

Lincoln, Abraham (12 Feb. 1809-15 Apr. 1865), sixteenth president of the United States, was born in Hardin County, Kentucky, the son of Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks, farmers. Thomas Lincoln had come to Kentucky from Virginia with his father Abraham in 1782. He acquired only enough literacy to sign his name but gained modest prosperity as a carpenter and farmer on the Kentucky frontier. He married Nancy Hanks, also illiterate, in 1806. Abraham was born in a log cabin on "Sinking Spring Farm" three miles south of Hodgenville. When he was two years old the family moved to another farm on Knob Creek about seven miles northeast of Hodgenville. On this farm of 230 acres (only thirty of which were tillable) Abraham lived for five years, helped his parents with chores, and learned his ABCs by attending school for a few weeks with his older sister Sarah.

In December 1816 the Lincolns again moved, this time to the newly admitted state of Indiana. The tradition that the Lincolns moved because of dislike of slavery may have some truth; they belonged to a Baptist denomination that broke from the parent church on the slavery issue. However, the main reason for the move was Thomas's uncertainty of Kentucky land titles. Indiana offered secure titles surveyed under the Northwest Ordinance. The Lincolns lived in a rude, three-sided shelter on Pigeon Creek sixteen miles north of the Ohio River. There Abraham learned the use of axe and plow helping his father carve a house and farm out of the hardwood forest. The growing youth also snatched a few more months of schooling in the typical one-room schoolhouses of the frontier. In late 1817 or 1818 the Lincolns were joined by Nancy's aunt Elizabeth Hanks Sparrow and her husband, Thomas Sparrow, and Abraham's cousin Dennis Hanks. In the fall of 1818 the Sparrows and Nancy Hanks Lincoln all died of "milk sick," probably caused by drinking the milk of cows that had grazed on white snakeroot.

After a year of rough homemaking, Thomas Lincoln returned to Kentucky, where on 2 December 1819 he wed the widow Sarah Bush Johnston and brought her and her three children to Pigeon Creek. His stepmother provided the teenage Abraham with more affection and guidance than his natural mother or his father ever did. With a desire for learning and ambition for self-improvement, he devoured every book he could borrow from the meager libraries of friends and neighbors. Thomas Lincoln neither understood nor encouraged his son's intellectual ambition; quite the contrary, he chastised Abraham's "lazy" preference for reading over working.

Abraham's thinly veiled disdain for the life of a backwoods farmer doubtless irritated his father. Abraham in turn resented the requirement of law and custom that any wages he earned before he came of age--by hiring out to neighbors to split rails, for example--must be given to his father. One historian has suggested that Abraham Lincoln's hatred of chattel slavery, which denied to slaves the "fruits of their labor," may have originated in Thomas Lincoln's expropriation of the teenage Abraham's earnings (Burlingame, pp. 37-42). In any event, relations between Abraham and his father grew increasingly estranged. When Thomas lay dying in January 1851, he sent word that he wanted to say goodbye to his son. Abraham refused to make the eighty-mile trip, stating, "If we could meet now, it is doubtful whether it would not be more painful than pleasant" (Basler, vol. 2, p. 97). He did not attend his father's funeral.

In 1828 Lincoln and a friend took a flatboat loaded with farm produce down the Ohio and Mississippi rivers to New Orleans. He repeated the experience in 1831. These trips widened his horizons and, by tradition, shocked him with the sight of men and women being bought and sold in the slave markets of New Orleans. Although he came of age in 1830, he did not immediately strike out on his own. Once more his father sold the farm and set forth to greener pastures, this time in central Illinois. After helping his father clear land, Abraham hired out to split rails for other farmers, and he kept his earnings. In the summer of 1831 he settled in New Salem, a village on the Sangamon River bluff about twenty miles northwest of Springfield.

Lincoln's Formative Years in New Salem, Illinois (1831-1837)

Lincoln's six years in New Salem were a formative period. For a time he drifted from one job to another: store clerk, mill hand, partner in a general store that failed, postmaster, surveyor. Six feet four inches tall with a lanky, rawboned look, unruly coarse black hair, a gregarious personality, and a penchant for telling humorous stories, Lincoln made many friends. Among them were Jack Armstrong and his gang of young toughs, "the Clary Grove boys." As the new boy in town with a reputation for great physical strength, Lincoln had to prove his mettle in a wrestling match with Armstrong. Winning the match, Lincoln also won the loyalty of the Clary Grove boys despite his refusal to participate in their drinking and hell-raising.

In 1832 the Sac and Fox Indians under Chief [Black Hawk](#) returned to their ancestral homeland in Illinois, precipitating the short-lived Black Hawk War. Lincoln volunteered for the militia and was elected captain of his company, which included

the Clary Grove boys. They saw no action, but Lincoln later recalled his election as captain as the most gratifying honor of his life.

Another side of Lincoln's complex personality was a deeply reflective, almost brooding, quality that sometimes descended into serious depression. Lincoln described this condition as "the hypo," for hypochondria, as medical science then termed it. This recurring ailment, coupled with Lincoln's almost morbid fondness for William Knox's lugubrious poem "Mortality" (1824) and his later self-reported dreams in which death figured prominently, may have resulted from the deaths of loved ones: his mother, his sister Sarah in childbirth in 1828; and Ann Rutledge in 1835. Lincoln met Rutledge at her father's tavern in New Salem, where he boarded in 1833. Their story has taken on so many layers of myth and antimyth that the truth is impossible to determine. For half a century, until the 1990s, professional historians discounted the notion of their love and engagement, but new scholarship revived the credibility of a Lincoln-Rutledge romance (Walsh, *The Shadows Rise*). In any event, Rutledge died in August 1835, probably of typhoid fever, and Lincoln apparently suffered a prolonged spell of "hypo" after her death.

During the New Salem years Lincoln developed new purpose and direction. The local schoolmaster, Mentor Graham, guided his study of mathematics and literature. Lincoln joined a debating society, and he acquired a lifelong love of William Shakespeare and Robert Burns. He also acquired a passion for politics and in 1832 announced his candidacy for the legislature. Although he failed of election, he received 92 percent of the vote in the New Salem district, where he was known. When he ran again in 1834, he campaigned throughout the county and won decisively.

Election to the Illinois Legislature

Lincoln was a Whig, a devotee of [Henry Clay](#), whom Lincoln described as his "beau ideal of a statesman." Clay's American System, with its emphasis on government support for education, internal improvements, banking, and economic development to promote growth and opportunity, attracted him. In the legislature Lincoln came under the wing of [John T. Stuart](#), a Springfield lawyer and Whig minority leader in the house. Stuart encouraged Lincoln to study law and guided him through Sir William Blackstone's *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (1765-1769) and other books whose mastery was necessary to pass the bar examination in those days. On 9 September 1836 Lincoln obtained his license. In 1837 he moved to Springfield and became Stuart's partner.

