

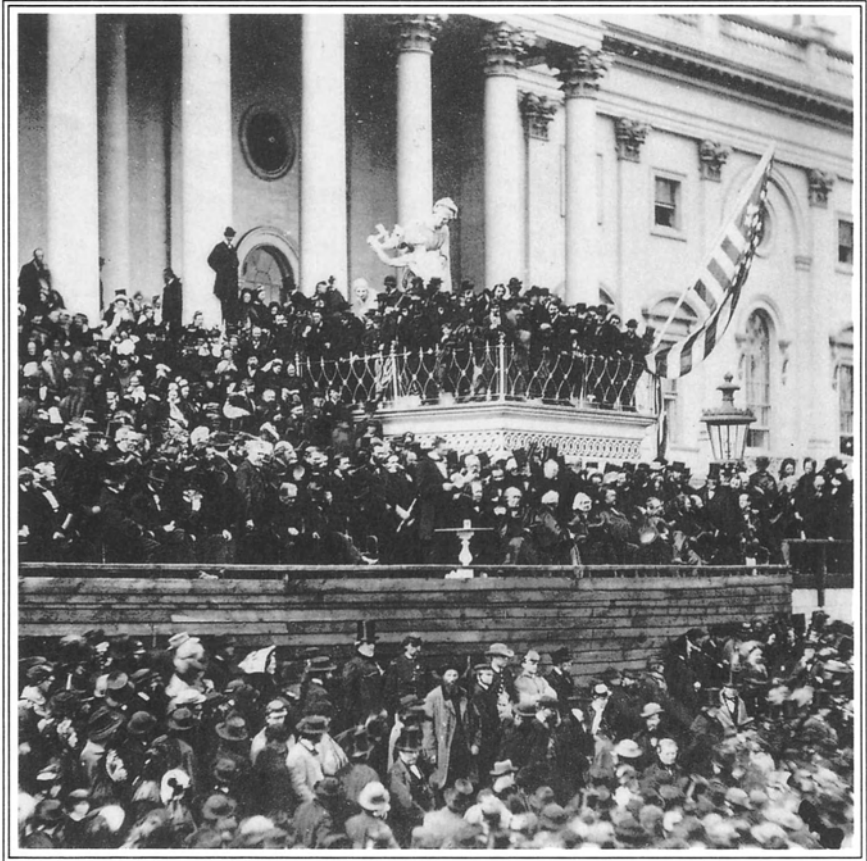
LINCOLN *on* DEMOCRACY

*His own words
with essays by America's foremost
Civil War historians*



*Edited, introduced, and with
a new preface by* **Marlo M. Cuomo
& Harold Holzer**

LINCOLN ON DEMOCRACY



Abraham Lincoln delivers his second inaugural address from the east portico of the United States Capitol on March 4, 1865. This was the only occasion on which Lincoln was photographed delivering a speech. It is probably the work of noted Washington camera artist Alexander Gardner. When Lincoln was introduced, journalist Noah Brooks reported, "a great burst of applause shook the air," and then the sun broke through overcast skies, flooding "the spectacle with glory and light."

(Photograph: Library of Congress)

LINCOLN ON DEMOCRACY

REVISED EDITION

Edited, Introduced, and with a New Preface by

MARIO M. CUOMO
and
Harold Holzer



WITH ESSAYS BY

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Afterword by Frank J. Williams

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To the People of Poland,
for inviting Lincoln abroad

The new edition of this book is dedicated to
Czeslaw Milosz (1911–2004)
Poet,
Patriot,
and apostle of democracy,
whose translation of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address
graces the Polish-language edition of this collection.

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better, or equal, hope in the world?

Abraham Lincoln
First Inaugural Address
March 4, 1861

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Preface to the Fordham University Press Edition

Fifteen years ago, when we launched the New York State Lincoln on Democracy project to provide readers in Poland with access to the words of America's greatest and most eloquent president, we had little reason to imagine that the idea would blossom into something of an international phenomenon.

At the outset, our goal was simply to supply a text for library shelves in a newly emerging democratic republic—shelves that stood barren after years of Communist censorship. Our response was to offer the words of the world's most recognizable and inspiring apostle of freedom and equality. Teachers from Poland's Solidarity Union had come all the way to Albany, New York, to visit the Governor's office and ask if there was some way to generate such a collection.

These brave and modest educators might well have settled for a Xeroxed edition bound in notebooks. But thanks to the work of a team of dedicated scholars and advisors, a gifted group of translators, a visionary publisher, and of course the timeless impact of Lincoln's brilliant writing, a modest printing project grew into a serious and, we learned, widely appealing book.

Lincoln O Demokracji appeared in Warsaw early 1990, followed quickly by the English-language edition, *Lincoln on Democracy*, which went through five hardcover printings and then a successful paperback edition that remained a staple in college courses for years.

The critics were kind. "This isn't simply another Lincoln book," wrote the *Chicago Tribune*. "In an America where the gap between

the rich and the poor continues to widen, where racial prejudice is far from dead, where democratic ideals have been lost in the exercise of ‘practical politics,’ it is good to hear Lincoln’s words again. Very good.” The *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* wrote: “*Lincoln on Democracy* could well become the essential one-volume Lincoln portrait for generations to come. To read his words is to appreciate that he was not only America’s greatest President, but also its most responsible citizen.” And the *Library Journal* called it “a gem of a collection, for all libraries.”¹

In 1991, the book won the Barondess-Lincoln Award from the Civil War Round Table of New York as best Lincoln book of the year, and also earned a special award of achievement from the Abraham Lincoln Association in Springfield, Illinois.

Even more heartening, a Japanese-language edition appeared later in 1991, followed quickly by *Lincoln al Democracy*, a Hebrew adaptation issued in Israel, and even *Lincoln Tentang Demokrasi*, which in 1996 became perhaps the first book of Lincoln’s writings ever published in Indonesia. Our only disappointment during this period was the inability of publishers in Moscow and the Arab-speaking world to muster the resources (the interest was strong) to issue translations of their own. Perhaps that day will yet come.

In the meantime, though the American edition eventually went out of print—not surprising after a decade and a half—we continued to receive requests for the book, along with heartening expressions of its impact on its readers.

Fortuitously, Fordham University Press proposed in 2004 to reissue the book and make it again widely available to students, Lincoln aficionados, and citizen readers yearning for the day when politics inspired literature—not just among observers, but among politicians themselves. This new edition is the result.

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The editors have made only a handful of changes from the original 1990 edition, and they are worth enumerating here.

