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## The Leadership of Abraham Lincoln: Why It Matters Today

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# **The Leadership of Abraham Lincoln: *Why It Matters Today***

***An Historical and Contemporary Portrait of Wisdom, Courage,  
Compassion and Determination<sup>1</sup>***

— Emilio Iodice, Rome, Italy, USA



*A Digital Portrait of Abraham Lincoln by Artist Ray Downing  
<https://pixels.com/featured/abraham-lincoln-portrait-ray-downing.html>. Courtesy, Wikimedia Commons*

***I am a patient man — always willing to forgive on the Christian terms of repentance; and also, to give ample time for repentance. Still, I must save this government if possible.***

— July 17, 1862, letter to Reverdy Johnson, U.S. Senator and attorney, and to U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom (defended Lincoln assassination conspirator, Mary Surratt).

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*Fellow-citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass, will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation.*

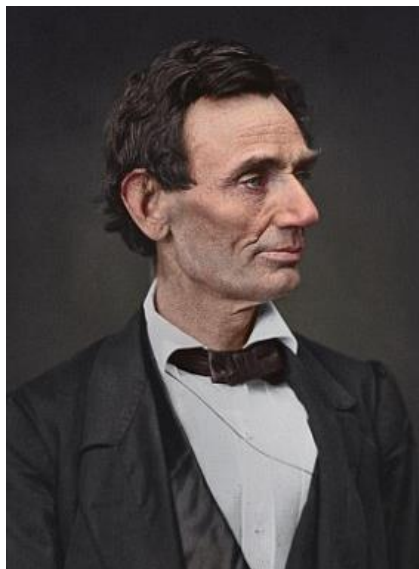
— Abraham Lincoln, December 1, 1862, Message to Congress.

*It is impossible to imagine anything which better becomes a ruler than mercy.*

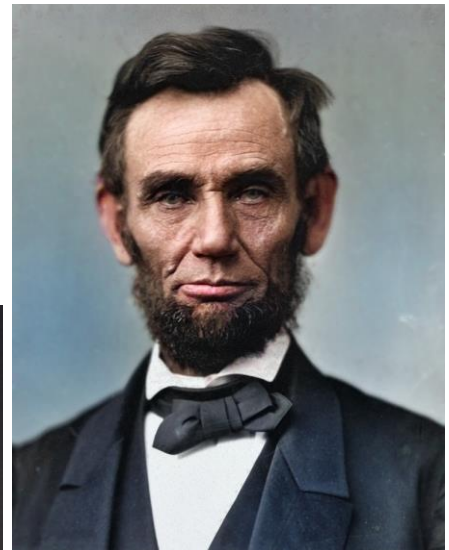
— Lucio Anneo Seneca (Seneca), Latin poet and philosopher.

## Leadership Secrets

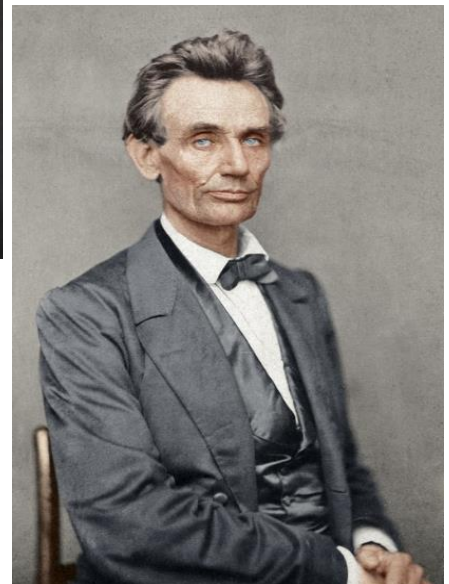
- Compassion combined with courage are essential for leadership;
- Perseverance and passion in all endeavors;
- Truth and integrity are the best policies;
- Include stories in messages;
- Communicate with care;
- Encourage creativity;
- Empower others with confidence;
- Help subordinates believe ideas are theirs;
- Trust people;
- Search for the best leaders;
- Project a vision of the future; and
- Seek high ideals and decide and act.



Courtesy, Marina Amaral/Library of Congress/Cover Images



Courtesy, Library of Congress and Wikipedia Commons



Courtesy, Santos Gutiérrez, Pinterest and Library of Congress

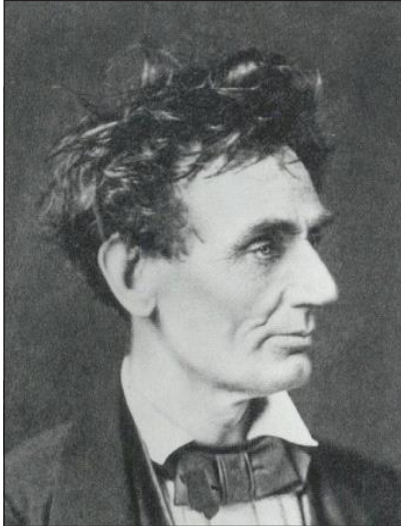
## Abraham Lincoln

He was born in Kentucky, on February 12, 1809, and died in Washington, DC on April 15, 1865. Lincoln was born in poverty and grew up in the American frontier. He was, to a large extent, self-educated. He became a lawyer and moved to Illinois, where he was a state legislator. Lincoln was elected to the US House of Representatives and served one term. He was elected President in 1860 and campaigned to end slavery. He presided over the Civil War and carried the North to victory. Shortly after the defeat of the South, Lincoln was shot by a Confederate sympathizer while attending a play at Ford's Theater, in the nation's capital. He was the first American President assassinated in office.

It was sweltering. The capital was blanketed with sun. The sour smell of the Potomac filled the air. It was Independence Day. Few were celebrating.

He entered the building from a side door. There were rumors of assassination. Guards surrounded him. He went up the marble staircase towards the opening of the great chamber. He glanced at paintings of Washington, Franklin, and scenes of the Revolution.

At the entrance, he reflected on his words and thoughts. The nation faced one of the worst



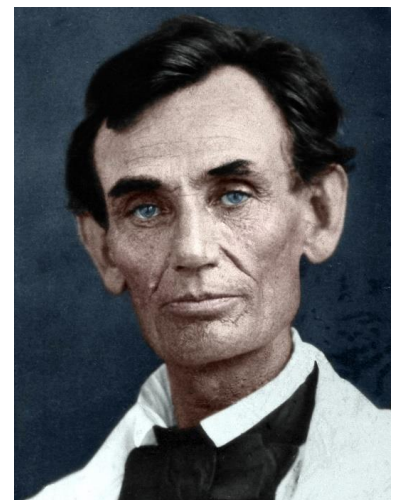
*Abraham Lincoln Research Site, Courtesy, Library of Congress*

financial crises in its history. Thousands of institutions and businesses had failed. Foreign investors were reducing holdings of U.S. stocks and securities. His predecessor had left him with a staggering deficit. Interest on official loans was climbing. There was doubt as to the ability of the government to fund its obligations. American and European banks were facing insolvency. Public debt was mounting on both sides of the Atlantic. Conflicts were absorbing badly needed funds for projects to put people back to work.