Lincoln won reelection to the legislature in 1836, 1838, and 1840. He became floor leader of the Whigs and a prominent member of the "Long Nine," Whig legislators from Sangamon County who averaged more than six feet in height. Legislative logrolling enabled the Long Nine to get the state capital moved from Vandalia to Springfield in 1837. During the same session Lincoln and one colleague from Sangamon County entered a protest against a resolution passed overwhelmingly by the legislature that denounced antislavery societies in such a way as to imply approval of slavery. Declaring slavery to be "founded on both injustice and bad policy," Lincoln and his colleague nevertheless criticized the abolitionists, whose doctrines tended "rather to increase than to abate [slavery's] evils" (Basler, vol. 1, pp. 74-75).

Although ill at ease with women, Lincoln in 1836 began a half-hearted courtship of Mary Owens, whose sister lived in New Salem. A year later she broke off the relationship, to the probable relief of both parties. In 1839 Lincoln met Mary Todd ([Mary Todd Lincoln](#)), who had come from Kentucky to live with her married sister in Springfield. Despite the contrast between the educated, cultured, and socially prominent daughter of a Lexington banker and the socially awkward, rough-hewn son of an illiterate farmer, Mary and Abraham fell in love and became engaged in 1840. What happened next remains uncertain. Lincoln seems to have developed doubts about his fitness for marriage and broke the engagement. In January 1841 he succumbed to the worst case of hypo he had yet experienced. "I am now the most miserable man living," he wrote to Stuart on 23 January. "If what I feel were equally distributed to the whole human family, there would not be one cheerful face on earth" (Basler, vol. 1, p. 229).

After a series of twists and turns, the courtship revived. Lincoln's closest friend, Joshua Speed, married in 1842; Speed's assurance that matrimony was not so frightening after all seems to have encouraged Lincoln. On 4 November 1842 he and Mary were wed. The quality of their marriage has been much debated. It produced four sons. Mary shared Abraham's lively interest in public affairs, he often sought her advice, and she encouraged his political ambition. In personality, however, they were in many ways opposites. He was disorganized, careless in dress, and indifferent to social niceties; she was quick-tempered, sometimes shrewish, dressed expensively, and lived by the strict decorum of Victorian conventions. He got along with almost everybody; she quarreled with servants, workmen, merchants, and some of Lincoln's friends. He was absent from home on the legal or political circuit for weeks at a time, leaving her to cope with the trials of household

management and child rearing. His moodiness sometimes clashed with her fits of temper. Over time her mental stability became more fragile.

A Successful Law Practice and One Term in Congress (1847-1849)

After retiring from the legislature in 1841, Lincoln devoted most of his time to his law practice. In 1841 he formed a partnership with [Stephen T. Logan](#), who helped him become more thorough and meticulous in preparing his cases. The Springfield courts sat only a few weeks a year, requiring Lincoln to ride the circuit of county courts throughout central Illinois for several months each spring and fall. Most of his cases involved damage to crops by foraging livestock, property disputes, debts, and assault and battery, with an occasional murder trial to liven interest. By the time of his marriage Lincoln was earning \$1,200 a year, income equal to the governor's salary. In 1844 he bought a house in Springfield--the only home he ever owned. In 1844 he also dissolved his partnership with Logan and formed a new one with 26-year-old [William H. Herndon](#), to whom Lincoln became a mentor.

Lincoln's ambitions were not fulfilled by a successful law practice. He wanted to run for Congress from this safe Whig district, but the concentration of Whig hopefuls in Springfield meant that he had to wait his turn under an informal one-term rotation system. When his turn came in 1846, Lincoln won handily over Democratic candidate [Peter Cartwright](#), a well-known Methodist clergyman who tried to make an issue of Lincoln's nonmembership in a church (Mary later joined Springfield's First Presbyterian Church, which Abraham also occasionally attended).

Lincoln's congressional term (1847-1849) was dominated by controversies over the Mexican War. He took the standard Whig position that the war had been provoked by President [James K. Polk](#). On 22 December 1847 Lincoln introduced "spot resolutions" calling for information on the exact "spot of soil" on which Mexicans shed American blood to start the war, implying that this spot was actually Mexican soil. Lincoln also voted several times for the Wilmot Proviso, declaring that slavery should be prohibited in any territory acquired from Mexico. On these issues Lincoln sided with the majority in the Whig House of Representatives. In addition, Lincoln introduced a bill (which was buried in committee) for compensated abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia if approved by a majority of the District's voters.

Lincoln's opposition to the Mexican War was not popular in Illinois. "Spotty Lincoln," jibed Democratic newspapers, had committed political suicide. "What an epitaph: 'Died of Spotted Fever' " (Thomas, p. 120). When Lincoln campaigned in 1848 for the Whig presidential nominee [Zachary Taylor](#), the "Spotty Lincoln" label came back to haunt him. The Whig candidate for Congress who succeeded Lincoln under the rotation system, his former partner Stephen T. Logan, went down to defeat--perhaps because of voter backlash against the party's antiwar stance. Taylor nevertheless won the presidency, but Lincoln did not get the patronage appointment he expected as commissioner of the General Land Office.

Lincoln returned to Springfield disheartened with politics and gave full time to his law practice. During the 1850s he became one of the leading lawyers in the state. His annual income reached \$5,000. The burst of railroad construction during the decade generated a large caseload. Lincoln at various times represented railroads. In two of his most important cases he won exemption of the Illinois Central from county taxation and successfully defended the Rock Island from a suit by a shipping company whose steamboat had hit the Rock Island's bridge over the Mississippi (the first such bridge ever built). Yet it would be misleading to describe Lincoln as a "corporation lawyer" in the modern sense of that term, since he opposed corporations with equal frequency. In one important case he represented a small firm in a patent infringement suit brought against it by the McCormick Reaper Company. Lincoln continued to ride the circuit each spring and fall; the great majority of cases handled by Lincoln and Herndon (some 200 each year) concerned local matters of debt, ejection, slander and libel, trespass, foreclosure, divorce, and the like.

The Kansas-Nebraska Act and Its Effect on Lincoln

In 1854 a seismic political upheaval occurred that propelled Lincoln back into politics. The Kansas-Nebraska Act, rammed through Congress under the leadership of Illinois senator [Stephen A. Douglas](#) (an old acquaintance of Lincoln and once a rival for Mary Todd's affections), revoked the ban on slavery in the Louisiana Purchase territory north of 36° 30'. This repeal of a crucial part of the Missouri Compromise of 1820 opened Kansas Territory to slavery. It polarized the free and slave states more sharply than anything else had done. It incited several years of civil war between proslavery and antislavery forces in Kansas, which became a prelude to the national Civil War that erupted seven years later, and it gave birth to the Republican party, whose principal plank was exclusion of slavery from the territories.

