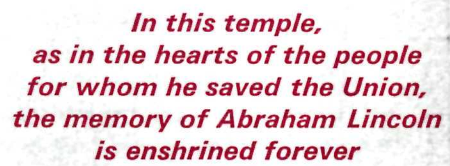
The Lincoln Memorial



In this temple,
as in the hearts of the people
for whom he saved the Union,
the memory of Abraham Lincoln
is enshrined forever

The sudden death of Abraham Lincoln on April 15, 1865, plunged the Nation into unexampled grief. Those who had admired the President without reservation—and of these there were no great number—tried to outdo each other in assigning him a place among the Nation's immortals. Bitter critics—and of these there were many—forgot their complaints and turned to eulogy. Hundreds of thousands of plain people attended the funeral services that were held almost daily in cities on the last long journey from Washington to Springfield. More touching were the small groups that lined the railroad track and bowed in silence as the black-draped train moved to its destination.

From Europe came unusual tributes. *Punch,* the English magazine which had sneered at Lincoln for 4 years, suddenly saw in him a "true born king of men." Disraeli said that the American President had successfully survived "one of the severest trials which ever tested the moral qualities of man." French liberals, with Victor Hugo at their head, caused a medal to be struck which bore this inscription: "Dedicated by French Democracy to Lincoln, President, twice elected, of the United States—Lincoln, honest man, who abolished slavery, reestablished the Union, saved the Republic without veiling the figure of Liberty." When the news of Lincoln's death reached Sweden, an observer wrote, "Our men clenched their fists in vain fury and our blue-eyed women shed many tears in memory of the remarkable man."

When Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States in November 1860, few would have predicted that his death 4½ years later would have been regarded as the passing of a great man. Viewed superficially, the first 51 years of his life offered few signs of greatness. In the United States of his time, Lincoln's life was not unusual, and a career such as his rarely pointed to world-wide fame.

He was born in central Kentucky on February 12, 1809, of poor and undistinguished parents. In all he had less than a year of schooling from backwoods schoolmasters of uncertain educational attainments. When the boy was 7, his parents moved to a region in southwestern Indiana only a step removed from the wilderness. Two years later his mother died, but his father soon married a widow of sturdy character who reared her stepson and his sister as her own. Young Lincoln passed the days and years doing the chores of a pioneer farm for his father, sometimes as a hired hand for neighbors. Hard work agreed with him, though he disliked it, and he grew tall and strong beyond his years.

Thomas Lincoln, Abraham's father, never succeeded in teasing more than a bare living from the soil. In 1830 he decided to move to central

Illinois. Young Lincoln, now 21, accompanied the family and helped them get started. The next year he struck out on his own. After his second flatboat trip to New Orleans, he settled in the little village of New Salem on the Sangamon River. There he clerked in a store, started a business of his own, which failed, and made a lean living as postmaster and deputy surveyor.

Meanwhile, events had enlarged his outlook. The Black Hawk war had broken out in 1832, and Lincoln had enlisted and served 90 days. Shortly before, he had announced himself as a candidate for the State legislature. He was defeated, but the heavy vote he received in New Salem encouraged him to run again 2 years later. This time he was elected. In all, he served four terms in the Illinois House of Representatives.

At New Salem Lincoln soon became aware of the gaps in his education. With the help of the village schoolmaster he studied grammar, then surveying. Encouraged by a Springfield lawyer, he studied law and was admitted to the bar in the spring of 1837. He immediately moved to Springfield, the newly chosen State capital, and became the junior partner of his mentor, John T. Stuart.

After 4 years with Stuart, Lincoln went into partnership with Stephen T. Logan, whose profound knowledge of the law and habits of industry and thoroughness must have been of great benefit to the younger man. In 1844 Lincoln formed his own firm, taking as his partner William H. Herndon. Meanwhile, on November 4, 1842, Lincoln had married Mary Todd of Lexington, Ky., who was then living with relatives in Springfield.

Lincoln's political ambitions persisted, and even rose a notch. He wanted to go to Congress. Twice he failed to obtain the Whig nomination, but the third time he succeeded. He won election and served in the House of Representatives from 1847 to 1849. The experience was disappointing. By opposing the Mexican War, which his constituents favored, he forfeited his chances for reelection. He returned to Springfield, determined to keep out of politics and devote himself to the law.