Unemployment was growing. Protests were happening in various parts of the country. He had been sworn in only a few months earlier, yet it seemed like the office weighed on him like a decade of toil and trouble. His hair was turning grey. Lines were deepening in his forehead.

Suddenly, the doors of the chamber opened. A man to his right called out his title. Hundreds of people rose. A few extended a hand as he walked down the aisle. Many felt he was not up to the task before him. Many believed the nation was at the brink of collapse and that he would not be able to guide it through. Many thought that this attorney from Illinois, with a thin political career, was inexperienced and incompetent, and lacked the knowledge and culture to deal with the challenges of the nation.

The government of the United States of America was before him. Its leaders looked to him for wisdom, solutions and a way out of the most severe problems America ever faced. He saw the place where his predecessors had spoken. Some asked for powers to wage war. Others pleaded for resources and sacrifices to meet emergencies. He would be the first to ask for both.



*Abraham Lincoln, Republican candidate for the presidency, 1860. Courtesy, Library of Congress*

His speech was prepared and ready for delivery. The chamber was quiet and somber as the tall man in black, with disheveled hair mounted the steps, opened his notes and looked at them. His eyes were dark and deep. He quietly and respectfully began.

He pronounced each word with care. His voice carried into the balconies and echoed off the walls of the chamber like the sound of conscience.

Abraham Lincoln was about to address a joint session of the Congress. It was July 4, 1861. He was going to ask for funds and soldiers to deal with the greatest crisis in American history. A rebellion was engulfing the nation. States had seceded from the Union. Brother would fight brother in a war that would tear apart the fabric of the nation he loved.

He told them our forefathers had transformed bullets into ballots. The people had the right to vote. They were free to choose.



Might did not make right. They had no reason to use the gun. The South would fight to preserve keeping men and women in bondage. Slavery went against the grain of America. Our nation was founded on human freedom and liberty, said Lincoln. It was united by the spirit that “all men are created equal.” The Union must be saved. He asked the country to sacrifice for it with their lives and sacred fortunes.



Lincoln at his desk, Courtesy, Ray Downing at <https://pexels.com/featured/abraham-lincoln-portrait-ray-downing.html>

He would lead the way.

Lincoln’s vision was to keep the states as one, end slavery and uphold the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. He would guide the country with persistence, dedication, and devotion, even if it cost him all he had.

His successors would face similar challenges but none as frightening, complex, or traumatic as the American Civil War. It happened when few resources were available. The country was still expanding and settling in the West and was least prepared to deal with a major emergency.

Lincoln had not spent decades priming for this role. He was not a Washington insider. He was not skilled in the ways of the capital and the meanderings of national politics. He did not have a reputation. He was unknown.

Some called him “a prairie lawyer.” He did not have a broad education. He was a self-made man. He had not traveled across the globe. He was not a warrior. Some would say he was not an orator or charismatic. He did not have a valet, tailor, or barber. He rode his own horse or a simple carriage. He neither smoked, nor drank.

He grew up in a land of hunters yet supported the rights of animals. He said women should vote. Many laughed and scoffed at his ideas.

As a politician, he had more failures than successes. He was elected with a minority of the popular vote. Others thought they were more worthy than him to assume the highest office of the land. He would take some of them into his cabinet. At first, they would dislike him, but at the end consider him a man of extraordinary courage and compassion and a remarkable inhabitant of the White House.

## Leadership Traits

Lincoln brought qualities of leadership that would bring him and the people of the United States through a bitter, agonizing storm. He would restore peace and save the republic.


### **Perseverance**

Nearly three years before his Independence Day speech before the Congress, he gave an address in Springfield, Illinois that would change the life of “the prairie lawyer.” He accepted the nomination of the newly-formed Republican Party to run for US Senator against Stephen A. Douglas. It was June 16, 1858. Lincoln said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand.” Slavery was cutting America into pieces. The nation argued for decades over the issue. It could do so no longer, claimed Lincoln. Either it became all free or all slaves. The principle of equality was clear. It was the heart of the Declaration of Independence. It was the essence of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The American Revolution was fought over it. He would fight for it. He lost the election in Illinois but not the struggle to abolish slavery. He persevered in his

beliefs. Two years later he was elected President of the United States.

## Show Compassion

As Lincoln spoke of a “house divided,” a man in animal skins refused to accept the United States occupation of the West. He would lead thousands of his people to fight and die for freedom from the white man. A young, fiery Native American, named Geronimo, turned twenty-nine that day. He led the Apache nation to wage war against the Mexicans who had killed his wife, children, and mother four months earlier. He would become chief of his tribe and battle the Mexicans and the United States for three decades to end the servitude of his race. He would fail. Lincoln would succeed.



*Geronimo, Courtesy, Granger  
Historical Picture Archive and the  
Library of Congress*

Two years into his Presidency, in the midst of the Civil War, Lincoln would show the people of Geronimo who he was and what made him one of the greatest of leaders of the nation Geronimo despised. An allied tribe of the Apaches, the Sioux, rose against the white population in Minnesota. Hundreds were killed on both sides. Three hundred and three Native Americans were arrested, tried, and convicted of war crimes. They appealed for a pardon to the President of the United States. The Minnesotans wanted vengeance. They expected their President to be forceful and kill them as they had killed his people.

Lincoln did not accept the verdict. He reviewed each case. He agonized over every story. He looked at them as a lawyer, a judge, a human being and as an American. He realized injustices were committed. He wanted to avoid more.

The Native Americans had not been properly represented. Their crimes were clear, but Lincoln felt that justice had not been done. There was anger, rage and fury among the white settlers. There was hatred among the Sioux. Any decision risked creating greater anguish. When in doubt, Abraham Lincoln followed the road toward mercy and forgiveness. It was not perfect, but fair.

Lincoln was a leader of enormous compassion and love for his fellow man. Life in all its forms was sacred and needed to be preserved. Human life, above all else, needed to be protected. Humanity needed to be appealed to so we could find the “better angels” within us. This was especially true in an era of violence and an “eye for an eye.”

As the war continued, Lincoln wrote letters to parents who had lost their children on the field of battle. One has never been forgotten.