Before 1854 Lincoln had said little in public about slavery, but during the next six years he delivered an estimated 175 speeches whose "central message" was the necessity to exclude slavery from the territories as a step toward its ultimate extinction everywhere (Waldo W. Braden, *Abraham Lincoln: Public Speaker* [1988], pp. 35-36). That had been the purpose of the Founding Fathers, Lincoln believed, when they adopted the Declaration of Independence and enacted the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, barring slavery from most of the existing territories; that was why they did not mention the words "slave" or "slavery" in the Constitution. "Thus, the thing is hid away, in the constitution," said Lincoln in 1854, "just as an afflicted man hides away a wen or cancer" (Basler, vol. 2, p. 274). By opening all of the Louisiana Purchase territory to slavery, the Kansas-Nebraska Act had reversed the course of the Founding Fathers. That was why Lincoln was "aroused," he later recalled, "as he had never been before" (Basler, vol. 4, p. 67).

Lincoln ran for the state legislature and took the stump for other "anti-Nebraska" Whigs. The fullest exposition of Lincoln's philosophy occurred in a speech at Peoria on 16 October 1854. Slavery was a "monstrous injustice," he said, that "deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world--enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites." With the Kansas-Nebraska Act, "our republican robe is soiled, and trailed in the dust. Let us repurify it. . . . Let us re-adopt the Declaration of Independence, and with it, the practices, and policy, which harmonize with it" (Basler, vol. 2, pp. 247-83). These sentiments were Lincoln's lodestar for the rest of his life.

That same year a coalition of anti-Nebraska Whigs and Democrats, including Lincoln, appeared to have gained control of the legislature. Their first task in February 1855 was to elect a U.S. senator, and Lincoln resigned from the legislature to become the Whig candidate. Through six ballots he led other candidates but fell short of a majority. To prevent the election of a regular Democrat, Lincoln then threw his support to [Lyman Trumbull](#), an anti-Nebraska Democrat, who was elected on the tenth ballot.

Deeply disappointed, Lincoln picked up his law practice again. In 1856 he helped found the Republican party in Illinois. With his speech at the new party's state convention in Bloomington on 29 May (the famous "lost speech"--so called because newspaper reporters were supposedly so entranced by its eloquence that they neglected to take it down), Lincoln emerged as the state's Republican leader. At the party's national convention he received 110 votes in a losing bid for the vice presidential nomination. Lincoln campaigned for the Republican ticket headed by [John C. Frémont](#), giving more than fifty speeches in all parts of Illinois. However, while Frémont won a plurality of the northern popular vote in the three-party contest, he lost Illinois and the other crucial lower North states of Pennsylvania and Indiana, which the Democrat, [James Buchanan](#), added to the Solid South to win the presidency.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

By the time Senator Douglas came up for reelection in 1858, he had broken with the Buchanan administration over the Lecompton constitution in Kansas and thus appeared vulnerable to a Republican challenge. The party nominated Lincoln (an almost unprecedented procedure in that time, when state legislatures elected U.S. senators), who set the theme for his campaign with his famous "House Divided" speech at Springfield on 16 June 1858. " 'A house divided against itself cannot stand,' " said Lincoln, quoting the words of Jesus recorded in the Gospel of Mark. "I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half *slave* and half *free*. . . . It will become *all* one thing, or *all* the other." The [Dred Scott](#) decision in 1857 had legalized slavery in every territory on a principle that Lincoln feared would legalize it in every state as well if the southern-dominated Supreme Court had its way. But when Republicans gained national power and had a chance to reconstitute the Court, they would ban slavery from the territories, thus stifling its growth and placing it "where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction" (Basler, vol. 2, p. 461).

Lincoln challenged Douglas to a series of debates. Douglas accepted, and the two met in seven three-hour debates in every part of the state. Why could the country not continue to exist half slave and half free as it had for seventy years? asked Douglas. Lincoln's talk about the "ultimate extinction" of slavery would drive the South into secession. Douglas also upbraided Lincoln for his alleged belief in "negro equality." Sensing a winning issue in Illinois, Douglas shouted questions to the crowd: "Are you in favor of conferring upon the negro the rights and privileges of citizenship?" Back would come the response, "No, No!" "Do you desire to turn this beautiful state into a free negro colony (no, no) in order that when Missouri abolishes slavery she can send one hundred thousand emancipated slaves into Illinois, to become citizens and voters on an equality with yourselves? (Never, 'no')" (Basler, vol. 3, p. 9).

Douglas's demagoguery put Lincoln on the defensive. A "Black Republican" would have no chance of election in Illinois. Lincoln replied with cautious denials that he favored the "social and political equality" of the races, but he preferred the

higher ground of principle. The problem with Douglas was that he "looks to no end of the institution of slavery," said Lincoln. "That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent" (Basler, vol. 3, p. 315).

The popular vote for Republican and Democratic legislators was virtually even in 1858, but because apportionment favored the Democrats, they won a majority of seats and reelected Douglas. Lincoln once again swallowed his disappointment and continued to speak for Republican candidates in the off-year elections of several midwestern states in 1859.

In retrospect, Lincoln was the real winner of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. His famous question at Freeport forced Douglas to enunciate the "Freeport Doctrine" that settlers could keep slavery out of a territory despite the Dred Scott decision by refusing to enact and enforce a local slave code. The Freeport Doctrine further alienated Douglas from southern Democrats and kindled their demand for a federal slave code in the territories. This issue split the Democratic party in 1860, virtually assuring the election of a Republican president. The national visibility achieved by Lincoln in the debates caused his name to be increasingly mentioned as the possible Republican nominee.

Preparing for the Presidency

While deprecating his qualifications for the presidency, Lincoln admitted privately, "The taste *is* in my mouth a little" (Basler, vol. 4, p. 45). Lincoln's prospects were enhanced by the favorable impact of his speech on a large crowd, including several prominent eastern Republicans, at Cooper Union in New York City on 27 February 1860. On the basis of thorough research, Lincoln explicated the parallels between the Republican position on slavery and that of the Founding Fathers. His success at Cooper Union brought Lincoln numerous invitations to speak in New England on his way to visit his oldest son Robert ([Robert Todd Lincoln](#)), who had enrolled at Phillips Exeter Academy for a year of preparatory work before entering Harvard.

Lincoln used these occasions to focus on what has been called the "free labor ideology," which was at the core of the Republican value system. All work in a free society was honorable. Slavery degraded manual labor by equating it with bondage. Free men who practiced the virtues of industry, thrift, self-discipline, and sobriety could climb the ladder of success. "I am not ashamed to confess," Lincoln said in New Haven, "that twenty-five years ago I was a hired laborer, mauling rails, at work on a flat-boat--just what might happen to any poor man's son." But in the free states an ambitious man "can better his condition" because "there is no such thing as a freeman being fatally fixed for life, in the condition of a hired laborer." The lack of hope, energy, and progress in the slave states, where most laborers were "fatally fixed" in the condition of slavery, had made the United States a house divided. Republicans wanted to keep slavery out of the territories so that white workers and farmers could move there to better their condition without being "degraded . . . by forced rivalry with negro slaves." Moreover, said Lincoln, "I want every man to have the chance--and I believe a black man is entitled to it--in which he *can* better his condition" (Basler, vol. 4, pp. 24-25; vol. 3, p. 478). The symbolism of Lincoln, the "poor man's son," visiting his own son at New England's most elite school was not lost on his audiences.

