln historians and is featured in the new documentary *Lover of Men*. Shaun Peterson was born in Kansas City, Missouri and grew up in the Kansas City area as well as in Cleveland, Ohio, Atlanta, Atlanta, Georgia, and the Saint Louis area. Oh, honey, yes. He got a BA in film production and theater arts at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Peterson lived in Los Angeles and New York City where he worked as an editor for MTV, VH1, and A&E. He directed his first feature film living in Missouri in 1999. He then started directing music videos for bands such as Train, Team Sleep, and you will know us by the trail of the dead, Vendetta, Red, and Low. Shaun is the director of the new documentary *Lover of Men* out September 6th. Today we're asking how gay was Abraham Lincoln and make sure to stick around for the end of the episode where we will dissect what I learned and what I'm curious about next. Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah, welcome to Getting Curious, how are you, Shaun and Tom?

SHAUN PETERSON: So good. It's so great to be with you.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, it's great. Great to be here.

JVN: You guys, I have to tell you, we don't do three ways that often on Getting Curious. But when we do, but when we do, we really have the most amazing guests. And I just want to get this off my chest, yesterday, I sidebar, I don't want to get off topic before we like jump into our conversation. But I had this like meeting in a boardroom yesterday and I think it's part of my mental health. One of the things, uh it must be a ADHD which I have been diagnosed with or something else that I haven't been diagnosed with. Uh but I, whenever I'm in a boardroom, I have to bring up Erin Brockovich. And if I don't bring up Erin Brockovich in the boardroom, I feel this deep sense of discomfort that I can't sit with. Like, I, I have to bring up Erin Brockovich when I'm in a boardroom. Similarly, when I talk about Abraham Lincoln, I really want to say Gay-braham Lincoln and I've always been like that since I was little, like, since I like said, like, even before any of these murmurings, like I just, I've always wanted to say that like, whenever, whenever people would be like, Abraham Lincoln, I always said

Gay-braham Lincoln and in a very, like, affin – like, loving non derogatory way because I've always been very pro gay. So I just had to get off that, off my chest. And then my second follow up question is, how many times do people say one of those things to you? And how annoying is that, or am I the first?

SHAUN PETERSON: Well, I know, no, I, I've heard it from people before and I find it endearing, you know, um and uh you know, but, but that's the thing, you know, maybe we'll, we'll get into this once we get into the, to the nitty gritty of the film is that we're also, you know, there's all this fun uh murmurings about Lincoln, but the film's point to its, to its core is that we're not trying to make the claim that Lincoln was gay per se is that, that Lincoln participated in behaviors that were very common at the time because there, there was no sexual or gender identity at the time at all. And that Lincoln was uh being intimate with men like tons of men did at the time and there was no name for it. So, you know, we, we, in today's terms, Lincoln would be queer but in, in his time, he was just being a person that had, you know, had, had desires.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, a total babe Jonathan, we can at least get on that. Babe-raham Lincoln for sure. And that's just not among the gays, by the way, everyone calls him Babe-raham Lincoln –

JVN: He was cute, he was cute.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: So you got something going there,

JVN: Shaun, you spoke first, you are the director of *Lover of Men*. And then Tom, you are giving us our Abraham Lincoln historian just so that everyone knows. So Shaun, will you say hi, Director Shaun so that people can hear?

SHAUN PETERSON: Hi everybody!

JVN: We love Shaun and Tom will you say hi?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Hi, hello!

JVN: Ok. Yes, I love. And also before we jump right in because of my really long monologue. How are you guys?

SHAUN PETERSON: So good. I mean, I can't tell you how excited we are to be on this podcast Jonathan, like, thrilled. You know, it's, it's just because you, you use your platform in such a beautiful way and you share it with others and it's just so exciting to bring, you bring pathos and humor and wisdom to all these topics. So it's a real honor to be here.

JVN: So, Shaun, how did you come into this project? Were you just minding your own business? And then you were like, I want to do this story. How did it come into your, into your hands in your mind?

SHAUN PETERSON: Well, you know, I think my, my story is similar to Tom's, there was a Vanity Fair article that Gore Vidal wrote about um this book that uh Clarence Tripp was writing and Tripp was a, was a researcher for, for Kinsey. And, you know, so he was a sex researcher and um and they wrote it, you know, and, and Tripp wrote this book about Lincoln's sexuality and then I went on a deep dive and I started reading uh Gene Baker who's in our film, uh who did the forward to the book. And I read Dr John Staffer from Harvard who's in our film and he wrote about Lincoln sexuality in his book *Giants*. And then

going back to Carl Sandberg, you know, who is the poet and Lincoln historian, you know, his book in 1925 that talked about the streaks of lavender that Lincoln and Speed had. And so I just did this deep dive and I became so fascinated with it through the years. And, you know, finally, um I got somebody as excited as myself, Rob Rosenheck, who's the producer of the film to um jump on and we just, we just went for it and got all these great scholars to come together and really bring it to the forefront.

JVN: And then tell us, Tom.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, I mean, once you go deep into Abraham Lincoln, there's no going back. I mean, the obsession is real, the fixation is real. And we, we are a community of Lincoln scholars in this film and that's how we actually define ourselves. We're so happy to connect with Shaun who is now really exhibited the same passion, the same gusto for Abraham Lincoln. And I think there's actually now a moment where the scholar, the producer, and the film have all come together beautifully.

JVN: So to give us some timeline on the film, the film came out, when does it, when did it come out? Is it out?

SHAUN PETERSON: When it comes out September 6th in theaters nationwide.

JVN: OK perfect. So it comes out September 6th. But obviously at this point, like the press has had their screeners, honey, because it's like everybody's talking about. So what has it been like it with it being, you know, kind of like in a limited release, you know, and as it's coming in, you know, to mass release, like, has it been hard for people to imagine Lincoln is queer, has there been like a backlash? Have you found yourself on Breitbart or Fox yet, or like –

SHAUN PETERSON: Well, Jonathan, seriously, that all that press was based on the 2.5 minute trailer and you know how, and you know how the right, the right loves to take a little nibble and then, and then just like, feel like they know everything about it and they haven't seen the film and, you know, we, you know, Ben Shapiro came out, uh Alex Jones, you know. Uh yeah, you know, um, so Elon Musk tweeted about it and of course, of course, it's like they're just completely pooh poohing it immediately, and we're kind of like, well, see the movie, see the evidence because, you know, I have all of this evidence here. You know, all of these letters and all of these books.

JVN: He's got fucking receipts, honey!