When the book first appeared, the distinguished Lincoln scholar Herbert Mitgang praised it in a review for the *New York Times*, but signaled his disappointment that the excerpt from Lincoln’s 1848

1. “Lincoln essays still translate into truth,” *Chicago Tribune*, November 19, 1990; Dennis Brown, “As Lincoln Defined Democracy,” *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, November 4, 1990; *Library Journal*, October 15, 1990.

speech to the House of Representatives against the Mexican War had omitted the young Congressman's prescient, and chilling, warning to leaders who would order Americans into armed conflict with insufficient cause.² Mitgang was correct, and this new edition gives us the opportunity to correct our mistake by adding this paragraph to the speech (page 35). The words have never seemed more timely.

Another unexpected but fascinating reaction came from a well-respected writer from Rye, New York, whom one of the editors of this book had known for years as a fellow parent of children in the local public schools. Gurney Williams—whose daughters Kim and Ashley, it should be noted, have gone on to fine acting careers in film and television—informed us that he was the descendant of nineteenth-century Quaker leader Eliza C. Gurney. He was delighted that we had published Lincoln's deeply moving letter to her, but wanted to point out that the version we used contained a word inconsistent with that in a copy he had retained in the Gurney family archives. Williams had a point: "contentious" is not quite the same as "conscientious." With thanks to him for his close reading, not to mention his distinguished family tree, we are delighted to have the opportunity to correct this miscue, and here present a fresh, properly edited version of this important manuscript (page 331).

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In addition to Herbert Mitgang and Gurney Williams, a number of people have earned our sincere thanks for helping to bring this new edition of *Lincoln on Democracy* into print.

First and foremost, the editors want to thank our extraordinarily generous friend, Tony Bennett, who painted the watercolor of the Lincoln Memorial that appears on the cover, and generously allowed us to use it for this book. Its expressiveness and power fully reflect his gifts with brush and song alike, a talent and optimism that once inspired radio commentator Jonathan Schwartz to dub him "the most popular man in America." Schwartz will get no argument from us. What is more, like the editors of this book, Tony also hails from Queens, New York, which elevates him to even higher status. We thank him for allowing Lincoln to inspire him, and then for permitting us to showcase the result to inspire others.

2. Herbert Mitgang, "New Lesson in Democracy, by Abraham Lincoln," *New York Times*, October 31, 1990.

At Fordham University Press, former director Saverio Procario first contracted for the reissued edition, and current director Robert Oppedisano and his excellent staff have worked to make it a reality. We thank them for their interest and professionalism. And we acknowledge again our original, visionary editor Simon Michael Bessie, assistant editor Amy Gash, and our intrepid literary agent, Geri Thoma.

We remain as mindful today as we were in 1990 of the contributions of the historian/editors who in 1990 helped to select entries for the collection, and then provided introductions to frame and analyze them. All, not surprisingly, have gone on to even greater heights in scholarly achievement and public service in the years since, making us even more appreciative of their efforts on behalf of the Lincoln on Democracy Project. Once again we thank Gabor Boritt of Gettysburg College; Charles B. Strozier of the John Jay College; dean of Lincoln scholars Richard Nelson Current; James M. McPherson of Princeton; Mark E. Neely, Jr., of Penn State; Hans L. Trefousse of the City University of New York; and Frank J. Williams, then President of the Abraham Lincoln Association, now Chairman of the Lincoln Forum and Chief Justice of the Rhode Island Supreme Court. Sadly, one of our contributors recently left us—too soon. The late William E. Gienapp of Harvard was a brilliant scholar and a lovely man, and we miss him.

Finally, thanks go to our families, for their patient endurance during all the hours we work on this and other Lincoln projects—not to mention our full-time jobs. Matilda Raffa Cuomo and Edith Spiegel Holzer have so far endured, between them, some 84 years with their respective (and grateful) husbands—as Lincoln would put it, “with malice toward none.”

Mario M. Cuomo
Harold Holzer
New York, August 1, 2004

Preface

BY MARIO M. CUOMO

In July of 1989—months before democracy blossomed in the capitals of Eastern Europe—the seed for this book on democracy was planted halfway around the world, in the capital of New York State.

I had the privilege of welcoming to Albany a delegation of leading educators from Poland, a nation with a long history of yearning and fighting for liberty, but at the time, only the briefest experience enjoying liberty itself.

They were members of the Teachers' Section of Poland's Solidarity Union, the heroic coalition of working people that had been advocating democratization in the face of rigid, historic repression. They had come to the United States on a tour sponsored by the "Democracy Project," a global exchange program organized by American teachers to foster understanding and opportunity among teaching professionals here and overseas. The American hosts had invited me to greet their Polish colleagues, and I was delighted to accept, hardly realizing that their visit would inspire this volume.

When they arrived in July, I proudly guided the delegation through our recently restored and refurbished "official" governor's office. This is an ornate chamber in the capitol building known as the "Red Room," where many of my predecessors, including Theodore Roosevelt, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Thomas E. Dewey, all enjoyed working, but which I use only for ceremonial purposes, preferring to work in smaller quarters next door. The Red Room, with its gleaming wood paneling, stately chandeliers, formal drapery, and gilt molding, is an architectural marvel. And it is more. It is a reminder of all that was accomplished

by those who came before us, and of our obligation to preserve what they left us and to build upon it for the benefit of those who will come after us.

What better room to display to our Polish visitors, I thought, than a chamber where so much of our own history has taken place, where democratically elected chief executives have administered one of the greatest states in the Union. The Poles seemed to share my enthusiasm for these surroundings. But our visitors had something more on their minds than the highlights of our capitol. There is no shortage of graceful public architecture or lavish interior design in Warsaw. What *had* long been missing there was the guarantee of freedom, not its trappings; the privilege of self-government, not monuments in its honor. What had been lacking there, in those dark days before Poland and her neighbors in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and East Germany so dramatically threw off the stifling yoke of longtime oppression, was the personal experience of democracy, and with it a meaningful, inspiring credo of freedom and self-determination that could be relied on to illuminate democratization in the future.

Speaking through translators, the Polish teachers asked whether I might help them begin building an archive of great thoughts and writings on democracy, by telling them which American writings on the subject had meant the most to me in my life and career, and might provide similar guidance for them.

I did not need to reflect on the question. My choice of a source was immediate and unequivocal: Abraham Lincoln.

I enjoy joking with people today that I've always admired Lincoln because he's reassuring to politicians like me. He was himself a big, homely-looking politician from a poor family who started off by losing a few elections, yet in the end succeeded brilliantly. Of course, my fascination with Lincoln goes far deeper, and has ever since I can remember. Lincoln was the president who argued that government has a responsibility "to do for the people what . . . they can not . . . do at all, or do so well, for themselves." I have quoted those lines many times to support my own belief that government today is no less obligated. I said so most recently at Gettysburg, on the 126th anniversary of the Gettysburg Address.