Lincoln returned from his eastern tour to find Illinois friends mounting a concerted effort for his nomination as president. As the 16 May opening date approached for the Republican National Convention in Chicago (a fortunate location for Lincoln's cause), circumstances converted him from a favorite son to a serious contender. The leading candidate was [William H. Seward](#) of New York. Seward's long and prominent public career was a source of both strength and weakness. His chief liability was a reputation as an antislavery radical who could not carry the crucial lower North states of Illinois, Indiana, and Pennsylvania that the Republicans had lost in 1856. Though Seward's current position was in some respects more conservative than Lincoln's, he suffered from the image created by his Higher Law speech of 1850 and Irrepressible Conflict speech of 1858. Lincoln's campaign managers worked feverishly to persuade delegates that Lincoln was more electable than Seward and to line up second-choice commitments to Lincoln from several states. Lincoln's promoters also skillfully exploited the "rail-splitter" image to illustrate the party's free labor theme. The strategy worked. Seward led on the first ballot; Lincoln almost caught up on the second and won on the third.

The ensuing four-party campaign was the most fateful in American history. The Democrats split into northern and southern parties, while a remnant of Whigs, mostly from the border states, formed the Constitutional Union party. Lincoln carried every free state except New Jersey, whose electoral votes he divided with Douglas, and thereby won the election despite garnering slightly less than 40 percent of the popular votes--no popular votes at all in ten southern states. Seven of those states enacted ordinances of secession before Lincoln's inauguration.

A Divided Nation

Between the election and his inauguration, Lincoln remained in Springfield, putting together an administration. He made no public statements despite panicky advice that he say something to reassure the South. He was already on record many times saying that he had no constitutional power and no intention to interfere with slavery in the states where it existed. "I could say nothing which I have not already said. . . . If I thought a *repetition* would do any good I would make it" (Basler, vol. 4, pp. 139-40).

Lincoln gave private assurances to southern moderates and Unionists of his purpose to go no further against slavery than the Republican platform's pledge to keep it out of the territories. To [Alexander Stephens](#) of Georgia, who opposed secession until his state went out, Lincoln wrote in December that the slave states had nothing to fear, but he added: "I suppose, however, this does not meet the case. You think slavery is *right* and ought to be extended; while we think it is *wrong* and ought to be restricted. That I suppose is the rub" (Basler, vol. 4, p. 160).

It was indeed the rub. Southerners had read Lincoln's House Divided speech, in which he had said that restriction of slavery was a first step toward "ultimate extinction." Whether ultimate or imminent, the demise of slavery portended by the South's loss of the national government to an antislavery party was the reason for secession. For most secessionists there was no turning back.

Nevertheless, a host of compromise proposals emerged during the 1860-1861 session of Congress. The most important were embodied in constitutional amendments sponsored by Senator [John J. Crittenden](#) of Kentucky. The centerpiece of the Crittenden Compromise was a proposal to allow slavery south of 36° 30' in all territories "now held, *or hereafter acquired*" (italics added). Such a compromise would not only negate the chief plank of the Republican platform but would also step up the drive to acquire Cuba and other tropical territories suitable for slavery. Seward (whom Lincoln had designated as secretary of state) and some other Republicans seemed prepared to tilt toward compromise, but from Springfield came admonitions to stand firm. "Entertain no proposition for a compromise in regard to the *extension* of slavery," Lincoln wrote to Seward and to other key Republican leaders. "We have just carried an election on principles fairly stated to the people. . . . If we surrender, it is the end of us. . . . A year will not pass, till we shall have to take Cuba as a condition upon which they will stay in the Union" (Basler, vol. 4, pp. 150, 172).

The Crittenden Compromise went down to defeat, but there is no reason to believe that the seven seceded states would have returned even if it had passed. These states had seized all federal property within their borders except Fort Pickens on an island off Pensacola and Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor. A month before Congress adjourned (and before Lincoln was inaugurated), delegates from the seven seceded states met at Montgomery, Alabama, and formed the Confederate States of America. As he departed Springfield for Washington on 11 February 1861, "with a task before me greater than rested upon Washington," Lincoln faced the reality of a divided nation (Basler, vol. 4, p. 190).

Lincoln's Inauguration (1861)

Lincoln's inaugural address offered both a sword and an olive branch. The sword was an unconditional affirmation of the illegality of secession and his intention to execute the laws in all states, to "hold, occupy and possess" federal property, and to "collect the [customs] duties and imposts." The olive branch was a reiteration of Lincoln's pledge not "to interfere with slavery where it exists" and to enforce the constitutional provision for the return of fugitive slaves. Wherever "in any interior locality" hostility to the federal government was "so great and so universal, as to prevent competent resident citizens from holding the Federal offices," Lincoln would suspend federal operations "for the time." In an eloquent peroration suggested by Seward, Lincoln spoke of the "mystic chords of memory," which he hoped would "yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature" (Basler, vol. 4, pp. 262-71).

Lincoln hoped that his inaugural address would buy time for passions to cool in the South and enable the seven states to "reconstruct" themselves back into the Union. This hope was founded on an erroneous but widely shared assumption in the North that a silent majority of southerners were Unionists who had been swept along by the passions of the moment. But time was running out. The day after his inauguration, Lincoln learned that Major [Robert Anderson](#), commander of the besieged federal garrison at Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor, had only supplies enough to last a few more weeks.

Fort Sumter was the flash point of tension. Charleston was proud of its reputation as the cradle of secession. Insisting that a sovereign nation could not tolerate a foreign fort in one of its harbors, Confederate leaders demanded the transfer of Fort Sumter to the Confederacy. For a month Lincoln endured sleepless nights and conflicting advice on what to do. To give it up would constitute de facto if not de jure recognition of the Confederacy. On the other hand, it would preserve peace and keep the upper South in the Union. On 15 March a majority of the cabinet, with Seward as the strongest voice, counseled Lincoln to yield Fort Sumter. Lincoln explored the possibility of pulling out in return for an assurance from Virginia that it would remain in the Union. Playing an independent role as the putative "premier" of the administration, Seward informed Confederate commissioners that Lincoln would withdraw the garrison. By the end of March, however, Lincoln had made the opposite decision. He let Seward know in no uncertain terms that he would be premier of his own administration.