SHAUN PETERSON: Yes, I have receipts. Exactly. And it's like, please I invite people to watch the movie because it does seem like for some people have never heard of this, it seems kind of like out of left field. But, you know, Tom, and I'll let Tom speak to this. Tom is doing deep dive research on this as he's writing his book about Lincoln. It, the the evidence is there. And then you have to also root the evidence in the context of the time because the 19th century was very different than it is today. So you have to put all those things together.

JVN: Well, yeah, it's like Kamala says like you didn't just fucking fall out of a coconut tree. You got like you exist in the context from with, which you came and Lincoln came in the 1800's. So it's like a different time, you know, that makes sense to me. So I actually didn't know that you guys got like hardcore like a blowback. But I just was assuming that's interesting that so I read this, the spirit of my grandmother did envelop my chakra. I will tell you when I read, I think there was a, was there a Vanity Fair article about it? Because I think

that's, yeah. So I read that. And then I was like, and I did, I had this like southern woman, you know, who would be like 90 year old woman now coming in my brain and I was like, oh what, you know why? And then you know what really sold me, you know what really sold me? You guys, it was the hairy, the perfect thighs, nobody talks about some – I was in Vegas and this man sat next to me at this three card poker and he had these fucking thighs, these hairy thighs that I, I looked at him after like 15 minutes and I said, I know that we don't talk about people's bodies anymore, but your hairy thighs are intoxicating. And then I, and then I couldn't tell if he was like, I just didn't know what his orientation was. And then once he spoke, I was like, oh, he's definitely heterosexual. But you know, he was like, oh my gosh, you know, he didn't say it like that, but he was like, thanks, you know, no one's ever gone for much of my thighs. And I was like, oh my God, you're so welcome. But it's very gay to love another man. I just think that's patently super gay.

SHAUN PETERSON: I'll let Tom speak to this but you know, it really ties back to femoral eroticism, you know, using the thighs as a –

JVN: What's femoral mean?

SHAUN PETERSON: Tom, go for it to a historical expert on femoral eroticism.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: I mean, one has to do something for a living um femoral means of course, of the femur. So that's the thigh bone. And so it's all that muscle mass. Jonathan surrounds the femur which creates the thigh. So we're going deep into bone marrow here when we say femoral.

JVN: Is that it, is that like f-e-m-u-r-a-l? Or is it like, or does it change?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: It's B-I-N-G-O.

JVN: It is right? OK. Oh, wow. OK. Femoral, oh god.

SHAUN PETERSON: You've got to, you got to see the movie uh Jonathan because there's a scene where you know Lincoln put, we have recreations in the film and we have, you know, a scene where he pushes his thighs together to prepare. And you know, and Kinsey did, you know, in all of Kinsey's research, there were literal questions about femoral eroticism as a sexual technique. Like it was very popular in the olden times. And so up until the fifties, people, you know, that was one of the questions, main questions on the questionnaire. Do you have this kind of sex, this kind of sex? Do you push your thighs together

JVN: And let someone fuck your thighs from that? Is that what you mean when you say femoral? Oh my God, you guys, I did that once in 2006 in hair school. I did. Yeah. Yeah, because this guy like he was like, I'm not writing and I was like, what do you mean? And then, and then I was like, oh, and then I was like, Oh, yeah, let's not, let's do that. So we just did his thighs

THOMAS BALCERSKI: And here we thought, yeah, here we thought this was a practice from the past, we'll have to put this in our note sheet.

JVN: I mean, I, I was 19, I was like, 19. Like that guy was like 19. We were like, honey. And

SHAUN PETERSON: I think we gotta bring it back. It's the ultimate form of safe sex.

JVN: It's so true. I do prefer a butt hole when I really, you know, all cards on the table. I'm not a full side queen, but I think that's really great. And I love like safer sex. So that's great. You know, who needs fluid bonding? I have a whole bit about that in my stand up show. OK, let's just like focus on it then. No, we, we got to focus. So OK, so, but you, you, so you're obsessed with Abraham Lincoln. You're thinking about – also my ADHD is really winning today. Not to name drop and not talk about myself so much. But just so, you know, when I worked at the salon called like Joseph Martin in like 2010 and 11, they had a salon at the Beverly Hills Hotel and I would work there on Tuesdays and Thursdays and Gore fucking Vidal used to come in there and he got his hair cut by this guy that would work there. I saw him with my own gay eyes and saw him on the ticket and everyone was like, that's Gore Vidal and because I was a dumb ass 22 year old in LA, I didn't really understand and now that I do understand, I'm like, fuck me, how did I not? Like I didn't, I didn't say I didn't know I was just like this. I looked, I looked like a 22 year old version of myself. Now, long fucking hair bumbling around with the little, you know, earphones in. Just, yeah, I'm disappointed in myself, but I've seen him in real life like a handful of times.

SHAUN PETERSON: And he always had that tight cut right?

JVN: It was like a little short, little white hair and, and he was like in a little wheelchair and he was like just a sweet man, just like a sweet, nice man. Very sweet at the Beverly Hills Hotel coming in to get his hair cut.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: That is so sweet.

JVN: Yeah, major. So I just had to say it not to name drop, but I did. OK. So when did you start filming and researching the movie officially?

SHAUN PETERSON: Well, uh about a year and a half ago, we did a deep dive into it. It's like right at the end of the pandemic. So like I had been doing this project for a while in different incarnations and I was just like, I just uh you know, even the real story is I like, I, I cashed in my Bitcoin right before it crashed and put my money together, flew to the east coast interviewed a couple of our scholars Johnson Stoffer, Gene Baker, and Jonathan Ned Katz, who is the godfather of queer history. Like anyone that has gotten into queer history is because of Jonathan Katz, I mean, right, right here, like, let's hold it up. Like right here. Like we got the, we got the double uh I got the double books here. So this is the guy and then I put together this little pitch reel and I, and I pitched it and then, you know, our pretty came on board Rob and, and, and here we are today and, and we just went and interviewed all these people across the country. And one of the things that was important for me was to not, one, to get several Ivy League scholars, you know, so it doesn't seem like a conspiracy theory film. And then, you know, Tom, who's just such a huge expert in this and this is like he lives and breathes Lincoln and then to get into the Library of Congress to get into Brown University and pull out the letters. So that on screen, it's not just this fake news thing. You're seeing Lincoln's handwriting, you're seeing letters that the public has never seen before. You're seeing this evidence right before your eyes. So it's not just a scholar saying it, you're seeing it. And so it, it just becomes undeniable when it's right before your eyes.

JVN: Tom, what do you think?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: I mean, I think Shaun's got the receipts, baby.