For 5 years he kept both resolutions. At the bar he rose steadily, engaging in litigation of ever-increasing importance while at the same time he rode the circuit and tried cases involving hog stealing and slander for $10 fees, often uncollectable. Had it not been for his old rival, Stephen A. Douglas, Lincoln might have lived the rest of his life as a moderately prosperous lawyer, unknown outside his own State.

"In 1846 I was once elected to the lower House of Congress. Was not a candidate for re-election. From 1849 to 1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before."
Lincoln, December 20, 1859

In 1854 Douglas, U.S. Senator from Illinois and chairman of the powerful Committee on Territories, introduced a bill to organize the territories of Kansas and Nebraska. In the course of legislative maneuvering, he accepted changes which specifically repealed the Compromises of 1820 and 1850. The compromises prohibited

slavery in the national territories, and thus prevented the spread of an institution which large numbers of Americans, particularly in the North, had come to consider evil in itself and a threat to the Union.

The passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill stirred up a storm. Lincoln, to use his own words, was aroused "as he had never been before." He plunged back into politics, but with no larger purpose than to secure the reelection of the anti-Nebraska Congressman from his own district. His speeches, however, attracted attention throughout Illinois. In 1855 he ran for the U.S. Senate, but lost by a narrow margin. The next year he joined the Republican Party and worked hard in the Presidential election, thus enlarging his own reputation.

The year 1858 was a crucial one in Lincoln's career. Douglas, the Democrat, would come up for reelection to the Senate. By common consent, Lincoln became the Republican candidate. Upon Lincoln's challenge the two men met seven times in formal debates, and for 3 months each spoke almost daily at his own party rallies. Lincoln polled a larger popular vote than Douglas, but the legislature, which then elected Senators, was so constituted that Douglas was reelected. Yet for Lincoln the result, though a cruel disappointment at the time, benefited him in the long run. The debates, widely reported, made him known the country over as an effective opponent of the extension of slavery.

When the Republican National Convention met in Chicago in May 1860, Lincoln had little more than the support of the Illinois delegation. The rank-and-file expected the nomination to go to some well known Republican like William H. Seward or Salmon P. Chase, who had long fought the slave power in Congress and on the stump. For some reason, neither of these men was acceptable to powerful blocs. Only Lincoln had no enemies. He was nominated on the third ballot, primarily because, in the politician's word, he was "available."

The Democratic Party proceeded to make Lincoln's election certain by splitting into two bitter factions. Another party, consisting mostly of those who adhered to the old Whig standard, further divided the opposition. As a result, Lincoln was elected on November 6, though his opponents polled a total of 2,815,617 votes to his 1,866,452.

The election of Lincoln, a "sectional" candidate, led to the secession of South Carolina. Six other States of the Deep South followed her lead and formed the Confederate States of America. Thus when the new President took the oath of office of March 4, 1861, he was confronted by a divided Nation moving inevitably toward civil war.

"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."

Lincoln, March 4, 1861

When the South assaulted Fort Sumter, a Federal outpost in Charleston Harbor, 6 weeks later, the Nation faced the most desperate crisis in its history. And the reins of power were in the hands of one who, at least on the surface, had little preparation for the trial before him.

Yet those who knew Lincoln well, who had followed his career in recent years, could have had reason for confidence. After his reentry into politics in 1854, a new depth, power, and moral fervor marked his speeches. He was an ambitious man—even he would not deny that—but above personal gain he put both the perpetuity of the Union and its dedication to the noblest ideals of humanity. "Let us readopt the Declaration of Independence," he said, "and with it, the practices, and policy, which harmonize with it. . . . If we do this, we shall not only have saved the Union; but we shall have so saved it, as to make, and keep it, forever worthy of the saving. We shall have so saved it, that the succeeding millions of free happy people, the world over shall rise up, and call us blessed, to the latest generations."

"Of our political revolution of '76, we all are justly proud. It has given us a degree of political freedom, far exceeding that of any other of the nations of the earth. In it the world has found a solution of that long mooted problem, as to the capability of man to govern himself. In it was the germ which has vegetated, and still is to grow and expand into the universal liberty of mankind."

