

ABRAHAM
LINCOLN

Quotes, Quips, AND Speeches



GORDON LEIDNER

Editor

An easy and enjoyable introduction to one of
America's greatest presidents and heroes.

—*Tom Schwartz*
Illinois State Historian

Gordon Leidner provides readers with a
toothsome smorgasboard of Abraham Lincoln's
wit and wisdom. This volume is an excellent
introduction to the Great Emancipator's
humanity, philosophy, humor, and eloquence.

To supplement Lincoln's own memorable
words, Leidner adds judicious comments by such
eminent figures as Frederick Douglass, Theodore
Roosevelt, and Booker T. Washington.

—*Michael Burlingame*
Sadowski Professor of History Emeritus
Connecticut College

Abraham Lincoln had the God-given talent to
express himself in words that the people felt
and understood. [This] book enables readers
to sample and touch the greatness of Lincoln
through his letters, public papers, and speeches.

—*Edwin C. Bearss*
Historian Emeritus, National Park Service



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In memory of my mother—

BETTY LEIDNER



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Preface

AMERICANS HAVE been fascinated with Abraham Lincoln for more than a century. Our fascination with and respect for Lincoln is rooted in his legacy both as a preserver of the Union and as the Great Emancipator. We also esteem him as an embodiment of integrity, faith, generosity, and determination. He persevered and fought his way up to occupy the highest office of the land, doing so without benefit of wealth, advantage, or formal education. We value his state papers, speeches, and letters as eloquent testimonies of his statesmanship and striking character. Ever since Lincoln's death at the hands of an assassin, people have acknowledged that his life is an excellent example of what honesty, determination, and industry can accomplish under a democratic government.

My interest in Lincoln and the Civil War began during my childhood. I grew up in southern Illinois, where Lincoln lore is integral to local

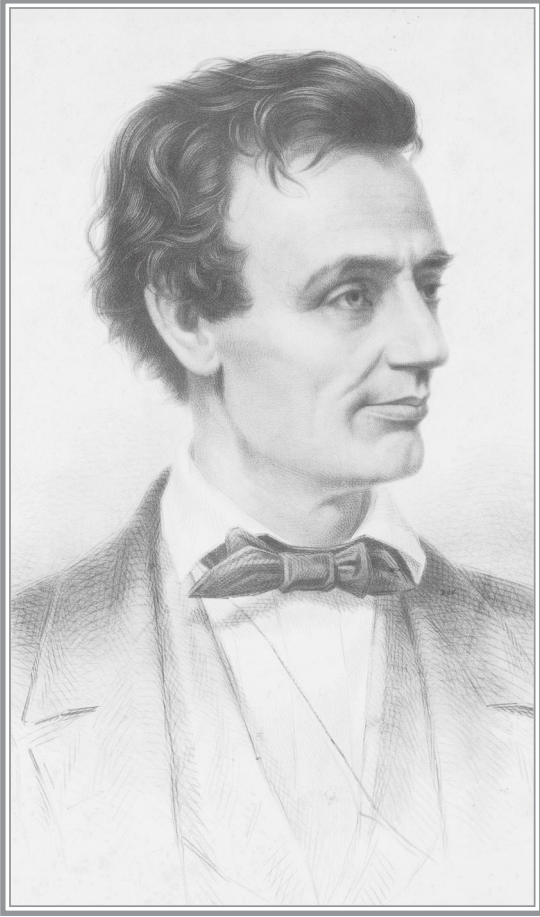
history. In September 1858 Lincoln had honored my hometown of Greenville with a visit in between his famous debate appointments with Stephen A. Douglas at Freeport and Jonesboro. Vandalia, a neighboring community, is the home of the second state capitol and is where Lincoln began his political career as a state representative from Sangamon County. Vandalia has the added distinction of being the city where Lincoln first publicly declared the “injustice” of slavery.

My task in assembling this book of Lincoln quotations primarily was to wade through mountains of Lincoln material, distinguish the genuine from the proverbial, and select the best of the best. The quotes herein are taken from the sources listed in the notes. I’ve made occasional minor changes in punctuation and corrected misspellings to improve readability.

Lincoln lived his life with a commitment to honor, and in this book the admirable qualities and virtues he embodied are examined in some detail and through his words. Included in each of the twelve chapters are observations of Lincoln by some of the people who knew him best, validating Lincoln’s association with the discussed virtue.

My intention is to provide casual readers with short, reliable, and inspirational quotes from America's sixteenth president as well as a handful of excerpts from his most famous speeches. Think of this book as an inspirational and motivational guide on how to live life today, emulating the best qualities of perhaps our nation's greatest leader.

—*Gordon Leidner*



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Biography

ABRAHAM LINCOLN was born near Hodgenville, Kentucky, on February 12, 1809. Raised in poverty by deeply religious parents, he had received less than a year of formal education by the time he turned twenty-one. He moved to New Salem, Illinois, in 1831 and continued his self-education there by borrowing books and teaching himself grammar, history, mathematics, and law.

Outgoing and ambitious, Lincoln was anxious to make his mark in politics. He was elected one of Sangamon County's Whig representatives to the Illinois state legislature in 1834. Vocally antislavery, he served four consecutive terms as state legislator, during which time he was admitted to the state bar. He soon became one of the most respected attorneys in the region, known particularly for his honesty and influential manner with juries.

In 1842 Lincoln married Mary Todd, a well-educated woman of a notable Kentucky family.

They eventually had four sons, although only one survived to adulthood.

Lincoln served a term in Congress from 1847 to 1849. He then went into semiretirement from politics in order to concentrate on his law practice. The Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, allowing for the introduction of slavery into the new territories, enticed Lincoln to again seek political office. He joined the Republican Party in 1856 and ran for the U.S. Senate in 1858, generating an energetic moral argument against slavery in a series of debates with the incumbent Democrat, Stephen A. Douglas.

Lincoln lost the Senate race to Douglas but two years later, in 1860, was elected president. Subsequent to his election, eleven Southern states declared their independence from the Union. Although Lincoln knew that slavery was the underlying cause of the war, he realized that to declare a war against slavery would result in many of the Northern people's refusal to fight. When the South fired on Fort Sumter on April 12, 1860, Lincoln declared a war to preserve the Union and called the North to arms.

It was more than a year into the Civil War

before Lincoln was finally able to add the elimination of slavery to the war's purposes. His Emancipation Proclamation, freeing the slaves of the rebelling Southern states, took effect on January 1, 1863. Through his personal leadership, the Thirteenth Amendment, which legally abolished slavery, was passed by Congress and sent to the states for ratification.

Subsequent Union victories at Gettysburg, Vicksburg, and Chattanooga soon had the Southern armies permanently on the defensive. Lincoln was reelected president in November 1864.

Lincoln's second inaugural address, delivered less than six weeks before his assassination, eloquently summed up his beliefs: the underlying cause of the war had been slavery; the war was God's just punishment on the nation for its failure to remove slavery from the land; and it was every American's duty not only to accept the elimination of slavery but to forgive his or her fellow man and pursue a "lasting peace" with all nations.

Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth on April 14, 1865, and died the following day.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Quotes, Quips, AND Speeches

Leadership

BEFORE HE WAS ELECTED president in 1860, Lincoln had little formal education, no administrative training, and held only one term in a national office, as a congressman from Illinois. His only military experience had been a few weeks of service in the state militia during the Black Hawk War.

Many of the North's most powerful political leaders wanted to let the South secede. Lincoln, however, was committed to preserving the Union and made his every task subservient to this cause. Although it is significant that he successfully led the war effort, including hiring and firing generals and cabinet members until he found the people who could achieve this victory, his most important accomplishment probably was the continuous motivation of the public to support the cause in spite of the terrible losses incurred during the long years of war.

It was in the oath I took that I would, to the best of my ability, preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States. I could not take the office without taking the oath. Nor was it my view that I might take an oath to get power, and break the oath in using the power.¹

☆ ☆ ☆

I don't know but that God has created some one man great enough to comprehend the whole of this stupendous crisis and transaction from beginning to end, and endowed him with sufficient wisdom to manage and direct it. I confess I do not fully understand, and foresee it all. But I am placed here where I am obliged to the best of my poor ability to deal with it.²

☆ ☆ ☆

I am decided; my course is fixed; my path is blazed. The Union and the Constitution shall be preserved and the laws enforced at every and at all hazards. I expect the people to sustain me. They have never yet forsaken any true man.³

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to “preserve, protect, and defend it.”⁴

☆ ☆ ☆

Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the government, nor of dungeons to ourselves. Let us have faith that right makes might; and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it.⁵

☆ ☆ ☆

I attempt no compliment to my own sagacity. I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years' struggle, the nation's condition is not what either party, or any man, devised or expected. God alone can claim it.⁶

*H*e would listen to everybody; he would hear everybody; but he rarely, if ever, asked for opinions. As a politician and as president, he arrived at all his conclusions from his own reflections, and when his opinion was once formed, he never doubted that it was right.⁷

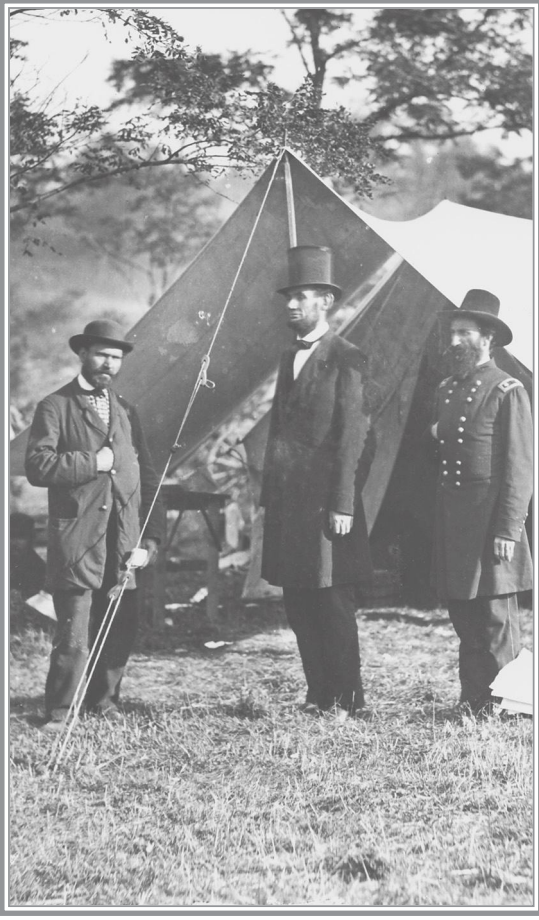
Leonard Swett, close friend of Lincoln



*T*hink nothing of me—take no thought for the political fate of any man whomsoever, but come back to the truths that are in the Declaration of Independence. . . . I charge you to drop every palsy and insignificant thought for any man's success. It is nothing; I am nothing; Judge Douglas [that is, Stephen A. Douglas] is nothing. But do not destroy that immortal emblem of Humanity—the Declaration of American Independence.⁸



*T*he Union must be preserved, and hence, all indispensable means must be employed.⁹



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