

This Fiery Trial: The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln Study Guide

This Fiery Trial: The Speeches and Writings of Abraham Lincoln by Abraham Lincoln

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Plot Summary

This Fiery Trial is a collection of the speeches and writings of Abraham Lincoln, as selected and edited by William E. Gienapp. They span the entirety of Lincoln's public service career, from 1832 when Lincoln was considering public office in Sangamo County, to April 11, 1865, three days before Lincoln was assassinated.

As Gienapp explains, Lincoln did not reveal much in the way of personal details or a rich emotional life in his public letters, and even in private letters. Instead, what are demonstrated in This Fiery Trial are several of the qualities that made Lincoln a great leader, including moral certitude with respect to slavery, political acumen, and a shrewd military mind.

Lincoln was raised in a rural environment, and was largely self-taught, rising to become a well-respected country lawyer prior to his entry into politics by way of the Illinois State Legislature in 1834. His rhetoric displays a combination of relatable rural aphorisms, imagery and stories, and a classical education of such works as Shakespeare's plays and John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

Always a right-leaning moderate, Lincoln embraced the Whig party platform and later spearheaded the Republican party, and was one of its earliest and most important leaders. Early on, he denounced slavery, and throughout his career he wrestled with the question of the status of blacks in the United States. As revealed through his writings, Lincoln walked a thin line on the race issue, calling for an end of slavery, but only as it affected the integrity of the Union. And though Lincoln was enlightened for his time, he still felt blacks were morally and otherwise inferior to whites. He felt blacks should be left alone and segregated, free to pursue their own interests.

Lincoln's 1860 election on an antislavery platform prompted Southern states to secede from the Union to begin the Civil War. Lincoln, particularly in the beginning of the war, kept a tight rein on his generals, and his letters show that Lincoln was adept at military strategy. He correctly believed that the Union's key to victory was to exploit its superior numbers, and that General Robert E. Lee's army was the lynchpin that held the Confederate resistance in place.

Lincoln endured constant criticism from congressmen and others with respect to his military strategy, his choice of generals, his wisdom in issuing the Emancipation Proclamation to free slaves, and his eventual strategy for the reconstruction of the South post-war. At every turn, Lincoln seemed to anticipate his opponents and respond with the ideal retort. He sidestepped criticisms that he was a proponent of racial equality by stating that the Civil War was waged simply to protect the Constitution and to keep the Union together, and that abolition of slavery was a means, not an end.

Lincoln delivered his last speech on April 11, 1865, when he called for limited black suffrage in the post-war South. Actor John Wilkes Booth was in the audience and was

outraged at the notion of black suffrage, and he murdered the president three days later at Ford's Theater during a performance.



Preface, Prologue, and I. Peculiar Ambition

Preface, Prologue, and I. Peculiar Ambition Summary and Analysis

Preface: Though Lincoln was largely self-educated, his literary ability was extraordinary, and his rhetorical skills have attracted many historians. His writings display a combination of his knowledge of classic texts such as Shakespeare's plays, John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* and the Bible, along with images from his rural upbringing.

Prologue: This section contains an 1859 brief autobiographical sketch Lincoln provided to Jesse Fell, an Illinois newspaperman. It contains just a few facts, and is typical of Lincoln insofar as showing that he led a very public life and was extremely guarded about any private details.

Lincoln was born in 1809 in Hardin County, Kentucky. Kentucky was a wild country then which was only beginning the process of entering the United States. Lincoln's family led a very rural existence, and beyond basic grammar school, Lincoln never had formal education. Lincoln worked on the farm until age twenty-one, when he went to Illinois. He learned law, served as a Captain of Volunteers in the Black-Hawk War, and rose in the political ranks, being elected to the House of Congress in 1846.

I. Peculiar Ambition:

"I am Young and Unknown" - This correspondence was written to the people of Sangamo County in 1832, as a way of introducing himself prior to his first run for public office. He discusses how everyone in the country should receive moderate education, and that he believes that river travel makes more sense for the people in the community than a costly railroad. Lincoln lost the election, the only time he lost.

"I Shall Be Governed By Their Will" - In 1834, Lincoln was elected to the state legislature. In 1836, Lincoln wrote this letter to the editor of the Sangamo Journal. He announces his candidacy for reelection, and advocates traditional Whig party policies, such as the diversion of federal funds to the states to fund internal improvements.