JVN: Why are some historians so dead set on dispelling any notion, any new notions of Lincoln's queerness or really anyone of that stature's queerness? Is it, I mean, is it kind of what we said at the beginning? Just that, that's just homophobia. So, of course, someone's going to be afraid of it or do you like, what is the pushback from those types of historians? *Those types* of historians?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, I mean, I mean, in a way they're just continuing a cover up that in some ways was put in by his very first biographer. I mean, Herndon, this fascinating figure knew Lincoln well, was in partnership with him in law firm, Herndon did the work. I mean, he put in the work he interviewed so many of these people, but he was also very fishy around Lincoln's love life and probably invented stories. Like for example that we don't talk about the film, but this invented narrative of Lincoln's love for Anne Rutledge, it should be said that without those original interviews, without that work done in the sixties and seventies, we wouldn't have a case to make in this film. So we're very much reliant on the historians who did the work for us. But the thing is ever since her, it, ever since the very first historians, there has been this cover up a conspiracy, you might say gatekeeping of the first order to keep Lincoln straight white and male and that's just become, then this heteronormative to use that word hierarchical patriarchal view that has buttressed so many aspects about manhood politics and really just American society.

JVN: Who is this Ann Rutledge?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, you're gonna have to, you're gonna have to take a beat on that one because it's a whole story. I mean, it, for a long time, it was assumed there was this great love and Lincoln loved her, they were engaged, she dies and this breaks his heart and least his depressive episodes. It's all made up. It's one big fabrication and it's only recently that historians have finally recognized the fabrication. And frankly, I've called into question so many of the other just falsehoods imposed upon Lincoln and his love life.

SHAUN PETERSON: Well, it's also the Lincoln overall, just the machoism of Lincoln, right? You know, this idea of him chopping wood all the time. I mean, he hated work. I mean, he did it out of necessity, but he did not like doing it. He didn't like splitting rails. I mean, everyone made him this big macho guy. You've seen the paintings of him, right? Where he's all muscly and, and sure he probably had some lean muscle mass because he was working, but he hated it. And it, and it wasn't, it's something that they use in his in, in the, in politics when he was running for office to kind of be this strong prairie guy. But to this complete heteronormative macho aspect. Of Lincoln is completely made up and, and, you know, Doctor John Stoffer, I keep bringing him in from Harvard who's in our film. He said in the film really eloquently, he's had prominent, famous Lincoln historians say to him on the side, if I lose my faith in Lincoln, I lose my faith in the United States. And what they're saying is that it, that the United States is heteronormative, it's white and it's, you know, in its upper middle class or, and, and so if you, if those guys think of Lincoln as a queer figure, the nation falls apart because you lose the power that the white heteronormative society is based on the patriarchy. And so that's what everyone's just terrified.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: And one other thing, I mean, all we're asking you is to just delete the image of Lincoln as a dom top. He's such a soft top.

JVN: That's all that.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: If that helps Jonathan, soft caressing, we haven't even talked about, we haven't even talked about Joshua Speed yet.

JVN: So does he meet him when he gets elected to the state legislator? And then that's like when, like when he moved to Springfield to start serving?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: So they had known of each other speed, had seen Lincoln in action at the legislature. We don't exactly know if they had conversations too much, but the familiarity of which Lincoln first of all, the fact that he came to the store he knew to go there, right? Like why? Then the familiarity of this initial conversation. Now mind you, this is one of the great examples of having to read against the grain because we do have only Joshua Speed's own account, which he gave twice of how Lincoln and he met. But I mean, it's worth just like listening to it. This is what speed said like years later, knowing he had to give the best possible count and just like listen to the words he says to Lincoln, "you seem to be so much pained at contracting so small a debt. I think I can suggest a plan by which you can avoid the debt. And at the same time attain your end, I have a large room with a double bed upstairs which you are very welcome to share with me. Lincoln: where is your room? Speed: upstairs. Lincoln takes his saddle bags in his arm, went upstairs, set them down on the floor and came down with the most changed countenance, beaming with pleasure. He exclaimed. Well, speed, I moved. Like where's the Hollywood mute? Cute there? Like that's like, let's see that I want. And when you do see it, by the way, dramatized and like the Abraham Lincoln National Store site in Springfield or like on the history channel, it's like, ok speed. I'm here. It's just like so blah and it's so just taking at face value this idea like, oh yeah, these two guys are friends like it just misses every little innuendo, every little subtle hint. And then ignores all of the receipts. Literally the most intimate correspondence of Abraham Lincoln's life is with Joshua Speed.

JVN: So what are some examples of like, like what are they like? What's the intimacy like? What are they like? What's like? What's the most sexy letter that we have between those two? Did they have a thigh equivalent?

SHAUN PETERSON: Lincoln was a total redneck hillbilly. You know, he taught himself to read. He was still from the country, but Speed came from a plantation in Kentucky. He was highly educated, very fancy came from a lot of wealth, the largest plantation with the largest amount of slaves in all the state of Kentucky. And when he shows up to Springfield, he's very sophisticated. And so he taught Lincoln a lot about how to be a proper man and how to, to, to conduct himself in Springfield, which is becoming this elite center in Illinois and lots of Kentuckians were moving there. So he navigated Lincoln through the party scene and through meeting all the right people and how to dress and how to behave. And also saying you've got to get married, like navigating him through the entire scene of courtship. And um, and I'll let Tom speak of this, but, you know, some people speculate that, you know, he probably introduced Lincoln to Mary Todd. Um and that was this complicated thing. Here's two men that I believe were in love, but also trying to say, hey, you got to get married at the same time. It was this very complicated love triangle.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: And I mean, Shaun's right. But the thing we have to remember is that Joshua Speed, if he's the son of the richest plantation or, you know, one of the largest plantations in Kentucky, why the heck is he holding down the fort, holding down a store in Springfield, Illinois. And when you unpack the Speed dynamics, you realize it's the same setup as Lincoln – troubled relationship with his father, loved his mother. And it's only after

Joshua Speed's father dies, this is now into the 1840's, that Speed is pulled back into that orbit. Does he actually feel comfortable I would argue, returning to a household where he was unwelcome and it's at that point that he marries and there's a whole story of Joshua Speed's marriage to Fannie Henning, how Lincoln visits and their correspondence is just all intricate into how each one was sort of having to man up to use the term in order to even face the marital altar and then the marital bed.

JVN: So Lincoln would go visit Speed with, with Fannie. Wait, what was her name?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: You want to talk about a name, Fannie Henning.

JVN: Fannie Henning. And, and they, and they would be like, really like intimate letters. Like, can't wait to see you next weekend, Fannie.

SHAUN PETERSON: Well they're more tragic than that. Like, here I'll read a little bit,

JVN: No!