A majority of the cabinet now supported Lincoln's decision to resupply Fort Sumter (as well as the less controversial Fort Pickens). The problem was how to do it. To send reinforcements prepared to shoot their way into the bay would surely provoke a war that Lincoln would be blamed for starting. Lincoln hit upon an ingenious solution. Instead of sending reinforcements, he would send only provisions--"food for hungry men"--and he would notify southern authorities in advance of his peaceful intention. On 6 April Lincoln sent a message to the governor of South Carolina, "An attempt will be made to supply Fort Sumpter [sic] with provisions only; . . . no effort to throw in men, arms, or ammunition, will be made, without further notice, or in case of an attack upon the Fort" (Basler, vol. 4, p. 323).

Civil War

With this message Lincoln in effect flipped a coin and told Confederate president [Jefferson Davis](#), "Heads I win; tails you lose." If the Confederates allowed the supplies to pass, the American flag would continue to fly over Fort Sumter as a symbol of sovereignty. If the Confederates attacked the supply ships or the fort, they would suffer the onus of starting a war and would unite a divided North. Davis did not hesitate; he ordered the Confederate guns to fire on Sumter. They did so on 12 April. And the war came.

On 15 April Lincoln called out 75,000 militia to quell the rebellion, prompting four more states to secede. On 19 April Lincoln proclaimed a naval blockade of the Confederate coastline. From there the war escalated step by step on a scale of violence and destruction never dreamed of by those who fired the guns at Sumter.

On the Union side Lincoln was the principal architect of this escalation. He insisted on a policy of unconditional surrender. Sovereignty, the central issue of the war, was not negotiable. As Lincoln put it late in the war, Davis "cannot voluntarily reaccept the Union; we cannot voluntarily yield it. Between him and us the issue is distinct, simple, and inflexible. It is an issue which can only be tried by war, and decided by victory" (Basler, vol. 8, p. 151).

Because "all else chiefly depends" on "the progress of our arms," as Lincoln said in 1865, he devoted more attention to his duties as commander in chief than to any other function of the presidency and spent vast amounts of time in the War Department telegraph office. He borrowed books on military history and strategy from the Library of Congress and burned the midnight oil mastering them. Eleven times he visited troops at the front in Virginia or Maryland. The greatest frustrations he experienced were the failures of Union generals to act with the vigor and aggressiveness he expected of them. Perhaps one of the greatest satisfactions he experienced was the ultimate victory of commanders who had risen to the top in large part because Lincoln appreciated their vigor and aggressiveness.

In 1861 Union armies achieved limited but important successes by gaining control of Maryland, Missouri, part of Kentucky, and also much of western Virginia, which paved the way for the later admission of West Virginia as a new state. Union naval forces gained lodgments along the South Atlantic coast. But in the year's biggest battle, at Bull Run (Manassas), 21 July 1861, the Union suffered a dispiriting defeat. Lincoln then appointed 34-year-old [George B. McClellan](#) commander of the Army of the Potomac and, from 1 November, general in chief of all Union armies. McClellan's minor victories in western Virginia had given him a newspaper reputation as the "Young Napoleon." He proved to be a superb organizer and trainer of soldiers but a defensive-minded and cautious perfectionist in action. He repeatedly exaggerated enemy strength as an excuse for postponing offensive operations.

Lincoln grew impatient with McClellan's inaction during the eight months after he took command, while Republicans in Congress grew suspicious that McClellan, a Democrat, did not really want to strike the "rebels" a hard blow. When McClellan finally began a glacial advance up the Virginia peninsula toward Richmond in the spring of 1862, Lincoln

admonished him on 9 April: "Once more let me tell you, it is indispensable to *you* that you strike a blow. . . . I have never written you, or spoken to you, in greater kindness of feeling than now, nor with a fuller purpose to sustain you. . . . *But you must act*" (Basler, vol. 5, p. 185).

Lincoln already had his eye on a commander who had proved he could act. His name was [Ulysses S. Grant](#), and he had captured Forts Henry and Donelson on the Tennessee and Cumberland rivers and then beat back a Confederate counteroffensive in the bloody battle of Shiloh, 6-7 April 1862. Other Union forces in the West also scored important victories in the spring of 1862, capturing New Orleans and Memphis and gaining control of most of the Mississippi River. In the East McClellan finally advanced to within five miles of Richmond by the end of May. The Confederacy seemed doomed.

Then the Union war machine went into reverse. By September 1862 Confederate counteroffensives in Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky took southern armies across the Potomac into Maryland and almost north to the Ohio River. This inversion stunned the northern people and caused home-front morale to plummet, but Lincoln did not falter. He issued a new call for volunteers and declared, "I expect to maintain this contest until successful, or till I die, or am conquered, or my term expires, or Congress or the country forsakes me" (Basler, vol. 5, p. 292).

The Confederate tide ebbed after the limited Union victories at Antietam in Maryland on 17 September 1862 and Perryville in Kentucky on 8 October. But the failure of Union commanders to follow up these victories caused Lincoln's frustration to boil over. He could not "understand why we cannot march as the enemy marches, live as he lives, fight as he fights" (*Complete Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. [John G. Nicolay](#) and [John Hay](#) [1905], vol. 8, pp. 63-64). On 24 October he replaced sluggish General [Don Carlos Buell](#) with [William S. Rosecrans](#) as commander of the Army of the Ohio (renamed the Army of the Cumberland). A week later he removed McClellan from command of the Army of the Potomac. McClellan had "the slows," the president told one of the general's supporters (Elbert B. Smith, *Francis Preston Blair* [1980], p. 328).

A Turning Point in the War: Grant's Promotion to General in Chief of All Union Armies (1864)

Lincoln did not have any better luck with the next two commanders of the Army of the Potomac. [Ambrose Burnside](#) lost the disastrous battle of Fredericksburg, 13 December 1862, and his successor [Joseph Hooker](#) fumbled several opportunities and lost the battle of Chancellorsville, 1-5 May 1863. Lincoln finally found a general who remained in command of that army for the rest of the war, [George G. Meade](#), whose skillful defensive tactics won the crucial battle of Gettysburg, 1-3 July 1863. Meade gravely disappointed Lincoln, however, with his failure to follow up that victory with a vigorous effort to trap and destroy [Robert E. Lee](#)'s Army of Northern Virginia before it could retreat across the Potomac. "My dear general, I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape," Lincoln wrote Meade on 14 July. "As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely" (Basler, vol. 6, p. 328). Upon reflection, he did not send this letter, but it expressed his sentiments, sharpened by contrast with his attitude toward Grant, who had captured Vicksburg on 4 July 1863. Grant's star had alternately dimmed and brightened since the spring of 1862. Unfounded rumors of excessive drinking and the appearance of aimless floundering in the early stages of the Vicksburg campaign had generated much criticism. Lincoln nevertheless retained his faith in Grant. "I think Grant has hardly a friend left, except myself," said Lincoln in the spring of 1863. "What I want . . . is generals who will fight battles and win victories. Grant has done this, and I propose to stand by him" (Shelby Foote, *The Civil War: A Narrative*, vol. 2: *Fredericksburg to Meridian* [1963], p. 217). Grant followed up his victory at Vicksburg by driving the Confederates away from Chattanooga and into the mountains of northern Georgia. Congress created the rank of lieutenant general (last held by [George Washington](#)). Lincoln promoted Grant to this rank in March 1864 and made him general in chief of all Union armies.