"Founded on Both Injustice and Bad Policy" - In this 1837 protest, Lincoln objects to the institution of slavery. However, he also scolds abolitionist forces in Illinois for harming the cause of anti-slavery, since the abolition movement was unpopular in Illinois at the time. For Lincoln to state this slavery condemnation in a largely pro-slavery state was politically courageous.



"Cold, Calculating, Unimpassioned Reason" - This address given to the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield warns that the United States is threatened from within and not from foreign forces. Only Americans' lack of respect for the rule of law and their adherence to wild, savage passion will tear the Union asunder. Above all, Lincoln urged restraint and self-control as essential to maintaining American political institutions.

"Bow to It I Never Will" - With fanciful rhetorical flourishes evoking volcanoes, demons, and hell, Lincoln belittles a Democratic party plan for a subtreasury as opposed to a strong national bank, which the Whigs supported.

"The Most Miserable Man Living" - In a rare glimpse into his personal life, Lincoln states that he is "the most miserable man living" in a letter to a law partner after he had broken off his marital engagement to Mary Todd in 1841. However, two years later, the couple reunited and were married.

"An Evil Tree Can Not Bring Forth Good Fruit" - Lincoln expresses frustration regarding abolitionist forces within the Whig Party that refused to vote for Henry Clay, a slaveholder, in the presidential election. If the abolitionists had not broken ranks, Clay would have been elected and not James K. Polk. He blames abolitionists for the annexation of Texas, stating Texas could have made for a fine country on its own.

"I am Not a Member of Any Church" - A political opponent charged Lincoln with atheism in 1846, and this letter was his response. While Lincoln was never one for organized religion and he never attended church, he assured his voters that he had never denied the truth of the Scriptures.

"No One Man Should Hold the Power" - Lincoln criticizes James K. Polk for starting a war with Mexico (1848), and he questions the authority of the president to wage war singlehandedly. However, his district was pro-war, so Lincoln voted for all military spending bills and looked forward to territorial acquisition.

"I Like the Letters Very Much" - The editor finds it revealing that this rare personal letter from Lincoln to Mary Todd is full of awkward mundane commentary and stilted words, as opposed to Lincoln's more fluid political discourse. Lincoln was never comfortable expressing intimate, personal emotion.

"Resolve to Be Honest" - Lincoln's most important characteristic for the ideal lawyer is diligence, followed by honesty and careful study of the facts. Other advice to lawyers: Encourage compromise and discourage litigation, never charge exorbitant fees, and never try to stir up litigation over little cause.

"More Painful Than Pleasant" - Lincoln writes to his stepbrother concerning his father's imminent death. He makes feeble excuses for not being able to attend the deathbed. For the editor, this letter demonstrates Lincoln's deep estrangement from his father.



II. Half Slave and Half Free

II. Half Slave and Half Free Summary and Analysis

"The Legitimate Object of Government" - For Lincoln, the legitimate object of government is to do for people what they cannot do as individuals. For anything else, the government should not interfere. One of government's important roles is to address crimes and wrongdoings.

"Our Republican Robe is Soiled" - After a five year retirement from politics, Lincoln was drawn in to politics again by his indignation with respect to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, drafted by his political opponent Stephen Douglas. The act would provide for the establishment of the states of Kansas and Nebraska as slave states. From 1854 on, Lincoln made anti-slavery his key issue. In this speech, Lincoln severely criticized Douglas and the notion of "popular sovereignty" (that would leave the slavery issue up to states). His political rhetoric became fiercer and leaner, and he invoked the Declaration of Independence, which would become a key document for him in his rhetoric.

"Where I Now Stand" - In a letter to his one close friend, Joshua Speed, Lincoln admitted feeling politically adrift in 1855. However, he knew that he was not politically aligned with the new Know Nothing party movement. He reiterates his opposition to slavery, still a somewhat unpopular position, as well as the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

"Can We Not Come Together, for the Future" - In 1856, Lincoln campaigned strenuously for the new Republican party. However, the vote was split by the Know Nothings, and James Buchanan, a Democrat, was elected.

"All the Powers of Earth Seem Rapidly Combining Against Him" - In 1857, the Supreme Court ruled in the controversial Dred Scott case that blacks could not be citizens, and that Congress could not prohibit slavery in states. This flew in the face of the Republican platform. Lincoln picked apart Chief Justice Roger Taney's argument, stating that the Founding Fathers did intend to include blacks as well as whites in the famous "all men are created equal" line of the Declaration.