In the fall of 1864, the Governor of Massachusetts asked the President to write to a widow who had lost sons in the war. Her name was Mrs. Bixby. Lincoln knew his words could provide little solace to this woman, but he had to convey why they fell and how their sacrifice would not be in vain:

Executive Mansion  
Washington, Nov. 21, 1864

*Dear Madam.*

*I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.*

*I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.*

*I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.*

*Yours, very sincerely and respectfully,*

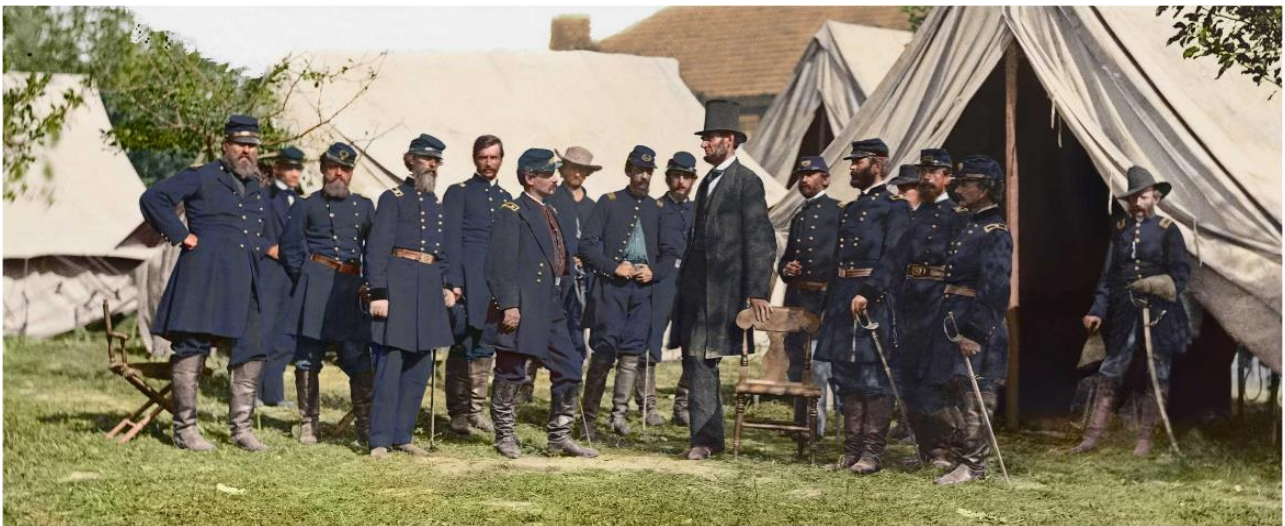
**A. Lincoln**

Lincoln would tender his own sacrifice “on the altar of freedom,” one hundred and forty-one days later. Until then, he continued to save lives. He went to the battlefields and felt the fear that hung in the air. He saw the amputated legs, the faces torn apart from grape shot, mangled hands and bodies and boys broken by the convulsions of war. He had compassion for young men who deserted or were afraid to fight. As President, he gave more pardons than any Chief Executive of the United States before him and after him.

He wanted to grant clemency in the case of the Sioux but could not. He studied each and pardoned eighty seven percent of those convicted and allowed the execution of those who committed the most violent crimes. He did so reluctantly. He realized that if he tendered pardons to all, he could cause greater bloodshed. White settlers would take matters in their own hands and kill more Native Americans. This solution would come as close to justice as anything that could be found in times of war. Lincoln took the most courageous and compassionate route. It was the hallmark of his leadership. He was not afraid to do what was right. He was ready to die for his country.

### ***Courage and Character***

Real leaders are always prepared to make the ultimate sacrifice. Lincoln never asked of others what he was not prepared to do himself. He set the example, he set the tone. As the war advanced, Lincoln showed himself to those who he sent to bleed and die for the Union. He was with the troops in hospitals, on the battlefields and in the line of fire. His actions followed his words. His courage and integrity were two sides of the same coin. Lincoln meant what he said and followed through with example, no matter what the risk.



*Courtesy, Time Magazine*

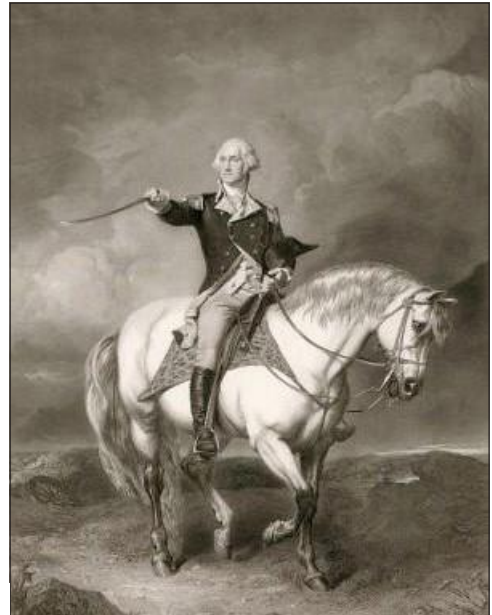
In July 1864, he and Mary Todd Lincoln visited Fort Stevens, in Maryland, not far from the nation's capital. Soldiers were wounded in a hospital on the compound. He spoke to them. He took their hands in his. He asked about them, their families and their lives. He wanted to know their feelings. Abraham Lincoln comforted those who were suffering to realize his vision to preserve the Union. He equated his life with theirs.



Confederate forces attacked Fort Stevens. Some believed that the rebels knew Lincoln was there. They wanted to kill him. Lincoln stood on the battlements with his troops. The men in grey opened fire. Bullets flew in and around him. A soldier was hit. Lincoln went to him. Troops surrounded the President and took him to cover. He was more concerned with the condition of the wounded than his own. The Confederates were driven off. They were less than fifty miles from the White House. The incident reinforced Lincoln's determination. He pressed General Grant to reinforce the Army of the Potomac to protect the nation's capital.



*Lincoln with General McClellan. Courtesy, Library of Congress*



*George Washington on the Potomac*

Persistence, determination, bravery, compassion, and setting the example were key elements of Abraham Lincoln's method of leading. He knew that each generation faced challenges that seemed overwhelming. Yet with the proper values and taking risks leaders could overcome the greatest difficulties. He was guided by the past to help him deal with the present and future. America's heritage was grounded in the principles of the Revolution and the words of our forefathers in the sacred documents of our Republic. American history was his compass.

### ***Set the Example***

Nearly eighty-eight years earlier, another American faced death, just like Lincoln did at Fort Stevens. General George Washington was in New York City. It was 1776. His army of farmers and tradesman was no match for the superpower of the world. The British had thousands of crack troops that landed in Manhattan and overran the American installations. Washington's soldiers were terrified. They dropped their weapons and fled. He demanded that they take their positions and fight.

They ignored him.

In frustration, the General watched as his army raced across the battlefield while British troops marched towards him. He stood his ground as all others fled for cover. His white horse, Old Nelson, could feel his master's courage. He took out his sword. British bullets sailed over and around him. The red coats tried to kill the commander of the rebel forces. Washington did not budge. He was in the line of fire.

The enemy finally stopped. They rose and cheered the General for his courage. His aides ran and brought him away as the red coats saluted the man on the white horse who had exhibited heroism that they had never seen before. Washington's steadfastness led the way. His persistence and bravery would lead to success. Five years later he would take New York from the British.



It was this kind of courage that gave Lincoln consolation during his darkest times. His predecessors faced moments where they had to choose to set the example. They knew that the people, the world and history itself would be watching.

In 1781, as Washington was attacking Manhattan, another figure in the American Revolution was in the South, embarking on a campaign, as well. He was one of Washington's ablest generals, and his protégé. He had valiantly fought in Canada and New York. Now he led a force of 1,200 troops. He attacked the city of Richmond and told the Governor of Virginia that his soldiers would spare the capital of the state if they were allowed to take tobacco without resistance. The soldiers were in red. Their leader wore a red coat. Not long before, he had been a hero in the army of George Washington. His name was Benedict Arnold.