For me Lincoln's writing—his unique ability to craft arguments of raw power and breathtaking beauty, to argue with the seamless logic

of a great lawyer and the large heart of a great humanitarian—is among the best produced by any American, ever.

I have read Lincoln's words over and over from the volumes of his *Collected Works*. I am always taken by the humor, the pathos, the determination, the compassion that resonate in those words. And by the great ideas.

Above all, the theme that courses through so many letters, speeches, and fragments, the great addresses and the simple greetings alike, is the unyielding commitment to the principles of our Declaration of Independence, what he calls the “sheet anchor” of our democracy. Lincoln talked about the Declaration as a stump campaigner, during the debates with Stephen Douglas, and again as president at Gettysburg. All people were created equal. All people had the right to enjoy the fruits of their own labor. All people shared the right to advance as far as their talents could take them. America, Lincoln believed, was a great society because it promised to “clear a path for all,” to provide opportunity for anyone with skill and ambition. When the institution of slavery blocked that road, it was Lincoln who cleared the path. Some have since argued that he did it too slowly, or too halfheartedly, or too imprecisely. But the fact remains that it was he who did it. He saved our democracy. He improved our democracy. And he characterized our democracy in timeless words of inspiration for the benefit of all the generations of Americans who have followed.

Lincoln has been an inspiration to me and to others for as long as his words have been heard or read. He was a man of principle and purpose, who not only forged in war America's new birth of freedom but hallowed it in words as well—unforgettable words that his mind sharpened into steel and his heart softened into an embrace. Words he spoke in Illinois and Washington and Gettysburg . . . calling for the highest sacrifices Americans could make to preserve their unique experiment in government, a system Lincoln believed was “the last best, hope of earth.” Lincoln brought the American people to their feet, cheering, crying, and laughing, an unforgettable reminder of the indomitability of the human spirit.

Lincoln was a model of active presidential leadership in crisis. He fought actively to maintain our system of majority rule, then broke the chains that bound four million Americans to slavery, and finally showed us the way to expanding democratic rights.

His presidency was a crucial turning point in the evolution of democracy here, and remains an example to people everywhere who aspire to exercise the full measure of their own freedom.

And so I thought, when my Polish guests asked for my advice on which expressions on democracy were worth reading, that surely Lincoln could now provide such guidance for countries too long denied the basic rights and freedoms Lincoln fought here to preserve. Surely the brilliance of his prose could withstand translation into a foreign tongue. Surely the logic of his arguments would transcend the decades and the distance, as well.

“Do Polish students study Lincoln’s words today?” I asked the Polish teachers.

“No,” they told me, because Lincoln’s words were simply not available in Poland—not since World War II, when freedom went into retreat there. When the Russians marched in, Lincoln went out; not surprising, since his passion for liberty was not suited for coexistence with tyranny. The teachers reported that not a single volume of Lincoln’s words in Polish existed in their country. That seemed a tragedy that startled and saddened me, but also a challenge that could be overcome.

Without anything more than a quick, powerful impulse, I promised on the spot to use whatever influences I had, or could produce, to see that Lincoln’s words on democracy were promptly translated into Polish and delivered to Poland for the fullest possible use of the Polish people. The teachers instantly greeted the idea with tremendous enthusiasm. Why not bring the volumes over yourself? they asked. I said I would be pleased to consider doing so. And the visit ended.

My promise was, indeed, the product of the moment. But even as the idea flashed into my mind and spilled out in unrehearsed conversation, there was good reason to believe that the promise could be kept. For one thing, New York State has an International Partnership Program, which we created specifically to establish cultural and economic links to foreign nations. With an already established record of outreach to Italy, Israel, Africa, and Spain, we found Lincoln a perfect way to launch a relationship with the reemerging nations of Eastern Europe.

For another thing, I am fortunate in that the professionals in the world of Lincoln scholarship are not strangers to me, and I knew I would be able at least to ask for their help. Harold Holzer, for example,

who later became the co-editor of this volume, has worked with me since 1984, and I have known him since 1977. When I was preparing to deliver a speech on Lincoln in Springfield, Illinois, on February 12, 1985, Holzer introduced me to several historians who came to Albany expressly to share their vast knowledge of the subject, and their infectious enthusiasm for it. When they published my remarks in a scholarly journal the following year, I felt, if not one of them, at least one who had been generously received by them, and it made me quite proud.

On the other hand, the promise proved easier to make than to keep. Frankly, I had thought that all we needed to do was select the best existing treasury of Lincoln's expressions on democracy and have it translated. Then I learned something that surprised me even more than the revelation that no such volume existed in Poland. No such volume existed here! Lincoln's unique prose on the subjects of freedom, self-government, and equality had never before been assembled together in English, either.

As it turned out, what might have dampened our enthusiasm for the Polish project instead heightened our enthusiasm for an English-language edition to be published in the United States. Even with Lincoln's *Collected Works* on so many library shelves, the need for access to Lincoln's thoughts on democracy had never been met. *The Collected Works* boasts a 378-page index, but not once does it mention the term "democracy."

And that is how and why this book was born. It is an American book inspired by the Polish people, just as it will be a Polish book devoted to an American—an American who belongs to another time and place, but whose devotion to democracy offers a sublime and universal diplomacy in transcendent prose.

On November 17, 1989, I had the further pleasure of formally announcing the "Lincoln on Democracy" project at an event honoring the chairman of the Solidarity Union, Lech Walesa, during his first visit to the United States. I told this extraordinary freedom fighter: "As you shake off four decades of doctrinaire rigidity, working to open the windows of liberty in every library and schoolroom in Poland—letting the sun shine in on minds too long denied the birthright of free expression—we want to help." *Lincoln on Democracy*, I suggested, constituted "a tangible way to link your struggle for freedom with our historic respect for liberty and democracy." The Polish edition, we

proposed, might be only the first of many. Future translations might include Hungarian, Czech, German—even Russian and Chinese—books for every nation where there is a yearning for democracy, a need for the guidance of historical truth, and the absence until now of available materials.

“This makes me feel even more warm,” Mr. Walesa said in his reply. “But I don’t know if you will be able to keep pace with the other languages, because the line is forming already.”

Lincoln’s words belong to everyone in that line.

Lincoln brought forth a “new birth of freedom” for America, as he put it at Gettysburg. But it was not just for America that he struggled. It was to save democracy for the world. He knew that by preserving *our* Union, he would guarantee “the civil and religious liberties of mankind in many countries and through many ages.”

Early in his presidency, Abraham Lincoln reminded a foreign visitor that Americans “cherish especial sentiments” for “those who, like themselves, have founded their institutions on the principle of the equal rights of men.”