"A Question of Interest" - Lincoln belittles the pro-slavery position of dividing slaves and masters along lines of skin or intellect. If so, Lincoln argues, the first man one meets who is of fairer skin or greater intellect is one's master.

"A House Divided" - This famous speech was delivered to the Republican state convention in anticipation of Lincoln's opposition to Democrat Stephen Douglas in the Senatorial election of 1858. Lincoln took an extreme position, and argued that Douglas and the Democrats were conspiring to make slavery a national institution. Lincoln argues that the Union cannot exist half slave and half free - a house divided against itself cannot stand.



"Construed So Differently from Any Thing Intended by Me" - Lincoln's House Divided speech caused controversy because it appeared he was questioning the sovereignty of the Southern states. Lincoln performed some damage control, trying to centralize his position.

"Public Sentiment" - In anticipation of a series of public debates with Stephen Douglas, Lincoln stressed his need for turning public sentiment. If Douglas managed to convince most Americans that slavery was not a moral issue, blacks were doomed.

"Blowing Out the Moral Lights Around Us" - In response to Douglas' charges that Lincoln was an abolitionist and a man who believed in racial equality, Lincoln turned the tables and charged that Douglas' position was akin to "blowing out the moral lights around us" and ignoring the issue of basic human decency and morality that was at the heart of the slavery issue.

"The Social and Political Equality of the Races" - Lincoln states that he does NOT believe in racial equality, and that he does not think whites and blacks are intellectually, socially, or politically equal. Rather, in opposing slavery, he simply wishes to ensure blacks are provided the basic rights promised in the Declaration of Independence. Blacks should be left alone and potentially segregated, not enslaved.

"A Moral, a Social, and a Political Wrong" - By the sixth Douglas-Lincoln debate in Illinois in 1858, Lincoln had honed his argument to a matter of slavery as a moral evil, and Douglas' pro-slavery stance as akin to amorality.

"The Eternal Struggle Between Right and Wrong" - By the seventh and last Douglas-Lincoln debate, Lincoln summarized the issues of the slavery question and boiled the matter down to a simple contrast of right versus wrong.

"For, and Not Against the Union" - In his last speech prior to the 1858 Senatorial election, Lincoln portrays himself as a moderate who does not wish for the break-up of the Union. By contrast, he has been fighting the keep the states together.

"Opens the Way for All" - Lincoln contrasts the "mud-sill" theory of labor and capital with the Free Labor theory. In the mud-sill theory, capital and labor are separate entities. In Free Labor, capital and labor are intertwined, and men gain capital through their labor in the name of self-advancement. Lincoln favors the Free Labor theory.

"Right Makes Might" - This important speech was delivered in February 1860 to a New York audience, and helped propel Lincoln to the Republican presidential nomination. He argued that antislavery was an ideal of the founding fathers, not slavery, and that the Republicans were merely conservatives who wished to return to that antislavery ideal.

"I am Not the First Choice of Many" - Lincoln, set on seeking the presidential nomination, feels he is the most electable among the candidates, though he may not be the first choice of many.



"The Taste is in My Mouth" - Though it was considered "improper" at the time to actively seek presidential nomination, Lincoln confesses to a potential political ally, Senator Lyman Trumbull, that he is seeking the nomination, and that it would be in Trumbull's best interest to support Lincoln.

"I Accept the Nomination" - Lincoln accepts the nomination in a short letter, and he provides little specifics about his platform, because it was seen as politically advantageous to be vague about policy at that point in time.

"A Piece of Silly Affection" - Lincoln writes back to a young girl, Grace Bedell, who suggested he grow a beard because his face is so thin. Lincoln indeed started letting his whiskers grow after that point.



III. The Perpetuity of Popular Government

III. The Perpetuity of Popular Government Summary and Analysis

"The Tug Has to Come" - After Lincoln was elected, the South actively put secession into motion. Lincoln urged Congress not to compromise with the South—that is, not to give in to any extension of slavery.

"There is No Cause for Such Fears" - Lincoln was slow to recognize the true gravity of the secession crisis, and wrote a fairly vanilla letter to southern Congressman Alexander Stephens trying to assuage fears. It didn't work; Stephens became the eventual vice president of the Confederacy.