Lincoln, February 22, 1842

Lincoln proceeded to buttress his stand against the expansion of slavery with historical evidence. By 1860 his argument was fully developed. At Cooper Union in New York City, he presented it in one of the great speeches of the century—a speech with a peroration that lifted a sophisticated audience to its feet: "Wrong as we think slavery is, we can yet afford to let it alone where it is, because that much is due to the necessity arising from its actual presence in the nation; but can we, while our votes will prevent it, allow it to spread into the National Territories, and to overrun us here in these Free States? If our sense of duty forbids this, then let us stand by our duty, fearlessly and effectively. . . . 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."

Lincoln, moreover, had indicated clearly that he would not compromise on essentials. This determination came out soon after his election, when desperate expedients to stave off disunion were being proposed. "Let there be no compromise on the question of *extending* slavery," he wrote to a Republican Senator. "If there be, all our labor is lost, and, ere long, must be done again. . . . Stand firm. The tug has to come, and better now, than any time hereafter." For weeks he was reluctant to speak of secession, still hoping that mutual interests and traditions might bring North and South together again, but on his way to Washington for the inauguration he gave one indication of the policy he would follow. "The man does not live who is more devoted to peace

than I am," he said at Trenton, N.J. "None who would do more to preserve it. But it may be necessary to put the foot down firmly."

Four years of war would bring these qualities and others into bold relief. Lincoln accepted the challenge of the South at Fort Sumter. He could do no less without condoning a fatal attack upon democratic government. "This issue," he wrote a few weeks later, "embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of man the question, whether a constitutional republic, or a democracy—a government of the people, by the same people—can, or cannot, maintain its territorial integrity against its own domestic foes. . . . So viewing the issue, no choice was left but to call out the war power of the government, and so to resist force employed for its destruction, by force for its preservation."

In directing that force, Lincoln determined from the beginning that he would have the final word. Even before Fort Sumter he taught this lesson to his Secretary of State, William H. Seward. Seward, doubting the capacity of his chief, had written that when a policy was adopted either the President must pursue it or "devolve it on some member of his cabinet"—meaning, of course, the Secretary of State. Lincoln answered, "I remark that if this must be done, *I* must do it."

"The old man sits here and wields like a backwoods Jupiter the bolts of war and the machinery of government with a hand equally steady & equally firm."

John Hay, September 11, 1863

He took full responsibility for selecting commanders to head the principal Union armies. He made mistakes. To give high commands to Frémont, Pope, Burnside, and Hooker was a grievous blunder, yet the President could only grope in a field where he had no experience. He did have patience, which was finally rewarded when he found Grant and put him in command of all the Union armies.

Many contemporaries interpreted Lincoln's patience and habit of deliberation as weakness. Those closest to him knew that he was anything but weak. In the summer of 1863 John Hay, one of his secretaries, wrote: "The Tycoon [Hay's familiar name for Lincoln] is in fine whack. I have rarely seen him more serene & busy. He is managing this war, the draft, foreign relations, and planning a reconstruction of the Union, all at once. I never knew with what tyrannous authority he rules the Cabinet till now. The most important things he decides & there is no cavil."

One of the "important things" Lincoln decided for himself was the meaning of the war, although he believed that in his interpretation the majority of the people of the North concurred. The South was attempting to set up an independent nation. Lincoln was determined that the Union be restored. This he stated when he issued his proclamation, the day after Fort Sumter, calling up the militia and convening Congress. "I appeal to all loyal citizens to favor, facilitate, and aid this effort to maintain the honor, the integrity, and the existence of our National Union, and the perpetuity of popular government." More than a

year later, when Horace Greeley, editor of the *New York Tribune,* chided the President for not interfering with slavery, Lincoln replied: "As to the policy I 'seem to be pursuing' as you say, I have not meant to leave anyone in doubt. I would save the Union. I would save it in the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored, the nearer the Union will be 'the Union as it was.' "

Even when the end of the war lay only 2 months off, Lincoln, meeting with representatives of Jefferson Davis, stated that he knew of only one way to end the war, "and that was for those who were resisting the laws of the Union to cease that resistance. The restoration of the Union," he added, "is a *sine qua non* with me."

Long before this Lincoln had decided that if the Union were to be preserved, he must abolish slavery insofar as he could under the Constitution. Accordingly, on September 22, 1862, he issued his proclamation warning that if the States and parts of States in rebellion did not return to the Union by January 1, 1863, their slaves would be "thenceforward and forever free." In due course, he issued the second proclamation as he had promised.

