

Abraham Lincoln

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Dialogue on Lincoln, *A Legacy of Liberty*
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Abraham Lincoln did not look like a presidential candidate. He was tall and awkward, had a shrill, nasally voice and had an overall appearance that was not that of a statesman. Being born in a log cabin in Kentucky, he only received one year of formal education. His life was working on the family farm. Lincoln was an avid book reader, which eventually led him to self-teaching law.

Lincoln's political career practically came out of nowhere. He had only served four terms in the Illinois state legislature and only one term in Congress. His reputation did not come as a lawyer. He mainly accepted divorce cases, wills, patents, debt collection, murders and fugitive slaves. His best case that made him \$5,000 was when he represented the Illinois Central Railroad in a right-of-way case.

The first slave Lincoln freed prior to the Emancipation Declaration was *Bailey v. Cromwell* in 1841. It involved a fugitive slave, Nance, and Lincoln won the case and she became free.

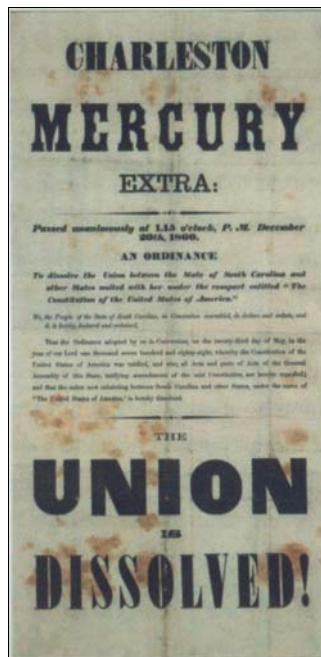
His most notable case was when he defended William "Duff" Armstrong, accused of murder in 1857. When the prosecution's witness claimed to have seen his client at the crime scene on a moonlight night, Lincoln produced an almanac showing that on that particular night, there was no moon! Lincoln gained a reputation for honesty, logic, precision and integrity. He learnt that courtroom finesse won many cases. He later earned the nickname of "**Honest Abe.**"

When Lincoln served in Congress from 1846-1848 he was noted for taking a stance on four major issues.

- He spoke out against the Mexican-American War.
- He advocated for abolishing slavery in the nation's capital.
- He fought for money for improved infrastructure and the Illinois state capital in Springfield.
- Lincoln also fought for suffrage rights for all tax-paying Illinois immigrants as they were often the target of nativist attitudes within the state.

When Lincoln became president, he argued that the Constitution did not allow for secession of individual states from the Union. He vowed to preserve the Union at all costs. On the day of his inauguration, March 4, 1861, eleven Southern slave states declared their independence from the United States of America. They viewed the Republican president as a threat to their states rights. They believed that Lincoln's new government would strengthen the federal government, restrict slavery, increase taxes, advance industrialization and implement higher tariffs. Lincoln's presidency would all but take away their agrarian and plantation societies.

"We hold to the principle among others that this government is not solely the government of the majority but that the minority have rights that must be respected....we will not submit to having our rights taken from us." John Cochran, Georgia.



On August 16, 1861, Lincoln declared that the Southern states were in rebellion against the United States. He called their actions “*an insidious debauching of the public mind,*” and simply unlawful.

We find the proposition that, in legal contemplation, the Union is perpetual as confirmed by the history of the Union itself. The Union is much older than the Constitution. It was formed, in fact, by the Articles of Confederation in 1774. It was matured and continued by the Declaration of Independence in 1776. It was further matured, and the faith of all thirteen States expressly plighted, and engaged that it should be perpetual, by the Articles of Confederation in 1778. And, finally, in 1787, one of the declared objects for ordaining and establishing the Constitution was “to form a more perfect Union.”
Abraham Lincoln at his second inaugural address, March 4, 1861.

Lincoln believed that if the Southern States were allowed to secede, the United States would no longer serve as an example of law, order, and liberty for the world. American democracy, “*of the people, by the people, for the people*” would be destroyed.

