



A B R A H A M  
L I N C O L N

A LEGACY OF FREEDOM





“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.”

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# PREFACE

BY GEORGE CLACK

The year 2009 marks the 200th anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln, the U.S. president often considered the greatest of this country's leaders. Americans' reverence for Lincoln began with his tragic death by assassination in 1865, at the end of a brutal civil war in which 623,000 men died, the American Union withstood its greatest test, and slavery was banished. And his hallowed place in the iconography of America continues. More than 14,000 books have been published on Lincoln to date. Contemporary scholar Douglas L. Wilson calls Lincoln the "best known and most widely acclaimed of all Americans."

Why add one more volume to the massive mound of Lincoln scholarship? Because we believe that Lincoln embodies fundamental American ideals that stretch from the founding of this nation down to the present.

Among the Americans embracing this vision of our 16th president is the 44th president, Barack Obama. Writing in 2005, as a newly minted U.S. senator, Obama declared it hard to imagine a less likely scenario than his own rise — "except, perhaps, for the one that allowed a child born in the backwoods of Kentucky with less than a year of formal education to end up as Illinois' greatest citizen and our nation's greatest president."

In Lincoln's biography, Obama continued, his "rise from poverty, his ultimate mastery of language and law, his capacity to overcome personal loss and remain determined in the face of repeated defeat ... reminded me of a larger, fundamental element of American life — the enduring belief that we can constantly remake ourselves to fit our larger dreams."

By bringing together leading historians and asking them to consider Lincoln from different places around the world understand the sources of the man's greatness as well as his place in Americans' hearts.

This volume, then, presents a sort of pointillist portrait of Lincoln. Our introduction presents a personal view of Lincoln, that of Eileen Mackevich, executive director of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. In our opening essay, "What Lincoln Means to Americans Today," journalist Andrew Ferguson considers the libraries of Lincoln books, the collectors of Lincoln memorabilia, the actors who present a reenacted Lincoln to the masses, and the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., for what they say about Lincoln's enduring appeal. Next, in "Groundwork for Greatness: Abraham Lincoln to 1854," historian Wilson recounts the story of a boy born to humble parents in a frontier cabin who wills himself to become that great archetype

of this country — the self-made man. In "The Words That Moved a Nation," Lincoln biographer Ronald C. White limns another of Lincoln's surpassing gifts — his eloquence, a mastery of words encompassing the soaring biblical cadences that inspire a nation and, equally, the homespun wisdom of the common man.

Three essays examine Lincoln's role as leader through the great national crisis of the Civil War. In "Path to the White House: Abraham Lincoln from 1854" and "Lincoln as Emancipator," this book's editor, Michael Jay Friedman, lays out the issues that led to the Civil War and the events that led Lincoln to order the 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, which freed the slaves of American South. Civil War historian Peter Cozzens, in "Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief,"



At the heart of the Lincoln Memorial (above), Daniel Chester French's sculpture (opposite) depicts Lincoln facing eastward, toward the Washington Monument.



IN THIS TEMPLE  
AS IN THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE  
FOR WHOM HE SAVED THE UNION  
THE MEMORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
IS ENSHRINED FOREVER



considers the obstacles the president had to overcome in developing an effective Union army and a cadre of generals to command it. Finally, diplomatic historian Howard Jones, in “Lincoln as Diplomat,” describes the international pitfalls that Lincoln as a war president needed to navigate and how he did it.

Despite all the Lincoln books, articles, tributes, and conferences,

a sense of a mystery remains. In the end the figure of Lincoln seems so grand, so varied, so susceptible to meaning that Americans of all stripes have often enlisted him in their causes. Perhaps Andrew Ferguson in a recent interview comes closest to getting at the power of the icon: “Lincoln also returns us to something essential in our national creed. The iconic Lincoln reminds us of the idea that the Union, by itself, is

not enough. The Union has to be dedicated to a proposition: that all men are created equal.”

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George Clack is director of the Office of Publications in the State Department’s Bureau of International Information Programs.

# What Lincoln Means to Me

BY EILEEN MACKEVICH

**A**mong history's heroes, Abraham Lincoln stands out as THE American original. Born to unambitious parents on the hard-scrabble frontier, his meteoric rise was never less than inspiring. Lincoln continued to grow and remake himself anew throughout his lifetime. Even 200 years later,

we seek his guidance. In truth, we can do no better than to emulate our 16th president: a man of dogged, so very American, ambition, but also one whose resolve was always tempered by an unswerving determination never to compromise his personal integrity.

Never boring, our Lincoln. He is a simple man, a complex man, a roustabout, a joker, a recluse, a man of action, a visionary. Just when we think we understand him, he eludes us. He is not a man to be pigeon-holed. There is a Lincoln for all seasons and all reasons.

Scholars find rich soil in Lincoln's many manifestations. They debate the substance of his life and the larger meaning of his tragic death. How did his views on race evolve? Why did he move so cautiously on emancipation? Was he moved only by the imperative of battlefield success and the consequent need to gather support from abroad? When did he embrace the idea of full citizenship for the former slaves? Would his Reconstruction plan have successfully reunited North and South while ensuring the former slaves their full legal equality?

Only Lincoln could have steered us from the tragic course of race relations that followed his death. As John Hope Franklin, the African-American scholar often called the dean of American historians, put it, "Of all the American presidents, only Lincoln stayed up nights worried about the fate of my people."

While Lincoln today enjoys the near-universal esteem of his countrymen, during his lifetime he was hardly a man for all seasons and all reasons. Many southerners and abolitionists disliked him. Frederick Douglass, the former slave turned abolitionist author, editor, and political reformer (also the most admired man in England), faulted Lincoln for failing to act swiftly on emancipation. Douglass felt that Lincoln was too solicitous of the slave-holding border states that refrained from joining the southern rebellion. Only later did Douglass perceive Lincoln's political artistry: The president, he came to understand, was a masterfully pragmatic politician who knew just how fast and how far he could push the American people toward abolition.

Ever anxious to learn, Lincoln invited outspoken people to the White House. He respected their honesty. Douglass was one. Another was Anna Dickinson, a Quaker activist abolitionist, women's rights advocate, and intense Lincoln admirer. But she turned against Lincoln because he would not support



Created by an act of Congress, the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission works to celebrate the life and legacy of America's 16th president while reinvigorating his thoughts, ideals, and spirit throughout the nation and around the world.

her charge of treason against the pompous, politically scheming General George B. McClellan. Lincoln listened respectfully to Americans of different stripes, from Negro abolitionists to Quaker activists, to the talented, high-powered individuals he included in his cabinet, to his political rivals — but the important decisions always were Lincoln's alone. As a leader, Lincoln moved deliberately, always testing the prevailing political winds. He changed his mind often. He was, in the modern jargon of the distinguished historian James Horton, the ultimate "flip-flopper." But the great social scientist W.E.B. Du Bois may have reached the essential truth when he called Lincoln "big enough to be inconsistent."

My great attraction to Lincoln rests on his nobility of character, his "self-making" in the larger 19th-century sense described by historian John Stauffer. Because his thought was deeply grounded in a belief in equality and in the ideals of freedom, we can imagine all things from Lincoln. He might have solved the race problem; he might have extended female suffrage. He is, more than any other, the American hero.

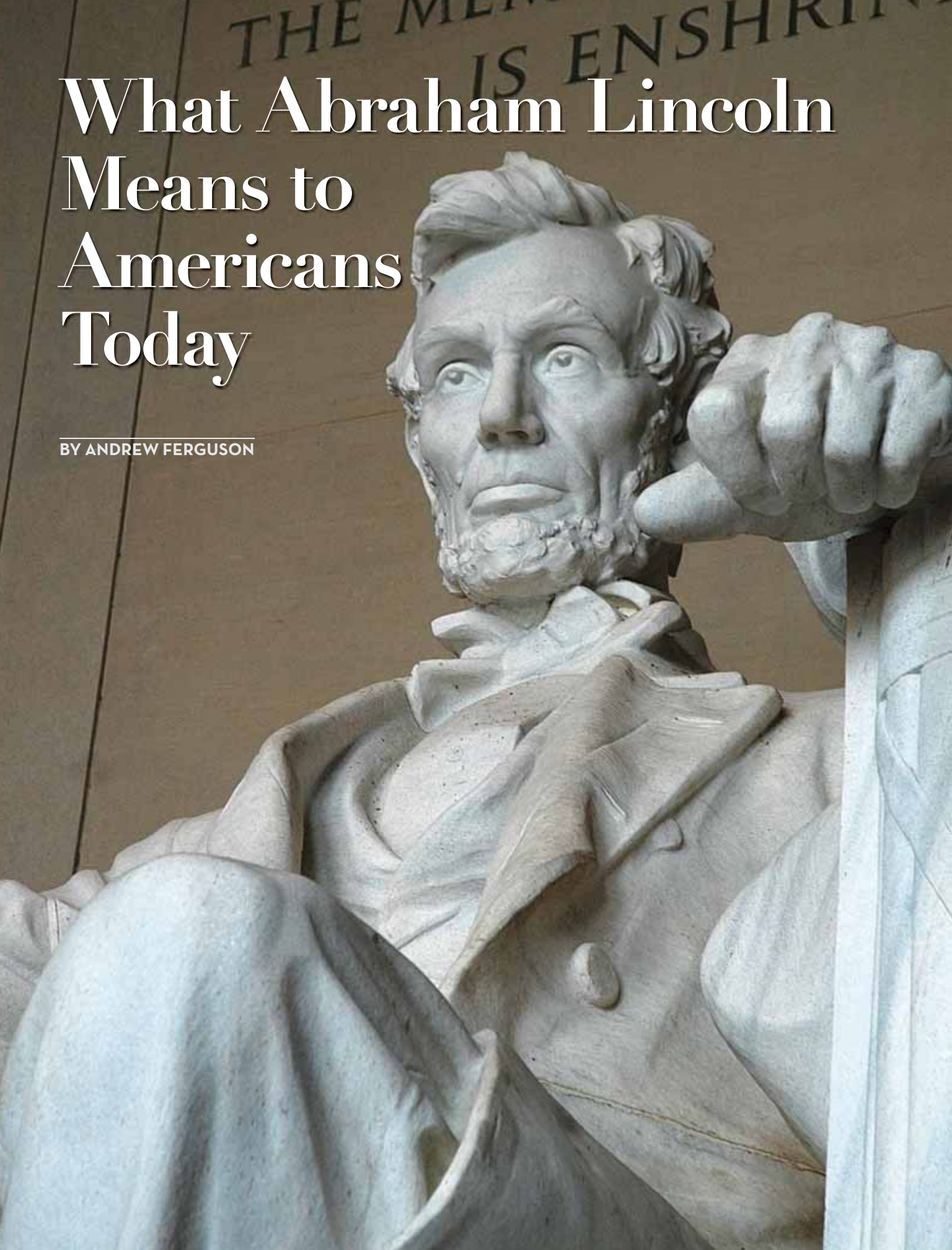
On a sunny spring day shortly before his assassination, Abraham and his wife, Mary Todd Lincoln, took a carriage ride. The war was over. Optimism reigned. Abe contemplated the future. After his presidency, Lincoln told his wife, he hoped they would travel to Europe and beyond. That was not to be. But in the larger sense, Abraham Lincoln has traveled the world — his belief that the common man can make himself anew is inspiration enough for us all.

Eileen Mackevich is the executive director of the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission. She is the co-founder of the Chicago Humanities Festival and was its president from 1989 to 2005. She has been a broadcast journalist on the Chicago affiliate of National Public Radio and was deputy director of the Illinois Humanities Council.



# What Abraham Lincoln Means to Americans Today

BY ANDREW FERGUSON



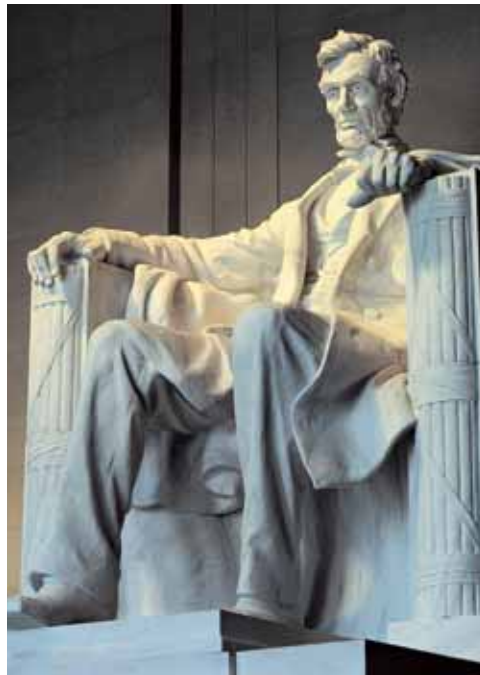


“Ah,” said a book-writing acquaintance, when I told him that I had signed up to write a book of my own. “A book about Abraham Lincoln. Just what America needs.” In fairness (to me), my book wasn’t *exactly* about Lincoln, at least not about Lincoln directly. Even so, my acquaintance’s sarcasm stung.

*“I am a firm believer in the people. If given the truth, they can be depended upon to meet any national crisis. The great point is to bring them the real facts.”*

There was truth behind it. He didn’t know the numbers, but I did: Since that unfortunate mishap at Ford’s Theatre, where an assassin’s bullet claimed his life, more than 14,000 books have been written about Abraham Lincoln, placing him second only to Jesus and Napoleon as an obsession of the world’s book writers. And the assembly line has never slowed, shows no signs of slowing even now — as the book you hold in your hand attests. I hadn’t been working on my own Lincoln book for very long when the point was pressed upon me.

I was in Lincoln’s hometown of Springfield, Illinois, one weekend,



Dedicated in 1922, the Lincoln Memorial includes (left and above) a 19-foot (5.8-meter) seated statue of Lincoln, fashioned on-site from 28 pieces of Georgia white marble.

at a Lincoln conference. (It’s an odd weekend in Springfield when someone isn’t holding a Lincoln conference.) The audience was fairly large — roughly 100 scholars, authors, amateur historians, hobbyists, buffs, and, by the looks of it, a few vagrants in from the street. At one point, the moderator interrupted the proceedings to ask for a show of hands.

“Just out of curiosity,” he said, “how many people here are writing a book about Abraham Lincoln?”

And nearly half of the audience raised their hands.

I was unnerved but not deterred, and before long I began bumping up against the practical difficulties the Lincoln glut creates for authors who are foolish enough to try to add to it. They include, but go far beyond, the problem of combing through a historical paper trail that has already been pulped for every conceivable fact and revelation. We still learn new things about Lincoln every once in a while, but the discoveries, tiny as they are, pique the interest of only professionals and the most hollow-eyed obsessives; the recent Lincoln books that have caught the public’s attention consist in taking old facts and arranging them in new ways. A more mundane and, for me, unforeseen problem involved the matter of a title. Let the writer beware: Somewhere in that pile of 14,000 volumes, one author or another has already given his or her Lincoln book the same title you’d chosen for yours.



## Lincoln in Print

Every phrase that can be detached from Lincoln's most famous utterances has been stamped on a cover, from *A New Birth of Freedom* to *With Malice Toward None*, from *With Charity for All* to *Of the People, By the People, For the People*. I looked further and discovered a kind of verbal daisy chain, as though all Lincoln authors had been given a limited number of words and were forced to arrange them in a different order. There was *The Sword of Lincoln* and *Lincoln's Sword*; *Lincoln and the Generals* and *Lincoln's Generals*; *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln*, *The Intimate World of Abraham Lincoln*, *Abraham Lincoln's World*, and *Abraham Lincoln's Intimate World*; *Lincoln's Virtues* and the *Virtuous Lincoln*.

There was *In Lincoln's Footsteps*, *In the Footsteps of the Lincolns*, and — for variety's sake — *In Lincoln's Footprints*. By my count, there are three books called *The Real Lincoln*, each of which presents a real Lincoln utterly incompatible with the real Lincoln described in the other two.

This surprised me less than it might have, for the other thing that struck me as I researched my own book, *Land of Lincoln* — not to be confused with *The Living Land of Lincoln*, by Thomas J. Fleming, which was published in 1980 — was just how many Lincolns were running around. I had been a boy in the early 1960s when Lincoln loomed large and inescapable, a common possession, a touchstone for the country at large. Now everyone seemed to have his own Lincoln.

Artists have found irresistible the challenge of imagining the backwoods Kentucky log cabin where Lincoln was born.

It was as if this great piece of our national patrimony had been broken up and privatized.

Again the books told the story. Just in recent years we've had a book proving Lincoln was a fundamentalist Christian — this was written by a fundamentalist Christian. Another proved that Lincoln's greatness arose from his struggle with clinical depression; the book was written by a journalist who has struggled with clinical depression. Most notoriously, a gay activist published a book in 2005 asserting that Lincoln, though not a gay activist himself, was at least actively gay. Conservatives have written books about Lincoln's





Abraham Lincoln served in the Illinois State Senate, whose original chamber, no longer in day-to-day use, is pictured here with a Lincoln-style cape and hat.



conservatism. Liberals have claimed him in books describing the liberal Lincoln. And in 2003, a book was published proving that if Lincoln were alive today, his political opinions would be indistinguishable from those of the former governor of New York State, Mario Cuomo. Two guesses as to who wrote that one.

### Understanding the Lincoln Infatuation

Agog at this exfoliation of Lincolns, you might be tempted to answer our title question — What does Abraham Lincoln mean to Americans today? — with a glib counterquestion: What *doesn't* Lincoln mean to Americans today? He seems to mean all things all at once, which might lead a cynic to conclude that Lincoln has ceased to have any particular meaning at all. But that really is too glib. For there is something peculiarly American in the sheer excess and exuberance of our Lincoln infatuation. Understanding the infatuation, I came to believe, might be a way not only of understanding Lincoln but of understanding the country itself.

The passion was undeniable, also surprising for a country supposedly indifferent to its own history. No other American has been so swarmed by curiosity seekers, so coddled and picked at and pawed; indeed — again with the possible exception of Napoleon — no other human being in modern history has shared a fate so implausibly extravagant.

Two images indelibly linked to the 16th president: his hat and the five-dollar bill bearing his portrait.



Yet not even Napoleon has ever inspired a group of men who make a living pretending to be him, as Lincoln has. In some respects, the Association of Lincoln Presenters (known as the ALP) is merely a trade association like any other — the Teamsters, for example, or the National Association of Manufacturers, or Petsitters International. Like them, the ALP holds an annual convention where members gather to socialize, swap professional tips, and hear expert speakers give advice on how to improve business. Unlike those other trade conventions, however, every member of the ALP is dressed in a black frock coat and stovepipe hat and sports a coal-black beard, real or otherwise. After the convention they return home and, refreshed, begin again the work of school

appearances, Kiwanis club talks, Chautauqua presentations, walk-throughs at county fairs — the work of evangelizing Lincoln to a country that they believe needs him more than it needs anything. I asked their founding president why they do it, why they bother. “Lincoln,” he told me, “reminds us of what we need to know but might have forgotten.”

It’s hard to describe the effect of seeing more than 100 men dressed like Abraham Lincoln gathered in a hotel ballroom, listening to a public relations expert discourse on “Making Local Media Work for You,” but I got used to such oddities as I looked for Lincoln.

There are perhaps as many as 15,000 Americans who are serious collectors of Lincoln memorabilia, even though in recent years the price of Lincoln documents and other

Located in Springfield, Illinois, the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library makes records and materials about the 16th president available to the public.

firsthand artifacts — what one collector called “the really good stuff” — has soared into a stratosphere accessible only to the wealthiest connoisseurs.

But collectors of more modest means are undeterred. With typical ingenuity, they have defined quality downward, to cover commodities that can be more reasonably priced: the “good stuff” now might include, for example, matchbook covers from the old Lincoln Life Insurance Company, which sell for under \$10. The online auction eBay has proved that anything with a Lincoln association can find a buyer. Documents in Lincoln’s hand now go



for tens of thousands of dollars; so non-rich Lincoln lovers have begun trading in forged Lincoln documents, particularly those of such celebrated forgers as Joseph Cosey, a scam artist who prospered in the 1930s. A Cosey-forged “Lincoln letter” might sell for \$2,500. “But you’ve got to make sure it’s a real forgery, a real Cosey,” one collector told me. “The market’s so hot now we’re seeing a lot of fakes.”

### Expressing the American Experiment

For nearly a century, historians and sociologists have tried to explain the historical infatuation that could result in such endearing absurdities. The reasons they’ve come up with are often clever and sometimes even plausible. Lincoln continues to fascinate his countrymen like no other historical personage, we’ve been told, because he was the first such personage to be commonly photographed: He is thus more

real to us than great figures from earlier times can be. And it’s true that Lincoln was exquisitely sensitive to the ways in which he presented himself to the public, including through the use of the then-new photographic art. He seldom passed up a chance to have his likeness made. Thanks to that craftiness, we seem to know him in a way we could never know George Washington or Thomas Jefferson.

Even so, goes another argument, no matter how familiar we are with his face, with the sad eyes and tousled hair, Lincoln is tantalizingly and finally unknowable; it’s this mystery that draws us back to the melancholy, humorous, intelligent, reserved, distant, and kindly man that his acquaintances described. Other historians have said our infatuation with him is rooted in the drama of his personal story: Born in abject poverty to become one of the great men of human history, Lincoln embodies the “right to rise” that Americans claim as their birthright. Still others credit his enduring fame to his assassination on Good Friday, a shock from which the country never quite recovered. The most sober-minded of our theorists say we’re obsessed with Lincoln because he presided over, and somehow exemplifies, the greatest trauma of American history, a civil war that reinvented the United States into the country we know today.

There’s truth in all these explanations, I suppose, but it’s the last one, in my opinion, that comes closest to being the comprehensive truth. I live not far from the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., that grand, photogenic temple on the banks of the Potomac River that is home to the “iconic Lincoln.” Researching my Lincoln book, spending time with scholars and



The original Emancipation Proclamation on display at the New York Public Library.



"Lincoln presenters" come in a variety of ages and sizes and are found in venues from the classroom to correctional facilities. As one Lincoln presenter explains, "Lincoln reminds us of what we need to know but might have forgotten."



collectors and obsessives and being introduced by each of them to yet another privatized Lincoln, a Lincoln pieced together from their own preoccupations, I was always glad to return home and pay the memorial

a visit: to see this singular and solid Lincoln, the enduring Lincoln that every American can lay claim to.

The memorial is the most visited of our presidential monuments. The strangest thing about it, though,

is the quiet that descends over the tourists who climb the wide sweeping stairway and step into the cool of the marble chamber. Before long their attention is drawn to one or both of the two Lincoln speeches etched in the walls on either side of the famous statue. After all this time I am still astonished at the number of visitors who stand still to read, on one stone panel, the Gettysburg Address, and, on the other, Lincoln's second inaugural address.

What they're reading is a summary of the American experiment, expressed in the finest prose any American has been capable of writing. One speech reaffirms that the country was founded upon and dedicated to a proposition — a universal truth that applies to all men everywhere. The other declares that the survival of the country is somehow bound up with the survival of the proposition — that if the country hadn't survived, the proposition itself might have been lost. Sometimes the tourists tear up as they read; they tear up often, actually. And watching them you understand: Loving Lincoln, for Americans, is a way of loving their country.

That's what Lincoln means to Americans today, and it's why he means so much.



From the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom (above), at which perhaps a quarter-million Americans witnessed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech, to two young people seeking to protect the rainforest (left), Americans looking for political change long have expressed themselves at the Lincoln Memorial.

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**Andrew Ferguson** is a senior editor at the *Weekly Standard* magazine and the author of *Land of Lincoln: Adventures in Abe's America*.



# Groundwork for Greatness: Abraham Lincoln to 1854

BY DOUGLAS L. WILSON



Bookish and largely self-taught, Lincoln would craft perhaps the finest political prose of any American and would outdistance his more privileged contemporaries.



**A**braham Lincoln is the best-known and most widely acclaimed of all Americans, and the only American statesman whose life story is generally familiar. Lincoln's status as the quintessential self-made man and his legendary rise from obscure backwoods beginnings to the presidency are

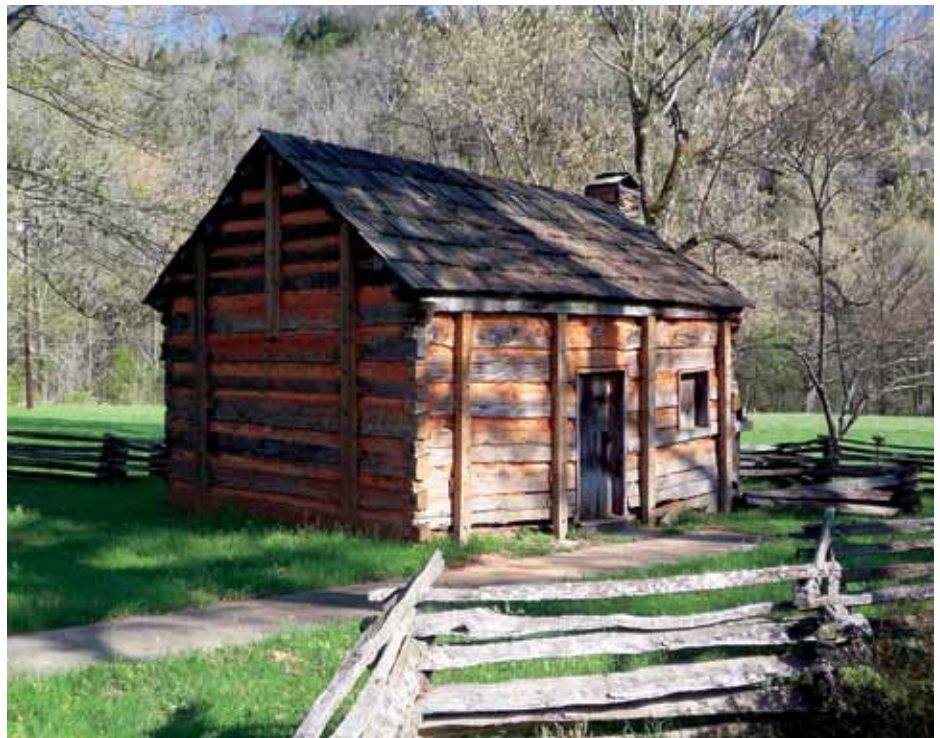
*“Whenever I hear any one arguing for slavery I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally.”*

deeply ingrained in the American imagination. What Americans generally know about their 16th president is admittedly more legend than biography, but the outlines of this familiar story are, for the most part, historical.

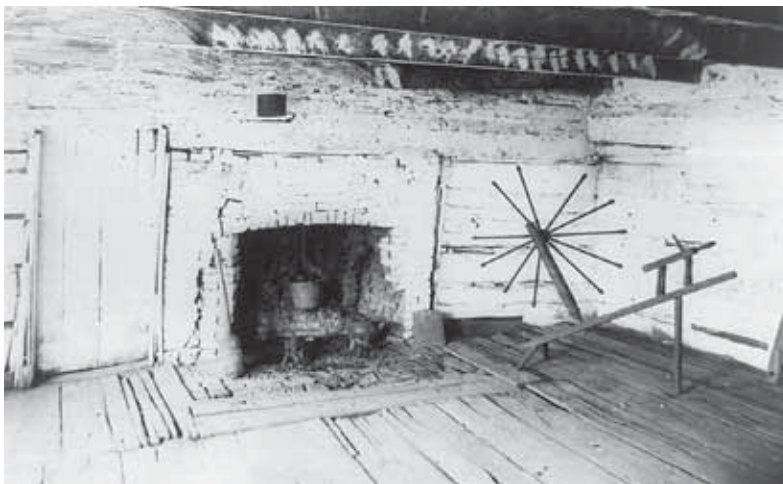
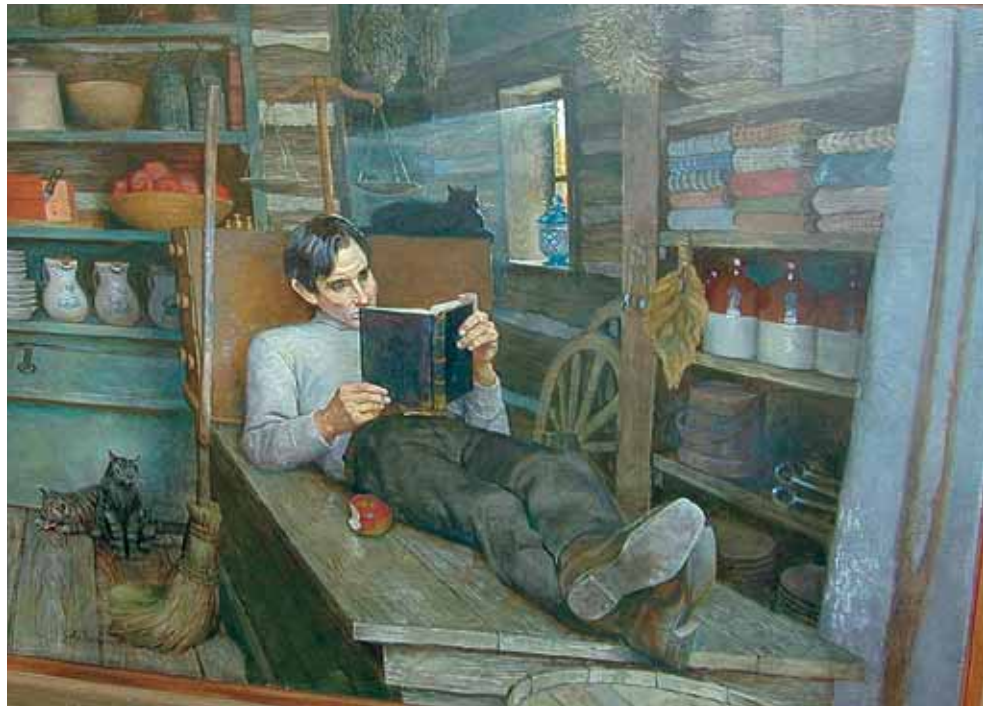
Lincoln was born in 1809 in a log cabin to very humble, uneducated parents; he did grow up in a backwoods settlement that was virtually a wilderness; there, beginning at the age of seven, he did help his father to hew a farm out of that wilderness with an axe; with the benefit of only a few months of schooling, he did study diligently on his own to acquire

basic skills in reading, writing, and arithmetic; as a young man out on his own and working at menial jobs, he did teach himself from books such subjects as English grammar, sufficient mathematics to learn surveying, and enough law to enter the legal profession at the age of 27. And, of course, he did perform triumphantly in the United States' most severe crisis, saving his country from dissolution, presiding over the destruction of slavery, and dying an authentic American martyr.

While Lincoln's worldwide fame is a result of his decisive and statesman-like conduct as president during the great Civil War of 1861-



“Virtually a wilderness.” The Abraham Lincoln Birthplace National Historic Site at Knob Creek, Kentucky.



Portrait of a self-made man. Clockwise from lower left: interior of the original Lincoln cabin, with Mrs. Lincoln's spinning jenny at right; a notebook crafted by Lincoln for doing his sums; Lincoln stealing a moment from his store clerk duties to study law; at work on the flatboats that carried farm goods downstream from Illinois, ultimately to New Orleans.

1865, the legend that surrounds him, and that Americans know so well, is anchored in familiar images from his early years — the poor Indiana frontiersman's son with an axe in his hands, the boy in the log cabin reading by the firelight, the honest store clerk and village postmaster, the fearless newcomer who stands up to bullies, the self-taught surveyor

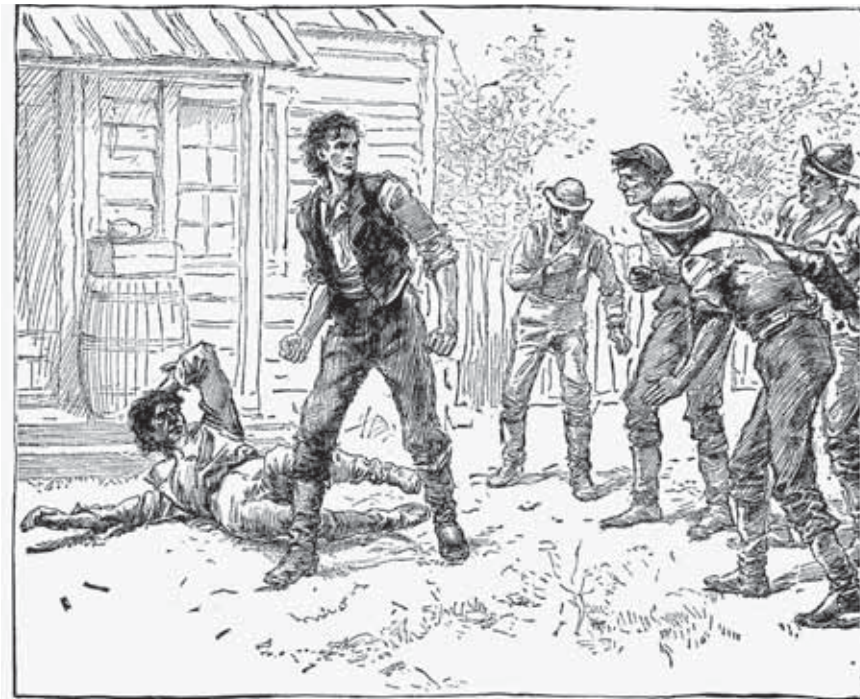
with compass and chain, the diligent student preparing himself for the practice of law.

Not generally part of the popular legend, although crucial aspects of his development, are such things as the rational and keenly skeptical cast of his mind and the very real difficulties he had to contend with in his formative years.

**A Mind Ripe for Learning**

From the very beginning, Abraham Lincoln was different, and in a way that many of his neighbors — and especially his father — did not approve. Unlike almost everyone else he grew up with, Lincoln was intensely interested in words and meanings. He learned to read and





Above: Lincoln arrived at New Salem, Illinois, at the age of 22. He soon earned the community's respect and was elected to the Illinois legislature. Left: Regarded as a nearly unbeatable wrestler, Lincoln throws Jack Armstrong of New Salem's locally notorious Clary Grove Boys.

former Indiana neighbors, many of whom remembered that the young Lincoln had distinguished himself as a talented writer of essays and poems. And in the end, his writings would prove at least as important as his deeds, for they are among the most familiar, as well as the most influential, in all of American letters.

When he left home and struck out on his own at the age of 22, Lincoln settled in the small village of New Salem, Illinois, where he spent six eventful years. Unprepossessing in appearance, he was frequently described as gawky and ill-dressed, but the other residents soon discovered he had many assets. In addition to being intelligent and surprisingly well informed, he was unusually good-natured and friendly. He excelled in popular athletic contests such as running,

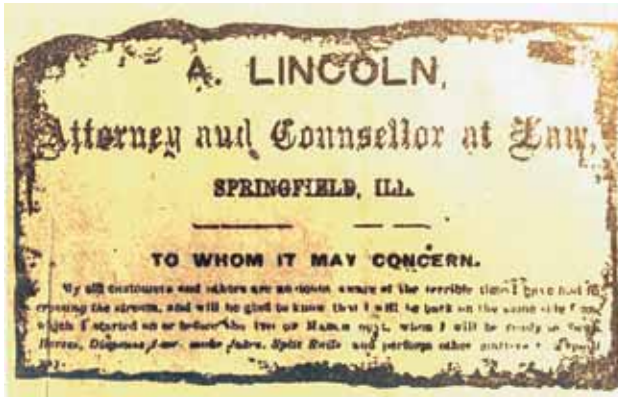
write at a very early age, actively seeking out books to borrow and taking notes on what he read. To his father and most of his peers, this was regarded as little more than sloth, a way of avoiding his farm chores.

But Lincoln was encouraged in his studies by his stepmother, who later told Lincoln's former law partner, William H. Herndon, that while the boy "didn't like physical labor,"

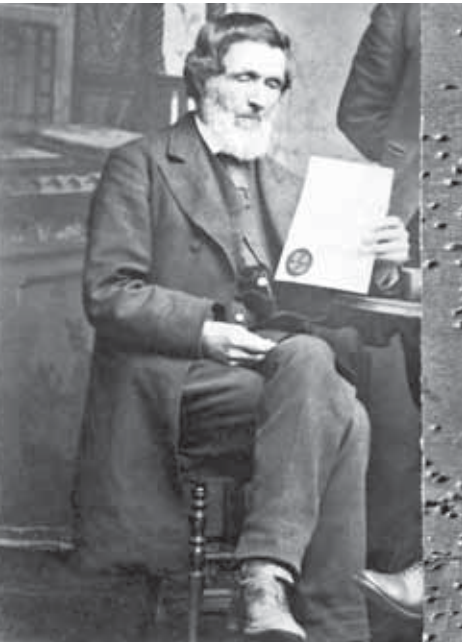
he was not lazy, but was "diligent for Knowledge — wished to Know and if pains and Labor would get it he was sure to get it."

While his youthful reading has always been a prominent feature of the Lincoln legend, it was probably not as important in the long term as his writing. After Lincoln's assassination, Herndon sought out and interviewed the president's

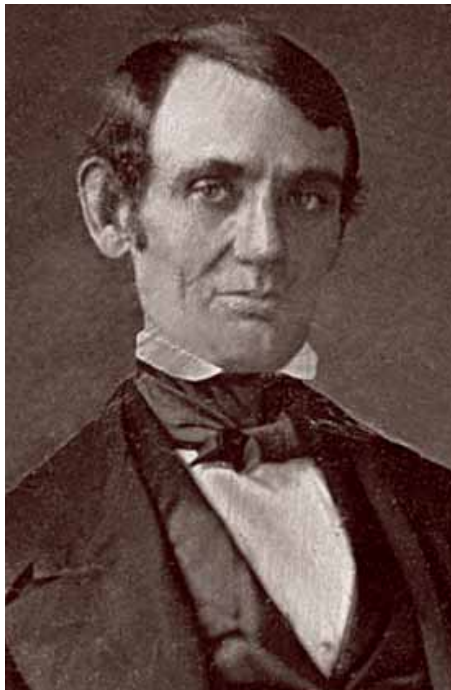




Lincoln established his legal practice with partner William H. Herndon (below, left), in downtown Springfield, Illinois (below), home of the State Capitol (bottom).