"It is the End of Us" - Lincoln rails against what he perceives as southern extortion attempts. He refuses again to compromise on the issue of slavery.

"An Affectionate Farewell" - Lincoln was unusually emotional in a farewell speech as he boarded a train to take him to Washington from Illinois.

"The Union is Perpetual" - In Lincoln's first inaugural address, he stressed the need to keep the Union together. He stated that no state had the right to secede, and that Americans were too culturally connected to suffer such a schism.

"To Suppress Said Combinations" - Lincoln ordered 75,000 militia troops to Fort Sumter to put down what he perceived as a southern rebellion. The North never formally recognized the Confederacy as a country, and so war was never officially declared.

"The Most Prompt, and Efficient Means" - Over worries that the Maryland state legislature would vote to secede, Lincoln orders his general to wait until the action is taken before he takes any action to counteract rebels.

"A People's Contest" - Increasingly, Lincoln made the Civil War struggles a matter of the Union preserving democracy, not just for the U.S. but for the world. The Civil War became a test for Lincoln of the democratic form of government.

"Constantly Drilled, Disciplined, and Instructed" - The Union suffered a disaster at Bull Run, and thereafter Lincoln ordered the army to be much more trained and orderly, and not the ragtag groups of militiamen he had organized prior to Bull Run.

"To Conform to the Act of Congress" - In this letter, Lincoln urged a general named John Fremont to modify an order Fremont issued that would have freed all slaves of "disloyal

residents." When Fremont refused, Lincoln revoked Fremont's order, causing outrage among antislavery radicals. This action shows Lincoln's ever-steady moderate politics.

"I Cannot Assume the Reckless Position" - Lincoln reacts with astonishment to Senator Orville Browning, who criticized Lincoln's handling of Fremont.

"For a Vast Future Also" - In an address to Congress, Lincoln reminds everyone that they are fighting not just for their futures, but for a "vast future" of success and prosperity for the entire United States.

"Grumbling Despatches and Letters" - Lincoln chastises General David Hunter for his constant complaining letters to the president. Lincoln had little patience for his squabbling generals who were often petulant and at cross-purposes with one another.



IV. We Cannot Escape History

IV. We Cannot Escape History Summary and Analysis

"Making Our Advantage an Over-match for His" - In this letter to General Don Carlos Buell, Lincoln demonstrates his increasing acumen for military strategy. He correctly asserts that the key to a Union victory is to exploit its advantage in sheer numbers, a strategy that would be successfully employed by General Grant in 1864. Lincoln also calls attention to wresting control of East Tennessee from the Confederacy, one of his key objectives in the war.

"Gradual Emancipation is Better for All" - Lincoln attempts to persuade Congress to pass a law giving financial aid to any state which instituted a policy of gradual emancipation, of gradual abolition of slavery. In his address, Lincoln stresses that the war is an "indispensable" means to an end: the integrity of the Union.

"But You Must Act" - In this letter to General McClellan, Lincoln urges the man to take decisive action. Lincoln had wanted him to strike the Confederate Army at Manassas, but McClellan insisted on traveling to Richmond and amassing reinforcements. McClellan's progress there was very slow, and he insisted on stopping for additional reinforcements; eventually McClellan was defeated decisively when the Confederates had the time to re-deploy its forces.

"Questions I Reserve to Myself" - In response to a proclamation by General David Hunter freeing the slaves of three southern states, which was largely symbolic since Hunter controlled only small portions of those states, Lincoln rescinds the order. Lincoln states that only he has the authority to issue such grand orders, and he hints that emancipation may be necessary, foreshadowing the Emancipation Proclamation.

"I Expect to Maintain this Contest" - In response to McClellan's setbacks in Virginia, Lincoln reaffirms his belief that the opening of the Mississippi and the seizure of East Tennessee are crucial objectives in the war. Lincoln wishes for more troops to fortify key areas, including the defense of Washington and western states such as Kentucky and Missouri.

"The Incidents of the War Cannot Be Avoided" - Lincoln makes a second appeal to border states (on the border between the Union and the Confederacy) to adopt emancipation. Lincoln felt such an adoption would substantially curtail the war if the Confederates saw that these states would not join the Confederacy. However, Lincoln was rejected a second time, and the border states made no such agreement.