For the first time Lincoln had a commanding general in whom he had full confidence, one who could take from his shoulders some of the burden of constant military oversight. On the eve of the military campaigns of 1864, Lincoln wrote Grant: "The particulars of your plans I neither know, or seek to know. You are vigilant and self-reliant; and pleased with this, I wish not to obtrude any constraints or restraints upon you" (Basler, vol. 7, p. 324).

Lincoln wrote thus because he and Grant saw eye to eye on military strategy. In this war the Confederates had the advantage of fighting on the strategic defensive with interior lines that enabled them to shift reinforcements from inactive to active fronts unless the Union employed its superior numbers to attack on several fronts at once. Lincoln grasped this point better than many of his generals. As early as 13 January 1862 Lincoln instructed the hapless Buell, "I state my

general idea of this war to be that we have *greater* numbers, and the enemy has the *greater* facility of concentrating forces upon points of collision; that we must fail, unless we can find some way of making *our* advantage an overmatch for *his*; and that this can only be done by menacing him with superior forces at *different* points, at the *same* time" (Basler, vol. 5, p. 98). Grant agreed. He devised simultaneous Union advances on several fronts to prevent Confederates from shifting troops from one point to another. In the end this strategy won the war.

Problems with Internal Security

An issue related to military events also absorbed much of Lincoln's time: internal security. Confederate sympathizers in the border states and antiwar activists in the North (the "Copperheads") constituted a "fire in the rear" that Lincoln feared "more than our military chances" ([Edward L. Pierce](#), *Memoir and Letters of Charles Sumner*, vol. 4 [1893], p. 114). Early in the war he suspended the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus in limited areas, which he kept expanding until a proclamation of 24 September 1862 extended the suspension to the whole country. In his capacity as a circuit court judge in Maryland, Chief Justice [Roger B. Taney](#) had ruled in May 1861 that the president could not suspend the writ without congressional authorization (Ex parte Merryman, 17 Fed. Cas. 144). Lincoln disagreed and exercised this power before as well as after congressional authorization in March 1863.

Under these suspensions of the writ, Union officials arrested and detained without trial at least 15,000 civilians during the war, mostly in the border states. Military courts also tried several civilians, most notably the Copperhead leader, [Clement L. Vallandigham](#), for "treasonable" activities. Some of these arrests and trials, as in the case of Vallandigham, came dangerously close to infringing First Amendment rights. Lincoln was embarrassed by the Vallandigham case, which aroused a storm of criticism. Nevertheless, he justified the detention of those who undermined the struggle for national survival. He made his case in pungent prose that everyone could understand. "Under cover of 'Liberty of speech,' 'Liberty of the press' and 'Habeas Corpus,'" wrote the president, the rebels "hoped to keep on foot amongst us a most efficient corps of spies, informers, suppliers, and aiders and abettors of their cause." If anything, he believed he had arrested too few rather than too many. "Must I shoot a simple-minded soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wiley [*sic*] agitator who induces him to desert? . . . I think that in such a case, to silence the agitator, and save the boy, is not only constitutional, but, withal, a great mercy" (Basler, vol. 6, pp. 263, 266-67). Scholars disagree about Lincoln's record on civil liberties, but one thing can be said with certainty: compared with the enforcement of espionage and sedition laws in World War I and the internment of Japanese-Americans in World War II, the curtailment of civil liberties during the far greater internal crisis of the Civil War seems quite mild.

Another matter bound up with Lincoln's powers as commander in chief, but involving many other considerations as well, was slavery. Lincoln's decision in 1862 to issue an emancipation proclamation freed himself as much as it freed the slaves--freed him from the agonizing contradiction between his antislavery convictions and his constitutional responsibilities. Lincoln had said many times that he considered slavery "a social, moral, and political wrong. . . . If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." Yet, he added, "I have never understood that the Presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially on this judgment and feeling" (Basler, vol. 3, p. 92; vol. 7, p. 281). The Constitution he swore to preserve, protect, and defend sanctioned slavery in states that wanted it. Moreover, Lincoln conceived his primary duty to be preservation of the Union. In 1861 he believed that to preserve it he must maintain the support of Democrats and border state Unionists, who would be alienated by any move toward emancipation. That is why he revoked General Frémont's military order freeing the slaves of Confederate sympathizers in Missouri. If he had let Frémont's order stand, Lincoln explained to a critic, it would have driven Kentucky into secession. "To lose Kentucky is nearly the same as to lose the whole game. Kentucky gone, we can not hold Missouri, nor, as I think, Maryland" (Basler, vol. 4, p. 532).

For the next year Lincoln adhered publicly to this position despite growing pressure from his own party to move against slavery. To a powerful emancipation editorial by [Horace Greeley](#) in the *New York Tribune*, Lincoln replied on 22 August 1862 with a letter published in the *Tribune*: "My paramount object in this struggle *is* to save the Union, and is *not* either to save or to 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" (Basler, vol. 5, pp. 388-89).

The Emancipation Proclamation

Lincoln had already drafted an emancipation proclamation but was awaiting a Union military victory to announce it. His letter to Greeley was designed to prepare the public, especially conservatives, for the announcement by making it clear that freeing *some* of the slaves was necessary to achieve his, and their, main goal of preserving the Union.

Earlier in 1862 Lincoln had tried to persuade border state Unionists to accept an offer of federal compensation for emancipation in their states. They refused, while Union military fortunes took a turn for the worse in the summer of 1862. By then Lincoln agreed with the Radical Republican argument that a proclamation of emancipation would strike a blow against the Confederate economy and war effort that would more than counterbalance the damage it might do by alienating Democrats and border state Unionists. Slaves constituted the principal labor force of the Confederacy. Escaped slaves (labeled "contrabands") had been coming into Union lines since the outset of the war; an official proclamation of emancipation would accelerate this process. In his capacity as commander in chief, Lincoln believed he had the constitutional power to seize enemy property (slaves) being used to wage war against the United States. On 22 September 1862, five days after the battle of Antietam, Lincoln issued a preliminary proclamation, declaring that all slaves in any state or part of a state still in rebellion against the United States on 1 January 1863 "shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free" (Basler, vol. 5, pp. 433-36). New Year's Day came, and Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which exempted Tennessee and parts of Louisiana and Virginia (as well as the slave states that had remained in the Union), because they were occupied by Union forces or deemed loyal to the Union and therefore not subject to the war powers under which Lincoln acted.