The earliest known (circa 1846) photographs of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln.

jumping, and throwing weights; he was unusually strong and a nearly unbeatable wrestler; and though he did not drink, he was convivial and had great ability as a storyteller. He was thus well liked, and when the militia was called out to fight Indians during his first year in New Salem, he was elected captain of the local company. In recalling this honor many years later, he allowed that he had “not since had any success in life which gave him so much satisfaction.”

Supporting himself with a variety of jobs, Lincoln studied assiduously during his New Salem years to make up for his lack of formal education, of which he remained painfully conscious all his life. Borrowing books wherever he could, he studied history and biography, and he displayed an eager appetite for literature, being particularly fond of Shakespeare and of the Scottish poet Robert Burns.

Though raised in a Baptist and church-going family, he resisted making a religious commitment, and under the influence of such 18th-century rationalists as the Comte de Volney and Thomas Paine, Lincoln developed a skeptical view of basic Christian doctrines. If his childhood church-going did not implant religious belief, it did stimulate an early interest that would have lifelong consequences, namely, public speaking. Having entertained his playmates in backwoods Indiana with imitations of sermons and stump speeches, he now joined a New Salem debating society to develop his abilities as a speaker.

### Early Politics

If Lincoln was not caught up in the religious fervor and sectarian disputes that characterized the frontier culture he grew up in, he did take an early interest in politics. As with most things he set his mind to, Lincoln soon proved himself a

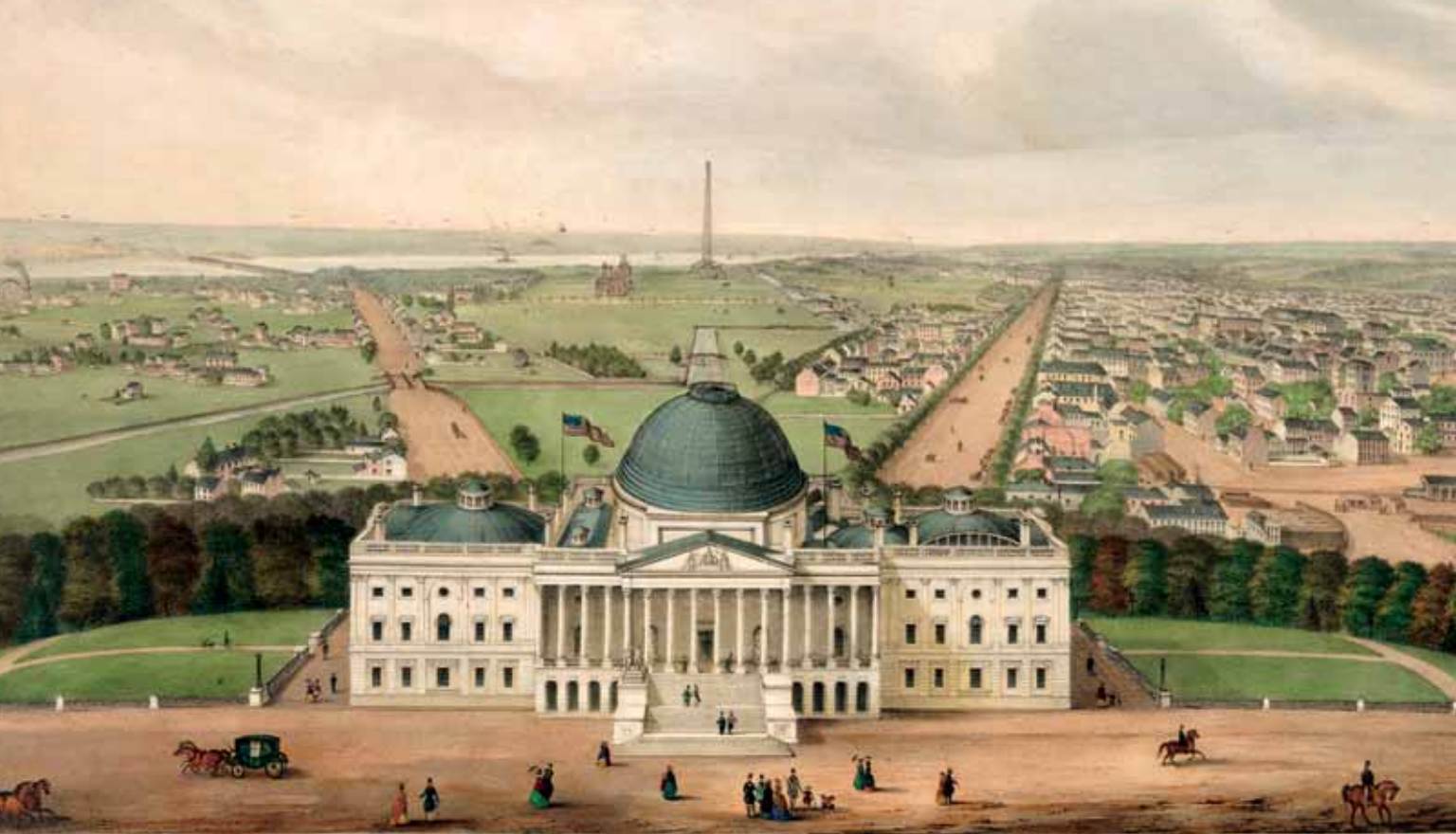
notably effective speaker, a talent directly related to his subsequent political success. Before his first year in New Salem was out, he declared himself a candidate for the state legislature, and this was to be, as he later said, “the only time I ever have been beaten by the people.”

When he ran again at the next election, he won handily, and served four successive terms. In his second term, in spite of being one of the youngest legislators, he was chosen as his Whig Party’s floor leader, an honor that reflected his effectiveness as a speaker, his energy, and his organizational and leadership abilities.

The character of Lincoln’s early politics is quite instructive. Coming of age at a time and place where enthusiastic supporters of the populist Andrew Jackson and his Democratic Party were an overwhelming majority, Lincoln here again proved to be different, for he very early identified himself as “anti-Jackson” in politics. Clearly, he was attracted by the economic development measures favored by Jackson’s Whig opponents, such as government-sponsored banks and internal improvements. If Lincoln’s only aim in politics was to get elected to office, he had chosen the wrong party.

When he moved to New Salem, Lincoln continued to be surrounded by Jacksonian Democrats, though the issues dominating state legislature campaigns tended to be local rather than national. Nonetheless, it says much about the budding politician that Lincoln could get himself elected, and by a good margin, by a strongly Jacksonian electorate.

While campaigning for the legislature, Lincoln was encouraged by John Todd Stuart, a lawyer in the Illinois state capital of Springfield, to study for the bar. Lincoln, writing in



the third person, later described how this was managed: “He borrowed books of Stuart, took them home with him, and went at it in good earnest. He studied with nobody. He still mixed in the surveying to pay board and clothing bills. When the legislature met, the law books were dropped, but were taken up again at the end of the session.”

After receiving his law license two years later, Lincoln joined Stuart as a junior partner, moving to Springfield in 1837. Soon afterward, Stuart was elected to the U.S. Congress and sent to Washington, D.C., leaving Lincoln to manage the firm and learn how to practice law on his own. A few years later, Lincoln joined the firm of Stephen T. Logan, the leader of the Springfield bar. Lincoln’s preparation in the law was limited, Logan later recalled, “but he would get a case and try to know all there was connected with it; and in that way before he left this country, he got to be quite a formidable lawyer.”

### Lincoln in Love

Lincoln’s friends and relatives seem to agree that he was never much interested in girls when growing up, but when he got to New Salem he fell in love with the tavern-keeper’s daughter, Ann Rutledge. Not long after they had become engaged, she was stricken with what was called “brain fever” and died within a few weeks. Already Lincoln’s mother had died quite suddenly when he was nine years old. These deaths may have contributed to the emotional turmoil that Lincoln now suffered. Alarmed friends feared that his excessive bereavement and despondency might end in suicide.

But slowly Lincoln recovered, and slightly more than a year later he was involved in another courtship, this time with Mary Owens, a well-educated and refined woman from a wealthy Kentucky family. We know from surviving letters that, having involved himself to the point of engagement, Lincoln decided that he

Lincoln served one term in the U.S. Congress, taking his seat in December 1847. This depiction of Washington, D.C., in that era shows the Capitol (its dome was constructed later and was completed during Lincoln’s presidency) and the Washington Monument (then under construction; its height is exaggerated here) in the distance. Pennsylvania Avenue, the roadway to the White House, extends to the right from the Capitol.

did not love Mary Owens and hoped to avoid marriage by convincing her that he was unworthy. When she proved noncommittal, he finally felt honor-bound to propose, and much to his astonishment and chagrin, she turned him down. He confessed to a confidante: “Others have been made fools of by the girls; but this can never be with truth said of me. I most emphatically, in this instance, made a fool of myself.”

Less than a year later, he found himself involved with another Kentucky belle, this one even better educated, more refined, and from an even wealthier family — Mary Todd



of Lexington. She had many suitors, but for reasons that are unclear, she set her sights on Lincoln. Again he decided in due course that he did not love Mary Todd and, attracted to someone else, wanted to end their relationship, but again, things were not so simple.

Another episode of melancholy followed. Lincoln wrote to his law partner in Washington: "I am now the most miserable man living. If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on the earth." Lincoln told his roommate, Joshua Speed, that he was not afraid of death, but "that he had done nothing to make any human being remember that he had lived." Lincoln recalled this remark 23 years later in the White House when he told Speed that, having authored the Emancipation Proclamation (freeing the African-American slaves in the rebellious Confederacy), he hoped he had finally done something for which he would be remembered.

Lincoln eventually recovered, and he and Mary Todd got back together. On November 4, 1842, to the surprise of their closest friends and relatives, they announced they were to be married the same day. That they were not a perfectly matched couple was well understood by their associates before the marriage, and their differences in upbringing and expectations soon made themselves felt. Lincoln did not know or care very much about appearances and proprieties, but his new wife did, and she had difficulty controlling her volatile temper when they disagreed. Raised in an aristocratic southern household, where slaves performed the menial tasks, the new Mrs. Lincoln was ill-suited to middle-class housekeeping. Lincoln's political and legal careers required

much travel. His time away from home — sometimes for weeks at a time — only deepened the domestic challenges. But the couple's shared adoration of their children helped to create a lasting bond that grounded their growing family.

### **As a Member of Congress**

At about the time of his marriage, Lincoln declined to run for a fifth term in the state legislature and began angling for election to the U.S. Congress. When he finally succeeded and took his seat in the House of Representatives in December 1847, the Mexican War was coming to a victorious conclusion, and Lincoln lost no time in joining other Whig members in attacking President James K. Polk for unconstitutionally provoking an unjust war for the purpose of acquiring new territory. This earned Lincoln considerable criticism back home, where the war was very popular.

Even as Lincoln contradicted his pro-war Democratic constituents on a matter of principle, he offended some of his fellow Whigs with his practicality. Even as many important Whigs favored their party's dominant figure, Henry Clay, for the presidency in 1848, Lincoln instead supported the war hero General Zachary Taylor. Taylor had no political record or party connection, but Lincoln argued that the party had lost too many elections and needed, more than anything else, to win. Ironically, when Lincoln's congressional term was over, the victorious Taylor ignored his recommendations for government appointments and denied Lincoln the one he sought for himself: head of the General Land Office.

As his brief congressional career ended, Lincoln returned to Illinois, his political ambitions frustrated and his energetic performance on behalf of his party unrewarded.

"Upon his return from Congress," Lincoln would later write in a third-person narrative, "he went to the practice of the law with greater earnestness than ever before."

With this greater attention to his legal profession, Lincoln's skill and reputation as a lawyer rose, and his firm gained a prominent position in the Illinois bar. He was "losing interest in politics," he said of this period, and was interesting himself in other intellectual pursuits, such as the mastery of Euclid's geometry.

But as the slavery issue heated up in the 1850s, Lincoln's long-standing affinity for political controversy unexpectedly revived. "In 1854," he wrote in his narrative, "his profession had almost superseded the thought of politics in his mind, when the repeal of the Missouri compromise aroused him as he had never been before."

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# Path to the White House: Abraham Lincoln From 1854

BY MICHAEL JAY FRIEDMAN



Abraham Lincoln depicted in an 1860 presidential election campaign poster.



**B**y 1854, Abraham Lincoln could be forgiven for believing his political career had reached an end. Lincoln had secured his party's congressional nomination in part by pledging to serve only one term, thus allowing other members of the local Whig Party the chance to serve. Lincoln came to regret this pledge,

*“I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has.”*

advising his law partner, William Herndon, “If it should so happen that nobody else wishes to be elected, I could not refuse the people the right of sending me again.” Lincoln had enjoyed his two years in Washington and had begun to make a name for himself as an opponent of the Mexican War, but there was no great public clamor for his continued service. Disappointed, he returned to Springfield and began rebuilding his legal practice.

But 1854 also saw new fissures in the delicate sectional compromises over slavery. Increasingly the free North and slaveholding South each saw the other's customs and practices as a lethal threat to its own way of life. Lincoln was drawn to this debate, and thus gradually back to public life. Whether Lincoln seized

events or they instead propelled him forward, there can be little doubt over the nation's good fortune: In its time of greatest need, America found its greatest leader.

### **Free Labor**

Abraham Lincoln had always championed “free labor,” the principle that a man — and in Lincoln's day this meant males only — could work how and where he wanted, could accumulate property in his own name, and, most importantly, could rise freely as far as his talents and abilities might take him. Lincoln himself was a model of this self-made man. As he wrote in 1854:

*There is no permanent class of hired laborers amongst us. Twenty-five years ago, I was a hired laborer. The*



The White House, pictured just before Lincoln assumed the presidency.



*hired laborer of yesterday, labors on his own account today; and will hire others to labor for him tomorrow. Advancement — improvement in condition — is the order of things in a society of equals.*

Along with many northerners, Lincoln believed that free labor was both economically and morally superior to the slave-based southern alternative. Free labor, he asserted,

*has the inspiration of hope; pure slavery has no hope. The power of hope upon human exertion and happiness is wonderful. The slave-master himself has a conception of it. ... The slave whom you cannot drive with the lash to break seventy-five pounds of hemp in a day, if you will*

*task him to break a hundred, and promise him pay for all he does over, he will break you a hundred and fifty. You have substituted hope for the rod.*

Lincoln believed that slavery would over time prove economically untenable, but he also understood that, in the short-term, individual wage-earners could not — indeed would not — compete with slave laborers. Along with many other Americans, Lincoln drew two political conclusions: Confined to its existing southern redoubt, slavery would wither away; but if slavery expanded into new territories, it could displace free laborers and gain a new lease on life.

## Compromise Fails

As the young nation grew westward, the terms on which new states would be admitted to the Union, that is, as “slave” or “free” states, thus assumed decisive importance. It first arose during 1820 and 1821, with the application of Missouri for statehood. Thomas Jefferson likened the sectional tension to “a firebell in the night.” It eased only through a grand compromise in which Congress admitted Missouri as a slave state, Maine as a free state, and barred slavery from all Louisiana Purchase territories north of 36° 30’, Missouri’s southern border. With the acquisition of new, formerly Mexican territories, a carefully crafted





Lincoln addresses a Charleston, Illinois, audience during the first Lincoln-Douglas debate.

“Compromise of 1850” mated the admission of a free California with a new Fugitive Slave Law, one that obliged northern courts to enforce the seizure and return of slaves who had escaped northward to freedom.

Meanwhile, Stephen A. Douglas, a Democrat and a United States Senator from Lincoln’s Illinois, offered a new formula to bridge the sectional gap. Under Douglas’s “popular sovereignty” doctrine, western territories would join the Union as free or slave states according to the wishes of their residents. In 1854, the Kansas-

Nebraska Act repealed the Missouri Compromise 36° 30’ line and mandated the organization of the Nebraska and Kansas territories under popular sovereignty rules.

Many northerners met these developments with a combination of anger and fear. It was one thing to expect that slavery would be limited to the South, another entirely to watch as a pro-slavery mob killed an abolitionist publisher in Alton, Illinois — free territory — and destroyed his printing press; to witness pro- and antislavery forces battling openly in what soon became known as Bloody Kansas; to stand aside as slave owners enforced their Fugitive Slave Law rights in the very heart of the North. Not only were northerners forced to confront ever more squarely the immorality of slavery; the free labor beliefs that underlie much of northern life now seemed under direct attack.

Lincoln declared himself “thunderstruck” and “stunned” by the Kansas-Nebraska Act’s passage. With powerful October 1854 addresses at Springfield and Peoria, Illinois, he emerged as a leading opponent of that law and of Douglas: He understood that the “revolutionary fathers” had found it politically necessary to accept slavery in the southern states, but they “hedged and hemmed it in to the narrowest limits of necessity.” Indeed, the Constitution’s authors used every euphemism they could devise to avoid even the word ‘slavery’: “The thing is hid away, ... just as an afflicted man hides away a wen or a cancer, which he dares not cut out at once, lest he bleed to death; with the promise, nevertheless, that the cutting may begin at the end of a given time.”

During the next two-and-a-half years, Lincoln helped establish the new Republican Party in Illinois. With sectional differences deepening, Lincoln’s Whig Party had collapsed, unable to paper over differences between its northern and southern wings. The Republicans, by contrast, were more forthrightly sectional and antislavery. Some northern Democrats, but not Stephen Douglas, joined up with the Republicans. Lincoln’s efforts for his new party earned him valuable political capital for the future, but for now he concentrated on his legal practice.

## A House Divided

In March 1857, the U.S. Supreme Court’s much-criticized *Dred Scott* decision further enflamed sectional tensions. Scott, an African-American slave whose master had taken him to the free Wisconsin territory then back to Missouri, had sued for his freedom, arguing that residence in Wisconsin had made him a free man. The Court ruled otherwise, and its broad (unnecessarily broad, many felt) decision increased northern fears. Congress, a majority of justices held, lacked the constitutional authority to prohibit slavery in the territories. The 36° 30’ line (still in force when the case began) was thus unconstitutional, and slavery was permissible in all the territories, the Kansas-Nebraska Act notwithstanding. Chief Justice Roger B. Taney also held that African Americans were not U.S. citizens, were excluded from the protections of both the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, and possessed “no rights which any white man was bound to respect.” *Dred Scott*, accordingly, could not even sue in federal court.