Governor Thomas Jefferson was confronted with a bitter choice. He could lose his city and surrender to a traitor. Jefferson chose to fight. He was nearly captured, as Richmond burned.

Washington sent a Frenchman, the Marquis de Lafayette, to stop the British advance in Virginia. Jefferson refused to give in, and Washington refused to give up even in the face of betrayal and disappointment.

### ***Stay Close to the People***

Like Washington, Lincoln engaged those under him. He was with the troops and with his subordinates. He was always present and there for them to see, hear, and talk with. He did not isolate himself. He did not create a palace guard. He did not develop a sense of his own importance. The Lincoln White House was open to one and all. He was especially close to his team. Lincoln made it a point to drop in to see his Cabinet officers, his staff, and met with visitors from all walks of life. He spoke with business leaders who proposed new technology and better medications to heal wounded troops. He studied new ideas, concepts, and weapons for the war effort.

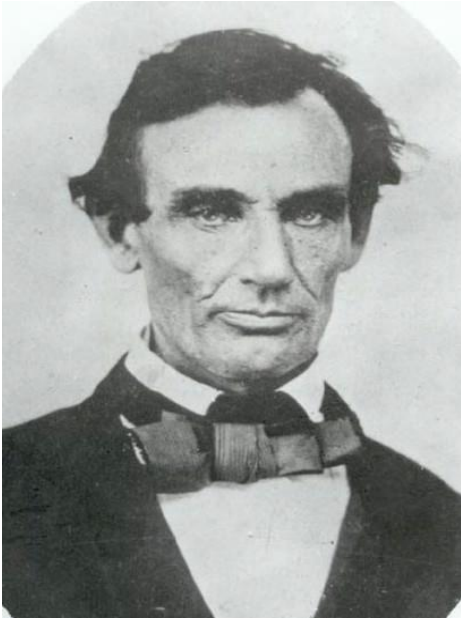
### ***Keep Priorities in Perspective***

Lincoln kept his priorities in perspective. The first was to win the war. This was paramount. His secondary objective was to handle the day-to-day affairs of government. He needed his cabinet, filled with men who were his political opponents, to support his initiatives. Lincoln engaged them personally. He often made them feel that ideas and initiatives he wanted to advance were theirs. He would visit their offices and homes. They would get to know each other. Each was different and Lincoln discovered a way to deal with each. With Secretary of State William H. Seward, he would meet at night, and they would tell stories and enjoy each other's company. Gradually he created a bond with Seward who had been one of his chief rivals for the Republican nomination. Their friendship grew and became the envy of members of the Cabinet. Salmon P. Chase was one of them.

Secretary of Treasury Chase was a man of ambition. Behind the scenes, he was maneuvering himself to challenge Lincoln for the Republican Presidential nomination of 1864. Lincoln knew it. In the process, Chase tried to discredit Seward, who was a potential candidate as well.

### ***Deal with Problems Directly***

Following a major Confederate victory, Chase took advantage of a distraught Congress to accuse Seward of wrongdoing and Lincoln of not consulting with the Cabinet on major decisions. He wanted Seward dismissed and Lincoln to reorganize the leadership. Chase assembled members of the Senate to meet with the President and hear their accusations. Lincoln told them he would consider what they felt and would meet with them the following night. Seward tendered his resignation in protest. Lincoln did not act on it. The following evening, the members of the Senate joined the President in a room filled with his Cabinet officers, except for Seward. It was a surprise.



The Senators did not expect the Cabinet to be present. Lincoln had no intention of reorganizing his government or taking orders from the Congress. He realized Chase was behind the affairs in question. He wanted to get the issues out in the open and settled. He caught all off guard. They were assembled in one room. Lincoln insisted that matters be resolved that evening. He presided over the meeting. Chase was in a corner. If he supported the accusations of the Senators, it would be clear that he was the origin of the allegations and had personal motives.

He was forced to agree that Lincoln consulted frequently with the Cabinet and that his team was in agreement on key policies. He admitted that Seward acted competently and properly in the execution of his duties. Chase was discredited. He gave Lincoln his resignation. It would not be the last time that Chase would tender it.

Lincoln needed Seward and Chase in the Cabinet. Eventually, he accepted Chase's request to resign and appointed him to the Supreme Court. Lincoln showed that open and frank discussion among feuding subordinates would expose the truth.



*Ford's Theatre, Washington, D.C., The Box of Abraham Lincoln, on the night of April 12, 1865, Courtesy, Library of Congress Collection Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library, Springfield, Illinois*

and administratively to advance his agenda and that of the nation. Personal engagement was the key.

One of the most memorable occasions happened close to the end of the War. It was early April, in 1865. General Grant was advancing on Richmond. The North had won a string of victories. On the eve of the fall of the Confederate capital, Lincoln decided to secretly visit the city. He took his son, Tad, with him. They crossed hills and valleys and rivers to get there. It was not an easy ride. The President was advised not to go.

### ***Learning to Relax***

Lincoln enjoyed the theatre. He enjoyed plays and spectacles. They let him escape and relax and recharge his batteries. One of his favorite places was a small playhouse in the nation's capital, not far from the White House. It was called Ford's Theatre.

### ***Presence and Symbolism***

His presence as leader was particularly important. He knew the prestige of the position he held and used it symbolically



*General Ulysses S. Grant, Courtesy, The Economist and Library of Congress*



His Secretary of War, Gideon Wells, was worried that he was putting himself in harm's way.



*General William Tecumseh Sherman, Courtesy, Library of Congress Collection and Colorized History.com*



*Courtesy, Time Magazine*

Lincoln was venturing into the bosom of the Confederacy. The President knew the risks. He also knew he needed to show strength, mercy, and healing so that the process of reconciliation could occur. He knew what was ahead. He was determined to stop the bloodshed. There were those who sought revenge on the South for the agony they forced upon the country. Lincoln needed to contain them. After victory, his objective was “to bind up the nation’s wounds.”

Few realized that Lincoln’s preoccupation with reintegration of the country began as soon as he took office. It was constantly on his mind and affected his daily decisions. Parts of states reclaimed by the North in battle had to be governed. He worked to prevent Border States from joining the Confederacy. He promised amnesty, gradual liberalization and black voting rights. His actions polarized his party and supporters. He had to be conscious of each act, each word and each measure as it rippled across the political climate. Even so, he steadfastly held by his principles of carrying the nation to reconciliation.



*General Robert E. Lee Surrendering to General Grant at Appomattox Court House in Richmond Virginia, April 9, 1865, Courtesy History.com, 2012*

General Sherman asked Lincoln what to do with the leaders of the Confederacy. There were calls to arrest them and try them for treason. Lincoln encouraged Sherman to allow them to escape. He saw no purpose in retribution. It would only drag out the process of uniting the country.

On April 2, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederacy, and his leaders departed Richmond as General Robert E. Lee, head of the rebel forces, abandoned the city. The next day, the people of Richmond woke to find their city occupied by Union troops.



Lincoln had been in the field for nearly two weeks. He met with his soldiers and the Confederate



*"The Harvest of Death" by Timothy O'Sullivan. Courtesy, Library of Congress Collection, Colorized by HistoryColor.com*

prisoners. Now, he wanted to reach the capital of the enemy and bring the conflict to an end. He realized that only his presence could achieve this. His personal involvement was essential. Two days after the fall of Richmond, Abraham Lincoln entered the city. The smell of smoke and the sites of burning buildings were everywhere. The rebels set fire to tobacco warehouses and structures across the capital. They scorched the earth as the Union forces advanced. Lincoln saw adolescent boys pressed into

service to the South. Their muskets were larger than their bodies. They were boys forced to be men. The smell of death hung in the air.

Bodies of fallen soldiers were everywhere. Lincoln did not enter Richmond as a conquering hero. He came into the city quietly. There was no fanfare. There was sadness and drama.

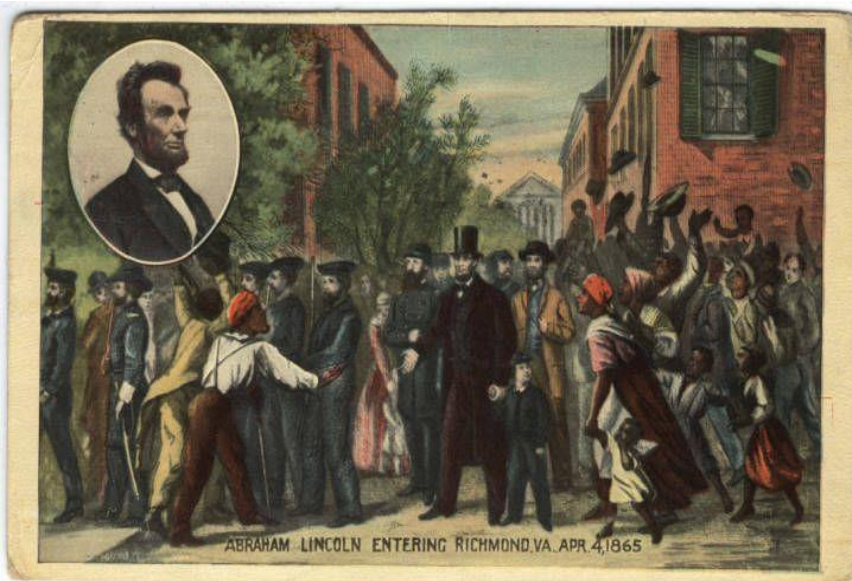
Lincoln crossed a river to reach the Confederate capital. As he reached the bank, Admiral David Dixon Porter recalled the following in his memoirs:

*There was a small house on this landing, and behind it were some twelve negroes digging with spades. The leader of them was an old man, sixty years of age. He raised himself to an upright position as we landed and put his hands up to his eyes. Then he dropped his spade and sprang forward. "Bress de Lord," he said. "Dere is de great Messiah! I knowed him as soon as I seed him. He's bin in me hear fo' long yeahs, an' he's cum at las' to free his chillun from deir bondage! Glory, Hallelujah!" And he fell upon his knees before the President and kissed his feet. The others followed his example, and in a minute, Mr. Lincoln was surrounded by these people, who had treasured up the recollection of him caught from a photograph and had looked up to him for four years as the one who was to lead them out of captivity.*

*It was a touching sight – that aged negro kneeling at the feet of the tall, gaunt-looking man who seemed in himself to be bearing all the grief of the nation, and whose sad face seemed to say, 'I suffer for you all, but will do all I can to help you.'*

*Mr. Lincoln looked down on the poor creatures at his feet; he was much embarrassed at his position. 'Don't kneel to me,' he said. 'That is not right. You must kneel to God only and thank him for the liberty you will hereafter enjoy. I am but God's humble instrument; but you may rest assured that as long as I live no one shall put a shackle on your limbs, and you shall have all the rights which God has given to every other free citizen of this Republic.'*

*His face was lit up with a divine look as he uttered these words. Though not a handsome man, and ungainly in his person, yet in his enthusiasm he seemed the personification of manly beauty, and that sad face of his looked down in kindness upon these ignorant blacks with a grace that could not be excelled. He really seemed of another world.*

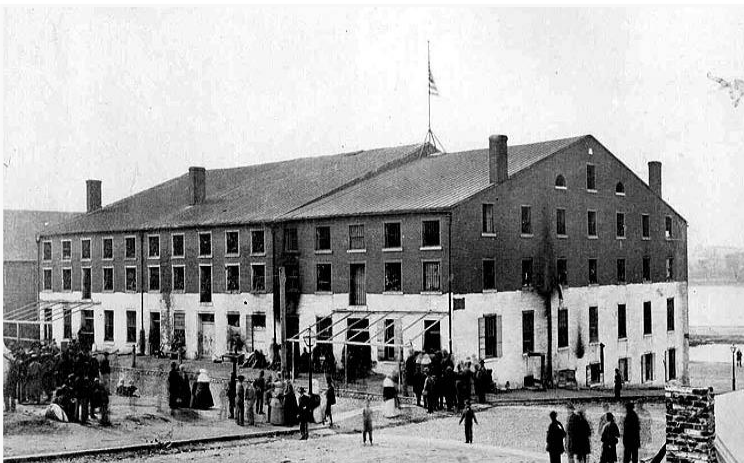
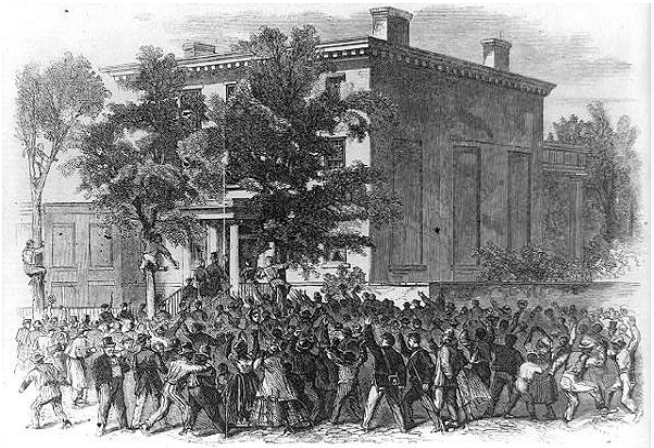


Color Drawing of Lincoln in Richmond on April 4, 1865. Courtesy, Library of Congress Collection

Pandemonium engulfed the city. People surrounded Lincoln as he advanced through Richmond. A girl of seventeen walked towards him. The crowd let her slowly reach the President. She was lovely. She held a bouquet of roses. She presented it with a few words of gratitude. He held her hand as she spoke. He thanked her as she disappeared into the throng. The President continued his march through Richmond with that bouquet in his hand. He tipped his hat to

enemy and friend. Lincoln was conveying a message through his presence, lack of fear, and the symbolism of the supreme commander of the North showing compassion to his enemies.

He reached the heart of the Confederacy, the headquarters of Jefferson Davis. The building was still warm with the ghosts of its former inhabitants. Servants were available to assist the new owners. Lincoln was courteous. He greeted all. He did not advance as the victor, but as the pacifier.