SHAUN PETERSON: I'll read a little bit because once he, once, you know, once he marries Fannie Henning, um, and then, and then it just Speed does once Speed and Fannie marry Lincoln knows that it's, it's the real deal. And here's the thing. Speed sent all of his letters, the letters of note. Keep in mind he, he, he did not send all of his letters, but from Lincoln to the biographer William Herndon. So a lot of these were, are missing and we don't have the opposing side. We don't have Lincoln's letters to Speed. We only have Lincoln's letters. I'm sorry, we don't have the letters from Speed to Lincoln. Lincoln lost Speed's letters, but we do have Lincoln's handwriting which you know

JVN: Which you know what that's giving, that's giving Thomas from Downton Abbey when he's like, fucking that one guy. And then he doesn't want to get found out. So he burns the letters.

SHAUN PETERSON: Exactly. Exactly. And he also burned some of his letters too. Right?

JVN: Because they probably were like flood my guts king. Like they probably like, you can't have anyone seeing this, you know.

SHAUN PETERSON: Exactly. But I, I will say this to your point and this is where like where all this queer history gets, gets distorted and gets um doubted is that in the 19th century it was very uncouth for people to write about very specific sexual acts. Whether you're he, whether there's heterosexual sex or, you know, same sex that was not proper to do. And there's very, very, very few is in all of history where people are writing about, like, even, you know, Whitman, who was obviously, you know, he took notes about all the men he would see down at the docks and he would describe their looks, but he didn't even write graphically about his exploits. So it just wasn't proper. So whenever uh a historian that doubts, this says, well, where's the proof? Where's the smoking gun? Where Lincoln literally said, I had you in my arms and I kissed you. Well, he didn't write that about any women either and he didn't write that about his wife. It just wasn't proper. But what we do have is Lincoln who is a lawyer who very wrote very crisply, very dryly. He did some humor in his letters, but very, very unemotional writer when he's writing to Speed, imagine this, his love of his life just got married and he writes to Speed. He says, and, and I think he has the impression that they might move him and Fannie might speed and Fannie might move to Illinois. Um and he has that impression. So he's getting this heartbreaking news that that's not going to happen. He



says, "I feel somewhat jealous of both of you now. You will be exclusively concerned for one another that I shall be forgotten entirely." He says, "I regret to learn that you have resolved not to return to Illinois. I shall be very lonesome without you. How miserably things seem to be arranged in this world. If we have no friends, remember what friend means we have. If we have no friends, we have no pleasure. And if we have them, we are sure to lose them and be doubly pained by the loss. I did hope she and you would make your home here, but I own, I have no right to insist."

JVN: That is so emotional, oh god.

SHAUN PETERSON: So emotional and, and Tom, let me ask you this. I, I'm curious, do you think Lincoln ever once, ever again in history wrote that he was jealous of anyone in any letter or any writing for Lincoln to say I'm jealous. That seems completely unlike that man.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: No, it's so keeping out of character. And I mean, we have to also remember that this relationship even after his marriage to Mary Todd is still so front and center that he vows to name his first child Joshua.

JVN: And does he?!

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Because Mary Todd veto that shit and absolutely not it will, he will be named Robert for a member of her family.

JVN: Yeah, she's like, oh not having that fucking gay shit over here. No, I love that good for her. Um but I would be mad. I mean, I would be jealous if I was her, I'd be like, no, fuck me. Um OK, but that brought to you.

SHAUN PETERSON: Can I just read one other line?

JVN: Please!

SHAUN PETERSON: So on the same day like keep in mind February 25th and February 25th, he writes two letters to Speed because this is when he's getting the news that the marriage is really, has happened and he's really heartbroken. He wrote, I, he goes, I wrote um he wrote, "I I opened the letter with intense anxiety." Now this is uh this is keep in mind speed, check this out. Speed has his wedding night and the second he consummates or supposedly consummates his wedding night, the next morning, he immediately gets up while she's still asleep and writes a letter to Lincoln to be like, OK, uh now this letter, you know, of course, is missing, but Lincoln's response is here. OK, well, I did it and I, and I was able to get through it and I actually Consummated the marriage. Well, Lincoln writes, I opened the letter with intense anxiety and trepidation so much that although it turned out to be better than I expected, I have hardly yet at the distance of 10 hours become calm. So Lincoln is fretting after reading that he actually had sex with his wife for 10 hours. And Lincoln is not a hyperbolic man, he's not exaggerating, it's not part of his, his way of being. He literally was an anxious mess for 10 hours at fretting that he just had sex with his wife. And so this is very telling too because when you look at Lincoln's style of writing and, and you have to put it in context. This is completely unlike this man.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah. And not only that I would go so one step further that because we don't actually have the letters from Speed to Lincoln. We actually don't know how graphic a they, the note would have been and how truthful b what we do know is that unlike Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd, who had four Children, Joshua Speed and Fanny had never

produced a child from their union. We don't know why. We just know that fact. And so it is possible that ultimately, they never did consummate the marriage. And that Speed was well fabricating the entire thing.

JVN: Where is this in Lincoln's political career? Like the like, like Speed is getting married and is Lincoln in the White House already or what's happening?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: No, no, he's four for one at this point. He's in the legislature still. It's 1842. He's in his last term and his depressive episodes however, are so bad at this point that he's unable to even be in the legislature for a portion of that last term, his last session –

JVN: Because of Joshua?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Well, I mean, yeah.

SHAUN PETERSON: So, so there's a thing called the Fatal First. So, so Speed, Speed finds out his dad dies, right? And then he's like, OK, I there's his older brother is a fancy guy down in Kentucky. Speeds the next heir in line. So he's like, I got to go down there and take over this plantation. So I have to and dad's dead. So there's not gonna be any drama I'm leaving. But he does really tell Lincoln because they're sharing this life together. So the fatal first is the first of January of 1840 where he reports to Lincoln and it says in the paper in the Springfield paper and it's in the film that there's this piece of evidence is there, Joshua Speed is selling the store and Lincoln sees this and he's like, oh my, what? You're selling the store, what's going on? You're, you're, you're leaving and they have this breakup and Lincoln falls into a depression that's reported across all of Lincoln history. People have applied it to other things, but clearly, it's that Speed is leaving. Lincoln gets so far into a depression and I'll let Tom kind of, uh, uh you know, elaborate on this. He's suicidal. He doesn't go to the legislature, which is unlike him. He has one of the best records of attending the assembly of any legislator and he loses his mind. And it's highly reported documented by, you know, a dozen people that Lincoln looks horrible. He's suicidal. Tom. You can elaborate on that.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: and then they said they had to keep razors away from him. I mean, it was really bad. He couldn't get out of bed. Um, and it's actually 1841. We think it's so 1840 1841 which puts it into his last term in the legislature and he really never recovers during that term. And that explains why. Ultimately, he leaves politics and goes into the practice of law. It's also because he needed a more stable lifestyle for this new marriage. He does enter into the next year with Mary Todd. So politics had been up to that point for Abraham Lincoln, a purely sort of project of Joshua Speed and him together. I mean, he was thriving in this relationship with Speed. He was peaking, you might say in his political prowess, bringing the state Capitol to Illinois, passing legislation of canals and other improvements in Illinois and it all falls apart. It literally collapses into 1841 two. And what we're left with is a man who probably had left politics. I mean, he kind of gave up. Um only to then be brought back in by his Whig party to run for the House of Representatives in 1846.

JVN: So, so he gets married to Mary Todd Lincoln in 1842. And then, and then, and he was, he already a lawyer, but he just started practicing law full time and just like left politics?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Pretty much, pretty much.

SHAUN PETERSON: He was a lawyer the whole time, you know, like in between uh sessions back then they would go out on the road, the judge and lawyers would go on horses from town to town and do little trials in the, in a town. So they'd show up and then

you'd pay them, you know, he'd be basically, like, I'll represent you and then, you know, and they'd make money on the circuit, they called it and he would do that in the off season. But, you know, keep in mind, let's just go back a little bit in 1840. He was courting Mary Todd, you know, so he was courting her. They broke up several times. There was always tumultuous, there was always drama. He broke up some time in December of 1840 right before the fatal first with her. Um, some historians try to say he got depressed because of their breakup, but he broke, they, they had so much drama that it doesn't make any sense that that is what would make him depressed because he easily could have just brought the mayor, you know, the union back together. It was clearly Speed and once Speed moves back to Kentucky and gets married himself. Lincoln's resolved to be like, ok, well, I guess that's what people do and he just kind of got back with Mary Todd and had a very quiet wedding. It was unceremonial. It was just kind of like on the down low. And that was that.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, I mean, this is so important to focus in here because when we talk about interpretation and how interpretations change over time among historians, this is the critical intervention is the fatal first is the moment of the separation of Speed and Lincoln. If you read that as a breakup, if you read that as two lovers drifting in different directions, being forced into what society expects of them, suddenly the entire view of Lincoln's life to that point changes and it will also change everything about what comes later, which will take us into his political rise and, and eventually his time in the White House.

JVN: OK, so I got to go back a little so '42 they get married were lawyers? Like, was there like different types of lawyers then? Or was like all lawyers? Just one lawyer? Like was there like environmental or like racial or like property or like, or was he just like a general lawyer? Like what kind of cases was he fighting?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Historians have famously called him a prairie lawyer. So it gets back to Illinois. I mean, literally, it's, this is the frontier law was practiced very sort of a few, sparsely few and far between. He did everything he did as the quote goes, every kind of business that could come before a prairie lawyer. But he ultimately was a courtroom lawyer. He wasn't really doing a lot outside the courtroom. He would show up to court, which means when court was in session, he was there representing client after client, after client, eventually his firm will get involved in larger corporate cases. And where Lincoln seems to really hit his stride as a lawyer ultimately is in the kind of interstate commerce cases. Um the one that's famous, there's been a book written about it is his, is his defense of um, a river boat company in Heard versus Rock Island Bridge, which a canal boat uh crashes into the pier of a bridge, a railroad bridge that had built across the, the river. And Lincoln is basically saying that this is not an impediment that there was, you know, a lot of ways to get around it, defending this sort of expansion of the railroad. And I think it's important because he's saying that um for Illinois to have a future, it's going to be through the railroad, he was definitely pro business pro development and his law ultimately will lean more towards that side than anything else.

JVN: So then '45. So how does he get back into politics? How does he get to the House of Representatives? And what does Mary Todd have to do with it?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: We really, I mean, we really don't know a lot about this period. It's, it's, there's just not a lot of evidence to show what brings it back. But we do know he's still active in Whig politics. He's campaigning, he was such a dynamic speaker that in the various campaigns like the campaign before his campaign, he would go and stop for the for the Whig

candidate. And so he was just known as another one of these figures. But the key I think is, and this is what sort of blows our mind today's incumbency era. The, the, the Whig party of that period had a strict, as I, as I said earlier, a strict policy of rotation, meaning each term, a new person will be brought to Congress from that district. And even though there was an incumbent, a Whig incumbent in that district, Lincoln is rotated in, he's given a chance something that wouldn't happen today where Congressman served 10, 20, 30 years. But as a result, he's only given the one term. So he doesn't actually campaign for a second term. He doesn't try for a second term making his record still five and one.

JVN: So then Mary Todd's like, yes queen, I'm a political wifey. I'm thriving and didn't a bunch of their kids die. I feel like I remember like a bunch of like grave sites at their house in Springfield.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, that's right. So the first child, Eddie dies in 1850. This is another major setback. But then in that same year, Willie is born who will make it up until 1862 but that's the second death. So then Taddy the third, the fourth child, the summer child is born in 1853 and he will outlive his but not by much because he does die in 1871. Such that in the tragedy of the Lincoln family, only one of the four Children will live to an adult that's Robert and Mary will of course, be estranged from Robert in later life. Its own sad saga there.

JVN: So it's '46. He becomes congressman and then since you can't run for election twice because of their little, their Whig rule, he comes back to Springfield. And then what happened?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: He's a lawyer at this point. This is where Herndon enters the room, chat room. I mean, this is where his firm becomes well known for all the different cases that represent. And he just becomes, you know, pretty much a great lawyer. And he probably, I mean, it's hard to say, would he have even tried for the Senate until major national events in the 1850's changes his entire ethos. And it's really the passage of the Kansas Nebraska Act in 1854 that reawakens Lincoln. And he finally gives a speech where he had kind of been on the sidelines for several years. And Peoria, name check, 1854 he gives this great Peoria speech where he declares his opposition to slavery and begins to really present himself as a possible candidate for another national office. And the one that makes sense is Senator, US senator.

JVN: So, so I guess his term was over in '48. So then he was kind of like chill for a few years, oh yeah, '49.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: But remember, the death of one child, it's, it's deeply traumatizing and depressing for him and his work keeps him so busy it, it was a period of sort of recovery, I would say for Lincoln personally. And again, I don't know what would have been Lincoln's return to politics. But for the Kansas Nebraska Act Critical Act which allowed slavery to enter into the West just on the other side of Illinois, suddenly in this territory which included the States now of Kansas, Nebraska, but all the way north of the Canadian border was suddenly open for any person from the south to bring a form of slavery, agriculture to the west. And this is absolutely the moment where Lincoln makes his stand. He is, he's so against the system of slavery. Arguably going back to this period of his youth has been made kind of a slave to his father Thomas. But also through all the years of his exposure to slavery as a river boat, uh pilot down the Mississippi and then his Whig politics and his Whig kind of

upbringing, idolizing so many of these figures who will become, if not anti slavery. Then abolitionists, Lincoln emerges in 1854.