"Leaving Any Available Card Unplayed" - Lincoln reacts with anger to southern Unionists who wish to "go easy" on Confederate forces in Louisiana. Lincoln feels that the people of Louisiana have invited the violence onto themselves, and that the Union must use all necessary military force to achieve its objectives.



"A Single Half-Defeat" - Lincoln writes to French author and politician Agenor-Etienne de Gasparin. The Union had just suffered a shocking blow by McClellan's failure to turn away General Robert E. Lee in Richmond. McClellan had instead been forced to retreat to the James River. Lincoln displays his military acumen by dismissing the importance of this setback, however damaging it was to popular opinion, and instead concentrating on successes in the western theater, including the taking of most of Tennessee and the Mississippi River basin.

"The Ban is Still Upon You" - Lincoln addresses a group of free black men and discusses a project of "voluntary colonization" for the blacks after the war. In a move to assuage Northern whites, Lincoln states that the races can never be equal, and that whites and blacks both suffer from being in each other's companies. The solution, therefore, is colonization of blacks to the Caribbean and elsewhere. This project failed and was abandoned.

"I Would Save the Union" - In response to perceptions that Lincoln was changing his policy on slavery, Lincoln affirms that his first and only objective is to save the Union, and that the slavery question is clearly secondary. However, Lincoln sets the stage for the Emancipation Proclamation by arguing that, if it is necessary to free all slaves to save the Union, he would do so. The Emancipation Proclamation was already in the works by this point (August 1862).

"The Will of God Prevails" - This short statement has Lincoln at his lowest, having just suffered another Union defeat at the second battle of Bull Run. He wonders whether any side in the Civil War has God on their side, and he expresses ignorance as to God's grand plan in all of this.

"Shall Be Thenceforth, and Forever Free" - Lincoln issued a preliminary Emancipation Proclamation in September 1862. This gave secessionist states 100 days to switch their loyalties back to the Union. By issuing a preliminary proclamation, Lincoln demonstrated his political shrewdness. This gave time for Northerners to adjust to the idea of the abolition of slavery.

"The Writ of Habeas Corpus is Suspended" - Two days after the preliminary Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln suspended the writ of habeas corpus (the right for people to be charged with a crime and not just imprisoned indefinitely), in response to continued insurrection and disloyalty. He also provided for the establishment of military trials to try disloyal citizens.

"Breath Alone Kills No Rebels" - Lincoln reacts with no enthusiasm to the positive reception of his preliminary Emancipation Proclamation. While the well-wishing is nice, the war continues; "breath alone [kind words] kills no rebels."

"If We Never Try, We Shall Never Succeed" - Lincoln writes to General McClellan and criticizes McClellan's apparent lack of urgency and his lack of confidence in his own military. After the successful Battle of Antietam, McClellan could have pursued Lee's



army and overcome it, but McClellan saw fit to rule out any pursuit. Shortly afterward, Lincoln stripped McClellan of his command over the entire Union army.

"I Do Not See That Their Superiority of Success has Been So Marked" - Lincoln writes to political leader Carl Schurz, who blamed the Lincoln administration for failures in the war and also the Republican failure in the Congressional elections of 1862. Lincoln expresses exasperation at Schurz' spurious claims.

"The Last, Best Hope of Earth" - In this address to Congress in December 1862, Lincoln makes keeping the Union synonymous with freeing the slaves, a policy shift from earlier rhetoric. He proposes compensation for gradual emancipation to states and to individual slaveholders, and he advocates black colonization of the Caribbean. Once again, he urges everyone to consider the future, and that their aim should be the preservation of the Union.

"In This Sad World of Ours" - Lincoln writes a note to a young girl whose father, a personal friend of Lincoln's, had been killed in the war. He states that the girl's grief will subside only with time.



V. A New Birth of Freedom

V. A New Birth of Freedom Summary and Analysis

"Are, and Henceforth Shall Be Free" - In the full Emancipation Proclamation (January 1863), Lincoln declares that all slaves in the Union and the Confederacy shall be free. As opposed to other areas of rhetorical flourish, the proclamation is straightforward and brief.

"Broken Eggs Cannot Be Mended" - Lincoln defends the Emancipation Proclamation to a Democratic Congressman. He dismisses alarmist claims that the slaves would rise up to exterminate whites in the South, and he refuses, of course, to retract any portion of the proclamation.