Libby Prison, Richmond, Virginia, shortly after its capture by Union Troops. Courtesy, Library of Congress Collection

He was tired. All he asked for was a glass of water as he sat in the chair of the man who wished him dead. The symbolism of the moment rested with him. He realized that history would recall that minute. Headlines would circle the globe that the President of the United States had entered the soul of his adversaries. The war would soon be over.

### ***Be Merciful to Your Enemies***

Lincoln needed to do one more thing as he departed Richmond. He visited a hateful place. Libby Prison was a chamber of horrors. Union soldiers had been incarcerated there. It had been jammed with three thousand captives from the North. Few were left alive. Now, it held nine hundred Confederate prisoners of war. Many rose as Lincoln entered and walked along the long line of cells. Some hissed. He looked at the place. The smell of filth and death hung in the air. He told his officers to go easy on these men. Soon, they would be free.

Libby was a symbol of the hatred of the conflict inflicted on innocent boys. Tens of thousands were deprived of their youth and health to fight slavery. Countless finished their days in places like Libby. Lincoln did not want it torn down. He wanted it to be a “monument” of man’s inhumanity to man. He wanted no one to forget the torture, the starvation, the illness, and mayhem caused by the war and carried out in places like that building.

The President returned to Richmond the next day. A group of the most prominent people in the town met with him. They were anxious. They were afraid of vengeance. They wanted to know what was ahead. Lincoln said the government would be generous and forgiving. In exchange, Virginians needed to be loyal to the nation and “not to love Virginia less but to love the republic more.” Lincoln’s message would resonate through the South and the North.

### ***Learn to Communicate Effectively***

He communicated in every form he could. After meeting with commanders or members of his staff or members of Congress, Lincoln would leave them a letter outlining what they discussed. He avoided ambiguity. He stressed clarity and transparency.

Communication was not a simple task for Abraham Lincoln. His physical presence could be an obstacle. He was the first to admit that he was not an attractive figure. His height, lack of good looks, and apparent introversion were not advantages. He overcame them. He knew he would not be charismatic but could be effective. He could assure that his words had meaning and depth.

He took his lessons from historical figures. He read famous speeches and studied techniques. He listened carefully to those who spoke. Eloquence did not come easily. Lincoln learned to craft a message, used stories and examples to make a point, studied his audience, and encouraged a dialogue with questions and answers. He viewed his audience as friends and constructed his message like an arrow to reach into their souls. His words were weighed with care. He wrote his own speeches and spent hours, days preparing, writing, and rewriting. Lincoln knew his limitations as a public speaker and sought to improve his delivery, his manners, and ways to make his case.

### ***Project a Vision of the Future***

On March 4, 1865, Lincoln would need all his talent to deal with the enormous problems facing the nation, looming on the horizon. He was to deliver his *Second Inaugural Address*. General Robert E. Lee’s army would surrender, five weeks later. Victory was in the air as were the great questions facing the nation in the aftermath of the war.

Lincoln had great executive power that would evaporate once the guns were silenced. What powers would the President need to reconstruct the South? How would the North deal with the vanquished? What would be the terms of peace? Would the South be treated as a colony or a subjugated territory or an integral part of America? How would war crimes be treated? Millions of former slaves were now searching for a future. Would land of plantation owners be divided and given to these new free people? What about their rights to compensation for centuries of labor, and their rights as workers in a free society?

As Lincoln prepared his address, these questions circled his thoughts and those of his audience. The people of the North had endured years of suffering and sacrifice.

They bled. They sent their sons and daughters into a conflagration. They paid with pain and treasure to keep the Union intact. Many expected the South to be punished for starting the war. They knew the complexity of the days and years ahead of them. They wanted to hear from their leader answers to the great concerns of the day.

Lincoln boldly redefined the agenda and contemporary thinking about the aftermath of the war. He avoided the questions. He would not deal with them at that moment. He had much more on



his mind and had much more to communicate. He expected that, on the wave of his words, he would have years before him to knit together solutions to the countless dilemmas confronting the United States of America at the end of the most painful period in its brief history.

All of Lincoln's qualities were poured into his words. He spoke with integrity, passion, and brevity. His perseverance, care, courage, and vision of the future, based on the principles of the past, were part of his Second Inaugural Address. His ideas were for his audience and posterity.

A year and a half earlier, Lincoln had issued his *Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction*. It was the first thread in the new fabric Lincoln was weaving to deal with the problems of the Civil War. He would grant amnesty and return the right to vote to those who lived in areas newly occupied by the North, in order to return them to the family of the Union. It isolated slavery, and slave owners and it welcomed back into the fold those who pledged fidelity to the United States. Lincoln was especially concerned with the plight of former slaves. He wanted the states to care for them and grant them the rights of all citizens with these words:

*And I do further proclaim, declare, and make known that any provision which may be adopted by such state government in relation to the freed people of such state, which shall recognize and declare their permanent freedom, provide for their education, and which may yet be consistent as a temporary arrangement with their present condition as a laboring, landless, and homeless class, will not be objected to by the National Executive (Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, December 8, 1862).*

Among the first granted amnesty was a person who lived in the Lincoln White House. She was the sister of the President's wife. The President lived with the criticism that he housed a rebel in the Executive Mansion. She had married an officer who fought and died for the South. Lincoln knew that there would be many families like his that would need to find forgiveness.

### ***Raise Minds to Think at a Higher Level***

His Second Inaugural Address would now carry the nation forward to healing, compromise, and the bringing together of a people divided by acrimony. On the day he gave his speech, Lincoln looked old and weary. The lines of age and emotion were chiseled in his face. He was solemn and sad. It would not be a talk filled with solutions. He would not outline the plan for the future. His worry was the nation's heart and soul. He wanted to raise the consciousness of the country. Some sought retribution against the South for having caused the conflict. Some sought revenge for the bloodshed and pain imposed on the nation. Lincoln's speech would be puzzling. He wanted the country to forgive so that "this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away."

Abraham Lincoln's speech would sound more like a sermon:

*On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it — all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war — seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.*

*One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war, while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and*

*pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences! For it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? 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."*

*With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan — to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations" (From the Second Inaugural Address of Abraham Lincoln, March 5, 1865).*

Lincoln was at his intellectual peak. His creative capacities were at their height. He had exhibited the utmost qualities of leadership. They were becoming evident to the citizens who heard those enigmatic words on that dark day in March. Thirty- eight days later, he would fall to an assassin's bullet.

## Lincoln's Achievements

- **Preserved the Union:** Lincoln's greatest achievement was saving the Union and preserving the values that kept the nation together. The price was high, including the one he personally paid to attain his goal. He viewed the safeguarding of the Union as his key political objective and all else as a means for achieving it.
- **Emancipation Proclamation:** Ending slavery was Lincoln's objective along with the preservation of the Union. The Civil War freed four million African Americans and changed the social nature of the United States.
- **Homestead Act of 1862:** Lincoln campaigned on a platform to grant public lands to farmers. On May 20, 1862, he signed into law the Homestead Act. It allowed settlers to have 160 acres of land to till and start a settlement and build a community. Lincoln's act literally opened the west and created towns and villages from territories that led to the establishment of new states to be part of the Union.
- **Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862:** Lincoln knew well the value of education. With the Morrill Act, the federal government created "land grant colleges" by selling federal lands to support agricultural and mechanical arts colleges. These later became the embryo of the great state university systems.
- **Avoiding Foreign Intervention in the War:** Lincoln managed to keep European nations out of the war, especially in active support of the South. It was a delicate and intricate exercise in diplomacy that went on throughout the period of the War and its aftermath.
- **Redefinition of the Presidency:** The American Presidency was redefined by Abraham

Lincoln. The assumption of new presidential powers left a permanent legacy on the institution of the office of the Chief Executive.

