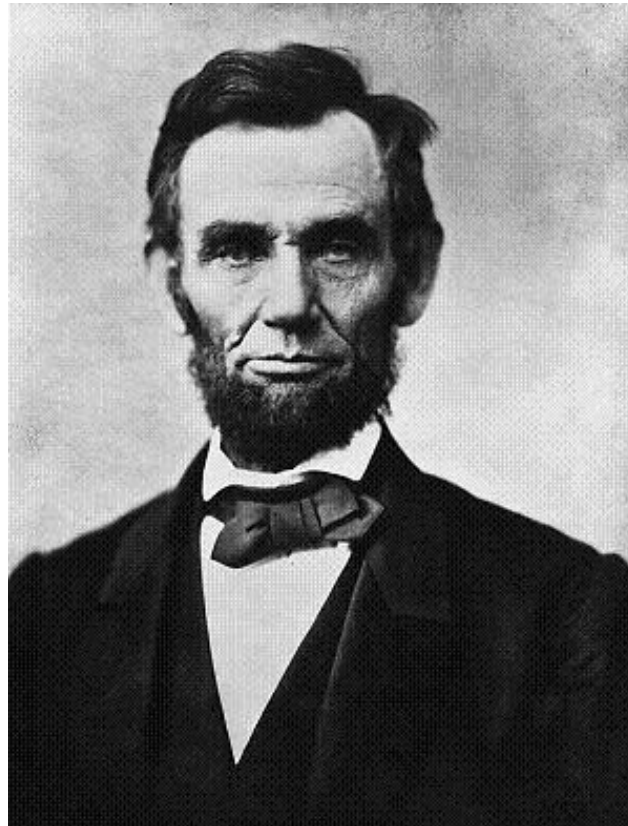


# Abraham Lincoln

For Whom the Swaying Mass Calls  
Sixteenth, 1861-1865



**Nicknames:** "Honest Abe", "The Rail-splitter", "The Great Emancipator", "The Uncommon Friend of the Common Man", "The Original Gorilla", "The Slave Hound of Illinois"

**Birth:** February 12<sup>th</sup>, 1809, near Hodgenville, Hardin (now Larue) County, Kentucky

**Death:** April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1865, Washington, D.C.

**Significant Events During Lincoln's Terms:** Eleven States Secede ... Civil War Begins ... Telegraph utilized nationwide (putting the Pony Express out of business) ... Homestead Act ... Emancipation Proclamation ... Gettysburg Address ... Fort Pillow Massacre ... Sand Creek Massacre ... Lincoln Reelected ... Civil War ends ... West Virginia (#35) and Nevada (#36) become States ... Lincoln Assassinated

**Quotes:** *"I was losing interest in politics, when the repeal of the Missouri Compromise aroused me again. What I have accomplished since then is pretty well known."*

-- Abraham Lincoln, in a short autobiography he wrote in 1859

*"It was no accident that planted Lincoln on a Kentucky farm, half way between the lakes and the Gulf ...Lincoln belonged just where he was put. If the Union was to be saved, it had to be a man of such an origin that should save it. No wintry New England Brahmin could have done it, or any torrid cotton planter, regarding the distant Yankee as a species of obnoxious foreigner. It needed a man of the border, where civil war meant the grapple of brother and brother and disunion a raw and gaping wound. It needed one who knew slavery not from books only, but as a living thing, knew the good that was mixed with its evil, and knew the evil not merely as it affected the negroes, but in its hardly less baneful influence upon the poor whites. It needed one who knew how human all the parties to the quarrel were, how much alike they were at bottom, who saw them all reflected in himself, and felt their dissensions like the tearing apart of his own soul. When the war came Georgia sent an army in gray and Massachusetts an army in blue, but Kentucky raised armies for both sides. And this man, sprung from Southern poor whites, born on a Kentucky farm and transplanted to an Illinois village, this man, in whose heart knowledge and charity had left no room for malice, was marked by Providence as the one to bind up the Nation's wounds."* -- Mark Twain, 1907

*"We saw Negroes chained, maltreated, whipped, and scourged. Lincoln saw it; his heart bled, said nothing much, was silent from feeling, was sad, looked bad, felt bad, was thoughtful and abstracted. I can say, knowing it, that it was on this trip that he formed his opinions of slavery. It run its iron in him then and there – May, 1831. I have heard him say so often and often."* -- John Hanks, speaking of a trip he and Abraham had made together on a flatboat carrying goods to New Orleans

*"He hated wrong and oppression everywhere; and many a man whose fraudulent conduct was undergoing review in a court of justice has writhed under his terrific indignation and rebukes. He was the most simple and unostentatious of men in his habits, having few wants, and those easily supplied. To his honor be it said, that he never took from a client, even when the cause was gained, more than he thought the service was worth and the client could reasonably afford to pay. The people where he practiced law were not rich, and his charges were always small."*

-- Judge David Davis, who presided over the court where Lincoln most often appeared.

*"I, John Brown, am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty land will never be purged away, but with Blood."* -- John Brown, just before he was hanged as a Samson-like martyr, 1859

*"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 all the wealth piled by the bondman'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.'"*

-- Abraham Lincoln, early 1865, in his second Inaugural Address

*"Next to the destruction of the Confederacy, the death of Abraham Lincoln was the darkest day the South has ever known."* -- Jefferson Davis

**How his term ended:** Assassinated

**Other Professions:** Farm Laborer, Store Clerk, Ferryboat Rower, Deckhand on a Flatboat, Postmaster, Owner of General Store/Merchant, Surveyor, Lawyer, Saloon Owner, Soldier

**Worst Mistakes:** Although always publicly in opposition to the extension of slavery, and later even for its total elimination where it had long existed, Lincoln was, at least for part of his life, a racist and a white supremacist. This can be deduced from the following statement that Lincoln made during one of his famous debates (chiefly concerning the slavery question) with Stephen Douglass: "I have no purpose to introduce political and social equality between the white and the black races. There is a physical difference between the two, which will probably forever forbid their living together upon the footing of perfect equality; and inasmuch as it becomes a necessity that there must be a difference, I, as well as Judge Douglas, am in favor of the race to which I belong having the superior position."

Yet that does not mean that Lincoln did not want fair treatment for blacks. He also said this: "There is no reason in the world why the Negro is not entitled to all the natural rights enumerated in the Declaration of Independence – the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." In this Lincoln was Thomas Jefferson's superior.

Actually, prior to the Civil War, Lincoln was considered to be a relatively "moderate" abolitionist. For this middle ground, he was viewed as a radical abolitionist by supporters of slavery, but called "The Slave Hound of Illinois" by so-called "radical" abolitionists.

Lincoln was also guilty of "playing politics," that is, saying one thing to one audience and something quite different to another. Although Lincoln was apparently truly always against slavery and wanted to see it done away with, he appeased those who saw him as a divisive and dangerous radical abolitionist by writing the following to newspaperman Horace Greeley during the Civil War: "I have not meant to leave any one in doubt...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 do it by freeing some and leaving others alone, I would also do that. What I do about Slavery and the colored race, I do because it helps to save this Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union...I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty, and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men, everywhere, could be free."

Yet, to an audience of abolitionist Unitarian ministers, Lincoln's tone was quite different: "We shall need all the anti-slavery feeling in the country, and more; you can go home and try to bring the people to your views, and you may say anything you like about me, if that will help...When the hour comes for dealing with slavery, I trust I will be willing to do my duty though it cost my life."