We cherish the same sentiments for the new spirit in Poland and all of Eastern Europe. It is our hope that *Lincoln on Democracy* not only will be tangible proof of that affection but will be of genuine and lasting benefit to future generations there, and here as well—an inspiration to further progress on the road to freedom in Eastern Europe, and for us in America an inspiration to renew faith in our own values. No one expressed or exemplified those values better than Abraham Lincoln.

Albany, New York
February 12, 1990



Introduction

BY HAROLD HOLZER

The Civil War had been over for twenty years, five postwar presidents had come and gone, and one of them had fallen victim to another assassin's bullet by the time poet Walt Whitman looked back, took the measure of history, and pronounced Abraham Lincoln still "the grandest figure yet, on all the crowded canvas of the Nineteenth Century." So he surely seemed to the vast majority of his countrymen, after leading the convulsive struggle to save the Union and destroy slavery.

To Whitman, whose own life and work seemed to one contemporary "imbued with the spirit of democracy," the explanation for Lincoln's unwavering appeal was obvious. He had been "Dear to Democracy, to the very last!" Still, Whitman wondered: "Who knows what the future may decide?"

In fact, the future has not substantially revised Whitman's generous appraisal. For more than a century and a quarter, Lincoln's enduring spirit has animated the American experience. The sobriquets attached to him in life and the tributes that greeted his death have all been fixed in our nomenclature so firmly for so long that they nearly constitute biography. To many, Lincoln is still Honest Abe, Father Abraham, the Great Emancipator, the Martyr of Liberty. His rise from log cabin to White House, from prairie lawyer to master statesman, justifiably remains the most famous and inspiring of all the validations of American opportunity. His face alone, homely yet intrinsically noble—"so awful ugly it becomes beautiful," in Whitman's words—remains indelibly inscribed on the national consciousness, whether one pictures it gazing down from the lofty heights of Mount Rushmore or staring out from

the ubiquitous copper penny. In an increasingly diverse culture, it is a palpable emblem of our common aspirations, itself an icon of democracy.

Inevitably, the real Lincoln has also become a victim of the irreversible passage of time. His life has entered the firm embrace of legend. The real man in large part has been subsumed by the prolonged leavening of folklore, history, and counter-history. No longer a figure of bright memory but one of the flickering past, he is partially, perhaps permanently veiled by distance and myth.

Even so, Lincoln may be said to hold his firmest grip on the American imagination by continuing to suggest in vivid and universal terms the boundless possibilities of a free society. It was not surprising that one newspaper of his day found him "as American in his fibre as the granite foundations of our Appalachian range," noting that "the very noblest impulses, peculiarities and aspirations of our whole people . . . were more collectively and vividly reproduced in his genial and yet unswerving nature than in that of any other public man of whom our chronicles bear record." In short, he was "as indiginous to our soil as the cranberry crop." To paraphrase Lincoln's own best-known words, he himself was of, by, and for the people—suggesting both an ideal and an idea, as historian Earl Schenck Miers expressed it. In both his time and ours, moreover, Lincoln's America seemed the one place in the world where a Lincoln was possible; America alone offered the hope, as Lincoln would tell a regiment of soldiers at the White House, that "any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has." Nowhere else, he suggested, was "presented a government of so much liberty and equality. To the humblest and poorest amongst us are held out the highest privileges and positions." By himself attaining the highest positions, Lincoln convincingly authenticated democratic government itself, government ruled by ballots, he would emphasize, not bullets.

Lincoln learned the limits and possibilities of American democracy firsthand, early on, and from the political grass roots up. In the words of one of his old Illinois law colleagues, he was never "exempt from bearing his full share of the burden" in the hurly-burly of nineteenth-century campaigns. As a young man, he served as an election day teller in one local contest for judge, and as a clerk in village elections for constable and sheriff, personally recording and tallying votes at rustic

polling places set up inside neighbors' log cabins. In the presidential election of 1840, he got paid \$19 to deliver election returns on horseback from a nearby county to the state capital; four years later, he performed the same service, but for \$1.40 less. He was alert to potential abuses of democracy, too; once he seized a poll book he believed contained evidence of fraud.

Lincoln also enjoyed the drama of political life. In his day, politics were also grand entertainment. In isolated western towns like Springfield, Illinois, to which he moved at the midway point in his life, the daily tedium was relieved only by the occasional visiting camp show, the state fair, the arrival of a guest orator, a revival meeting, or the perennial fever of local, county, state, and national politics. Townspeople thronged Fourth of July picnics, flagpole raisings, campaign barbecues, stem-winder speeches, and torchlight parades. They stood patiently and listened attentively through marathon debates. Lincoln was present, year in and year out, as both an observer and a participant in this ferment that combined ideas and spectacle. Twenty years before he engaged Stephen A. Douglas in the celebrated senatorial debates of 1858, for example, Lincoln looked on as young Douglas debated an early foe so venomously that his rival grabbed the "Little Giant" in his arms and threatened to thrash him. Douglas did not bother to ask for equal time to reply. He simply bit his opponent on the thumb.

Lincoln's own debates with Douglas would be more dignified, of course, but no less exciting for eyewitnesses. One 1858 encounter featured, according to an eyewitness, martial music, and even floats "profusely decorated with flags and bunting—and filled with young girls—in a number representing every state in the Union." Throughout the campaign, the candidates addressed crowds as large as fifteen thousand—some spectators traveling considerable distances, arriving on horseback, on foot, in covered wagons, and on the railroads, swarming into unshaded fields under blistering summer sun for the sheer pleasure of basking in the spectacle of the heated oratory. And onlookers participated as well, interrupting the debaters with hearty applause, roars of laughter, and occasional catcalls.

This was Lincoln's arena of democracy, and he thrived in it. But beyond its drama, he reveled in its substance. He meticulously researched speeches (for he publicly admitted that he was prone to say "foolish things" when he spoke extemporaneously; once as president,

he appeared in a doorway to tell an eager crowd only that it was important in his position “that I should not say foolish things,” to which a voice in the audience shot back, “If you can help it.”). As a young politician he carefully printed petitions, wrote election notices, drafted and offered legislative bills and resolutions, chaired legislative committees, and twice ran unsuccessfully for speaker of Illinois’s lower house.

Nurtured by all this hands-on experience, and honing a gift for precise, powerful writing that elevated him above his contemporaries, Lincoln emerged from the frenzied environment of debates, meetings, lawmaking, and stump oratory as a spellbinding oracle of democratic ideals. No doubt it is difficult for citizens in today’s often drab, mindless era of fifteen-second sound bites, glib advertising slogans, and political inarticulation to imagine a time when nearly all politicians could speak coherently in long, complex, compelling sentences; could cultivate serious ideas, argue and debate, convince and convert; could actually write incisive, evocative prose. America’s nineteenth-century political culture in fact demanded that its leaders come equipped with both a loud voice and an agile pen, and Lincoln had both. He worked so hard to be heard to the outskirts of his vast audiences, for example, that an eleven-year-old boy who pushed his way to the front of one such crowd remembered gazing up at Lincoln and being doused with “falling mist upon my brow” which, he sympathetically explained, “any speaker will emit addressing an outdoor audience.” The boy was forced to keep his red bandanna handkerchief at the ready whenever Lincoln “leaned directly toward me.” And yet what Lincoln said seemed so gripping, “I had no thought of changing my position till the last word was said. . . . I had been baptized that day . . . into the faith of him who spoke.” As historian Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., has pointed out, Lincoln would go on to become “not only our greatest president, but the greatest writer among our presidents.”

In all, over the course of more than thirty years in public life, Lincoln composed more than a million known words. He did almost all of his writing himself. Even as president, he employed neither speechwriters nor ghostwriters to place words in his mouth or thoughts in his head. The rare note drafted by a secretary for his signature, the occasional diplomatic letter or Thanksgiving proclamation written at the State Department, were very much the exceptions, not the rule. In his day,

in and of itself such creativity was not unusual. What set Lincoln apart from other politicians was not that he crafted his own arguments but that he did so brilliantly and memorably, in resonant words that enriched the political dialogue of his age. Despite almost no formal education, this son of a farmer who could manage little more in the way of writing than to “bunglingly sign his own name” helped forge a new American political idiom, liberating it from the grandiloquent verbiage and ripe classical allusions then common to such oratory, and instead achieving, particularly after 1854, a simple grace, an assurance, a lively wit, an unshakable logic, and at times a soaring beauty. Even his earliest speeches, recalled his longtime law partner, William H. Herndon, were “cool—calm, earnest—sincere, clear.” And they were punctuated by dramatic ideas, not dramatic gestures. Eulogizing his hero, Henry Clay, in 1852, Lincoln recalled an eloquence that “did not consist of . . . elegant arrangement of words and sentences; but rather of that deeply earnest and impassioned tone, and manner, which can proceed only from great sincerity and a thorough conviction . . . of the justice and importance of his cause.” Taking up Clay’s mantle, Lincoln eschewed bombast in favor of sober straightforwardness—although his talent was such that “elegant arrangement of words” was also inevitable. A newspaperman from the town of Galena in northwestern Illinois was particularly impressed with Lincoln’s forthright manner. After hearing him speak for the first time, he filed this report in the local newspaper, the *Daily Advertiser*:

His voice is clear, sonorous and pleasant and he enunciated with distinctness and emphasis. His style of address is earnest, not . . . bombastic, but animated without being furious and impresses one with the fact that he is speaking what he believes. His manner is neither fanciful nor rhetorical but logical. His thoughts are strong thoughts and are strongly jointed together. He is a clear reasoner and has the faculty of making himself clearly understood. He does not leave a vague impression that he has said something worth hearing; the hearer remembers what that something is. The sledge hammer effect of his speech results from the . . . force of the argument of the logician, not the fierce gestures and loud rantings of the demagogue.

Herndon, too, noticed that Lincoln the orator “never beat the air—never sawed space with his hands—never gestured at all”—unless, that

is, "he was defending liberty." Then, Herndon remembered, Lincoln would extend his arms as if to "embrace the spirit of that which he so dearly loved."

Walt Whitman was not alone among the authors of his day who saw in Lincoln something unique. Harriet Beecher Stowe, whose own writing had helped awaken the nation to the corrosive evil of slavery, maintained that some of Lincoln's words were "worthy to be inscribed in letters of gold." In Mrs. Stowe's opinion, Lincoln's sincere appeals "to the simple human heart and head" evidenced "a greater power in writing than the most artful devices of rhetoric." Ralph Waldo Emerson believed Lincoln did "more for America than any other American man." Nathaniel Hawthorne, no admirer of his politically, reluctantly conceded after an interview with the President that he would as soon "have Uncle Abe for a ruler as any man." The leading historian of the day, George Bancroft, earmarked the Gettysburg Address for an honored place in an album of *Autograph Leaves of Our Country's Authors*. And to the great novelist Leo Tolstoy, Lincoln "aspired to be divine—and he was." George Washington seemed to the Russian author an ideal American much as Napoleon seemed an ideal Frenchman; but Lincoln "was a humanitarian as broad as the whole world."

Somehow, the critic Edmund Wilson seemed astonished years later to find in Lincoln's prose no evidence of the "folksy and jocular countryman" whom he had pictured "swapping yarns at the village store." Lincoln the writer, instead, seemed "intent, self-controlled, strong in intellect, tenacious of purpose." Added Wilson: "Alone among American presidents, it is possible to imagine Lincoln, grown up in a different milieu, becoming a distinguished writer of a not merely political kind."

Of course, Lincoln's writing was nearly all of a "political kind." And running like a silver thread through the fabric of his public utterances and private letters was the core sentiment that had made admirers of Whitman and others: democracy was dear to *him*. Lincoln not only defended democracy in war, he defined it in words. He was a politician, not a philosopher, but he knew that "whoever moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statutes, or pronounces judicial decisions." Accordingly, in logical and lyrical phrases that still echo in the vocabulary of our literature—"malice toward none," "a house divided," "a new birth of freedom," to name but a few—he vividly extolled the virtues and exposed the vulnerabilities of the American

experiment. Lincoln's rhetoric consecrated in high relief the crucible of civil war, and gave majesty to the ethic of majority rule, "the only true sovereign," as Lincoln expressed it, "of a free people." Law partner Herndon, for one, was not surprised by Lincoln's emergence as a spokesman for democracy. On the subjects of "justice, right, liberty, the Government, the Constitution, and the Union," Herndon predicted, "you may all stand aside; he will rule then, and no man can move him—no set of men can do it." Neither could a rebellion. Adding both new urgency and an international vision to the original ideas in the Declaration of Independence—equality and inalienable rights—Lincoln used words as powerfully as he used arms to fight for both the preservation of American democracy and, by purging it of slavery, its purification as well. It must be saved, he insisted, even as it faced what he called its "hour of trial," not only for ourselves but for people everywhere. For America's Declaration of Independence, he believed, offered "liberty, not alone to the people of this country, but hope to the world for all future time," hope that "*all* should have an equal chance."

Most foreign governments, Lincoln pointed out, had been based "on the denial of equal rights of men." Ours, on the other hand, began "by *affirming* those rights"—by giving "*all* a chance." But if it was true that "no man is good enough to govern another man, without that other's consent," how could it be justified that Negro slaves enjoyed no such rights? "When the white man governs himself that is self-government," Lincoln insisted in 1854. "But when he governs himself, and also governs another man . . . that is despotism." In three sentences which he jotted down on a plain piece of paper a few years later, he summarized this philosophy at its purest, most basic level: "As I would not be a *slave*, so I would not be a *master*. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy."

It was the inherent despotism in slavery, Lincoln came to believe, that undermined the promise of American democracy and its potential inspiration for the rest of the world—precious little of which could be called democratic in Lincoln's day. As the Lincoln-era Massachusetts congressman George Boutwell explained it years later, "with the curse of slavery in America there was no hope for republican institutions in other countries. In the presence of slavery, the Declaration of Independence had lost its power; practically, it had become a lie." Slavery,

Lincoln worried in 1854, “enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites.” Lincoln urged Americans to return to the original idea of their government: “Universal Freedom.” Accordingly, inequality was unacceptable, Lincoln declared on another occasion, whether “of the British aristocratic sort or the domestic slavery sort.” As he expressed it at the final Lincoln-Douglas debate in 1858, there were “two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time, and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity; and the other, the divine right of kings.” To Lincoln, the latter represented “the same spirit that says, ‘You work and toil and earn bread, and I’ll eat it.’ No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king . . . or from one race of men . . . enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle.” In Lincoln’s words, the retrograde institution of slavery was a “danger to liberty itself.”

Lincoln was not prepared to let democracy and liberty die of hypocrisy. Americans, he believed, had not only the opportunity but the responsibility to champion democracy everywhere by defending democracy here. Appropriately, when Hungarian freedom fighter Lajos Kosuth began an American tour in 1852, Lincoln was one of several prominent men from his hometown to sign a resolution of support for “the cause of civil and religious liberty” in Europe—not only in Hungary but also in Ireland, Germany, and France. On another occasion, affixing his name to a resolution endorsing a Polish-American engineer for a military commission, Lincoln placed himself in sympathy with the Poles’ “bold but unfortunate attempt to regain their national independence.” Later, Lincoln extended to the Mexican liberator Benito Juárez, destined soon for temporary exile, his hopes for the “liberty of . . . your government, and its people.” As president, Lincoln could ill afford to give more than encouragement to democratic struggles in other countries, faced as he was with the dissolution of his own. He would instead let American democracy speak for itself; Lincoln came to represent not just words but democracy functioning under siege, or as historian Mark E. Neely, Jr., has put it, democracy in action. Under Lincoln the Civil War became a “People’s contest” to “maintain the capacity of man for self government.” If “our enemies succeed,” he warned, “every form of human right is endangered.” But if “all lovers of liberty everywhere” joined in sympathy, he predicted, “we shall not

only have saved the Union; but we shall have so saved it, as to make, and to keep it, forever worthy of the saving . . . so saved it that the succeeding millions of free happy people, the world over, shall rise up, and call us blessed, to the latest generations.”

Inevitably, the people’s contest began exerting an ironic impact on the people’s government it was meant to preserve. As the war progressed, testing the limits of acceptable dissent in the midst of constitutional crisis, exposing raw, unprecedented tensions between democratic rights and national survival, Lincoln found himself cleaving to the “necessity” of saving the country first, in order to preserve democracy in the future. “Must a government . . . be too *strong* for the liberties of its own people, or too *weak* to maintain its own existence?” he challenged those who questioned his assumption of executive authority. By law, Lincoln would point out, “life *and* limb must be protected; yet often a limb must be amputated to save a life; but a life,” he added, “is never wisely given to save a limb.” It was possible, Lincoln warned, to save the Constitution and yet lose the nation. Lincoln was prepared to do all within his power—and, some charged, beyond it—to fight “the attempt to overthrow this government, which was built upon the foundation of human rights.”

Confident in the ultimate justice of the people, but aware that perfect liberty was a perpetual challenge, he was comfortable with what historians have called the limits of the possible. “In relation to the principle that all men are created equal,” he said in 1858, “let it be as nearly reached as we can.” What was just and what was attainable was, for much of Lincoln’s presidency, separated by the wide chasm of necessity. Most ironic of all, perhaps, there were even those Americans who would see a threat to liberty in Lincoln’s greatest effort to extend liberty, the Emancipation Proclamation. Some Americans would hail the Proclamation as a second Declaration of Independence. But in New York City, Maria Lydig, the wife of a local judge, angrily greeted its announcement by noting in her diary: “We are under a worse despotism than they have in France or Russia. There is no law but the despotic will of Abe Lincoln.” As the selections in this treasury demonstrate, Lincoln probed all these vexing issues with an unwavering “firmness in the right,” with persuasiveness, statesmanship, common sense, vision, and a mastery of the language that at times approached poetry.

He reached his rhetorical zenith at Gettysburg, a Pennsylvania vil-

lage of bullet-scarred stone houses where thousands had given their lives in one of the bloodiest battles ever fought anywhere on earth. A year earlier, Lincoln had called on his fellow countrymen to “disenthral ourselves”—to “think anew, and act anew”—in order to “save our country.” He had challenged Americans to “rise with the occasion.” For Lincoln, that occasion was Gettysburg. Here he searched eloquently for a rationale for the enormous sacrifice, and found it in the promise of democracy. But, as he reminded his audience, the Declaration of Independence, and its guarantees of liberty and equality, still represented only a “proposition” in the eyes of the world. In “testing” whether America could survive, the Union would decide for the entire world “whether . . . any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.” Government of, by, and for the people had to be rescued here to remain viable elsewhere.

Seventeen months later, the “new birth of freedom” was painfully accomplished, with Lincoln its final, and most widely mourned, casualty. Looking on incredulously as the entire city of New York cloaked itself in funeral black, British newspaper correspondent Edwin L. Godkin expressed astonishment at the universal outpouring of grief. Deaths of European leaders, he pointed out, elicited little more there than polite mourning in “the court circles,” and among “those who would like to belong to it.” In New York in that spring of 1865, every “little huxter or cobbler” was decorating his door with black muslin, every laborer was wearing crape on his arm or a mourning rosette on his collar. “Whatever be the faults of democratic institutions,” he reported, “they at least make the meanest of the people feel themselves a part of the nation, entitled to share in its sorrows and its joys as much as its proudest and highest.” No dead king, he admitted, “had ever half as many tears shed over his bier as have fallen on Abraham Lincoln’s—the Illinois attorney, the ex-rail-splitter, the ex-flatboatman.”

Among the tributes that began pouring into Washington after Lincoln’s death were the condolences of the very monarchs whose rule the President had so vigorously questioned. To be sure, some of these expressions were obligatory and perfunctory, like the letter from Tsarist Russia acknowledging that Lincoln had restored the Union and with it, “that concord which is the source of its power and of its prosperity.” More heartfelt was the message from the Polish members of the Prussian chamber of deputies—Poland itself had for a time disappeared from the world map—lauding Lincoln as “a victim, a martyr, of the

great cause” of liberty. And from Italy, Giuseppe Garibaldi eulogized Lincoln as the “heir of the aspirations of Christ and of John Brown,” predicting he “would pass to posterity” with a fame “more enviable than any crown or any human treasure.”

Even in totalitarian France, liberals undertook to mint a memorial medal in Lincoln’s honor. Although the government of Napoleon III tried to bar the tribute, official France surprisingly conceded that “Mr. Lincoln . . . passed through the most afflicting trials that could befall a government founded on liberty.” Eventually, the medal was struck in Switzerland in defiance of the French government wishes, funded by public donations from Lincoln’s French admirers. Transmitting a finished medal—whose inscription proclaimed that Lincoln had “Saved the Republic/Without Veiling the Statue of Liberty”—the liberals, who included novelist Victor Hugo, advised Mrs. Lincoln: “If France had the freedom enjoyed by republican America, not thousands, but millions among us would have been counted as admirers.”

While the Civil War raged, there had been little support for Lincoln from the British government, either. The rebellion had interrupted the cotton trade, plunging English mills into idleness and leaving workers unemployed. Nonetheless, workingmen from South London would now send a touching letter to Lincoln’s widow, assuring her that the “hero martyr of liberty and right” had been considered “one of themselves, fighting the battle of freedom for all lands.” Similar, if more muted expressions of grief and appreciation arrived from Parliament. And Queen Victoria herself, still very much in mourning for her own husband, wrote a touching condolence letter to Mrs. Lincoln. Observed the English dramatist Tom Taylor—who had written the play Lincoln was watching when he was assassinated—“The Old World and The New, from sea to sea,/Utter one voice of sympathy and shame!” for “this rail-splitter, a true-born king of men.”

Considering this phenomenon, Walt Whitman was astounded by the “spectacle of all the kings and queens and emperors of the earth” now “sending tributes of condolence and sorrow in memory of one raised through the commonest average of life.” The man who had died for democracy now seemed in retrospect to have lived for it as well, for both American and world liberty, and his personal and political example had become a potent, perhaps even frightening symbol of democracy’s possibilities to working people and royal courts alike.

Nearly a century later, the American composer Aaron Copland

would recall an incident that confirmed the enduring strength of that symbol. In the 1950s Copland traveled to Venezuela to conduct a performance of his *Lincoln Portrait*, an orchestral piece in which a narrator speaks Lincoln's most famous words against a background of inspirational music. "To everybody's surprise," Copland told a newspaper reporter, "the reigning dictator, who had rarely dared to be seen in public, arrived at the last possible moment," joining six thousand spectators jammed into an outdoor stadium. The narrator that evening was the fiery Venezuelan actress Juana Sujo. When she spoke the final words of the piece—"government of the people, by the people—*por el pueblo y para el pueblo*—shall not perish from the earth"—the audience responded by jumping to its feet and shouting and cheering so vociferously that even Copland was unable to hear the end of the piece.

"It was not long after that the dictator was deposed and fled from the country," Copland remembered. "I was later told by an American foreign service officer that the *Lincoln Portrait* was credited with having inspired the first public demonstration against him. That, in effect, it had started a revolution."

As the Copland recollection so vividly suggests—as the Solidarity Teachers' enthusiasm for this book confirms—Lincoln's written legacy continues to transcend both time and place, holding relevance for today as well as tomorrow. "*Writing*," as Lincoln understood, ". . . is the great invention of the world . . . very great in enabling us to converse with the dead, the absent, and the unborn, at all distances of time and space." As this anthology reminds us, Lincoln's writings on democracy continue to vivify this promise. And the promise, just as Lincoln understood early and well, extends not just to Americans but to people everywhere thirsting for what he aptly described in a temperance address as the "sorrow quenching draughts of perfect liberty." What Lincoln said once of the nation's founders might as easily be said today of his own rich and hitherto uncollected speeches and writings on democracy. He "grasped not only the whole race of men then living," but "reached forward and seized upon the farthest posterity." He "erected a beacon to guide" his "children and . . . children's children, and the countless myriads who should inhabit the earth in other ages."

No American president, no American writer was ever more "Dear to democracy."



A Note on the Lincoln Texts . . .

With but a handful of exceptions, all the 140 Lincoln texts presented on the following pages—speeches, letters, remarks, greetings, replies, drafts, and fragments—come from texts published in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, eight volumes issued by Rutgers University Press (1953–1955) and ably edited by a team headed by Roy P. Basler, who died while *Lincoln on Democracy* was in preparation. We are grateful to the Press for granting us permission to adapt these definitive versions.

When relevant to the theme of democracy, we present the full texts of speeches and letters. In other cases, we present appropriate extracts—especially of some of the very lengthy pre-presidential addresses. We identify each such selection as “from a speech” or “from a letter,” and to indicate missing sections of text, use a series of dots. Ellipses are avoided whenever possible—except for those cases in which an extract begins in the middle of a paragraph. Excerpting can be a difficult task, and in the case of a writer as cogent as Lincoln, a presumptuous one. All our consulting scholars, together with the editors, have tried to ensure that the texts flow naturally, while focusing on the issues of liberty, equality, and self-determination.

Whenever possible, Basler’s texts followed Lincoln’s own manuscript copies of his letters and speeches. But none of Lincoln’s pre-presidential addresses survive in his own hand. Typically, such manuscripts would be taken to newspaper offices to be set in type for the next day’s editions, and then simply thrown away. In such cases we are compelled to rely on these newspaper reprints.

In still other instances—principally Lincoln’s impromptu remarks as president-elect and president—no handwritten texts may ever have existed. Here, on-the-scene newspaper correspondents transcribed the words, often peppering them with parenthetical indications of crowd reaction, thus providing us rare and evocative glimpses into the way in which audiences of his own day received Lincoln’s spoken words. We preserve these inserted cheers and applause intact.

Finally, there is the special case of the Lincoln-Douglas Debates, every syllable of which was duly reported in the press of the day. Later, when Lincoln decided to assemble these reprints in a scrapbook, and submit it for publication as a book, the question arose as to which newspaper reprints to use. By mutual consent, Douglas’s side of the debate was taken from the pro-Democratic *Chicago Times*, and Lincoln’s from the pro-Republican *Chicago Press & Tribune*. Scholars have called into question the absolute reliability of these accounts, and a glimpse at the opposition *Democratic* version of Lincoln’s words, or the *Republican* version of Douglas’s, confirms that the friendly newspapers did provide some friendly editing to the candidate of their choice. Nonetheless, these are the only records we have, and like Lincoln and Basler before us, we have relied exclusively on the *Press & Tribune*’s accounts of Lincoln’s performance in the debates.

Basler decided—and we have followed suit—to simplify some of Lincoln’s curious punctuation, but to retain his individualistic spelling, even when archaic or simply incorrect. For example, Lincoln ended many sentences with a long dash instead of a period, and he sometimes used two periods after initials or abbreviations. We have reverted to the standard period to make the texts easier to read. On the other hand, while Lincoln was an overindulgent friend of commas, we have not endeavored to correct his generous use of them. And while he employed capitalization with haphazard inconsistency, we have not imposed uniformity. Likewise, Lincoln’s nonuniform spelling (he spelled the same word in different ways at different times), as well as his devotion to archaic or simply personalized spellings—“criticise,” “labour,” “burthen,” “defence,” “indorsements,” “contemn,” and “verry,” to name but a few—has been retained here, without the use of the warning sign *sic*, except in the most egregious cases, where readers might be confused without such clarification. However, in cases where crumbling manu-

scripts are missing an occasional word, or where period newspaper transcriptions omit key words, we have adopted Basler's generally accepted use of bracketed inserts.

Since Basler's volumes first appeared, further scholarship inevitably revealed a few errors in *The Collected Works*, and we have adopted these corrections where appropriate. For example, Basler published a period newspaper copy of the famous House Divided speech, and until historians George B. Forgie and Don E. Fehrenbacher examined it closely twenty years later, no one seemed to realize that an entire paragraph had been transposed to a later portion of the text, rendering several intervening paragraphs all but unintelligible. We have used Dr. Fehrenbacher's revised text for the House Divided speech printed here.

Text selection was not the only problem the editors confronted. Ever since collections of Lincoln writings have appeared—and the first appeared last century—editors have been properly reluctant to insert bracketed, explanatory notes within Lincoln's texts. *The Collected Works* presented all such explanations in tiny footnotes below each selection. We have chosen—prudently and sparingly, we hope—to present some crucial information within the body of Lincoln's own writings. This was not an easy decision, but after much thought it was determined that most American and surely all foreign readers might not otherwise be able to identify many of the issues and people Lincoln sometimes cited rather breezily in many speeches and letters. A footnote solution was rejected as too unwieldy, and end notes were ruled out for the same reason. So we endeavored to identify, as briefly as possible, contemporaries to whom Lincoln referred only by last name (sometimes only by first name!), as well as the more obscure issues he occasionally mentioned. Such an approach seemed especially justified for those writings of which we present only excerpts. As often as possible, we presented our explanations in introductory annotations, so as to avoid interruptions of the texts themselves. But sometimes we judged the insertion of bracketed information unavoidable, even vital.

What is remarkable is how little such explanation and introduction Lincoln's writings seem to require, even a century and a quarter after his last words were written. Though they focus almost exclusively on the issues confronting mid-nineteenth-century America, they feature

expressions of the heart and mind that transcend their place and time. The editors' task, as a result, has been happily limited. Lincoln still speaks directly to us, and requires very little help to do so effectively and meaningfully.

. . . And the Introductory Essays

Each of the seven chronologically arranged sections of Lincoln materials that follows is preceded by an introductory essay by a different Lincoln scholar. Each essayist is a widely recognized and respected historian, and of course each brings his own sensibilities to the period he covers. Thus, the introductions reflect varying, although not incompatible interpretations of the Civil War and Lincoln himself.

The editors believe that such diversity is an asset to this anthology. The study of Abraham Lincoln, after all, much like democracy itself, is not fixed: it is a dynamic process of examination, interpretation, and analysis. When the best historians in the field are asked to contemplate the subject of Lincoln on democracy, and focus their attention on specific periods of Lincoln's career, the results are bound to differ, intrigue, and provoke. At least we hope so.



“NOT MUCH OF ME”

Lincoln's "Autobiography," Age 50

[DECEMBER 20, 1859]

Abraham Lincoln wrote this "little sketch" of his first fifty years just five months before his nomination to the presidency. He composed it as a research tool for a newspaper feature designed to introduce the still largely unknown western politician to the East. "There is not much of it," Lincoln apologized in a cover letter, "for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me." Predictably, it was sumptuously embellished when adapted by the Chester County (Pennsylvania) Times on February 11, 1860, even though Lincoln wanted something "modest" that did not "go beyond the materials." The article was widely reprinted in other pro-Republican organs. But it is the original Lincoln text that remains a principal source of our knowledge about the guardedly private public figure his own law partner complained was "the most shut-mouthed man I knew." In truth, the sketch rarely travels beyond perfunctory facts toward the realm of insight, and it ends with the vaguest of personal descriptions of the face that would soon become the most recognizable in America. Although he authored more than a million words altogether, Lincoln would produce nothing further about himself except for a slightly longer account of his early days written in 1860 as the basis of a campaign biography. Even though democracy could claim no more convincing validation than his own rise, Lincoln the writer hardly ever illuminated Lincoln the man. Where Lincoln is concerned, history comes no closer to autobiography than this.

I was born Feb. 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families—second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams, and others in Macon counties, Illinois. My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky, about 1781 or 2, where, a year or two later, he was killed by indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were quakers, went to Virginia

from Berks County, Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New-England family of the same name ended in nothing more definite, than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like.

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age; and he grew up, literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer county, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came in the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called; but no qualification was ever required of a teacher, beyond "*readin, writin, and cipherin,*" to the Rule of Three. If a straggler supposed to understand latin, happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizzard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course when I came of age I did not know much. Still somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the Rule of Three; but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty two. At twenty one I came to Illinois, and passed the first year in Illinois—Macon county. Then I got to New-Salem, (at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard county[)], where I remained a year as a sort of Clerk in a store. Then came the Black-Hawk war; and I was elected a Captain of Volunteers—a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went the campaign, was elated, ran for the Legislature the same year (1832) and was beaten—the only time I have been beaten by the people. The next, and three succeeding biennial elections, I was elected to the Legislature. I was not a candidate afterwards. During this Legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield to practice it. In 1846 I was once elected to the lower House of Congress. Was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849 to 1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a whig in politics, and generally on the whig electoral tickets, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again. What I have done since then is pretty well known.

If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said,

I am, in height, six feet, four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing, on an average, one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair, and grey eyes—no other marks or brands recollected.
Yours very truly

A. LINCOLN