"I Will Risk the Dictatorship" - Lincoln writes to General Hooker, whom he had just appointed as general for the Potomac army. Lincoln directly addresses Hooker's headstrong and ambitious nature, and states that he is assigning him the generalship in spite of, and not because of such qualities.

"There is No Eligible Route for Us into Richmond" - Lincoln writes to Hooker and states that Hooker's chief aim should be to harass and pursue Lee's army, and not to take Richmond. The eastern theater had been battled to a stalemate, but continued pressure was essential so that the Confederacy could not divert troops to the West, where they were on much rockier ground.

"Constantly Denounced and Opposed" - Lincoln responds with irritation to Illinois Congressman Isaac Arnold about his recent criticism concerning Lincoln's appointment of General Henry Halleck to the Union Army. The editor calls the constant criticism of Lincoln's military appointments a "major impediment" to Lincoln's ability to conduct the war.

"Lee's Army Is Your True Objective Point" - This correspondence shows Lincoln's increasing confidence in military matters. He presses General Hooker to pursue Confederate General Lee, but like McClellan before him, Hooker wishes to abandon Lee and press on to Richmond. Hooker was soon relieved of his duties.

"Indispensable to the Public Safety" - In a public address, Lincoln defends the government's arrest and trial of former Ohio Congressman Clement Vallandigham, who spoke out against the war. Lincoln aggressively pursued antiwar elements in the North throughout the entirety of the war.

"Few Things are So Troublesome" - Lincoln rejects a congressman's request to trade cotton. Profiteers exploited the war in order to generate massive personal profits through cotton and other goods, and Lincoln realized the deleterious impact of such profiteering.



"You Were Right, and I Was Wrong" - Lincoln praises General Ulysses S. Grant's strategy in capturing Vicksburg. Grant pursued a different strategy than the one Lincoln suggested, and so Lincoln gives him credit in this letter.

"I Am Distressed Immeasurably" - Lincoln expresses his disappointment that General Meade, commander of Potomac forces, allowed the Confederate Virginian Army to return to Virginia. Meade never enjoyed the degree of Lincoln's confidence in him that Grant enjoyed.

"The Same Protection to All Its Soldiers" - The Confederacy had a policy in place of enslaving all captured black Union soldiers, and executing any of their white commanding officers on charges of leading a slave insurrection. Lincoln sternly warns the Confederacy against this practice.

"I Can Not Consent to Suspend the Draft" - In response to antidraft riots in New York City, Lincoln holds firm in his policy of conscription. Throughout the war, the compulsory draft of soldiers remained.

"It Works Doubly" - In this note, Lincoln supports the use of black soldiers throughout the Union army. He felt this worked "doubly" with emancipation, and that it would hasten the end of the war.

"I Am Not Watching You with an Evil-Eye" - Lincoln again soothes a cantankerous general (this time, William S. Rosecrans) who expressed his displeasure at government micromanagement. However, Lincoln reminded Rosecrans of the importance of capturing East Tennessee.

"A Fair Specimen of What Has Occurred to Me Through Life" - Lincoln wrote to an actor expressing admiration for Shakespeare's plays, and the letter was unexpectedly published, compelling Lincoln's critics to deride him. In this note, Lincoln assures the actor that he is not angry, and that the recent criticism is the same as what he has always endured.

"The Heaviest Blow Yet Dealt to the Rebellion" - In this long letter, Lincoln writes to an Illinois acquaintance and defends his military policy, his attitude toward blacks, and his decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.

"Give Up All Footing Upon Constitution or Law" - The original Emancipation Proclamation excluded several state counties. Lincoln here rejects a request to include those counties for emancipation, reasoning that he could not find a military reason to do so at that time.

"An Idea I Have Been Trying to Repudiate for Quite a Year" - In response to the increasing military stalemate in Virginia, Lincoln again stresses the importance of leveraging the Union's superior manpower, and the importance of capturing Lee's army.



"Quarrel Not at All" - Lincoln delivers a mild reprimand to a soldier, the brother-in-law of longtime political adversary Stephen Douglas, who was accused of quarreling. Lincoln did so to spare the Douglas family further embarrassment.

"Give Me a Tangible Nucleus" - Lincoln instructs General Nathaniel Banks to begin reconstruction efforts in Louisiana (November 1863). This letter foreshadows the difficulties of Reconstruction in the South, since Lincoln is vague as to the status of African Americans.