Much of the North reacted with fury. The *Chicago Tribune* flatly predicted that it would force the free states to accept slavery, and that Chicago, Illinois' largest city, would against its will become a slave market. Lincoln feared that the Court next would bar state prohibitions of slavery. He decided to run against Senator Douglas, who had endorsed the *Dred Scott* decision, in the 1858 election. Lincoln accepted the Republican nomination with his famous "House Divided" address:

*A house divided against itself cannot stand.*

*I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.*

*I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided.*

*It will become all one thing or all the other.*

*Either the opponents of slavery, will ... place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will put it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new — North as well as South.*

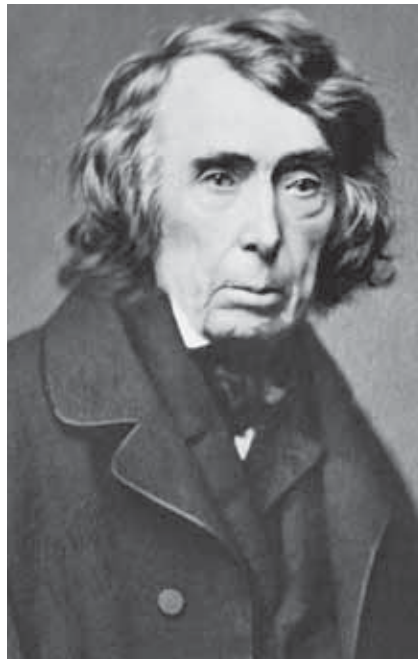
The *New York Times* swiftly pronounced the Lincoln-Douglas contest "the most interesting political battle-ground in the Union."

Lincoln challenged Douglas to a series of seven debates in different parts of Illinois. Together these Lincoln-Douglas debates emerged as an iconic moment in American democracy. Citizens converged in towns large and small, from Freeport to Jonesboro, Galesburg to Alton. They arrived on horseback, by canal boat, or simply walked for miles to witness the two champions address the greatest divide in their nation's

history. The contrast between the candidates was apparent. Douglas was smartly dressed and flowery of speech — the picture of sophistication. Lincoln was gangly, far less polished in appearance and mannerism. But the country lawyer scored real blows, holding Douglas to the contradiction between popular sovereignty and the *Dred Scott* decision, which forbade antislavery settlers from prohibiting slavery in their territories. In the very last debate, Lincoln memorably framed the dispute as a conflict

*on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery as a wrong, and of another class that does not look upon it as a wrong. ... That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles — right and wrong — throughout the world. They are the 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.*

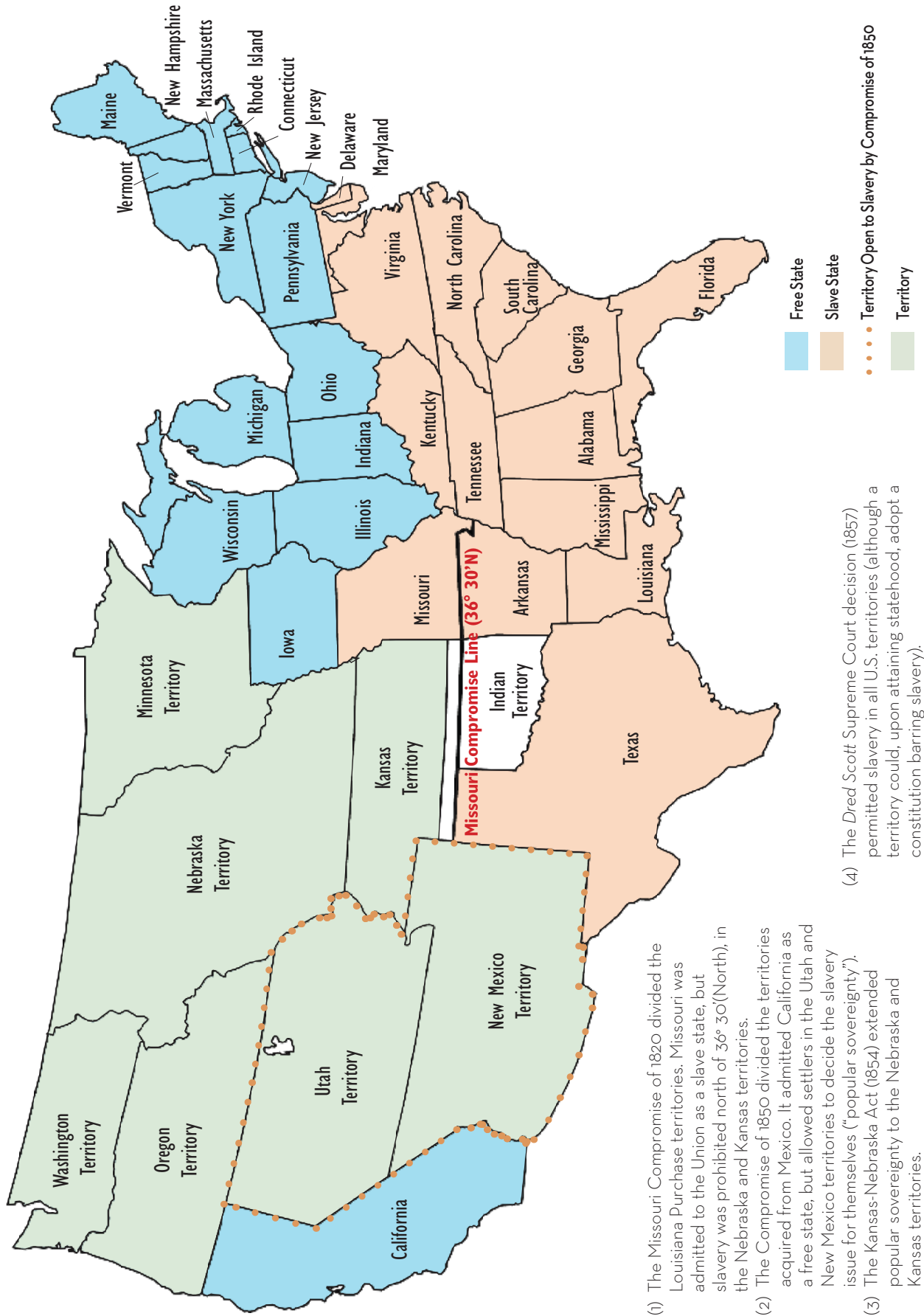
In this era, United States senators were not directly elected but rather chosen by the state legislatures. When that vote was counted, it was Douglass who prevailed, by 54 votes to 46 for Lincoln. But Lincoln's effort against one of the Senate's leading figures had been noticed by many. Nor was Lincoln willing to abandon the field. As he told a friend: "The fight must go on. The cause of civil liberty must not be surrendered at the end of one or even one hundred defeats."



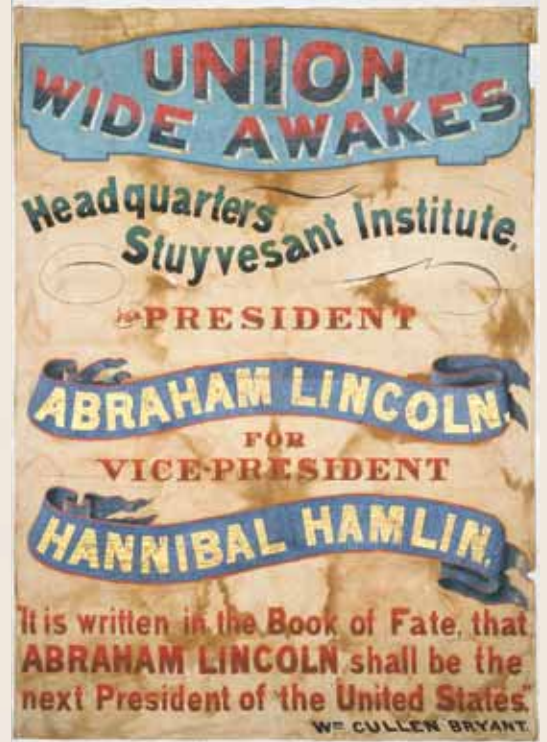
Chief Justice Roger B. Taney (right) ruled that Dred Scott (left) was not a U.S. citizen, and helped launch America toward civil war.



# THE THREAT TO FREE LABOR (1857)



- (1) The Missouri Compromise of 1820 divided the Louisiana Purchase territories. Missouri was admitted to the Union as a slave state, but slavery was prohibited north of 36° 30'(North), in the Nebraska and Kansas territories.
- (2) The Compromise of 1850 divided the territories acquired from Mexico. It admitted California as a free state, but allowed settlers in the Utah and New Mexico territories to decide the slavery issue for themselves ("popular sovereignty").
- (3) The Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854) extended popular sovereignty to the Nebraska and Kansas territories.
- (4) The Dred Scott Supreme Court decision (1857) permitted slavery in all U.S. territories (although a territory could, upon attaining statehood, adopt a constitution barring slavery).

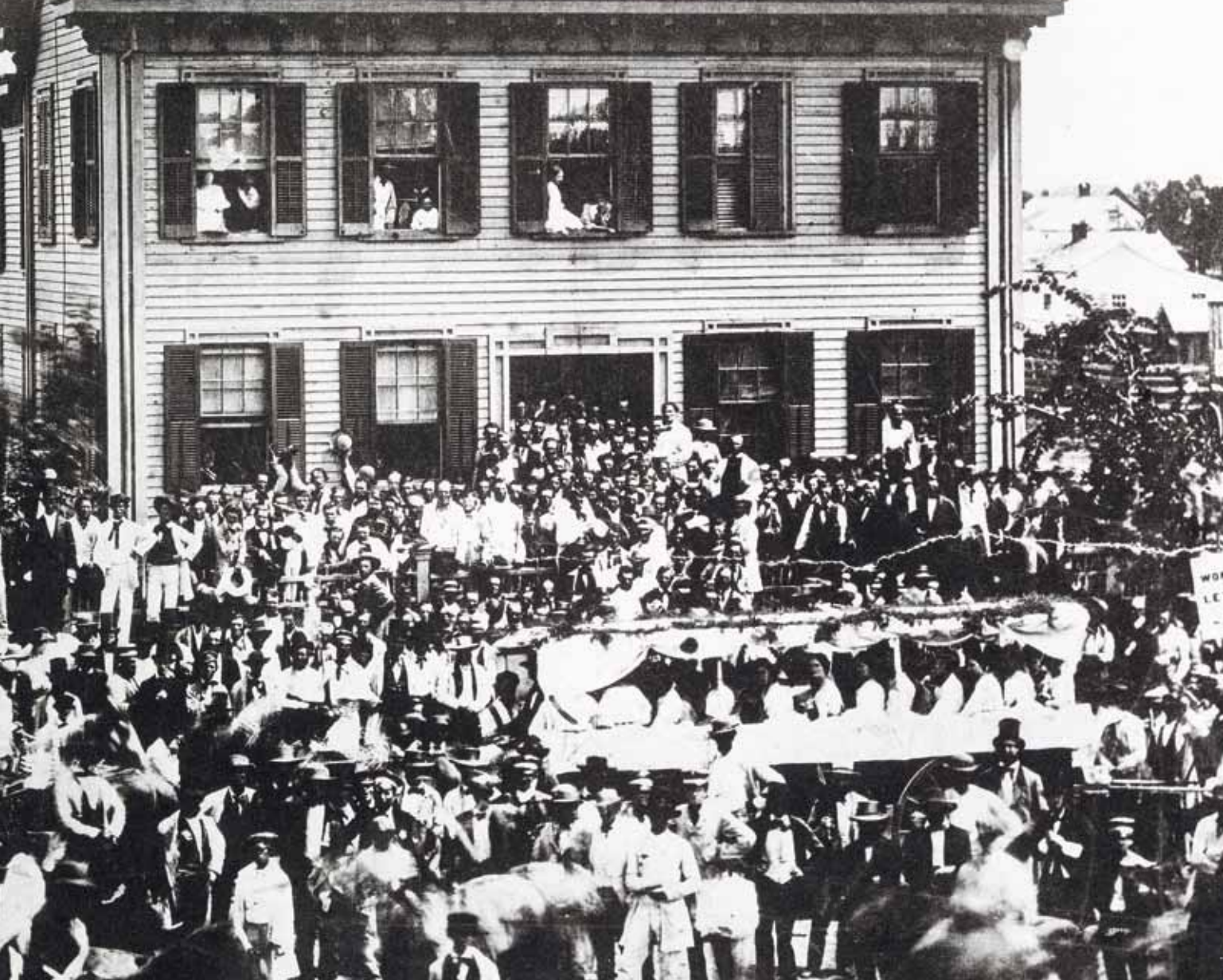


**THE COMING MAN'S PRESIDENTIAL CAREER, à la BLONDIN.**

Morro.—Don't Give up the Ship.

Top left: Three leading candidates for the presidency in 1860: Lincoln; John C. Breckenridge, and Stephen A. Douglas. Top right: An 1860 Republican campaign poster. Above: By 1860, the national press had taken note of Lincoln's growing political stature. Left: A cartoon depicts Lincoln as a tightrope walker crossing Niagara Falls with a black man on his shoulders and using the U.S. Constitution as a balancing pole.





Presidential candidate Lincoln (in white suit to right of front door of his Springfield house) with local supporters in August 1860.

## To the White House

Throughout 1859, Lincoln toured a number of midwestern states, speaking against Douglas's popular sovereignty doctrine and warning against slavery's further spread. Probably he already was thinking about a long-shot run for the presidency: He authorized the compilation and publication of his debates with Douglas and, in December 1859, began to prepare his autobiography.

In February 1860, Lincoln traveled to New York, the nation's leading city, not least to meet and address the civic and financial leaders

who would have a large say in naming the Republican Party's presidential nominee. Many who gathered at the Cooper Union expected to witness a rough, uncultivated midwesterner. At first, they were not disappointed. One recalled Lincoln's

*long, ungainly figure, upon which hung clothes that, while new for the trip, were evidently the work of an unskilled tailor; the large feet; the clumsy hands ... the long, gaunt head capped by a shock of hair that seemed not to have been thoroughly brushed out, made a picture which did not fit in with New York's conception of a finished statesman.*

But then Lincoln spoke. In measured words calibrated to assure the audience he was no radical, Lincoln demonstrated definitively that a majority of the signers of the U.S. Constitution had believed the federal government could indeed prohibit slavery in the territories. The true radicals were instead the southerners who threatened secession if their interpretation was not accepted: "Your purpose, then, plainly stated, is that you will destroy the government, unless you



be allowed to construe and enforce the Constitution as you please, on all points in dispute between you and us. You will rule or ruin in all events.” Lincoln called for northerners to confine slavery to the states where it already existed, and to oppose fervently its extension to the national territories.

The Cooper Union address was extremely well received. Several New York newspapers published the entire text. One reporter proclaimed Lincoln “the greatest man since St. Paul.” Horace Greeley, editor of the influential *New York Tribune*, deemed Lincoln “one of Nature’s orators.” And Lincoln himself,

discussing with a friend a possible presidential candidacy, admitted that “the taste is in my mouth a little.”

Many Republicans assumed that the powerful William Seward of New York would capture their party’s presidential nomination. But Seward was weak in Pennsylvania, Indiana, and Illinois, crucial states where a midwesterner might have more appeal. Were Seward unable to capture the nomination on the first ballot, Republicans might well seek a candidate from one of those states. “My name is new in the field, and I suppose I am not the *first* choice of a very great many,” Lincoln explained. “Our policy, then, is to give no

offence to others — leave them in a mood to come to us, if they shall be compelled to give up their first love.” This proved a sound analysis. Seward fell short on the first ballot, then faded as midwestern states shifted their votes to Lincoln, securing him the nomination on the third ballot.

The Republican candidate possessed real advantages in the 1860 general election. Like the now dissolved Whigs, the Democratic Party was crippled by its own sectional divisions. Its northern and southern wings nominated rival candidates, allowing Lincoln, who won less than 40 percent of the popular vote in a four-way race, to capture a majority of the electoral votes and the presidency.

The South would not accept a Lincoln presidency. As Lincoln later would put it, “the war came.” Only then would the nation truly witness the wisdom, the strength, and, ultimately, the magnanimity of the man it had chosen during its greatest trial.



Chief Justice Roger B. Taney administers the oath of office to the new president, March 4, 1861.

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# A New Look for Lincoln

BY MEGHAN LOFTUS

The billions of U.S. pennies that will be produced in 2009 are getting a makeover. The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission (ALBC) and the U.S. Mint recently unveiled four new designs for the reverse side of the one-cent coin to celebrate Lincoln's 200th birthday.

The new pennies will be released periodically throughout the year. The obverse side, or "heads," will remain the same: Victor David Brenner's profile of Lincoln has been on the front of the penny since the 1909 centennial of Lincoln's birth. The reverse side, or "tails," has been redesigned twice since that time. But in 2009 the design will change four times to represent four periods in Lincoln's life: his early childhood in Kentucky, his young adulthood in Indiana, his career as a lawyer and legislator in Illinois, and his time as president in Washington, D.C.

The U.S. Congress, which is the only body that can authorize changes to coins, passed legislation for the redesign in 2005. Designs for the pennies were submitted by sculptor-engravers at the U.S. Mint and through the Artistic Infusion Program, a group of outside artists under contract to the Mint. The designs were reviewed by the ALBC, the Citizen Coin Advisory Committee, and the U.S. Commission on Fine Arts. Treasury Secretary Henry Paulson reviewed their recommendations and selected the final designs.

Richard Masters' depiction of a log cabin was one of the designs selected by Secretary Paulson for the series. Masters had been a coin enthusiast as a boy and had also collected coins for the Cub Scouts while working for

a merit badge. But he never pictured himself as a coin designer, much less a master designer with the Artistic Infusion Program, which he is today.

Nor as a child did Masters think about the design process, figuring the renderings on the coins just magically appeared. "Someone, somewhere decides what to put on these," he remembers thinking.

Decades later, *he* is that someone. Masters used the historical narrative provided by the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission as a starting point to craft his image illustrating Lincoln's birth and early childhood in Kentucky. "I thought it [the log cabin] would be an image most Americans recognized," says Masters, who is also an associate professor of art at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh.

One of the most difficult parts of the design was the scale. An artist's vision may have to be shrunk to fit within a coin's small diameter. "The challenge here was really to stay focused on the primary element," says Masters.

Still other changes are to come. Congress has mandated that, beginning in 2010, the reverse side of the penny feature a yet-to-be-determined image of Lincoln's "preservation of the United States of America as a single and united country."