Despite cavils that the Emancipation Proclamation did not in and of itself free a single slave, it did broaden northern war aims to include emancipation. Union armies became armies of liberation. As a corollary of the proclamation, the Lincoln administration began recruiting black soldiers and sailors, mostly freed slaves--189,000 in all by the end of the war. In August 1863 Lincoln stated in a widely published letter, "The emancipation policy, and the use of colored troops, constitute the heaviest blow yet dealt to the rebellion." Referring to critics of emancipation and opponents of the war, Lincoln said pointedly that, when the war was won, "there will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while, I fear, there will be some white ones, unable to forget that, with malignant heart, and deceitful speech, they have strove to hinder it" (Basler, vol. 6, pp. 408-10).

As a war measure the Emancipation Proclamation would cease to have any effect when the war was over. While many slaves would have gained freedom, the institution of slavery would still exist. Thus Lincoln and his party pledged to adopt a constitutional amendment to abolish slavery. Antislavery Unionists gained control of the state governments of Maryland and Missouri and abolished slavery in those states. The wartime "reconstruction" governments in the occupied parts of Louisiana, Arkansas, and Tennessee did the same. With a skillful use of patronage and arm-twisting, Lincoln nurtured these achievements.

"A New Birth of Freedom"

Lincoln did not live to see the final ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment. Yet the future shape of a disenthralled United States was clear enough by 19 November 1863 for Lincoln to proclaim "a new birth of freedom" in the brief address he delivered at the commemoration of a cemetery at Gettysburg for Union soldiers killed in the battle there.

Lincoln is best known for his brief speech at Gettysburg, but on many other occasions also he gave voice to the purpose for which 360,000 northern soldiers gave their lives. "The central idea pervading this struggle," he said as early as 1861, "is the necessity . . . of proving that popular government is not an absurdity. We must settle this question now, whether in a free government the minority have the right to break up the government whenever they choose. If we fail it will go far to prove the incapability of the people to govern themselves" ([Tyler Dennett](#), ed., *Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay* [1939], pp. 19-20).

Abraham Lincoln's eloquence and statesmanship were grounded in his skills as a politician. He was not only president and commander in chief but also leader of his party. Some of the party's fractious members in the cabinet and Congress gave Lincoln almost as many problems as fractious and incompetent generals. Four members of his cabinet had been his rivals for the presidential nomination in 1860. Some of them as well as some congressional leaders continued to think of themselves as better qualified for the presidency than Lincoln. Yet he established his mastery of both cabinet and

Congress. He generally deferred to cabinet members in their areas of responsibility and delegated administrative authority to them to run their departments. Although he listened to advice, Lincoln made the most important decisions himself: on Fort Sumter, on emancipation, on appointing or dismissing generals, on Reconstruction. Secretary of the Treasury [Salmon P. Chase](#), who thought of running for president in 1864, convinced Republican senators that Lincoln was too much influenced by Secretary of State Seward. At a low point in the Union cause after the battle of Fredericksburg in December 1862, the Senate Republican caucus pressed Lincoln to dismiss Seward. If he had "caved in" (Lincoln's words), he would have lost control of his own administration. In an exhibition of political virtuosity, he confronted Chase and the senators in the presence of the cabinet and forced them to back down. Chase offered his resignation, which Lincoln refused to accept, thereby keeping both Seward and Chase in the cabinet and maintaining the separation of executive and congressional powers.

Another contest of power and policy between Lincoln and congressional Republicans occurred in 1864 over the issue of Reconstruction. Lincoln conceived of this process as primarily an executive responsibility, a part of his duty as commander in chief to win the war by "reconstructing" southern states back into the Union. On 8 December 1863 he issued a "Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction," offering pardons to most categories of Confederates who would take an oath of allegiance to the United States. When the number of those pardoned in any state equaled 10 percent of the number of voters in 1860, Lincoln authorized them to form a Union state government, to which he promised executive recognition. Congressional leaders, however, viewed Reconstruction as a legislative process in which Congress would mandate the conditions for restoration of states to the Union and readmission of their representatives to Congress. The showdown in this struggle came in the summer of 1864, when Lincoln killed the Wade-Davis Reconstruction Bill, which was more stringent than his own policy, by a pocket veto. The bill's cosponsors, Representative [Henry Winter Davis](#) and Senator [Benjamin Wade](#), thereupon issued a blistering "Manifesto," charging Lincoln with executive usurpation.

This imbroglio became entangled with Lincoln's campaign for reelection. The party's national convention had unanimously renominated him, after an initial token vote for Grant by the Missouri delegation, on 7 June. But beneath this surface unanimity seethed hostility to Lincoln by Republicans who opposed him on Reconstruction. The main issue in 1864, however, was not Reconstruction but the war itself. Union offensives, especially in Virginia, bogged down in a morass of carnage that made victory appear more distant than ever. War weariness and defeatism corroded the will of northerners as they reeled from the staggering cost in lives. Lincoln came under immense pressure to open peace negotiations. Unofficial envoys met with Confederate agents in Canada and with Jefferson Davis at Richmond in July to make clear Lincoln's terms for peace: reunion and emancipation. Davis spurned these conditions, insisting on Confederate independence, but somehow northern Democrats convinced much of the electorate that only Lincoln's requirement of emancipation blocked a peace settlement.

Lincoln refused to back down. "No human power can subdue this rebellion without using the Emancipation lever as I have done," he said. Black soldiers would not continue fighting for the Union if they thought the North intended to "betray them. . . . If they stake their lives for us they must be prompted by the strongest motive . . . the promise of freedom. And the promise being made, must be kept" (Basler, vol. 7, pp. 500, 507).

When Lincoln said this, he fully expected to lose the election. On 23 August he wrote his famous "blind memorandum" and required cabinet members to endorse it sight unseen: "This morning, as for some days past, it seems exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected. Then it will be my duty to so co-operate with the President elect, as to save the Union between the election and the inauguration; as he will have secured his election on such ground that he can not possibly save it afterwards" (Basler, vol. 7, p. 514). A week later the Democrats nominated McClellan for president on a platform that branded the war a failure and demanded an armistice and peace negotiations.

Triumphant Reelection in 1864

The war did indeed seem a failure. Two days later, on 2 September, came a telegram from General [William T. Sherman](#), however, saying "Atlanta is ours and fairly won." Northern opinion turned 180 degrees almost overnight. Then came news of spectacular military victories by General [Philip Sheridan](#)'s army in the Shenandoah Valley. Lincoln's tarnished reputation as commander in chief turned to luster. He was triumphantly reelected in November, carrying every Union state except New Jersey, Delaware, and Kentucky.

As Sherman marched through Georgia and South Carolina, Union armies advanced on other fronts, and Grant tightened the vise near Richmond. The end of the war seemed only a matter of time. In his second inaugural address, on 4 March

1865, Lincoln looked forward to a peace "with malice toward none; with charity for all." He also suggested that "this terrible war" may have been God's punishment of the whole nation for the wrong of slavery. "Fondly do we hope-- fervently do we pray--that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away," said Lincoln. "Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and 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' " (Basler, vol. 8, p. 333).