Going back to the debates with Douglas, note the differences in Lincoln's tune when speaking to different audiences. Here is Lincoln speaking to a group in industrialized Chicago in the

northern part of Illinois:

*Let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man, this race and that race and the other race being inferior, and therefore they must be placed in an inferior position. Let us discard all these things, and unite as one people throughout this land, until we shall once more stand up declaring that all men are created equal.*

And here he is two months later in agrarian Charleston, which is located in southern Illinois:

*I will say, then, 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; that I am not, nor ever have been, in favor of making voters or jurors of negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people...And inasmuch as they cannot so live, while they do remain together there must be the position of superior and inferior, and I as much as any other man am in favor of having the superior position assigned to the white race.*

Another black mark on Lincoln's record (no pun intended): Why did he volunteer for the Blackhawk War, against a people (the Sauk and Fox Indians) abused as badly as the slaves, a people even more wronged than the Mexicans during Polk's administration? Lincoln showed compassion for the Mexicans during the Mexican War and the slaves during the Civil War, so why did he not show the same compassion for the Indians, the same sense of justice? Was it, perhaps, because his grandfather and namesake had been killed by Indians after relocating from Virginia to Kentucky at Daniel Boone's suggestion? If so, how would history have turned out differently if Lincoln's ancestor had been killed by a black man?

Another mistake Lincoln made was appointing the timid whiner George McClellan as a General of the Union forces. Militarily, McClellan failed to push forward when doing so could have meant Union victory and an early end to the war. Yet McClellan blamed his failures on Lincoln, displaying extreme insubordination while sniveling mournfully.

During the Civil War, anyone criticizing Lincoln's policies was jailed without trial.

Finally and most damning, for a time Lincoln upheld the enforcement of the abominable Fugitive Slave Law. In his first inaugural address, Lincoln said that he would not interfere with slavery in the South and that he would enforce the Fugitive Slave Law.

**Saving Graces:** Lincoln faced the issue that had been smoldering and sizzling for decades, and ultimately engineered an end to slavery. Although he sometimes denied it, that seemed to be Lincoln's intention all along – to serve as the instrument of freedom to the black race.

Lincoln's statement that his sole purpose in fighting the war was in saving the Union was not strictly true; in spite of some things he said, he *did* care deeply about ending slavery, and was not willing to preserve the current state of affairs in 1860 (some states slave, some free, with new states deciding for themselves which road they would travel) when a compromise was offered that would preserve both the Union and slavery in perpetuity. Lincoln (to his credit)

rejected that compromise. While it is true that all war is failed diplomacy, in this case it is the South who were clearly in the wrong, slavery being a shameful practice that they should have weaned themselves of “cold turkey” to preserve the Union or, more importantly, because of its pervasive evil.

Additionally, just one month before Greeley wrote Lincoln the letter that provoked Lincoln to make the comments quoted above (about wanting to preserve the Union above all else and not really caring about the slavery issue one way or the other), Lincoln presented the Emancipation Proclamation to his Cabinet, not as a request for comments, but as a done deal.

Lincoln always selected the best man for the job, even if they had been personal enemies of his or he had been slighted by the person earlier. Rather than exacting revenge for prior insults, Lincoln seemed to think first and always of what was best for the country.

**Notes:** Of the eight Presidents to have been born in a log cabin, Lincoln is the most famous for that (many at one time thought of William Henry Harrison (#9) in connection with log cabins, but he was actually born in a Virginia estate).

Lincoln's mother died when he was nine years old. When his father Thomas remarried, there were two Sarah's in the house: Abraham's older sister, and his stepmother. Abe was very close to his stepmother, who encouraged him to educate himself, but was not emotionally close to his father.

As mentioned above, our subject's grandfather, a revolutionary war veteran who was also named Abraham Lincoln, was killed in Kentucky by Indians in the early 1780s.

Besides Kentucky and Illinois, Lincoln also lived in Indiana, moving there when he was eight years old. He said of this area: “It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond 'reading, writing, and ciphering' to the Rule of Three. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.”

Raised on a farm in a farming family, Lincoln remained a farmer until he was twenty-two.

Ulysses S. Grant (#18), who eventually became Lincoln's “go to” General in the Civil War, was also born to a farming family, said something similar about the schools he knew growing up in nearby Ohio: “The schools were very indifferent...They were all supported by subscription, and had a single teacher – who was often a man or woman incapable of teaching much, even if they imparted all they knew.”

Lincoln was known in the backwoods communities where he lived as the preeminent wrestler (besting even the worst bullies in the 'neighborhood'), a good mimic, and an excellent raconteur, or “yarn-spinner.”

Lincoln had an interesting history with women. He fell in love with a blue-eyed, blond daughter of a tavern keeper, Ann Rutledge. When she died in 1835, Abe was so grief-stricken that friends feared he might commit suicide. He later agreed to marry a well-to-do Kentucky spinster sight unseen, but on seeing her, wanted to back out of the deal.\* He wouldn't do that directly, but it took him one-and-a-half years to convince her that he would make a lousy husband, whereupon she made his joy complete by deciding not to marry him, thus freeing him from his obligation.

\* Lincoln wrote of her: "I knew she was oversize, but she now appeared a fair match for Falstaff. I knew she was called an 'old maid,' and I felt no doubt of the truth of at least half of the appellation; but now, when I beheld her, I could not for my life avoid thinking of my mother; and this, not from withered features, for her skin was too full of fat to permit of its contracting into wrinkles, but from her want of teeth, weather-beaten appearance in general, and from a kind of notion that ran in my head that *nothing* could have commenced at the size of infancy and reached her present bulk in less than thirty-five or forty years; and, in short, I was not at all pleased with her. But what could I do? I had told her sister that I would take her for better or for worse; and I made a point of honor and conscience in all things to stick to my word, especially if others had been induced to act on it, which in this case I had no doubt they had; for I was now fairly convinced that no other man on earth would have her, and hence the conclusion that they were bent on holding me to my bargain."

Later, Lincoln met Mary Todd, and in time the two became engaged. Before they got married, though, Lincoln determined that he had actually fallen in love with another woman, one who lived in the same house as Miss Todd, namely a certain Matilda Edwards. Abe's friends said he was acting "crazy as a loon" and spirited him off to Kentucky, where he could 'recover' his senses. When he returned months later, he did eventually marry Miss Todd as originally planned.

Lincoln was challenged to a duel in 1842 by a politician who had read an anonymous satirical article about himself (he assumed Abraham had written it, whereas in fact it was Lincoln's wife Mary who had done so). The weapon chosen by Lincoln—his prerogative, as he was the one who had been challenged—was "cavalry broadswords of the largest size," which weapon gave the tall, long-armed Lincoln a distinct advantage. At the last moment, the challenger (wisely, no doubt) changed his mind, backed off and bowed out of the proceedings.

As detailed in the James Polk (#11) chapter, Lincoln gained notoriety during the Mexican War for his so-called "spot resolutions" before Congress, where he asked President Polk to specify the precise spot where American blood had been shed on American soil at the hand of the Mexicans.

Between the time Lincoln was first elected and took office, seven states had seceded from the Union, namely South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. Four more seceded shortly thereafter, specifically: Arkansas, Tennessee, North Carolina and Virginia (the western portion of which did not want to secede and so broke away and formed a new State). Woodrow Wilson (#28) recalled that one of his earliest memories was of hearing

that Lincoln had been elected and that it meant war (Wilson was born in Virginia in 1856, and so was four years old when Lincoln was elected).

The Emancipation Proclamation did not free all slaves, just those in states that had seceded (or *claimed to have seceded*, as Lincoln never accepted them as having in actuality broken free, as they had not had the right to do so). Slave states who had *not* joined the Confederacy were: Delaware (the first Colony and State), Kentucky (Lincoln's birthplace), Maryland (where Francis Scott Key wrote "The Star Spangled Banner" during the War of 1812), Missouri (a strategic border state), and Tennessee (also a very important state from a strategical standpoint due to its location and topography).

In a way, Lincoln's racism makes it even more impressive that he fought against slavery. I do not subscribe to the excuse, though, that Lincoln can be absolved of guilt for his bigotry simply because most then felt the same way. He was an intelligent man who could read, ponder, discuss, and meditate, and just because the majority were racists is no excuse for him or anyone else to have been one.

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, probably the most famous speech in American history, was received less than enthusiastically by many at the time it was given. One reason for this was its length, which some perceived as being ridiculously, even disrespectfully, short. The previous speaker on the program had expounded on his theme for a good two-and-a-half hours; Lincoln followed up that marathon oration with this three minute oration:

FOUR SCORE AND SEVEN YEARS AGO OUR FATHERS BROUGHT FORTH ON THIS CONTINENT, A NEW NATION, CONCEIVED IN LIBERTY, AND DEDICATED TO THE PROPOSITION THAT ALL MEN ARE CREATED EQUAL.

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. IT IS ALTOGETHER FITTING AND PROPER THAT WE SHOULD DO THIS.

BUT, IN A LARGER SENSE, WE CAN NOT DEDICATE – WE CAN NOT CONSECRATE – WE CAN NOT HALLOW – THIS GROUND. THE BRAVE MEN, LIVING AND DEAD, WHO STRUGGLED HERE, HAVE CONSECRATED IT, FAR ABOVE OUR POOR POWER TO ADD OR DETRACT. THE WORLD WILL LITTLE NOTE, NOR LONG REMEMBER WHAT WE SAY HERE, BUT IT CAN NEVER 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.

During the above address, given in the middle of the Civil War at the scene of one of its

bloodiest and most pivotal battles, Lincoln wore a black crepe band on his hat in memory of his son "Willie," who had died just nine months prior, at the age of eleven.

Lincoln was assassinated exactly four years after calling up troops in response to the Confederate attack on Fort Sumter, South Carolina that officially started the Civil War.

Four of Lincoln's brothers-in-law fought for the Confederacy.

Of the Lincolns' four sons, only Robert, the firstborn, lived to old age; he was born in 1843 and lived until 1926. The others died at three (Edward), eleven ("Willie"), and eighteen (Thomas, or "Tad").

Politicos during the times of the World Wars should have learned lessons from Lincoln's prosecution of the Civil War. The first lesson they failed to discern and apply was that appeasement is not the right route to take when dealing with something as wicked as slavery or genocide. Lincoln did not appease the slavers, but drew a line in the sand where it needed to be: Here and no further! Britain's Neville Chamberlain, contrariwise, sought to appease the diabolical Hitler. The British Lion crept into its den and took a nap.

Second (but preceding it in time): At the end of World War I/The Great War, the negotiating nations neglected to take a page from Lincoln's book, as they should have, on how to treat a vanquished foe. Instead of instructing the band to play "Dixie" and mending fences as a means to an early restoration of the normalization of relations, they punished Germany so harshly and vindictively so as to set in motion an almost inevitable replay of hostilities a scant two decades later.

The frontiersman born in a log cabin had a lot more "horse sense" (after all, horses don't bet on humans, as W.C. Fields noted) than the University-educated Statesmen of Europe displayed in those times of crisis. Yet Lincoln had paid attention to Europe, as is made clear by this quote from him: "...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. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says, 'You toil and work and earn bread, and I'll eat it.' No matter in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle."

Following the assassination, Walt Whitman (1819-1892) wrote his famous poem "O Captain! My Captain!" of and for Lincoln, which cries out:



*O Captain! my Captain! Our fearful trip is done,  
The ship has weather'd every rack, the prize we fought is won,  
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,  
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;  
But O heart! heart! heart!  
O the bleeding drops of red,  
Where on the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.*

*O Captain! my Captain! Rise up and hear the bells;  
Rise up – for you the flag is flung – for you the bugle trills,  
For you bouquets and ribbon'd wreaths – for you the shores a-crowding,  
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;  
Here Captain! dear father!  
This arm beneath your head!  
It is some dream that on the deck,  
You've fallen cold and dead.*

*My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still,  
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will,  
The ship is anchor'd safe and sound, its voyage closed and done,  
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;  
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!  
But I with mournful tread,  
Walk the deck my Captain lies,  
Fallen cold and dead.*