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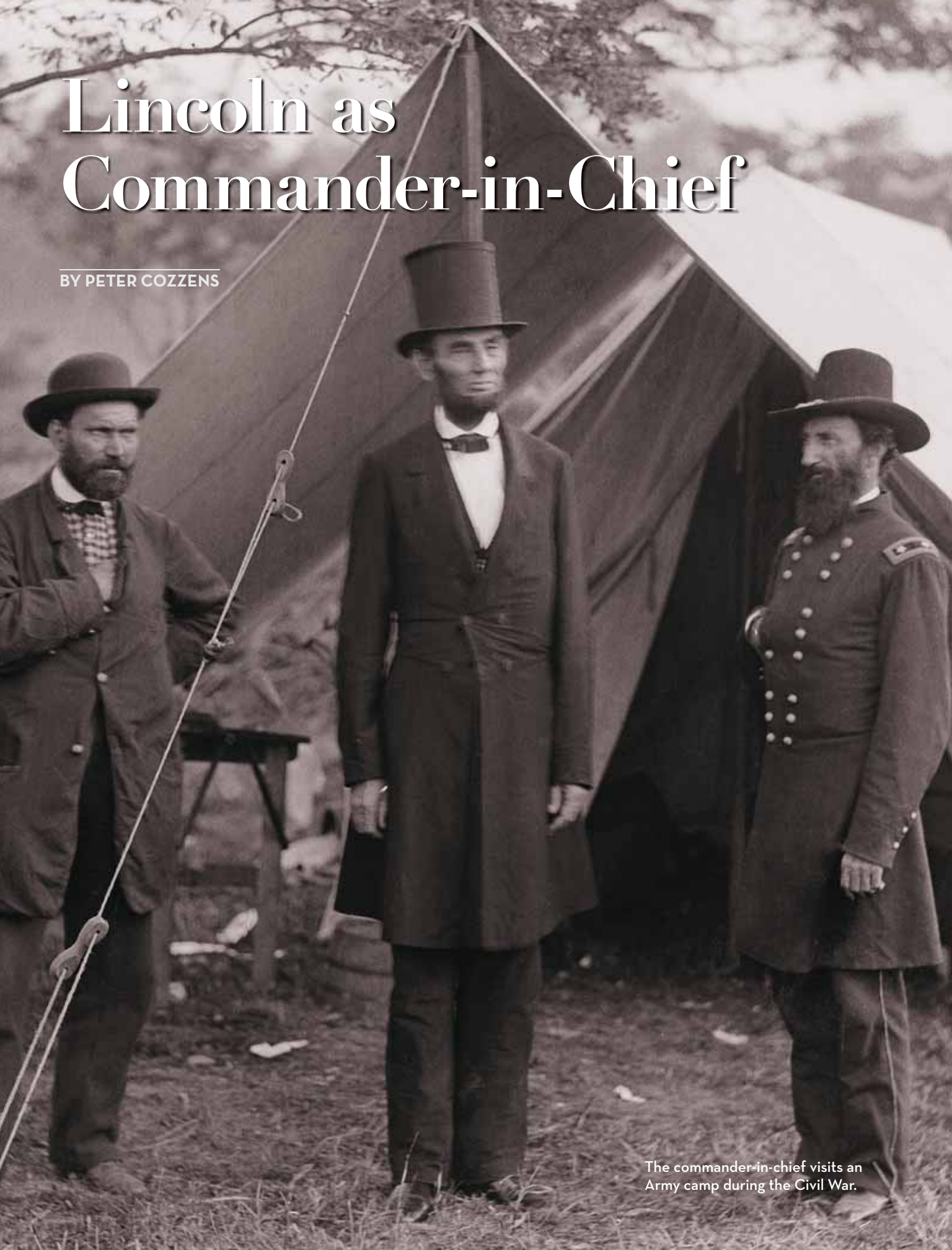
Meghan Loftus is an intern at the Bureau of International Information Programs.



In 2009, the U.S. Mint will introduce four Bicentennial Lincoln pennies. The face of the coin will remain unchanged, but the reverse will feature scenes from Lincoln's life.

# Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief

BY PETER COZZENS



The commander-in-chief visits an Army camp during the Civil War.



One day toward the end of the Civil War, a high-ranking military visitor to the White House told President Lincoln that two of his fellow generals had been captured while visiting lady friends outside their camps. Along with them, several hundred horses and mules had been swept up.

*“America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms, it will be because we destroyed ourselves.”*

Lincoln replied: “I don’t care so much for brigadiers; I can make them. But horses and mules cost money.”

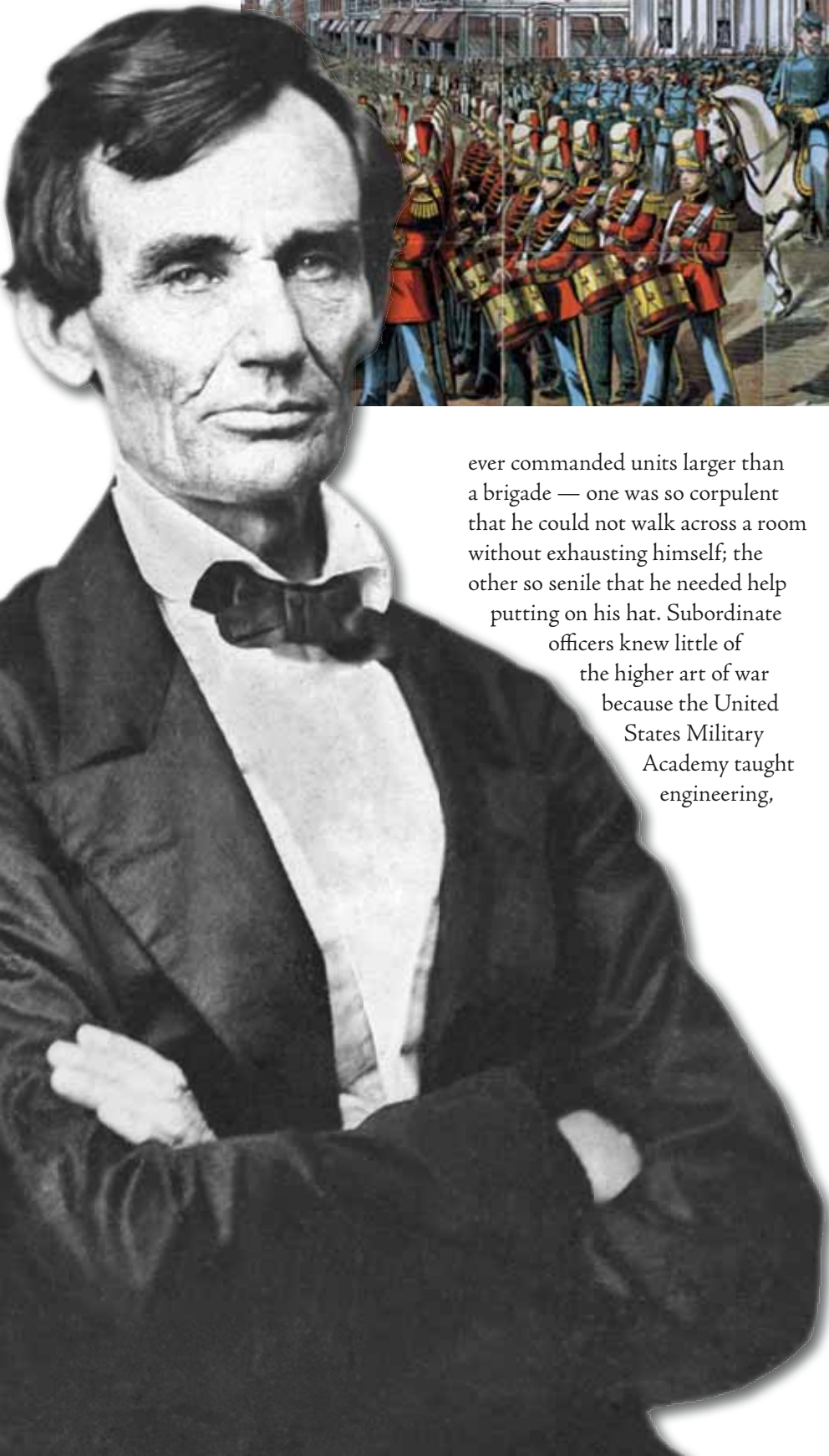
That jest had a bitter undertone, borne of Lincoln’s long frustration with mediocre generals and the burden of having had to run the war effort almost single-handedly for three years.

The American Civil War was the first modern total war — a conflict waged not only between armies, as had long been the tradition in Western warfare, but also between societies, their economic resources, and their very ways of life.

Abraham Lincoln had entered the presidency with no military training or experience except as a militia captain in a minor Indian war three decades earlier. The standing army Lincoln inherited in March 1861 numbered just 16,000 men who were dispersed in small garrisons from the Atlantic Coast to California. Lincoln had no modern military command system on which to rely for advice or to communicate his instructions effectively to field commanders. Not only was there no general staff when war broke out a month later, but only two regular army generals had



Depiction of patriotic northern volunteers joining forces after the Confederate shelling of Fort Sumter (at front center) in South Carolina. Although present here, the Capitol dome was, in reality, not yet completed.



ever commanded units larger than a brigade — one was so corpulent that he could not walk across a room without exhausting himself; the other so senile that he needed help putting on his hat. Subordinate officers knew little of the higher art of war because the United States Military Academy taught engineering,

mathematics, and horsemanship at the expense of strategy.

The Union army's swift wartime expansion did not solve this leadership crisis. In less than a year, the northern army swelled to 600,000 men, and by the war's end it had climbed to a million. Regular army captains became generals overnight. In order to unify the North and rally its large European immigrant population, Lincoln was compelled to appoint volunteer generals from civilian life. Most "earned" their stars because of their political influence or their standing among their ethnic community (Germans and Irish in particular), rather than for any military potential they might possess.

The crisis extended to the nation's political leadership. Lincoln lacked the support of a united cabinet.

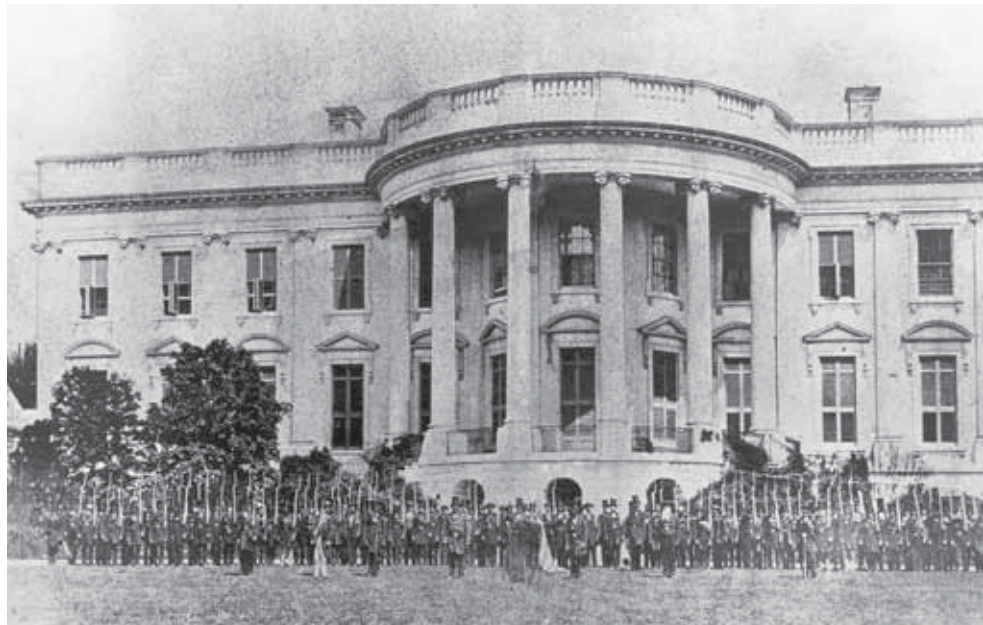
Left: Presidential candidate Lincoln, 1860. He would age noticeably during the course of his wartime presidency. Above: Union soldiers on their way to join the Civil War.



While later presidents possessed the luxury of appointing talented but usually pliant subordinates, then-existing custom and political reality required that Lincoln fill his cabinet with willful politicians of national prominence. Among them were Secretary of State William H. Seward, whom Lincoln had defeated for the Republican presidential nomination in a stunning upset; Secretary of the Treasury Salmon P. Chase, a founder of the Republican Party who fancied himself a future president; and Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, a Democrat who had bested Lincoln in a major court case when both were lawyers. In the early months of the conflict, these men all considered themselves intellectually superior to Lincoln, equally if not more capable of steering the ship of state through the treacherous waters of civil war.

### **A Challenge From the Incompetents**

Despite these liabilities, by the power of his mind and force of character Lincoln became a brilliant strategist, with a better grasp on the nature and objectives of civil war than any of the long line of generals who commanded Union armies, Ulysses S. Grant not excepted. From the start, Lincoln recognized the value of the North's overwhelming naval power, and he employed it relentlessly to choke the Confederacy, closing southern ports to prevent the export of its only commodity of international value — cotton — and to prevent the import of badly needed arms and other war supplies from Europe. He also understood the importance of seizing the Mississippi River to cut the South in half, as well as the need to maintain pressure on the whole strategic line of the Confederacy,



Union troops muster before the White House.

something his generals proved singularly incapable of doing until General Grant assumed the role of general-in-chief in February 1864. To Lincoln's constant frustration, his generals consistently failed fully to press the North's large advantages in manpower and industrial capacity.

Lincoln knew there could be no half measures, that the issues of national union and emancipation could be settled only in such a way that they could never be reopened. This required both the total destruction of the Confederate army and of the capacity of the South to wage war.

As the war dragged on, Lincoln rid the army of scores of incompetent political generals at great risk to his reelection. He asked only for commanders who would fight, and he willingly discarded his strategic judgments when he thought he had found an able general. But all too often he instead encountered inaction, delay, and excuses. He relieved the most popular commander of the first year and a half of the war — Major General George B. McClellan, a man fiercely

idolized by his men — because he suffered from what Lincoln termed “the slows.” He showed similar, and proper, impatience with generals who were too timid to follow up battlefield victories decisively. Unfortunately for the North, every army commander in the war's first three years displayed this shortcoming.

Lincoln also faced an internal challenge to his commander-in-chief authority. Today, of course, the principle of absolute civilian control over the military is universally accepted. It had not been when Lincoln took office. Since the nation's founding it had been acceptable for army commanders to pass judgment on political questions — a brand of insubordination that was comparatively harmless during the war with Mexico, but that could threaten the fabric of the nation in a struggle for national survival as did the Civil War.

When Lincoln relieved McClellan of command, a number of McClellan's subordinate generals in the Army of the Potomac discussed





The Civil War claimed more total American casualties than any other conflict, save World War II, and the casualty rate in the Civil War was far higher. Top row, left to right: General Ulysses S. Grant, standing behind bench, examines a map held by General George G. Meade; Union arms depot, Yorktown, Virginia; Union forces broke the rail line supplying the forces of Confederate General John Hood; the Confederate bombardment of Fort Sumter, in Charleston, South Carolina, provided the war's first shots. Bottom row, left to right: The Civil War saw trench warfare decades before it became common during the First World War. Pictured here, a Union trench near Petersburg, Virginia; four years after the war began at Fort Sumter, parts of Charleston lie in ruins.











Above: General George B. McClellan, whom Lincoln relieved of his command of Union forces, ran unsuccessfully against Lincoln for the presidency in 1864. Left: Lincoln's fighting general, Ulysses S. Grant, pictured amid scenes from his career, including the Confederate surrender, depicted bottom center.

### A Shift in Sentiment

By the time of the 1864 presidential campaign, the common soldiers also had come to recognize the greatness of Lincoln's strategic leadership. Their votes went overwhelmingly to Lincoln, ensuring his victory over George B. McClellan. After being sacked by Lincoln, the former general had emerged as the president's Democratic opponent and, as a proponent of sectional reconciliation, the most prominent challenger to his political vision.

The significance of this shift in military sentiment from McClellan to Lincoln cannot be overstated. Lincoln had at last found his fighting general, Ulysses S. Grant, a rough-hewn commander who shared his chief's determination to

abandoning the battle against the Confederacy and instead marching on Washington to unseat the president. As late as April 1863, Major General Joseph Hooker, the commander of that critical army, advocated replacing the presidency with a military dictatorship. Lincoln responded in a measured but firm manner. After he was removed from command for losing the battle of Chancellorsville against an enemy whom he had outnumbered more

than two to one, Hooker recognized how restrained had been the president's reaction to Hooker's political blustering and how prudent had been Lincoln's counsel in military matters. Tearfully he told fellow generals that Lincoln had treated him as a caring father would an errant son.





Confederate General Robert E. Lee (right) surrenders to General Ulysses S. Grant on April 9, 1865, at Appomattox Court House in Virginia, ending the Civil War.

press the North's real advantages in manpower and resources. The Army of the Potomac had suffered nearly 55,000 casualties during the first month and a half of Grant's tenure as general-in-chief. Decisive victories in the Shenandoah Valley and the capture of Atlanta, Georgia, fruits of Lincoln's vision of relentless pressure on the entire military front, offered hope for ultimate victory.

But the South showed no signs of surrendering. Grant's superior generalship and Lincoln's policy of simultaneous offensives were being sorely tested in a bitter and stalemated siege of General Robert E. Lee's army at Petersburg, Virginia. In the Western Theater (as the area between the Appalachian Mountains and the Mississippi River was called), a weakened but still formidable Confederate army roamed, and west of the Mississippi, a large and virtually untested enemy force held Louisiana and Texas. Lincoln's 1864 electoral triumph thus represented a national consensus to wage the war to its finish.

Politically secure as a second-term president, Lincoln persisted with the same firmness of purpose he had shown during an unpopular first term. His appointment of the dependable Grant as general-in-chief had eased much of the daily pressure on Lincoln, who found he could safely yield to Grant the day-to-day management of the war. But even Grant faced hard questions from Lincoln when the president doubted the wisdom of his decisions.

### Road to Reunion

In the first week of April 1865, final victory was at last in sight. After smashing much of what remained of Lee's once seemingly unbeatable Army of Northern Virginia, Major General Philip H. Sheridan telegraphed Grant: "If the thing be pressed I think Lee will surrender."

Grant passed Sheridan's dispatch to Lincoln. The president told Grant: "Let the *thing* be pressed." It was Lincoln's last important order, and like most of his orders a good one.