During the last winter of war, Lincoln and congressional Republicans came closer together on a postwar Reconstruction policy. After Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Lincoln spoke to a large crowd of celebrants at the White House on 11 April. He hinted that his Reconstruction policy would enfranchise literate blacks and black army veterans. "That means nigger citizenship," muttered a member of the crowd, the actor [John Wilkes Booth](#). "Now, by God, I'll put him through. That is the last speech he will ever make" (William Hanchett, *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies* [1983], p. 37).

A native of Maryland and an unstable egotist who supported the Confederacy and hated Lincoln, Booth headed a shadowy conspiracy with links to the Confederate secret service, which had intended to kidnap Lincoln and hold him hostage in Richmond. The fall of Richmond had ruined that plot, so Booth decided to kill the president. While the Lincolns watched a comedy at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C., on 14 April, Booth gained entrance to their box and shot Lincoln in the head. Lincoln died at 7:22 the next morning.

Lincoln's Legacy

Scorned and ridiculed by many critics during his presidency, Lincoln became a martyr and almost a saint after his death. His words and deeds lived after him and will be revered as long as there is a United States. Indeed, it seems quite likely that without his determined leadership the *United States* would have ceased to exist. Union victory in the Civil War resolved two fundamental, festering problems that had been left unresolved by the Revolution of 1776 and the Constitution of 1789: whether this republic, "conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," would "long endure" or "perish from the earth"; and whether the "monstrous injustice" of slavery would continue to mock those ideals of liberty. The republic endured, and slavery perished. That is Lincoln's legacy.

Bibliography

The principal collection of Lincoln's papers is the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection in the Library of Congress. Most of the 18,000 items in this collection are incoming letters. The fullest collection of Lincoln's own letters, speeches, and other writings is *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy P. Basler (8 vols. and an index, 1953-1955), with the addition of *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln: Supplement 1832-1865*, ed. Basler (1974). The most important of Lincoln's letters and other writings have been selected by Don E. Fehrenbacher and published in two volumes titled *Abraham Lincoln: Speeches and Writings* (1989). Another valuable selection of Lincoln writings is *Lincoln on Democracy*, ed. Mario M. Cuomo and Harold Holzer (1990), which has been translated into several languages.

The number of biographies and other books about Lincoln is huge--far greater than for any other figure in American history. Lincoln's law partner William Herndon spent several years after Lincoln's death interviewing people who had known him and gathering other material about the first fifty years of Lincoln's life. Herndon collaborated with Jesse W. Weik to present this material in *Herndon's Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life* (3 vols., 1889), which has been reprinted in whole or in part in many subsequent editions. Herndon's account distorted some aspects of Lincoln's life and accepted as true some information that may have been apocryphal. Nonetheless, all subsequent biographers were indebted to Herndon for most of what we know about Lincoln's early life. A year after the appearance of *Herndon's Lincoln*, Lincoln's wartime private secretaries, John G. Nicolay and John Hay, published a ten-volume biography, *Abraham Lincoln: A History*, which focused mainly on the presidential years.

Until the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection was opened to the public in 1947, the Nicolay and Hay biography was the only one based on full access to Lincoln's papers. Before 1947, however, other important biographies appeared: Lord Charnwood, *Abraham Lincoln* (1917), which was notable for its sympathetic British perspective; Albert J. Beveridge, *Abraham Lincoln 1809-1858* (2 vols., 1928), whose author died before he could continue the biography into the war

years; and Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* (2 vols., 1926) and *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (4 vols., 1939), a powerful evocation of Lincoln and his times, which, however, piles up dubious as well as authentic evidence in a mixed profusion. The fullest scholarly biography, part of it written after the Lincoln papers were opened, is James G. Randall, *Lincoln the President* (4 vols., 1945-1955), with the fourth volume completed after Randall's death by Richard N. Current, who has also written a volume of incisive essays, *The Lincoln Nobody Knows* (1958). Randall's interpretation is marred by a tendency to squeeze Lincoln into a conservative mold that fails to appreciate the depth of his antislavery convictions. The same fault is shared in part by Benjamin Thomas's one-volume biography *Abraham Lincoln* (1952), but is corrected by another readable one-volume biography, Stephen B. Oates, *With Malice toward None: The Life of Abraham Lincoln* (1977). The best biography within the covers of a single volume is David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* (1995). A concise thematic biography is Mark E. Neely, Jr., *The Last Best Hope of Earth: Abraham Lincoln and the Promise of America* (1993). Neely has also written a comprehensive and valuable reference work, *The Abraham Lincoln Encyclopedia* (1982), as well as *The Fate of Liberty: Abraham Lincoln and Civil Liberties* (1991).

Other valuable studies of specific aspects of Lincoln's life and career include: Gabor Boritt, *Lincoln and the Economics of the American Dream* (1978); Boritt, ed., *The Historians' Lincoln* (1988); Michael Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (1994); David Donald, *Lincoln Reconsidered*, 2d ed. (1961); Fehrenbacher, *Lincoln in Text and Context: Collected Essays* (1987); Fehrenbacher, *Prelude to Greatness: Lincoln in the 1850's* (1962); James M. McPherson, *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution* (1991); Phillip Shaw Paludan, *The Presidency of Abraham Lincoln* (1994); Charles B. Strozier, *Lincoln's Quest for Union* (1982); John E. Walsh, *The Shadows Rise: Abraham Lincoln and the Ann Rutledge Legend* (1993); T. Harry Williams, *Lincoln and His Generals* (1952); Kenneth P. Williams, *Lincoln Finds a General* (5 vols., 1949-1959); and LaWanda Cox, *Lincoln and Black Freedom* (1981).

The *New York Times* ran an obituary on 17 Apr. 1865.

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Online Resources

- The District of Columbia Emancipation Proclamation
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/dc_emancipation_act/
Featured Document from the National Archives and Records Administration.
- The Emancipation Proclamation
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured_documents/emancipation_proclamation/index.html
Featured Document from the National Archives and Records Administration.
- Lincoln Assassination Report
http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/american_originals/lincoln.html
From the National Archives and Records Administration's American Originals Exhibition.
- Lincoln Documents in the Illinois State Archives
<http://www.cyberdriveillinois.com/departments/archives/lincdocs.html>
From the Illinois State Archives. Includes some manuscripts and collection information.
- The Lincoln Museum
<http://www.alplm.org/museum/museum.html>
Sponsored by the the Lincoln Historical Research Foundation. See the [Exhibit](#) and [Research](#) areas for photos and documents.
- Mr. Lincoln's Virtual Library
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/alhtml/alhome.html>
From the Library of Congress's American Memory website, featuring documents from the 20,000-item Lincoln Papers collection.

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