"No ceremony was made or attempted of this final official signing. The afternoon was well advanced when Mr. Lincoln went back from his New Year's greetings, with his right hand so fatigued that it was an effort to hold the pen. There was no special convocation of the Cabinet or of prominent officials. Those who were in the house came to the executive office merely from the personal impulse of curiosity joined to momentary convenience."

Nicolay and Hay, 1886

Lincoln's emancipation policy was another of the "important things" he decided alone. When he first laid the subject before the Cabinet in July 1862, he told the members frankly that he had resolved to issue a proclamation of emancipation. He had not called them together to ask their advice but would listen to any suggestions they cared to make. Seward argued for postponement; the military situation was not favorable. Lincoln agreed. When he brought up the subject 2 months later, he stated again: "I do not wish your advice about the main matter, for that I have determined for myself."

This was not arrogance. In Lincoln's opinion, the Constitution in wartime conferred extraordinary powers upon the President. These powers were his alone, and he would neither dodge nor delegate them. Besides, he could see no one else on the national scene better able than himself to guide the country through its trial. This he expressed when he accepted renomination: "I view this call to a second term as in no wise more flattering to myself than as an expression of the public judgment that I may better finish a difficult work than could one less severely schooled to the task."

As the end of Lincoln's term approached, it was evident that many leaders of the party preferred some other candidate. The President was vacillating, so they said. He was not

wholeheartedly antislavery. He meant to reconstruct the Nation on his own terms, and would be lenient toward the South. But the dissidents did not dare affront the mass of Republican voters, whose confidence in Lincoln was undiminished. In June 1864 he was renominated.

The Democrats were jubilant. Expecting to take advantage of the widespread longing for peace at almost any price, and hoping also that the military deadlock would continue, they put off their national convention until the end of August. At that time they nominated George B. McClellan, whom Lincoln had twice removed from high command—unfairly many contended—and adopted a platform calling for an immediate end to hostilities. McClellan accepted the nomination but repudiated the platform.

"I could not look in the face of my gallant comrades of the army and navy, who have survived so many bloody battles, and tell them that their labors and the sacrifice of so many of our slain and wounded brethren had been in vain, that we had abandoned that Union for which we have so often periled our lives. A vast majority of our people, whether in the army and navy or at home, would, as I would, hail with unbounded joy the permanent restoration of peace, on the basis of the Union under the Constitution without the effusion of another drop of blood. But no peace can be permanent without Union."

George B. McClellan, 1864

The hopes of the Democrats, based on war weariness, soon faded. Farragut led a Federal fleet into Mobile Bay. Sherman took Atlanta. Sheridan swept the Confederates from the Shenandoah Valley and destroyed one of Lee's principal sources of supply. Union victory seemed assured, and not far distant. When the voters went to the polls in November, they gave Lincoln a clear-cut majority of 400,000.

In little more than 5 months the war was over, an unconditional victory for the Union. Then came the night of April 14, 1865, and the bleak morning of the 15th when Lincoln drew his last breath.

"Mother prepared breakfast—and other meals afterward—as usual; but not a mouthful was eaten all day by either of us. We each drank half a cup of coffee; that was all. Little was said. We got every newspaper morning and evening, and frequent extras of that period, and passed them silently to each other."

Walt Whitman

His death brought immediate eulogies, but much time passed before his countrymen took the man's full measure. They saw at once that he had set one goal—the restoration of the Union—as a justification for prodigal expenditures of life and property; that he, more than anyone else, had administered the government so that victory resulted; and that he had freed many thousands of slaves and had made the abolition of slavery throughout the Nation inevitable.

As time passed, they recognized that he had done more than this. He had seen that the preservation of the Union was only a means to an end, and that the real purpose of the con-

flict was to prove that democratic government had within itself the strength to overcome whatever assaults might be made upon it. This vision he had clothed in language of imperishable beauty and strength, words mighty as armies in the field. In November 1863 there were critics who complained of the Gettysburg Address, but posterity has taken its closing plea—"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"—as the noblest appeal ever uttered for the elevation of mankind.