SHAUN PETERSON: And let me inject in there too when he going back to Speed, when he went to visit Speed. Um, keep in mind he stayed on Speeds plantation. And that was the first time Lincoln saw slavery up close. So he spent over a month there watching slavery at a hemp farm, which is particularly a cruel form of slavery because the dust, dust is so sticky that, it just covers people and gets in their lungs. And slaves that were on hemp farms had a much lower life expectancy because of the gummy hemp pollen in their lungs. And it was a, you know, it was a very cruel, you know, thing to witness. And so he saw slavery up close and personal when he was at Speeds plantation.

JVN: So what was, do we have any letters between Speed and Lincoln from like the time he left in '41? And then like when Lincoln gets elected or when Lincoln goes to Congress?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, we actually do. So the bulk of the letters are from this period of intimacy, the period of their, their, their love and their relationship. But there are a few scattered letters. One is he's about to head off to Congress in 1846. This has been appended in that book we talked about by C. A. Tripp *Intimate World*, but other scholars of course, have it there and Shaun has the originals that appear in the film uh that he writes the Speed from his term in Congress in 1848 right? Again, in 1849 1855 I mean, they're in contact and again, even these later letters, by the way, show that Lincoln cares so deeply about Speed that he's trying to sort of get him to his point of view. I mean, at this point, it isn't so much about the intimacy of a relationship, they don't see it. But Lincoln is so committed to convincing Speed to oppose slavery and to actually take the Republican side because in Kentucky, that would have been a very difficult position in a, in a pro slavery state, a slave state. But he will never let go of Speed. And so much that even into his presidency, there are letters where he is literally offering Joshua Speed a position in his cabinet. Speed ultimately rejects it. So he turns to his brother, Speed's own brother becomes Lincoln's cabinet officer. And I I mean that he just never lets go.

SHAUN PETERSON: And as a reminder, keep in mind, Kentucky was a border state. So they never entered the war on the side of the South. They were kind of like this Switzerland neutral state that continued to have slavery but didn't take either side in the war per se. So that kind of, you know, it was a buffer, I think in his communication with Speed. But Speed was also instrumental. Maybe you could speak at this Tom, in um in, in during the war uh creating a supply chain uh out of Kentucky for Sherman's battalion. Am I am I? Is that something that rings a bell?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, it does. I mean, and at this point, Kentucky is pretty much occupied ground during the civil war and it was key to have the arms supply coming into the Union Army and he approaches Speed. He actually approaches him to help with that. And this is in the very early days of the war and Speed who is a loyalist and a unionist during the entire war will do what he can in that moment. I said it's James Speed who Lincoln will appoint Attorney general in 1864. And it should be noted that James, as compared to his brother, Joshua is a much more of a committed radical republican and a pro uh a sort of an abolitionist and a pro civil rights individual for African Americans. So it's, it's interesting how it ends up being James who's more politically aligned than Joshua. But personally, of course, we see that alignment with Lincoln.

JVN: So 1861 March, Lincoln takes office and then when do the Southern States secede and then who is his lover at this point? Or who do we think? Who is, who is, who is enjoying those um abolitionist thighs?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Thank you. I'll just give the first half of the question and I'll just say answer once the, the Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina is fired on by confederate forces. The secession movement takes up steam South Carolina already seceded so many of the other deep South. But then finally, Virginia and once Virginia secedes, it's –

JVN: So, '61, say that again. So they take over in March and then so someone seceded and someone else seceded. But then when Virginia did it, that's when Lincoln was like, oh, no, no, no, we're declaring war now on the south?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: It's complicated. I mean, books and careers are made on secession and this moment in American history, it's, it's important to say that South Carolina goes first. They lead the way coming with them are Alibi, Mississippi, Georgia, Florida, Texas, the Deep South, but they're on their own. The so called upper South or border states are waiting and the big one was Virginia. Without Virginia, You don't really have a chance as a Southern confederacy to fight the northern army and most of the battles of the civil war end up really being fought in Virginia. So it's only after South Carolina fires the first shot on the Fort in Charleston Harbor, Fort Sumter that we finally see Virginia seceding from the union. This is April 1861 and then boom, Robert E Lee was offered the generalship, but he actually goes with this country and this gets into some lost cause stuff. But like basically Lincoln knows he's up Schitt's Creek without a paddle because when he looks at his generals, he doesn't got the best ones.

SHAUN PETERSON: Well, this is a great transition into the first casualty of the civil war is a character in our film named Elmer Ellsworth. And Elmer Ellsworth is this beauty, beautiful young man who looks very much like Joshua Speed that Lincoln meets when he's campaigning for president in Illinois. And Ellsworth is not an official member of the military, but back then, they would, they would dress, the *\*unintelligible\** were a based on French military regalia and they would wear these elaborate outfits and go from town to town and do these big military marches for entertainment. And Lincoln becomes fascinated by this young man. At one point, he just wanted this kid around him during the campaign and wanted to offer him a law clerkship, but this kid was not interested in law. So he's just like, well, fine, we'll just have him do his marches as part of the campaign. So the moment that Lincoln becomes president, he gets this kid with zero military background with, he didn't go to West Point. He's never been in the military, gets him appointed to be um to what was his, what was his colonel? Yeah, I guess.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Colonel. He wasn't a private, he was a lieutenant. The guy got a colonel ship colonelcy

SHAUN PETERSON: And he wrote and this is the only time Lincoln used his power of office, he wrote twice to the war department insisting that this kid get bumped up. Um and so he, so then he's in the White House with Lincoln at all times. And uh so when he's, since he's around and maybe I'll let you take this over, Tom because you, you do such a good job in the film describing just being at the right place at the right time, gets him this, this uh mission that he goes on.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, so I don't want to, you know, I feel like uh of all the things in the film, this might be arguably the biggest reveal we have. And so I don't want to –

JVN: No, I love it. No spoilers

THOMAS BALCERSKI: But yeah, Lincoln, Lincoln, Ellsworth, we'd be crushing. We'd be crushing.

SHAUN PETERSON: And I'll tell you right now, I, I know that in the state of Kansas, you know, where I have a lot of family, there is a Ellsworth County and Lincoln County is right below it. There are a lot of Ellsworth counties and Ellsworth cities throughout America because he was considered the first war hero in the civil war. And that's why there's so many –

JVN: And he died? He was the first death?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Watch the film.

SHAUN PETERSON: You gotta watch the film.

JVN: Oh my God. Ok. That was really good. You guys that was like, so fucking good. So then he dies and then,

SHAUN PETERSON: Yeah, he will. He's very sad, extraordinarily sad, but it kind of opens his heart again. And shortly after that, um Lincoln needs a reprieve from the bustle of Washington DC. It's insane during the war. So just outside of DC, there's this summer cottage that's still there today. You can visit it, you can go on a tour of it, we film there. Um and you can go this beautiful cottage. It was kind of like the Kinney bunk port for the Lincoln family and they would go out there in the summers to get away from the city. Um and he was still commuting from the, the location into the city, but, you know, it gave them a little respite, but it was right next to a military hospital. So he was surrounded by military people and they felt it necessary for him to have a, you know, some uh some protection. So his bodyguard, Captain Dave Derickson is assigned to Lincoln and they become very good friends. They're, you know, he's a, he's a little bit younger than Lincoln, but they're both middle aged men, family men. And it is reported through multiple pieces of evidence that we have, you know, in fact reported in this book, right in broad daylight, you know, like some of these letters we dug out of the Library of Congress, but some of this stuff is in broad daylight. I bought this book off Amazon. You know, this is a uh an official military um regimental history that was written by, you know, uh was written by Captain Derickson superior officer and it Thomas Chamberlain and it describes in detail that when Mrs Lincoln, the first lady would go out of town that Captain Derickson would sleep in the bed with the president, he would wear his night shirt like the equivalent his pajamas and that they had a very close intimacy. And they did this night after night, multiple people commented on this and this excuse that historians have of like, well, you know, he didn't have enough money or there were no, not enough beds. That's why people shared beds.

JVN: He was the president of the United States at this point.

SHAUN PETERSON: Yes, in a giant house with multiple beds.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: But that's the key for this fascination. OK, to happen. It couldn't happen in the oval office which wasn't built yet. Couldn't happen in the Lincoln bedroom. Not named that yet. Couldn't happen wherever you would think in the White House it had to

happen off site your place or mine. It was the soldiers cottage four miles out of the city. Mary Todd never came up there. It was Lincoln's place and he would sleep there regularly on his own except when Captain David Derickson was with him.

JVN: Wow. OK. So that's, do we have any like correspondence between those two?

SHAUN PETERSON: No, because they were with each other all the time. That's what's interesting too. There's no letters between Lincoln and Speed when they live together.

JVN: Does Derickson die in the war?

SHAUN PETERSON: He goes on to be a politician –

JVN: Is he devastated that Lincoln gets killed?

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Oh, yeah, actually he is, uh, but Derickson is actually promoted actually from within his unit because of Lincoln. That's the one piece of evidence we had of the favoritism like Ellsworth. Lincoln will use his office to give him a promotion and will actually help his unit as well. And that military history that Shaun showed you goes through his rise in the military, which was again faster than it might have been for a unit that was in reserve and was on guard duty in Washington DC.

SHAUN PETERSON: And they were also out of soldiers, like they were desperate for manpower. And Lincoln continued to delay the departure of Derickson's battalion to go off to war because he wanted him near. So they, they, you know, a lot of those guys didn't serve in the actual, actually saw uh uh action because of that.

JVN: So years ago in late 2020 we did an episode about uh I was always curious how like, reconstruction and like, what happened, like after Lincoln was assassinated. So we got to interview this cool historian called um Dr. Eisenhower Ramirez who since like died of COVID, which was really sad. Like he like, like, like back in 2021 I think it was like, really sad. But that episode was titled, like, what happened to The Racist Ass Confederate Fucks like After the Civil War? And I think that because there were so many asterisks in the title, like, you know, I think people just didn't know what that episode was about, but I think about it all the time and one thing from that episode that just totally like, it's that like Lincoln was killed, like, what was it like a week after the war ended? Like, it was like, like there's something about Appomattox and then –

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Five days, five days after Appomattox.

JVN: So, Appomattox is like when the surrender thing was done and they were like, wait, everyone's back together. Like, and like all of the South came back at that point.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Absolutely. I mean, it was actually when Lee's army surrendered, there was still Joe Johnson's army in North Carolina. There's a second surrender. We got to celebrate it twice at the Confederacy surrenders in May. But yes, they surrendered. Appomattox as we understand it, as we remember it is the real end of the war. And it's April 9th, 1865. Good Friday, April 14th, 1865, the day of tragedy. That's when he was assassinated. Lincoln part of what we think Lincoln's legacy could have been is his richer story, is history and we don't know what would have come from it later in life. Had he lived a ripe old age, had he been able to write? He never wrote an autobiography. He never wrote a memoir. We don't know what happened to even some of his papers after his death. There was such a rush. He had to leave the White House. I mean, so much probably was even lost



about his life after his death. That's what makes the reconstruction that we try to do in the film so necessary is that there is this upheaval after his death and really so much was lost.

JVN: I'm, I'm, I'm also curious about what happened after the civil war, but honey, you guys have served your time. You have done the damn thing here with me today. So Shaun and Tom, I love you guys so much. I'm so obsessed with you. And by the way, if our people just cannot get enough of queer Abraham Lincoln. Can you please tell us where to find the film and how we can follow along the journey of what's coming down the pipeline for *Lover of Men*, please.

SHAUN PETERSON: Well, you know the, the movie. OK, perfect. Yeah. So the, the movie comes out nationwide uh September 6th. And so we encourage people to go to [LoverofMen.com](http://LoverofMen.com) to see where the closest theater is to you and get tickets and see. And you know, what's next for us is we really want as many people to see this film as possible because it doesn't just talk about Lincoln, it talks about queer history, it talks about equality and we really get into Gen Z and this new generation of people that find uh labels and the binaries, uh they're finding themselves more fluid. And I think that that really speaks back to Lincoln's time in all of human history. These ideas of homosexual and heterosexual and the binaries are very new concepts. It really didn't show up until the 1870's and didn't really become popularized until the early 20th century. So, uh I think Gen Z can really relate to this film as well because they see they'll see themselves in Lincoln and his relationships with people and a more of a label is uh world where love and desire and sexual impulses are what really dominated people's lives and getting caught up in what you were wasn't. And that's what makes I think Lincoln's love so beautiful is that he was just following his heart. And Lincoln is thought of as this great political figure, but he was a man with a huge heart and he loved people very deeply and I think it's a side of Lincoln that um, no one's ever seen before. There's never been a movie about this topic. Uh and I, I can't wait for people to see it.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Everyone come, come and see. This film. *Lover of Men* opens nationwide in theaters on September 6th, visit, [LoverofMen.com](http://LoverofMen.com) to find a theater near you and buy movie tickets. And if you want a really great follow on socials, follow [@LoverofMen](https://www.instagram.com/LoverofMen) film on Instagram. You will learn something every day from the post and the stories and connect with the producers and the *Lover of Men* production team. The response so far from historians from the public has been overwhelming. It's been fantastic. We are just so excited to bring this different interpretation of Abraham Lincoln. One that is more inclusive one that makes people I think more able to connect to their history. And one in which Lincoln finally comes to light as a man in all his sensitivities and all his flaws as a real individual, a real human being. He's a Lincoln that 21st century America can connect to. And I think anyone who watches this film will really be glad that they did.