- ***Establishment of the Republican Party:*** The newly-formed Republican Party was led by Lincoln. Its initial principles and values were defined under his presidency and were carried forward for decades.

## The Meaning in His Own Words

*As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this to the extent of the difference, is no democracy.*

— August 1, 1858, on Democracy

This is the “Golden Rule.” We should not do to others that we would not want done to us. We need to put ourselves in their place and realize the implications of what we do.

*Understanding the spirit of our institutions to aim at the elevation of men, I am opposed to whatever tends to degrade them.*

— May 17, 1859, Letter to Theodore Canisius, Consul of the US

Leaders need to work to raise the attitude and vision of those who follow to seek higher principles and higher goals.

*...I do not mean to say that this government is charged with the duty of redressing or preventing all the wrongs in the world; but I do think that it is charged with the duty of preventing and redressing all wrongs which are wrongs to itself.*

— September 17, 1859, Speech at Cincinnati, Ohio

Responsibility cannot be avoided. It must be confronted and dealt with.

*This is essentially a People’s contest. On the side of the Union, it is a struggle for maintaining in the world, that form, and substance of government, whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men – to lift artificial weights from all shoulders – to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all – to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life.*

— July 4, 1861, Message to Congress

The plight of slavery, the plight of injustice is a universal and uniform problem where each is responsible to address. No individual can push the blame on others.

*May our children and our children’s children to a thousand generations, continue to enjoy the benefits conferred upon us by a united country, and have cause yet to rejoice under those glorious institutions bequeathed us by Washington and his compeers.*

— October 4, 1862, Speech at Frederick, Maryland

The benefits we strive for are ones that should move from one generation to the next. We need to think in terms of posterity for our actions.

*The restoration of the Rebel States to the Union must rest upon the principle of civil and political equality of both races; and it must be sealed by general amnesty.*

— January 1864, Letter to James S. Wadsworth, Philanthropist and Union General

We need to understand compassion and forgiveness as a tool to achieve a higher goal.

*While we must, by all available means, prevent the overthrow of the government, we should avoid planting and cultivating too many thorns in the bosom of society.*

— March 18, 1864, Letter to Edwin M. Stanton, Secretary of War in the Cabinet of President Lincoln

Conflict results in resentment and can lead to permanent scars. Before a leader embarks on a



mission that requires violence, the consequences must be carefully understood.

*In this great struggle, this form of Government and every form of human right is endangered if our enemies succeed. There is more involved in this contest than is realized by everyone.*

— August 18, 1864, Speech to the 164th Ohio Regiment

At times, the larger picture is not clear to all. A leader needs to bring focus to a situation so that all understand the implications of one outcome or another.

*It is not merely for today, but for all time to come that we should perpetuate for our children's children this great and free government, which we have enjoyed all our lives.*

— August 22, 1864, Speech to the One Hundred Sixty-sixth Ohio Regiment

Leaders need to explain that what is being done is for the future, and not just for today. This gives relevance to the sacrifices of the moment.

*Nowhere in the world is presented a government of so much liberty and equality. To the humblest and poorest amongst us are held out the highest privileges and positions. The present moment finds me at the White House, yet there is as good a chance for your children as there was for my father's.*

— August 31, 1864, Speech to 148th Ohio Regiment

The sense of opportunity, openness and fairness should be understood by all and transmitted as part of the culture, not only of the nation, but also of the institution. Abraham Lincoln was an example of the American Dream.

*Thoughtful men must feel that the fate of civilization upon this continent is involved in the issue of our contest.*

— December 27, 1864, Letter to John Maclean, President of Princeton University. (Maclean offered a Doctor of Laws to Lincoln. After the war began, seventy students from Princeton joined the armies of the North and the South and perished in the conflict).

Commitment to a just cause demands risks, sacrifices and choices.

*When it comes to this, I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty — to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy.*

— From the August 24, 1855, Letter to Joshua Speed

Freedom must be based on action and sincerity, and it must be promoted from the top down.

*That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles — right and wrong — throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity and the other the divine right of kings.*

— October 15, 1858, Debate at Alton, Illinois

Power is not inherited. Neither is leadership. It is granted and earned with respect, hard work, integrity and perseverance. It is the difference between right and wrong.

*What I did, I did after very full deliberation, and under a heavy and solemn sense of responsibility. I can only trust in God that I have made no mistake.*

— September 24, 1862, Reply to Serenade in Honor of [Preliminary] Emancipation Proclamation

It is not easy to do the right thing, but it is necessary. Doing the right thing demands serious reflection and then action.

*When the conduct of men is designed to be influenced, persuasion, kind, unassuming persuasion, should ever be adopted. It is an old and a true maxim, that a “drop of honey catches more flies than a gallon of gall.”*

— February 22, 1842, Temperance Address

It is better to convince others to our cause and vision than to coerce them and force them to accept it. Cooperation needs to be won and not assumed.

*Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man’s nature — opposition to it is in his love of justice. These principles are an eternal antagonism; and when brought into collision so fiercely, as slavery extension brings them, shocks, and throes, and convulsions must ceaselessly follow. Repeal the Missouri Compromise — repeal all compromises repeal the declaration of independence — repeal all past history, you still cannot repeal human nature. It still will be the abundance of man’s heart that slavery extension is wrong; and out of the abundance of his heart, his mouth will continue to speak.*

— October 16, 1854, Speech at Peoria

There are certain values that are immutable about human beings. Some have been codified but most are innate and part and parcel of humanity’s search for justice. Leaders must respect and accept them.

*The Autocrat of all the Russias will resign his crown and proclaim his subjects’ free republicans sooner than will our American masters voluntarily give up their slaves.*

— August 15, 1855, Letter to George Robertson

Some wrongs will never right themselves. It is up to those who know what the right thing to do to is to fight injustice. No one will voluntarily give up a privilege.

*I believe this Government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved — I do not expect the house to fall — but I do expect it will cease to be divided.*

— June 16, 1858, House Divided Speech

Problems need to be resolved fully and not partially, even if difficult measures must be used.

*I don’t believe in a law to prevent a man from getting rich; it would do more harm than good. So, while we do not propose any war upon capital, we do wish to allow the humblest man an equal chance to get rich with everybody else.*

— March 6, 1860, Speech at New Haven, Connecticut

Equality of opportunity should be a guiding light for leaders who strive to develop the talents of all those that depend on them, no matter what their status.

*The lady — bearer of this — says she has two sons who want to work. Set them at it, if possible. Wanting to work is so rare a merit, that it should be encouraged.*

— October 17, 1861, Letter to Colonel George Ramsay, Superintendent of the Washington Arsenal

Hard work, persistence is a virtue that should be promoted and used as an example.

## Leadership Lessons

- **Personal Presence is Essential:** Move out from the office environment to deal directly with stakeholders and make friends and influence people.
- **Collect Information:** If you can do it in person, it is better. If not, send experts or trusted followers to get the facts.

- ***Be Brave and Show No Fear:*** You cannot ask others to sacrifice, if you do not take the lead. You have to be with the troops.
- ***Compassion and Courage Go Together:*** Lincoln stressed compassion, wherever possible. It not only was the right thing to do, but it also went a long way to promote peace and harmony.
- ***Integrity and Honesty are Essential:*** Unethical behavior is immediately detected. Lincoln emphasized the truth and a sense of honor and respect for all.
- ***Take Responsibility:*** He was the first to take blame and give credit to others.
- ***Revenge Sparks Fear, not Respect:*** Lincoln never acted out of vengeance. His tasks were higher and more important than to dwell on reprisals or retribution. He urged all to follow his example, especially in dealing with the South.
- ***Expect to be Criticized:*** Leaders will be reproached. Lincoln suffered enormous criticism. He dealt with lies before they became “biblical,” but often did not waste energy on critics.
- ***Perseverance and Decisiveness Go Hand in Hand:*** Lincoln pursued his goals with energy and determination. He was decisive and took responsibility for his actions.
- ***Convince vs. Order:*** Lincoln took time to convince others of his ideas. He often made them feel that they were their own.
- ***Encourage Creativity:*** Innovation and new ideas were critical to Lincoln and the war effort. They were important to help achieve his primary objectives. He created an atmosphere that emphasized new ideas.
- ***Communication is an Art and Science:*** Lincoln crafted his words carefully. He perfected the medium and message. He knew how to give a speech and to make the words meaningful for his audience and history.

## Why Lincoln Matters Today: Life Lessons

- ***Persistence:*** Lincoln never gave up. In the face of failure and depression, he continued to persevere. The same pertains to each of us in our daily lives. It is perseverance that succeeds.
- ***Work Hard:*** He never stopped working, whether it was in the prairie, the law office or the White House; he stayed focused on his work. He knew how to relax, yet his priority was to achieve the task at hand. There are no meaningful short-cuts to attaining our goals. There is no greater satisfaction than achievement based on our own toil. Hard work pays off.
- ***Stay Informed:*** Lincoln was a voracious reader. He absorbed information, stored it and used it. Truth only comes from examination. If we are to discover reality, we must search for it by reading and accumulating information. This then helps us make rational decisions. Those who make the best decisions are those chosen to lead.
- ***Live by Example:*** He knew others looked to him as a model for leadership and wisdom. He lived each day with this thought in mind. If we do the same, we will discipline ourselves and be conscious of our actions and deeds. This will help us achieve “emotional intelligence,” which is a key to success.
- ***Nice People Finish First:*** Lincoln was compassionate, but not weak. He could be tough and decisive. Yet, he treated people with respect and dignity, no matter what their walk of life. Being sincerely courteous and liking people is a virtue worth cultivating. It helps





Courtesy Christopher Leary, Pinterest, Library of Congress and National Park Service

“win friends and influence people.”

- *Honesty is the Best Policy:* Lincoln was called “Honest Abe.” He lived up to this. Honesty helps us be transparent and gain the respect and, most of all, the trust of others. It is difficult to attain trust and trust can be lost with one lie.

- *Stand Up for Principle:* People knew what Abraham Lincoln stood for. He was willing to take risks for his values. Do people know what we stand for? Are we willing to risk upholding them? If our principles are based on honesty, fairness, and justice for all, they will become obvious in our daily words and deeds. With time, they will be part and parcel of our makeup. All will know what we stand for and who we are.

*I am happy to join with you today in what will go down in history as the greatest demonstration for freedom in the history of our nation. Five score years ago, a great American, in whose symbolic shadow we stand, signed the Emancipation Proclamation. This momentous decree came as a great beacon light of hope to millions*

*of Negro slaves, who had been seared in the flames of withering injustice. It came as a joyous daybreak to end the long night of captivity. But one hundred years later, we must face the tragic fact that the Negro is still not free. One hundred years later, the life of the Negro is still sadly crippled by the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination.*

*We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.*

*It is not possible to be in favor of justice for some people and not be in favor of justice for all people.*

*Let no man pull you low enough to hate him.*

*Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.*

*We may have all come on different ships, but we're in the same boat now.*

*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*

*Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability but comes through continuous struggle.*

*Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into friend.”*

*There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must take it because conscience tells him it is right.*



Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivering his I Have a Dream Speech at the Civil Rights March on Washington, D.C. 08/28/1963ARC Identifier 542069 / Local Identifier 306-SSM-4D (107)16

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## About the Author



**Emilio Iodice** – Educator, Diplomat, Senior Executive, Best-Selling Author, Presidential Historian

Emilio Iodice was the son of immigrants. Iodice received his BS from Fordham University, his MBA from the City University of New York, and was named to *Beta Gamma Sigma* the honorary society of top business graduates. He conducted doctoral work at George Washington University in Washington, DC.

Iodice spent over four decades as a senior executive and as an

educator and as a university administrator including being a key official for several Administrations, and reaching the top ranks of the civil service and the US diplomatic corps.

He was among the most decorated officers in history with a Gold Medal for Heroism, a Gold Medal and Silver Medal, nominations for the Bronze Medal, and commendations and citations. He was Minister in key missions abroad and was named to the list of future Ambassadors. He was knighted by the King of Italy and received Medals of Honor from Spain and Italy. At age 33, he was named by the President to the Senior Executive Service as the youngest career public official to reach this distinction.

Before joining Loyola University Chicago, as its Director and Vice President of the University, he was Vice President of Lucent Technologies in charge of global operations. He taught at Trinity College and, after nearly a decade at Loyola, was awarded the title of Director Emeritus and Professor of Leadership.

Among his best-selling books are: *A Kid from Philadelphia*, *Mario Lanza: The Voice of the Poets*; *Profiles in Leadership from Caesar to Modern Times*; *Sisters*; *Future Shock 2.0*, *The Dragon Brief 2020*, and *Reflections, Stories of Love, Leadership, Courage and Passion*. In 2017, his book: *“When Courage was the Essence of Leadership, Lessons from History”* was published and in 2019, the new edition was launched. Three new bestselling books were published in 2020 and 2021: *The Commander in Chief*; *The Return of Mussolini, the Rise of Modern-Day Tyranny*; and *Liberation*, which reached the number one bestselling status after one week and became a USA TODAY bestseller. Royalties from the sale of his books go to support charitable causes.

Iodice was recently named a Senator of the Royal Family of Italy. He is Director of the Scientific Committee of the Italy USA Foundation, a member of the Editorial Board of the *Journal of Values-Based Leadership*, and sits on the Board of Trustees of several educational institutions. He resides in Rome, Italy. He can be reached at [efiodice@yahoo.com](mailto:efiodice@yahoo.com) and his books and works can be found at <http://www.iodicebooks.com>.