For those who resisted the Emancipation Proclamation and the use of Negro soldiers, he had words of compelling power. "Peace does not appear so distant as it did. I hope it will come soon, and come to stay; and so come as to be worth the keeping in all future time. It will then have been proved that among free men, there can be no successful appeal from the ballot to the bullet; and that they who take such appeal are sure to lose their case, and pay the cost. And then there will be some black men who can remember that, with silent tongue, and clenched teeth, and steady eye, and well-poised bayonet, they have helped mankind on to this great consummation; while, I fear, there will be some white ones unable to forget that, with malignant heart, and deceitful speech, they have strove to hinder it."

And the world would come to know that Lincoln's trials and agonies left him without rancor. He had never spoken of the Confederates as enemies. Instead, they were "our adversaries" or "those people over there." He had no desire to punish anyone for his part in the rebellion. In fact, he hoped that Jefferson Davis and other leaders of the Confederacy would escape from the country at the end of the war so that the problem of what to do with them would not arise. His attitude toward the South found moving expression in the closing words of his Second Inaugural Address: "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."

More simply, he had revealed his own great soul when he said in response to a serenade soon after his second election: "So long as I have been here I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom."

Paul M. Angle

A MEMORIAL IS BUILT

The first organized effort to raise a monument to Lincoln in Washington came 2 years after his death when Congress chartered the Lincoln Monument Association. But the drive languished for lack of funds, and nothing was accomplished until Congress set up a new commission in 1911.

Within a few years the commission had chosen a site—in Potomac Park on the axis of the Capitol and the Washington Monument—and an architect—Henry Bacon. Work began on the memorial on February 12, 1914, and was completed 7 years later. In a dedication ceremony on May 30, 1922, attended by thousands, Chief Justice William Howard Taft turned the edifice over to President Warren G. Harding for administration by the U.S. Government.

Built of white Colorado-Yule marble, the memorial is patterned after the Parthenon in Greece. The outer columns are Doric; the columns inside the great hall are Ionic. Within this classical framework, the structure symbolizes the Union of the States. The 36 columns represent the 36 States in the Union at the time of Lincoln's death. These States are named on the frieze above the colonnade. On the attic walls above the frieze are the names of the 48 States composing the Union at the time the memorial was built.

Daniel Chester French's statue represents Lincoln as the War President. It is 19 feet high, and the scale is such that if Lincoln were standing he would be 28 feet tall. The murals on the north and south walls suggest some of the dominant elements in Lincoln's life. Above the Gettysburg Address an Angel of Truth frees a slave; on each side groups represent Justice and Immortality. The mural above the Second Inaugural Address on the opposite wall portrays the unity of the North and South. Groups right and left represent Fraternity and Charity. Both murals were painted by Jules Guerin.

THE MEMORIAL IN STATISTICS

Retaining Wall of Terrace Approach:
- Height, 14 feet.
- Length, 257 feet, east and west sides; width, 187 feet, 4 inches, north and south sides.

Foundation:
- 44 to 65 feet to bedrock below original grade.

Height:
- 80 feet above top of foundation.
- 99 feet above grade at foot of terrace walls.

Colonnade:
- Length, 189 feet.
- *Width, 118 feet, 8 inches.*
- Number of columns, 36.
- Height of columns to cap, 44 feet.
- Diameter of column at base, 7 feet, 4 inches.
- Number of stone drums in column, 11.

Ionic Columns inside Memorial:
- Height, 50 feet.
- Diameter at base, 5 feet, 6 inches.

Central Chamber with Seated Lincoln:
- Width, 58 feet.
- Depth, 74 feet.

The Two End Chambers:
- Width, 63 feet.
- Depth, 36 feet, 8 inches.

Cost of Memorial Building, $2,957,000.

Cost of Lincoln Statue, $88,400.

ADMINISTRATION

The Lincoln Memorial is administered by the National Park Service, U.S. Department of the Interior.

The National Park System, of which this memorial is a unit, is dedicated to conserving the great historical, natural, and recreational places of the United States for the benefit and enjoyment of the people.

A superintendent, whose address is National Capital Region, National Park Service, 1100 Ohio Drive, SW., Washington, D.C. 20242, is in immediate charge of the memorial.

THE DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR—the Nation's principal natural resource agency—has a special obligation to assure that our expendable resources are conserved, that our renewable resources are managed to produce optimum benefits, and that all resources contribute to the progress and prosperity of the United States, now and in the future.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT
OF THE INTERIOR
National Park Service

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