The **Fugitive Slave Act** of 1850 gave stronger property protections to slaveholders and stricter punishments for those in violation of the law. Every American, according to the Act, including those in free states, must protect any slaveholders’ property rights by returning a runaway slave. In addition to this law, any free slave in the North was subject to being mistaken for a runaway and taken to the South in lieu of the origin runaway. Northern abolitionists had to choose to either break the law or honor their values. People that were found guilty of aiding a fugitive slave were subject to six months in prison and a \$ 1,000 fine.

Ending slavery at the start of the Civil War was not the main priority for Lincoln. He saw that the war was all about preserving the Union.

*“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.”*

Abraham Lincoln in a letter to Horace Greeley in 1862.

Lincoln’s underlying motive was to ensure that the slaveholding border states, **Kentucky, Missouri, Maryland and Tennessee** stayed in allegiance with the Union. However, as the war dragged on, Lincoln realized that emancipation was essential to preserving the Union.

On January 1st, 1863, under the given role of commander-in-chief, Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Declaration.

“I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel. And yet I have never understood that the Presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling”.

Abraham Lincoln in a letter to Albert Hodges, April 4, 1864.

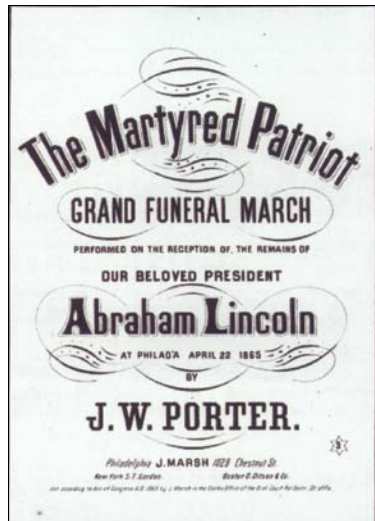
Lincoln did not want the Emancipation Declaration to be seen as a wartime measure. He had to have the declaration pass in Congress. It was a difficult fight for him but finally in January, 1865, Congress passed the **Thirteenth Amendment**. Lincoln would not live to see it ratified!

The Civil War was fought between the Northern and Southern states across an imaginary line, the **Mason-Dixon Line**. Propaganda and political speeches fueled both sides into a more aggressive war. To maintain national security, he issued orders to suspend the writ of habeas corpus, restrict free speech, and have his government control the freedom of the press. Many of his contemporaries called him a tyrant, but Lincoln defended his actions before Congress, citing his inaugural pledge to protect the country.

Lincoln’s actions resulted in approximately 38,000 American citizens being arrested during the war as threats to national security.

When Lincoln was assassinated in 1865, just days after the end of the war, his goal for “the new birth of freedom” had to continue. People began honoring him immediately following his death.

Lincoln was the first American president to be assassinated. He became a political martyr, he had sacrificed his own life for the nation he fought so hard to preserve.



Timeline of Lincoln's Life

1809	Born in a log cabin in present day Hodgenville, Kentucky
1816	Family moved to Indiana
1816	Lincoln's mother died of poisoning in milk contaminated with white snakeroot poison tremetol
1819	Lincoln's father remarried
1830	Family moved to Illinois, settling near present day Decatur
1831	At age 22 moved to New Salem, Illinois, where he worked as a store clerk and then the postmaster
1834	Elected to Illinois General Assembly represented his county for four terms and began to study law
1836	Licensed by Illinois Supreme Court to practice law
1842	Married Mary Todd
1844	Established law practice with partner William Herndon, in Springfield, Illinois
1846	Elected to U.S. House of Representatives, served only one term, opposed Mexican War, proposed legislation to abolish slavery in Washington, D. C.
1858	Nominated by Republican Party for the U.S. Senate, lost seat to Stephen Douglas. The Lincoln-Douglas debates were during this campaign, making him a national figure.
1860	Selected by the Republican National Convention in Chicago as candidate for president. Won the election with his running mate Hannibal Hamlin
1861	Inaugurated as president shortly before the Civil War begins. In the same year, seven of the eleven states seceded to form the Confederate States
1863	Issued the Emancipation Proclamation. Delivered the Gettysburg Address.
1864	Re-Elected to presidency, defeated Democrat George McClellan
1865	Assassinated just days after the Civil War ends and months before the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment.