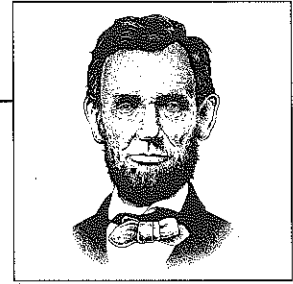


Abraham Lincoln

The Man Who Held the Union Together

It is an often heard story: No matter how poor you are, if you work hard enough and never give up, you can succeed. It is the American Dream. Abraham Lincoln (1809–1865) proved the dream can come true.



Abraham Lincoln's grandfather was a good friend of Daniel Boone, and was among those whom Boone led into Kentucky. In 1786, Grandfather Lincoln was killed by a Native American as he worked in his field. One of his sons, Thomas, saw the murder. Thomas would honor his father 23 years later by naming his first son Abraham after the grandfather.

Life on the Frontier Like many poor people on the frontier, the Lincolns moved often, building log cabins as they went. They were always searching for new opportunities. By 1830, the Lincoln family had moved to Indiana and then on to Illinois. Lincoln's mother died of disease, and all the family's possessions were lost when a boat carrying them sunk in a river.

Times were not all bad, however. Following the death of his mother, Lincoln's father returned to Kentucky, bringing back a new wife. She had three children of her own, but treated the young Lincoln and his sister very well. He learned the basics of reading and writing.

Lincoln loved to read and would walk miles if he heard of a family who had a book he might borrow. He became well-known in the area for holding a plow with one hand and a book in the other. His favorite stories included those in the Bible, tales by Aesop, and the biography of George Washington. The lessons taught in those books would help Lincoln become a man deeply concerned about ethics, morality, and character.

Making His Way Lincoln was more than a bookworm. He loved to chop wood and to wrestle. By the time he was an adult, he was one of the

strongest young men around. Lincoln decided he wanted to be a lawyer. He studied the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Then he decided to run for political office. However, shortly after he announced his candidacy for the Illinois legislature, the Black Hawk Indian War started. Lincoln was elected captain of a company of soldiers.

Before they got involved in any battles, the war ended. However, there were only two weeks left before the election. Lincoln lost. He then worked at odd jobs. In 1834, he ran again for the state legislature and won. He was reelected to three more terms in the legislature. Lincoln was in a tough position, though. On the one hand, he hated slavery. On the other, he opposed many of the methods used by abolitionists. The argument over slavery was turning violent. Lincoln wanted people to talk things out.

Practicing Law By the time he was 28, Lincoln had passed the Illinois bar examination, the test given to see if a law student knows enough to practice law. He began to practice in Springfield, Illinois. He had so little money, he had to live in a rented room. After several years, he formed a partnership with attorney Thomas Herndon.

Lincoln also married Mary Todd. Mary's family didn't like Lincoln, and Mary didn't like the fact that she had to move into a small rented room above a tavern. Mary battled emotional difficulties, and Lincoln battled depression. These problems would get worse as three of their four sons would die before they were 21. Lincoln worked hard to please his wife, and in 1844 bought a two-story home. He often traveled around Illinois, hearing cases.

Public Life In 1846, Lincoln was elected to the United States Congress. When he took his family to Washington, D.C., Mary was so appalled at the dirty, crowded streets and the slavery that she packed up her sons and moved them home. Lincoln stayed in Washington, opposing slavery.

In 1858, the argument over slavery threatened to rip the country apart. Lincoln again ran for office, this time the U.S. Senate. His opponent was Stephen Douglas. The two men held a series of debates over the issue of slavery. When abolitionist John Brown attacked Harper's Ferry to start a slave rebellion, many people decided that abolitionists were dangerous. Brown was executed. Lincoln lost his Senate race.

War Comes The 1860 presidential election was a wild affair, with political parties fighting amongst themselves and with each other. The Republican party ended up selecting Lincoln. After his election, South Carolina seceded from the Union, and the Civil War began. Northern armies lacked good leadership. Until 1863, it appeared the South would win.

Then, in the summer of 1863, two battles—at Vicksburg and Gettysburg—turned the tide in favor of the North. Lincoln also made one of the greatest speeches of his life, dedicating the battlefield at Gettysburg in honor of those who lost their lives.

A VOICE FROM THE PAST

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.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN,
Gettysburg Address, November 19, 1863

Few believed Lincoln would be reelected as president in 1864. The nation seemed to be coming apart. His Emancipation Proclamation set slaves free behind enemy lines, but left slaves in Union

border states still in bondage. People in Northern cities were rioting to avoid the draft. While the South had seceded for states' rights, many in the North also believed in states' rights. They said Lincoln had no power to tell the South it couldn't have slavery. However, Lincoln refused to back down, saying, "If slavery isn't wrong, nothing is wrong."

The victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg were just enough to swing the election in his favor. By April 1865, the South surrendered, bringing the war to a close. Five days later, Lincoln and his wife went to Ford's Theater to see a play. At about 10 p.m., Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth.

By the next morning Lincoln was dead. News of Lincoln's death shocked the nation. Songs, sermons, and poems were dedicated to Lincoln. In 1922, the Lincoln Memorial was dedicated in Washington. Biographies of Lincoln continue to inspire people because he was a person who refused to give up.

Review Questions

1. Who was Abraham Lincoln named after?
2. What three states did the Lincoln family live in during Lincoln's youth?
3. Why did Mary leave Washington, D.C., with her sons?

Critical Thinking

4. **Recognizing Effects** How did the books Lincoln read as a boy influence him throughout his life?
5. **Making Inferences** Were there any inconsistencies between Lincoln's views of slavery and his policies on slavery?
6. **Drawing Conclusions** Why did the victories at Gettysburg and Vicksburg help Lincoln win reelection?