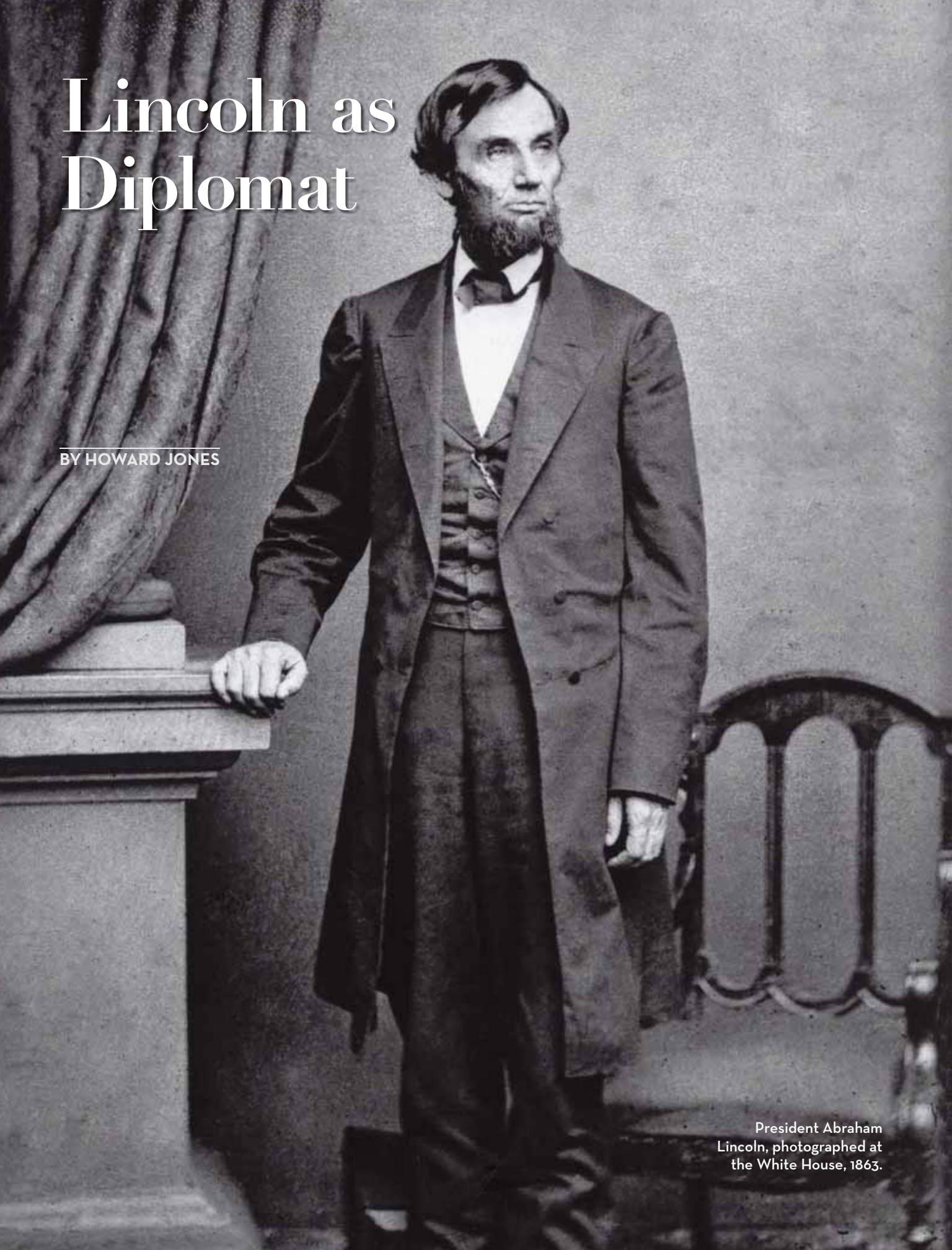
Three days after writing it, Lincoln was dead, the victim of an assassin's bullet. The United States had lost its greatest war president and a great natural strategist. But more than any other factor, his strategic vision and firmness of purpose had won the Civil War and started the nation on the road to reunion.

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**Peter Cozzens** is a foreign service officer and a leading military historian. He is the award-winning author of 16 books on the U.S. Civil War and the Indian Wars of the American West.

# Lincoln as Diplomat

BY HOWARD JONES



President Abraham  
Lincoln, photographed at  
the White House, 1863.



**P**resident Abraham Lincoln as diplomatist? Hardly a subject at the top of the list in examining a presidency that spanned the U.S. Civil War. His search for military leaders, his quest for victory on the battlefield, his personal trials, his difficulties with advisers who vied for influence with each other and even with

*“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man’s character, give him power.”*

the president himself — these matters draw the most interest when one studies the nation at war with itself from 1861 to 1865.

Yet when Lincoln declared that he waged the war to preserve the Union, he necessarily also accepted challenges from beyond the nation’s borders. Had the rebellious South won diplomatic recognition from England and other European nations, especially during the war’s crucial first 18 months, the Confederate States of America might have won its independence. Lincoln’s leadership on this diplomatic front proved as important as his command of the armed forces in securing the Union’s ultimate victory.

Lincoln was the very prototype of a diplomatist. Although he admitted to knowing little or nothing about foreign affairs, he possessed the characteristics common to the best statesmen: humility, integrity, wisdom combined with common sense, a calm demeanor in the hardest times, and a willingness to learn. Furthermore, he had the courage to appoint advisers of stature: His secretary of state, William H. Seward, earlier had been one of Lincoln’s most bitter political rivals, but more importantly, Seward was knowledgeable and experienced in foreign affairs. Their relationship did not start out well. Seward fancied himself a prime minister or head



A White House diplomatic reception, 1865.



The U.S. House of Representatives, 1861, during the secession crisis.

of government and Lincoln a mere symbolic leader, if not a buffoon. But when Seward rashly proposed to unite North and South by instigating a war with foreign powers, Lincoln quietly killed the idea, established his primacy, and soon won his secretary's respect and admiration.

### A Two-Front War Averted

The outbreak of war in April 1861 presented the new president with his first foreign affairs crisis. From the perspective of the Union (the North), the conflict was not a war between nations but rather an internal rebellion to be suppressed without interference from other nations. But to Britain and France, each of which hoped to continue trading with the Confederacy (the South), Lincoln's decision to blockade southern ports allowed them under international law to acknowledge that a state of

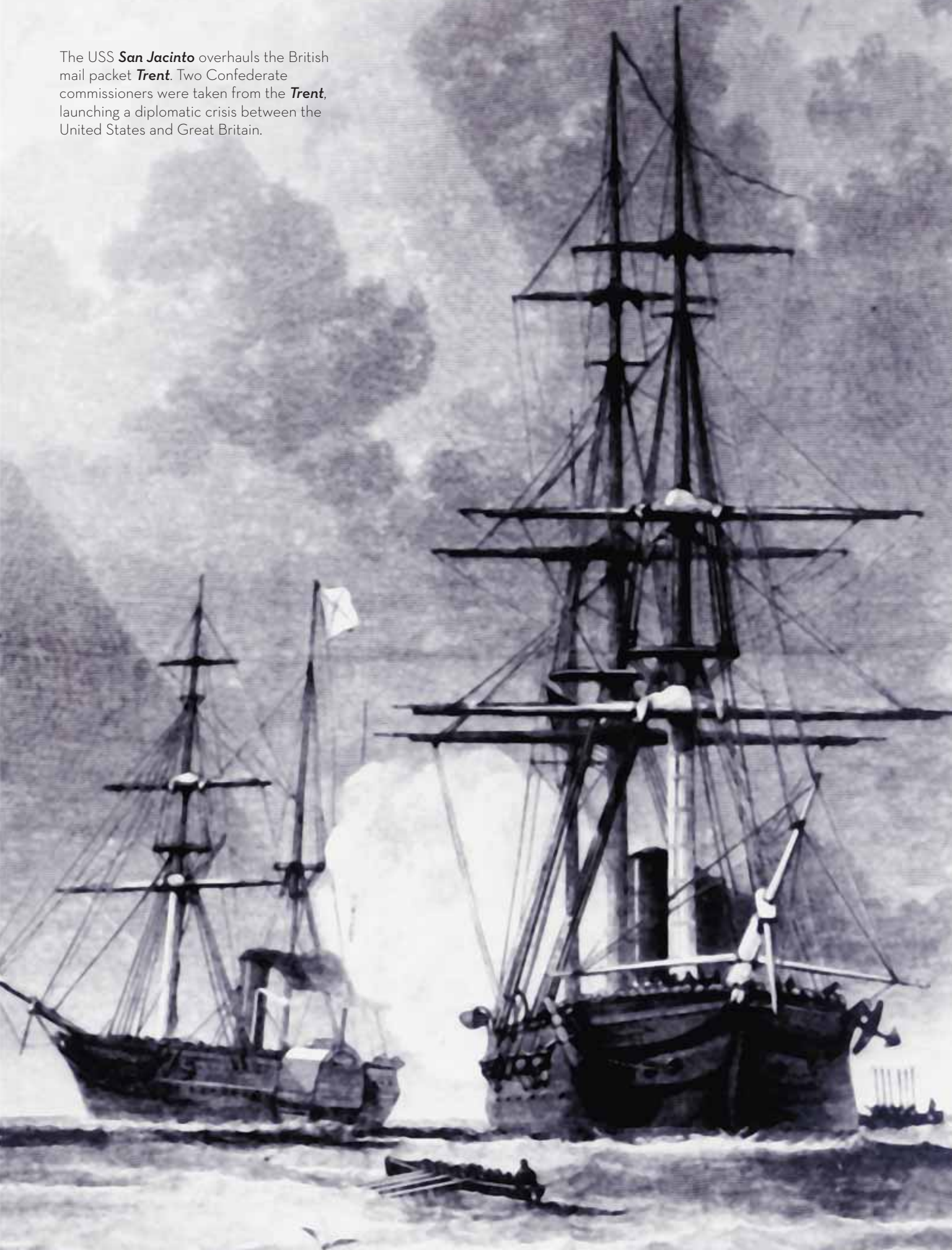
war existed, proclaim their neutrality, and recognize the Confederacy as a belligerent. Together these moves bestowed a legitimacy on the South that was one step short of outright recognition as a nation.

Lincoln's diplomacy thus focused on preventing outside powers from recognizing southern independence. He continued to oppose any foreign involvement, whether by a nation's making its good offices available to promote peace talks or by proposing a mediation, an arbitration, or an armistice. Yet Lincoln also toned down (but never renounced) Seward's warnings that the United States would go to war with any nation that interfered. The president also moderated the secretary's dispatches and relied on his mild-mannered yet stern minister to England, Charles Francis Adams, to resolve other problems.

The recognition issue flared up repeatedly during the course of the Civil War. The Union's humiliation at the battle of Bull Run in July 1861 convinced some Europeans that Confederate independence was a *fait accompli*. How could the Union force reconciliation onto 11 states and millions of people? The following November, a U.S. naval vessel seized a British mail ship, the *Trent*, and illegally removed two southern commissioners, James Mason and John Slidell, who had run the Union blockade and were en route to England. Lincoln wisely freed the captives and authorized a loosely worded admission of error that salvaged American face and narrowly averted a two-front war pitting the United States against Great Britain as well as the South.



The USS *San Jacinto* overhauls the British mail packet *Trent*. Two Confederate commissioners were taken from the *Trent*, launching a diplomatic crisis between the United States and Great Britain.







Above: Confederate commissioners James Mason and John Slidell being removed from the *Trent*. President Lincoln ordered their release to avoid further damaging relations with Britain and risking the loss of British support for the Confederacy. Left: John Bull, at right in this British cartoon, threatens the United States: "You do what's right, my son, or I'll blow you out of the water."

## An Act of Military Necessity

One tool Lincoln employed in his quest to forestall diplomatic recognition of the Confederacy was antislavery sentiment among Europeans. Soon after the Union's razor-thin victory at Antietam in the fall of 1862, Lincoln exercised his military powers as commander-in-chief to declare that as of January 1, 1863, all slaves in states still in rebellion were free. He characterized this landmark Emancipation Proclamation as an act of "military necessity," intended to encourage slaves to abandon the plantations and band with the advancing Union armies.

As always, Lincoln had carefully balanced competing objectives while advancing toward a greater purpose. The Emancipation Proclamation remained silent on slaves in border states such as Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland, and Delaware that had



not joined the Confederacy (as well as parts of Tennessee already under Union occupation). Lincoln thus retained the support of those crucial states, and he avoided alienating conservative northerners and possible Union loyalists in the South. Even so, Lincoln knew that his Emancipation Proclamation was morally just. He also recognized that it would lift Union morale by elevating the war

into a humanitarian crusade. And, of course, he counted on emancipation preventing the British and French, both opposed to slavery, from entering the war on the South's side.

The president's diplomatic instincts proved sound. A number of British and French leaders had calculated that the division of the United States into two rival nations would best serve their own nations' objectives. The Emancipation Proclamation was a potent tool in overcoming this sentiment. At first, some British statesmen considered the document a hypocritical Union





At war's end: Crowds in Richmond, Virginia, the former capital of the Confederacy, welcome President Lincoln.

effort to snatch victory from certain defeat by inciting slave rebellions. If the war concerned slavery, why had Lincoln declared its purpose was to preserve the Union?

Indeed, in the following November, the British cabinet under Prime Minister Lord Palmerston considered an interventionist proposal to recognize the Confederacy and thus force the Union to discuss peace. The cabinet overwhelmingly voted against this, not least because it did not wish Britain to be seen on the side of slaveholders against Lincoln and emancipation. Together with the Russians, Britain then rejected the proposal by French Emperor Napoleon III for an armistice demand backed by multilateral force should either American belligerent reject the demand (in reality this was a threat aimed at the North, since an armistice effectively would

ratify southern independence). By the close of 1862, the Palmerston ministry came to realize that whatever blend of *realpolitik* and moral instinct drove Lincoln's proclamation, however less than 100 percent pure his motives, the results would be desirable and just.

### **A New Birth of Freedom**

And so it was. When northern victory finally came in April 1865, it was clear that the president had saved the Union, but not the Union of 1861. As the postwar amendments to the U.S. Constitution assured that Americans would never again permit slavery in their land, the true breadth of Lincoln's vision became clear. Lincoln had midwived a new birth of freedom based on the natural rights underlying the Declaration of Independence. He had destroyed slavery and the Old South, and he

emerged with a better Union. And Lincoln's role as skillful diplomatist was an indispensable ingredient in forestalling European intervention and prevailing in one of the often-forgotten yet crucially decisive battles of the Civil War.

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Howard Jones is University Research Professor at the University of Alabama. He is the author of *Union in Peril: The Crisis Over British Intervention in the Civil War*.



# Lincoln as Emancipator

BY MICHAEL JAY FRIEDMAN



ABRAHAM LINCOLN  
AND HIS

## Emancipation Proclamation

Whereas

On the Twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a Proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing among other things the following, to-wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State, or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward and forever free, and the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof respectively shall then be in rebellion against the United States, and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be in good faith represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State and the people thereof are not then in rebellion against the United States."

Now, therefore, I, ABRAHAM LINCOLN, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do, publicly proclaim for the full period of one hundred days from the day the first above mentioned order, and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to-wit:

ARKANSAS, TEXAS, LOUISIANA (except the parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James, Assumption, Terre Bonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the city of New Orleans), MISSISSIPPI, ALABAMA, FLORIDA, GEORGIA, SOUTH CAROLINA, NORTH CAROLINA and VIRGINIA (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkeley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth), and which excepted parts are, for the present, left precisely as if this Proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States and parts of States are and henceforward shall be free; and that the executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons. And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free, to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defence, and I recommend to them that in all cases, when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In testimony whereof, I have hereunto set my name, and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-Seventh.

IS

WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.

By the President:

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

NOTE.—The rest of the slaves were afterwards freed by Legislation and Constitutional Amendments.



**F**or some Americans, Abraham Lincoln remains the Great Emancipator, the man who freed the African-American slaves. For others, Lincoln was an opportunist who lagged behind the abolitionist movement, an advocate of black Americans' voluntary emigration, and even a white supremacist.

*“Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power.”*

Which is it? A fair answer requires that we evaluate Lincoln in the context of his times and of his role in public life.

“I have always hated slavery as much as any abolitionist,” Lincoln said in 1858. But when political opponent Stephen A. Douglas charged that Lincoln favored racial equality, he responded that “I am not, nor have ever been, in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality of the white and black races.” Lincoln also attacked “that counterfeit logic which presumes that, because I do not want a Negro woman for a slave, I must necessarily want her for a

wife.” And shortly before signing the Emancipation Proclamation freeing slaves in the Confederate South, President Lincoln invited a visiting free black delegation to consider emigrating to Haiti or Central America, saying, “It is better for us both ... to be separated.”

Many of Lincoln's actions are best understood by recalling that his chosen career was not moral prophet but instead, as the leading historian James M. McPherson has written,

*a politician, a practitioner of the art of the possible, a pragmatist who subscribed to [abolitionist] principles but recognized that they could only be achieved in gradual, step-by-step*



President Lincoln in the War Department Telegraph Office, drafting the Emancipation Proclamation.

*fashion through compromise and negotiation, in pace with progressive changes in public opinion and political realities.*

However much Lincoln bowed to public opinion, he always held fast to a core belief that, under the Declaration of Independence, all men possessed equally the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Lincoln also remained, for a man of the early- and mid-19th century, free of social prejudice. Frederick Douglass, the great African-American thinker, publisher, and abolitionist, met with Lincoln at the White House in 1864 and reported that “in his company I was never in any way reminded of my humble origin, or of my unpopular color.” The president had received Douglass “just as you have seen one gentleman receive another.” Lincoln, Douglass concluded, was “one of the very few Americans who could entertain a Negro and converse with him without in anywise reminding him of the unpopularity of his color.”

## The Real Issue Defined

Before attaining the presidency, Abraham Lincoln’s signature political issue was a determined opposition to the extension of slavery into the western territories. The issue was for Lincoln a moral one, and in his final 1858 Senate campaign debate with Stephen A. Douglas, he made that point with stunning clarity, defining “the real issue” as a conflict

*on the part of one class that looks upon the institution of slavery as a wrong, and of another class that does not look upon it as a wrong. ... It is the eternal struggle between these two principles — right and wrong — throughout the world. They are the 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.*

But Lincoln’s ultimate political loyalty was to the Union. As the Civil War raged, Lincoln wrote Horace Greeley, influential editor of the *New York Tribune*: “My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union,

and is not either to save or destroy slavery. [If] I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that.” To that end, Lincoln allowed the slaveholding border states that sided with the Union to retain their slaves until the war’s end. When a Union general took it upon himself to declare slavery abolished in parts of the South, the president swiftly rescinded the order, reserving to himself the authority for such an act.

The problem, from the perspective of Abraham Lincoln the wartime political leader, was that northern public opinion still was not ready for emancipation. But as the historian James Oakes has documented, Lincoln’s rhetoric during the war’s early years prepared the nation for that step. Even as he rescinded General David Hunter’s May 1862 liberation order, Lincoln carefully included a paragraph asserting his authority to issue a similar order. In June, he began quietly to draft that order.

In July, with Union armies stalled, the president quietly informed leading cabinet members that he now viewed emancipation as a military necessity. This was arguably quite true, and it also was politically shrewd. Enslaved blacks now comprised a majority of the Confederacy’s labor force. Drawing them to the Union cause would simultaneously strengthen the North’s war effort and weaken that of its Confederate opponent. Even as a growing number of northern whites came to support abolition, many who opposed it and fought only to preserve the Union could see how freeing the slaves might prove decisive on the battlefield.