SHAUN PETERSON: And to any of the people that have questions about it or doubts about it? I just encourage you to watch the film because there's a lot of evidence, just give it a chance because that's where we kind of put a lot of our focus in is, is trying to teach people about the history of human sexuality, about human relationships and about Lincoln himself by presenting evidence and by talking to his scholars that have dedicated their lives to this topic. So um yeah, I say give it a shot.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: I'd love *Lover of Men*. September 6th. Be there

JVN: You guys. Thank you so much for coming. I appreciate it so much. I love you so much. Yes, queens go check out *Lover of Men*, everybody and thank you so much Shaun and Tom for coming to Getting Curious.

SHAUN PETERSON: Yeah. Well, Jonathan, thank you so much. It's such an honor to be on your show, such a huge fan of everything you do. And so and giving a sharing your platform for a topic that really means a lot to us. So and I can't wait for you to see the movie. So give us uh give us your review once you see it.

THOMAS BALCERSKI: Yeah, Jon, thank you for having us. I hope this got you curious and I hope you got your listens curious. Come follow us as well. *Lover of Men* film on Instagram. And we hope to see you in the theaters. So,

JVN: Did we learn the thing, honey? Well, it seems to me like there is strong inclinations that Abraham Lincoln was in fact a lover of men. But I think what also really resonates is that our current understanding of sexuality and how people identify in their sexuality and having so much to do with your personality is maybe so different. And so the same in diff in different ways, I just, I just think it's so complex and so interesting when we look into history and we see the way um that people express themselves in the way that people were perceived. And it's like there is still only so much that you can know. And, and so it's weird because I, it's like, I fully, I buy that Lincoln was gay, but I also understand that kind of like, I can't remember if it was Shaun or Tom that was talking about like that smoking gun thing where it's like, you know, I inhaled his throbbing dick and, and, and, you know, kissed him softly with his big rough pecks. Uh we don't have that. And so I can see how other people would say that, you know, there isn't a smoking gun. But I also think being a, a queer person myself and list, especially the letters um with um the letters with uh what was that second yes, the letters of Joshua Speed after he consummates the marriage that, I mean, he was rattled, shaken and shook and all upset and, and you can clearly see that. But I also want to say that I'm really dying to see the movie because it looks incredible. It sounds incredible and I'm sure there's even more where that came from and there's that spoiler alert that we still don't know. So, um, yes, I think that we know that Lincoln is reasonably, you know, was loving him some, some, some dick. But uh you know, I can see why the, the right wing and maybe even other people would be offended by this. So, you know, because that's, you know, homophobia and a in a heteronormative world. Um of course, yeah, I just had an intrusive thought of like, of someone coming back in 500 years and being like maybe Jonathan Vaness loved women and I'd be like, no! I didn't leave me alone. Uh don't accuse me of such things. Ok. Here's the most interesting things that we took from this conversation. Femoral sex. I apparently had some fem, some femoral trists in beauty school. Um it's literally thigh fucking, I can't get over it. You guys. Oh, and also that friendship, let's go a little deeper. Friendship meant something deeper than now. It was really giving like soulmate. And um oh and then also, oh my, I didn't even get to talk about this but I have heard Donald Trump talk about how it was the Republicans who, you know, were the ones who were freeing the enslaved people and, and Republicans were really the good ones and it was the Democrats who are the racist, bad ones and, but they literally switched parties. So like the misinformation and the disinformation is so rich there. And I just, you know, having that confirmed, you know, Donald Trump's a nightmare that, you know, no, no surprise there. Um but also I thought one thing that was really interesting and I've heard this, you know, anecdotally that Lincoln was a, he was a little bit more moderate, a little more conservative and it, and it wasn't until it was politically, he just waited for his moment to pass the 13th and

14th amendment. And um you know, we think of him as being this, you know, person that, you know, prior to 1854 he had some moments where he was really peddling in really racist things of the time. Um they're racist now they were racist then. But he did have so much to do with, um you know, setting our trajectory, right? But I, I, I think that's important, you know, when we think about someone in there in the wholeness of that person. Um I also think it's interesting the way that historians will say, oh, well, they didn't have money to afford two different beds, blah, blah, blah, honey, they, he was a lawyer. He had enough money, he could have had his own bed. Um, I, my husband and I sometimes think about, I mean, come on, like you're only sleeping in the same bed when you love somebody. That's just true. That's how it is. Um, oh, and that Joshua Speed introduced Mary Todd. I also wish I could have asked them what they think about *Oh, Mary*, I cannot wait to see it, by the way. Uh, and Fannie Henning, what a name? Um let me just think about uh oh and the fatal first. He was so depressed after Joshua and, and his, you know, the move. Um who was that John Wilkes Booth? Why did he kill him? How different would it have been if Lincoln would have survived? Um I'm also curious about like law and like courtrooms and stuff back then, like just people were running around on fucking horses and stuff. Um you know, is going to court with the judges like, and just thinking about Illinois is the west I think is really interesting. Um but Mary Todd Lincoln and *Oh, Mary's* got me curious about Mary Todd Lincoln, but I heard that she got institutionalized after the assassination because that surviving son said she spent too much money and she had to abscond to France to go spend her fucking money and then she just came back to die in like 1875. I think that's what happened. I'm not sure we're gonna have to fact check it later, but we love leaving you on a little cliff hanger. So am I right about Mary Todd? Am I wrong? You'll have to come back and find out when we do a follow up episode about her. Um yeah, I'm so. Oh, so I guess I was just going to leave you on. We're looking for a man in history. 6'4 thick thighs, gray eyes. That's what it should have been. Anyway, we love you so much. Thanks for coming on Getting Curious. Thanks for listening about Abraham Lincoln and supporting our work. We love you and thanks for coming. We'll see you next time.

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