African-American troops, fighting for the Union, liberate the slaves on a North Carolina plantation.



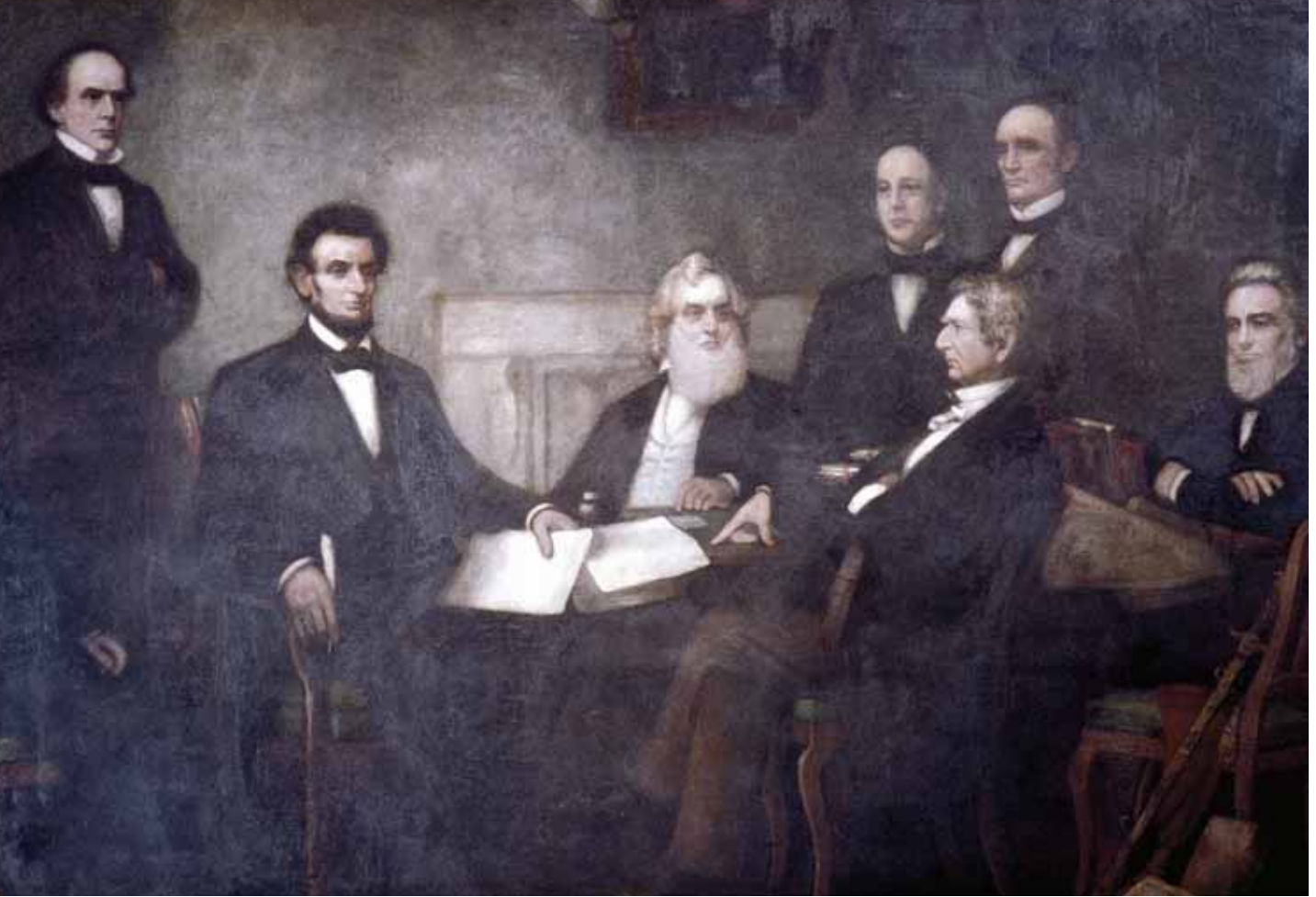


Slaves reading the Emancipation Proclamation.



Slaves gathered on a Baton Rouge, Louisiana plantation (left) and at work in the cotton fields (above).





Above: The first reading of the Emancipation Proclamation to Lincoln's cabinet. Left: With the Proclamation, the Union Army recruited black soldiers, such as the 2nd United States Colored Artillery.



### A Promise Kept

On September 22, 1862, Lincoln issued what became known as the Preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. It announced his intent on January 1, 1863, to issue another order that “all persons

held as slaves within any state or designated part of a state, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free.”

With the new year, Lincoln kept his promise. The Emancipation

Proclamation declared that all slaves within the Confederacy “are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.” It also announced the Union’s intent to recruit and field black soldiers.



The future African-American leader Booker T. Washington was about seven years old when the Emancipation Proclamation was read on his plantation. As he recalled in his 1901 memoir *Up From Slavery*:

*As the great day grew nearer, there was more singing in the slave quarters than usual. It was bolder, had more ring, and lasted later*

*into the night. Most of the verses of the plantation songs had some reference to freedom. ... Some man who seemed to be a stranger (a U.S. officer, I presume) made a little speech and then read a rather long paper — the Emancipation Proclamation, I think. After the reading we were told that we were all free, and could go when and where we pleased. My mother, who was standing by my side, leaned over and*

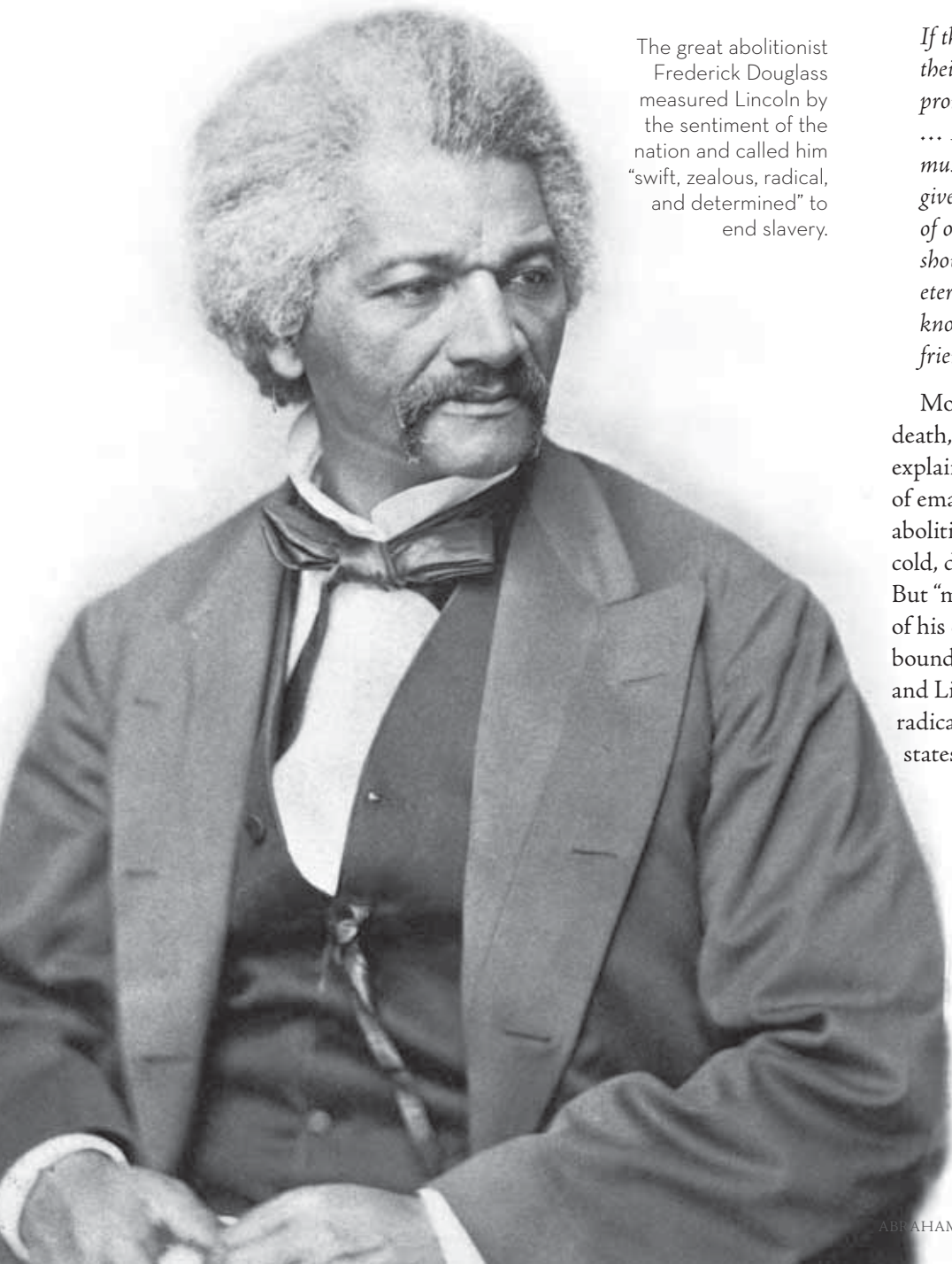
*kissed her children, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks. She explained to us what it all meant, that this was the day for which she had been so long praying, but fearing that she would never live to see.*

On the political front, Lincoln continued to defend emancipation on military grounds. “No human power can subdue this rebellion without using the Emancipation lever as I have done,” he wrote.

*If they [African Americans] stake their lives for us they must be prompted by the strongest motive. ... And the promise being made, must be kept. ... Why should they give their lives for us with full notice of our purpose to betray them? ... I should be damned in time and in eternity for so doing. The world shall know that I will keep my faith to friends and enemies, come what will.*

The great abolitionist Frederick Douglass measured Lincoln by the sentiment of the nation and called him “swift, zealous, radical, and determined” to end slavery.

More than a decade after Lincoln’s death, Frederick Douglass tried to explain Lincoln’s relation to the cause of emancipation. Compared to the abolitionists, “Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent,” he wrote. But “measure him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult,” and Lincoln “was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.” Perhaps no statesman could accomplish more.



# The Words That Moved a Nation

BY RONALD G. WHITE JR.



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This advertisement for a collection of Lincoln's speeches illustrates the how the president's rise from humble roots resonated deeply with many Americans.



**F**rom all around the world, people come to see the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. In this sacred space, visitors stand in awe as they read the eloquent words of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and his second inaugural address.

*“When I am getting ready to reason with a man, I spend one-third of my time thinking about myself and what I am going to say and two-thirds about him and what he is going to say.”*

Fascinated by the sound of words, Lincoln wrote for the ear. He whispered or spoke a word out loud before putting his pencil to paper. Lincoln's pattern then was to speak or read his addresses slowly.

Let us examine three speeches Lincoln offered as president of the United States between 1861 and 1865. I encourage you to speak Lincoln's words aloud, an exercise that will help you enter more fully into the meaning of the words that moved a nation.

### **First Inaugural Address (1861)**

March 4, 1861, dawned windy and cool. A crowd of more than

25,000 arrived early at the U.S. Capitol, hoping for places from which they could hear Abraham Lincoln's inaugural address. No president had ever been inaugurated in such turbulent times. Lincoln's election had raised the all too real possibility of southern secession from the Union. Rumors of threats to Lincoln's life were racing through the capital city.

In his inaugural address Lincoln sought to balance conciliation with strength. After speaking for nearly 30 minutes, the president reached his concluding paragraph. Lincoln's early drafts ended with a question: “Shall it be peace or a sword?” Secretary of State William Seward urged



Lincoln's first inaugural, March 1861.



The U.S. Capitol when Abraham Lincoln assumed the presidency.

Lincoln instead to conclude with “some words of affection — some of calm and cheerful confidence.” A comparison illustrates how Lincoln transformed Seward’s words into his own remarkable prose poetry.

♦ **Seward:** *I close.*

**Lincoln:** *I am loath to close.*

♦ **Seward:** *We are not, we must not be, aliens or enemies, but fellow countrymen and brethren.*

**Lincoln:** *We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies.*

♦ **Seward:** *Although passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly, they must not, I am sure they will not, be broken.*

**Lincoln:** *Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection.*

♦ **Seward:** *The mystic chords which, proceeding from so many battlefields and so many patriot graves, pass through all the hearts and all the hearths in this broad continent of ours, will yet again harmonize in their ancient music when breathed upon by the guardian angel of the nation.*

**Lincoln:** *The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearthstone, all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.*

Lincoln pared away extraneous words. He brought together words or syllables with related sounds. He employed alliteration, placing together the same consonant and sound five times in the final two sentences, encouraging the listener to link those words:



break  
bonds  
battlefield  
broad  
better

Lincoln used powerful images to remind the nation of its past and announce his political vision for the future.

### Gettysburg Address (1863)

On July 1-3, 1863, Union and Confederate forces fought a great battle in the small Pennsylvania village of Gettysburg. After three days, nearly 50,000 dead, wounded, and missing lay among the peach orchards and farm pastures.

On November 19, nearly 15,000 people gathered at Gettysburg to dedicate the nation's first national military cemetery. Edward Everett, former president of Harvard University, was invited to be the featured speaker for the event. President Lincoln, at the last moment, was asked to offer "a few appropriate words." After Everett had spoken for two hours and seven minutes, President Lincoln would address the ceremony for two-and-a-half minutes, a mere 272 words.

*Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, upon this continent, a new nation: conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.*

"Four score and seven" was not a simple way to say eighty-seven. Lincoln asked his audience to calculate backwards to discover that the United States began not with the 1787 Constitution that established its federal government, but instead in 1776, with the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a proclamation of the universal truths



President Lincoln arrives at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. His Gettysburg Address consecrated the cemetery at the site where some 8,000 Americans perished in three days of battle.

to which its founders subscribed. Lincoln also chose his words with confidence that biblically literate Americans would link his "four score" passage to Psalm 90, in which a dying man looks back over his life and hopes that the short time spent in this world has been meaningful:

*The days of our years are threescore years and ten;  
And if by reason of strength they be fourscore years.*

Lincoln built his Gettysburg Address on a structure of past, present, and future time. He started in the past by placing the dedication of the battlefield within the larger story of American history. In speaking of "our fathers," Lincoln invoked a heritage common to both North and South, that of the nation's Founding Fathers.

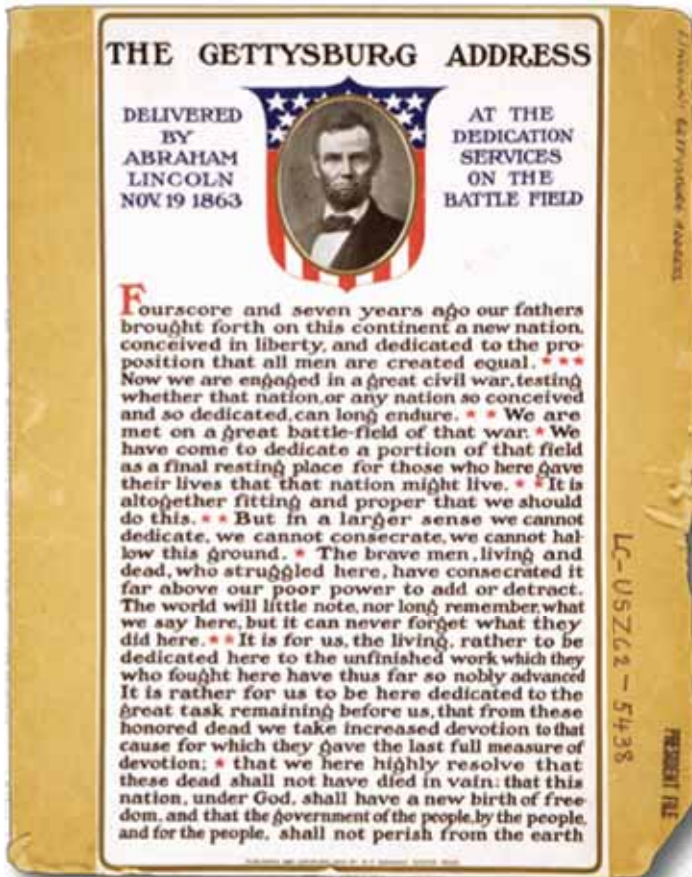
Lincoln's first sentence concluded with another reference to the Declaration of Independence: the truth that "all men are created equal." By affirming this truth, Lincoln

defined the Civil War as a contest both to secure liberty — for the slaves — and to preserve a united nation.

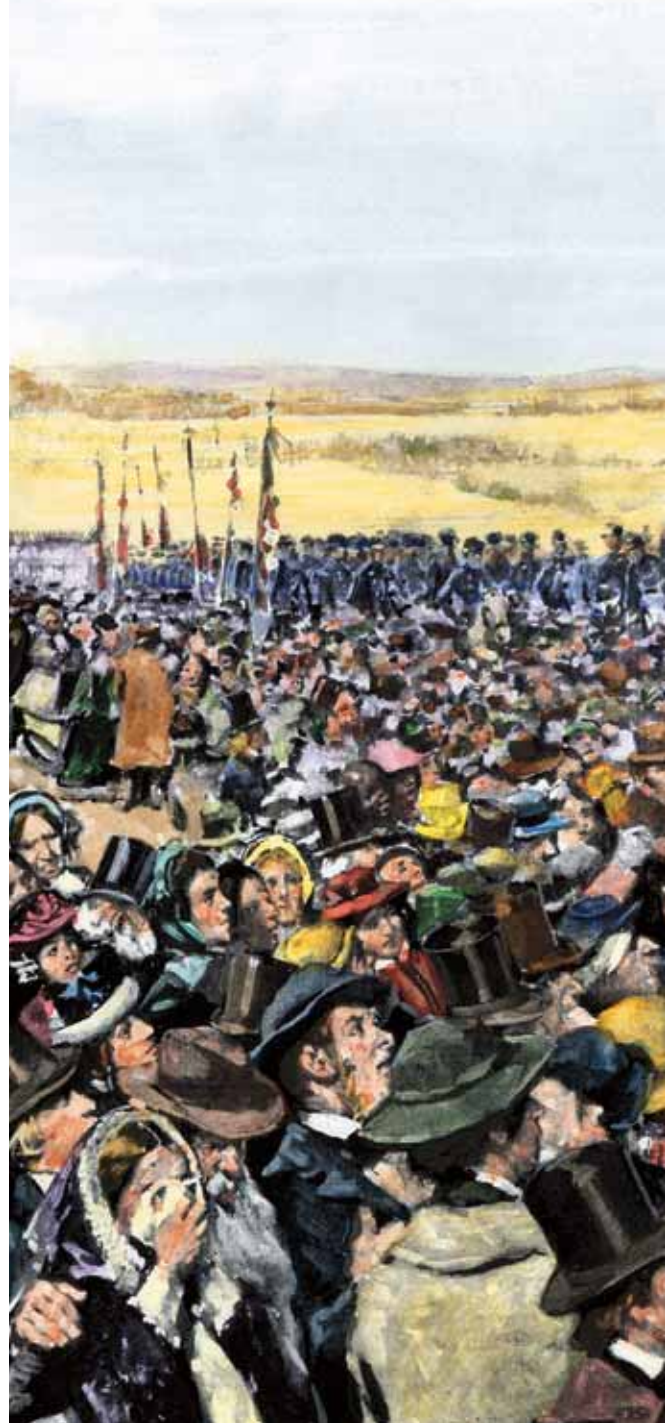
*Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives, that that nation might live.*

After his long introductory sentence, Lincoln led his audience rapidly forward from the American Revolution to the Civil War. With quick brushstrokes he summarized the war's meaning. Unlike Edward Everett, Lincoln spent none of his words on the details of the recent battle. Rather, he transcended it, linking the dedication to the larger





The text of the Gettysburg Address.



President Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address.



Union dead on the first day of battle at Gettysburg.





purpose of the “nation,” a word he would use five times in his address. The Civil War was a “testing” of the nation’s founding ideals, one that would determine whether they could “endure.”

*It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this. But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate — we cannot consecrate — we cannot hallow — this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled*

*here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or detract.*

These words signaled Lincoln’s transition from the events on the battlefield to the events of the future. But before he lifted their eyes beyond that battlefield, Lincoln told his audience what they could not do.

*we cannot dedicate  
we cannot consecrate  
we cannot hallow*

In the last three sentences of the address Lincoln shifted his focus a final time.

*The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it cannot forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before*



*us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*

Lincoln now laid out his vision of the future and of the responsibility of his listeners — and by extension the responsibility of every American — to bring that vision to fruition. Lincoln pointed away from words and toward deeds. He contrasted “what we say here” with “what they did here.”

At this point Lincoln uttered his only addition to his written text. He added the words “under God.” It was

an uncharacteristically spontaneous revision for a speaker who did not trust extemporaneous speech. Lincoln had added impromptu words in several earlier speeches, but always offered a subsequent apology for the change. In this instance, he did not. And Lincoln included “under God” in all three copies of the address he prepared at later dates.

“Under God” pointed backward and forward: back to “this nation,” which drew its breath from both political and religious sources, but also forward to a “new birth.” Lincoln had come to see the Civil War as a ritual of purification. The old Union had to die. The old man had to die. Death became a transition to a new Union and a new humanity.

As Lincoln approached the climax of his unexpectedly short address, he uttered the words that would be most remembered:

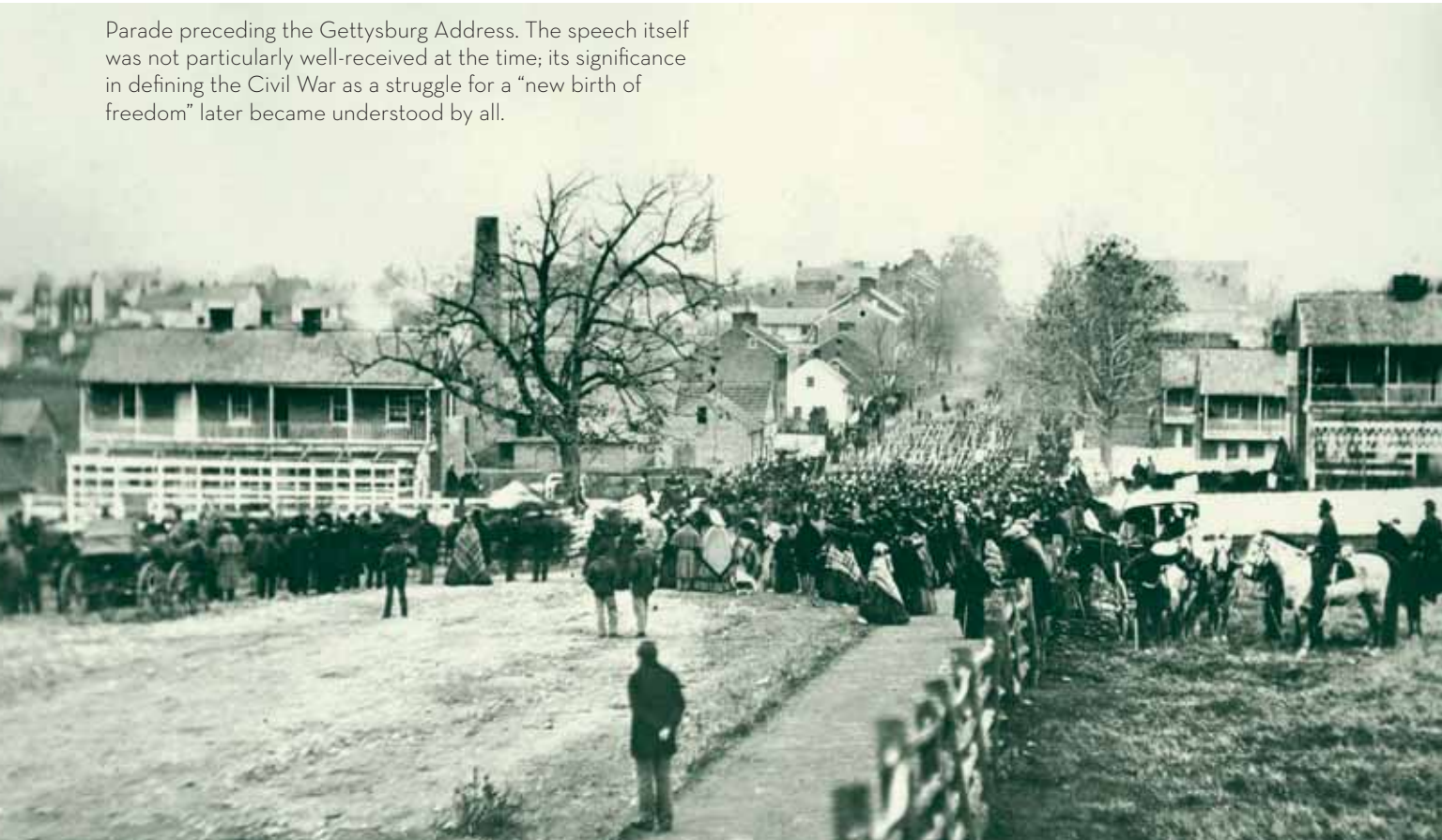
*and that government  
of the people,  
by the people,  
for the people,  
shall not perish from the  
earth.*

Lincoln was finished. He had not spoken the word “I” even once. It was as if Lincoln disappeared so Americans could focus unhindered upon his transcendent truths.

## **Second Inaugural Address (1865)**

President Abraham Lincoln had every reason to be hopeful as Inauguration Day, March 4, 1865, approached. After four years of war, the Confederacy was splintered if not yet shattered. Yet apprehension intruded upon this hopeful spirit. Rumors flew about the capital that desperate Confederates, realizing

Parade preceding the Gettysburg Address. The speech itself was not particularly well-received at the time; its significance in defining the Civil War as a struggle for a “new birth of freedom” later became understood by all.





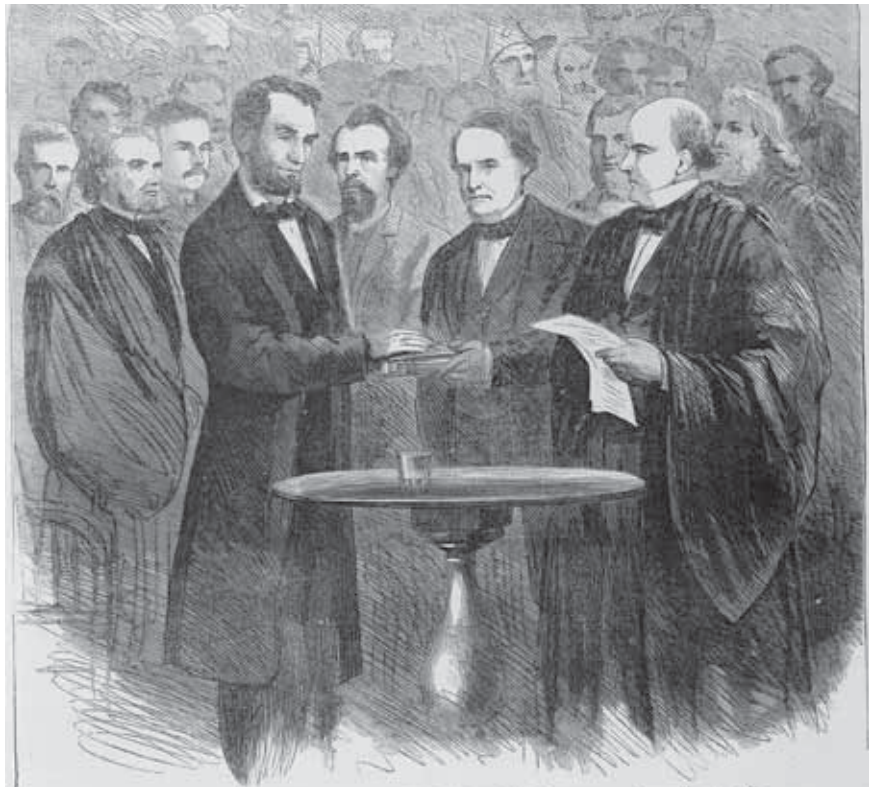
that defeat was imminent, would attempt to abduct or assassinate the president.

Lincoln's second inaugural address is 701 words long, 505 of only one syllable. Lincoln began in a subdued tone. In the highly charged atmosphere of wartime Washington, with soldiers everywhere, it is as if he wanted to lower anticipations.

In his second paragraph, Lincoln employed the image of war in every sentence. The tension mounts throughout the paragraph, building to a crescendo in the final sentence: "And the war came." In four words, four syllables, Lincoln acknowledged that the war came in spite of the best intentions of political leaders. Lincoln wants his listeners to understand that this war cannot be understood simply as the fulfillment of human plans.

"Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God." This introduction of the Bible marks new territory. The Bible had been quoted only once in the previous 18 inaugurals. Lincoln thus signaled his intent to examine the war from both a theological and a political perspective.

After recognizing that soldiers on both sides of the conflict read the Bible and prayed similar prayers, Lincoln probed the Bible's appropriate use. Lincoln suggests that some wielded the Bible and prayer almost as weapons to curry God's favor for one side or the other. But this only produced contrary readings of the same book. On one side stood those who read a Bible that they steadfastly believed sanctioned slavery. On the other were those who understood it to encourage the abolition of slavery. ("Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other.") Lincoln



Lincoln takes the oath of presidential office, March 1861.

instead builds a case for an inclusive God, one who does not take the side of a particular section or party.

As the address builds toward its final paragraph, it takes an unexpected turn. When many expected Lincoln to celebrate the successes of the Union, he instead pointed courageously to the malady that long had resided at the very center of the American national family, with the acquiescence of far too many Americans. If God now willed slavery's end, "this terrible war" appeared as "the woe due to those by whom the offense came."

Lincoln had come to believe that where there was evil, judgment would surely follow. He saw this judgment in the death of 623,000 Union and Confederate soldiers, and he accepted this judgment:

*Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue ... until*

*every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said 'the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether.'*

Lincoln invited his countrymen to weigh their own history on the scales of justice. He did this knowing that no nation is comfortable facing up to its own misdeeds.

*With malice toward none, with charity for all ...*

Lincoln closed by asking the nation to enter a new era, armed not with enmity but with forgiveness. These words immediately became the most memorable expressions of the second inaugural. Well aware that the nation was nearing the close of its most destructive armed conflict,



one that pitted brother against brother, the president was about to ask Americans for acts of incredible compassion. He would summon them to overcome the boundaries of sectionalism and come together again in reconciliation.

Lincoln ends his second inaugural address with a coda of healing:

*to bind up ...*

*to care for ...*

*to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.*

Lincoln had defined winning the peace as achieving reconciliation. In this final paragraph he declares that the true test of the aims of war would be how Americans then treated the defeated.

Sometimes the modern shibboleth “it’s only words” seems to win the day. This portrait of Abraham Lincoln is based instead in the premise that words matter. Lincoln led America through the Civil War with words that galvanized his nation’s courage.

“With malice toward none, with charity for all. ...” Lincoln’s Second Inaugural, 1865.

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## WORDS OF WISDOM

*"I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me."*

*"Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed."*

*"Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often a real loser — in fees, expenses, and waste of time. As a peacemaker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough."*

*"It is said an Eastern monarch once charged his wise men to invent him a sentence to be ever in view, and which should be true and appropriate in all times and situations. They presented him the words: 'And this, too, shall pass away.' How much it expresses! How chastening in the hour of pride! How consoling in the depths of affliction!"*

*"Ballots are the rightful and peaceful successors to bullets."*

*"Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing."*

*"Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition. Whether it be true or not, I can say for one that I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem."*

*"Every one desires to live long, but no one would be old."*

*"I don't like that man. I must get to know him better."*

*"If you look for the bad in people expecting to find it, you surely will."*

*"It has been my experience that folks who have no vices have very few virtues."*

*"Most folks are about as happy as they make their minds up to be."*

*"The assertion that 'all men are created equal' was of no practical use in effecting our separation from Great Britain and it was placed in the Declaration not for that, but for future use."*

*"The ballot is stronger than the bullet."*

*"The best way to destroy an enemy is to make him a friend."*

*"The best way to get a bad law repealed is to enforce it strictly."*

*"The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just."*

*"To stand in silence when they should be protesting makes cowards out of men."*

*"What kills a skunk is the publicity it gives itself."*

*"Whatever you are, be a good one."*

*"With Malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds."*

*"You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time."*

*"You cannot build character and courage by taking away a man's initiative and independence."*

*"You cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today."*

*"If I were to try to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how — the very best I can; and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what's said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference."*

*"Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, can not long retain it."*

*"Common looking people are the best in the world: that is the reason the Lord makes so many of them."*



# Additional Resources

## BOOKS

Carwardine, Richard. *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.

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Wilson, Douglas L. *Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2006.



## YOUNG ADULT

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Mayer, Cassie. *Abraham Lincoln*. Chicago: Heinemann Library, 2008.

Pascal, Janet B. *Who Was Abraham Lincoln?* New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 2008.

Trumbauer, Lisa. *Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War*. Chicago, IL: Heinemann Library, 2008.

## INTERNET RESOURCES

### GOVERNMENT

#### Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission

<http://www.lincolnbicentennial.gov>

#### Abraham Lincoln Papers

Library of Congress

The complete Abraham Lincoln Papers at the Library of Congress consists of approximately 20,000 documents, organized into three “General Correspondence” series that include incoming and outgoing correspondence and enclosures, drafts of speeches, and notes and printed material. Most of the 20,000 items are from the 1850s through Lincoln’s presidential years, 1860-1965. The collection encompasses approximately 61,000 images and 10,000 transcriptions.

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/malhome.html>

#### Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum

The Presidential Library is a public, non-circulating research library specializing in Abraham Lincoln and Illinois history. Collections include books, pamphlets, maps, and periodicals; photographs, films, tapes, and broadsides; manuscripts; and Illinois newspapers on microfilm. The library contains extensive resources on the Civil War and many publications useful for genealogical research, as well as the renowned Henry Horner Lincoln collection.

<http://www.alpl.org/home.html>

## ACADEMIC AND PRIVATE

#### Abraham Lincoln Association

The Abraham Lincoln Association has made significant contributions to keeping alive his unique story and ideals. Those contributions have taken many forms, including the publication of scholarly works, providing teaching materials to students, and providing preservation assistance for Lincoln sites.

<http://www.abrahamlincolnassociation.org/>

#### Abraham Lincoln Book Shop

Established in 1938, the Abraham Lincoln Book Shop serves the needs of collectors and scholars, professional historians and independent writers, dedicated first edition hunters, and casual history enthusiasts.

<http://www.alincolnbookshop.com/html/bibliographies.htm>

#### Lincoln Institute

The Lincoln Institute concentrates on providing support and assistance to scholars and groups involved in the study of the life of America’s 16th president and the impact he had on the preservation of the Union, the emancipation of black slaves, and the development of democratic principles that have found worldwide application.

<http://www.abrahamlincoln.org>

### **Miller Center of Public Affairs: Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865)**

University of Virginia

The Miller Center of Public Affairs is a national nonpartisan center to research, reflect, and report on American government, with special attention to the central role and history of the presidency.

<http://millercenter.virginia.edu/academic/americanpresident/lincoln>

### **Northern Illinois University**

Lincoln Digitalization Project

Before Abraham Lincoln became the nation's chief executive, he led a fascinating life that sheds considerable light upon significant themes in American history. This World Wide Web site presents materials from Lincoln's Illinois years (1830-1861), supplemented by resources from Illinois' early years of statehood (1818-1829). The collection provides a record of Lincoln's early career and helps readers fix his experiences within Lincoln's social and political milieu.

<http://lincoln.lib.niu.edu>

### **Presidential Papers of Abraham Lincoln**

A collaborative project of the Abraham Lincoln Association, the Lincoln Studies Center, the Library of Congress, the Lehrman Institute, and the Lincoln Institute, this effort supplements and coordinates a number of other efforts to create an authoritative, comprehensive, on-line version of Lincoln's words and his incoming correspondence.

<http://www.presidentialpapersofabrahamlincolnonline.org/index2.html>



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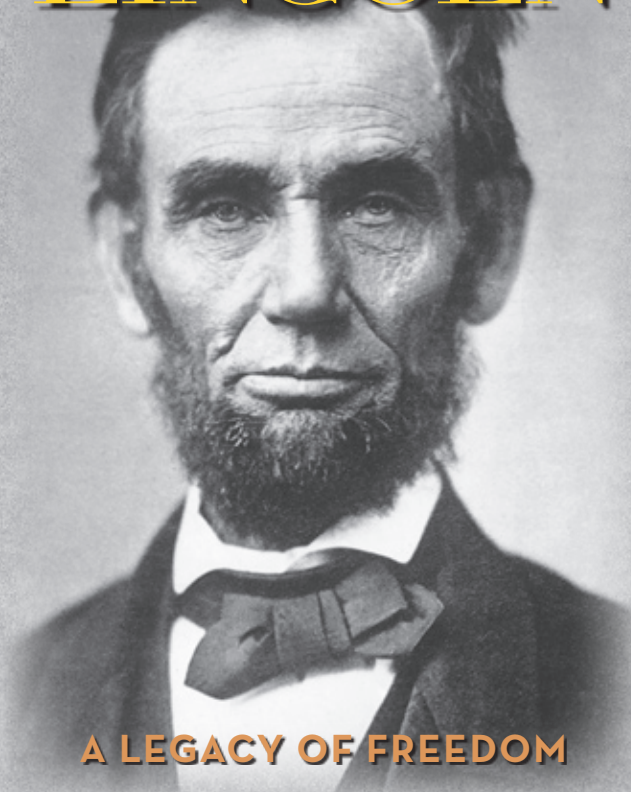
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