"A New Birth of Freedom" - This is Lincoln's famous Gettysburg Address, beginning with the words, "Four score and seven years ago." Lincoln eloquently gave his reason for why the young men at Gettysburg had to die - to save the Republic.



VI. Events Have Controlled Me

VI. Events Have Controlled Me Summary and Analysis

"The New Reckoning" - In a December 1863 address, Lincoln points out that the recent Republican victory in the elections demonstrated that the public had embraced his policies, including his handling of the war and the emancipation. He lays the groundwork for the difficult work of reconstruction.

"A Full Pardon" - Lincoln emphasizes future loyalty over past transgressions for white southerners who had fought on the Confederate side. He did not wish, nor did the country have the capacity, to treat all soldiers or disloyal citizens as traitors or criminals. Lincoln leaves the legal status of African Americans open, and the race issue became the most contentious issue of the Reconstruction era.

"The Jewel of Liberty" - Lincoln stresses his idea for limited black suffrage for the state of Louisiana. Unlike "Radicals" who wished that blacks be given all legal rights that whites enjoyed, Lincoln was more moderate, and stressed a more gradual process.

"If Slavery is Not Wrong, Nothing is Wrong" - While Lincoln feels slavery is wrong, he states his case that he prosecuted the Civil War and issued the Emancipation Proclamation not because of personal conviction, but because he took an oath to defend the Constitution of the United States. It was in that capacity, he argues, that he took the steps he did.

"The World Has Never Had a Good Definition of Liberty" - In an April 1864 address in Baltimore, Lincoln praises the state of Maryland for making a move to abolish slavery entirely.

"I Wish Not to Obtrude Any Constraints Upon You" - By April 1864, General Grant was in overall control of Union forces. Unlike previous generals, Lincoln had complete faith in Grant, and Lincoln's role as a military commander became less and less, as more duties were entrusted to Grant.

"Not Best to Swap Horses When Crossing Streams" - Lincoln expresses his gratitude to the Union League for backing him for the 1864 presidential nomination. Lincoln easily won the nomination, despite some grumbling.

"Unprepared to Be Inflexibly Committed to Any Single Plan" - Lincoln pocket-vetoed the Wade-Davis Bill of July 1864, which called for much more stringent Southern reconstruction plans than Lincoln was prepared to implement. The exact strategy for Reconstruction became a sticking point between Congress and Lincoln, and Lincoln maintained that he was prepared to modify any and all plans.

"Will Be Received and Considered" - By July 1864, Lincoln was under increasing pressure to negotiate peace terms with the Confederacy and end the war, considering



Grant's heavy losses in a major offensive. Lincoln holds fast to his conviction that nothing less than the integrity of the Union and the abolition of slavery could stop the war.

"Not an Entirely Impartial Judge" - Lincoln wryly responds to a letter from a white man declaring that blacks should be slaves to whites forever. Lincoln states that the man cannot accurately make such a statement since, being white, he is not an impartial judge.

"Hold On With a Bull-dog Gripe" - Lincoln urges Grant to "hold on with a bull-dog gripe [grip]" in his war efforts, despite increasing calls for peace negotiations.

"The Curses of Heaven" - In response to detractors claiming that Lincoln only wanted to prolong the war to end slavery, Lincoln points instead to President of the Confederacy Jefferson Davis' unwillingness to reunite with the Union.

"Equal Privileges in the Race of Life" - Lincoln stresses to a group of soldiers that the war is not only about their generation, but about the prosperity of future generations.

"The Administration Will Not Be Re-Elected" - With the war far from won, Lincoln, in August 1864, was convinced he would not be re-elected president. He wrote that he was willing to aid the President-Elect in assuming the office. But naturally, he never sent this letter, because he was indeed re-elected.

"Go Far Towards Losing the Whole Union Cause" - Always the shrewd politician, Lincoln here urges General Sherman to allow his soldiers time to go home and vote in the November election. Union soldiers were overwhelmingly pro-Republican.

"I Am Struggling to Maintain the Government, Not to Overthrow It" - On the eve of the November election, Lincoln urges American citizens to observe the rule of law and to embrace the constitutional system of voting, no matter the outcome.

"The Election Was a Necessity" - This address was written on November 10, 1864, after Lincoln's successful election. Lincoln stresses that, despite the inconvenience, elections are necessities in a modern republic in order to preserve freedom.



VII. To Bind Up the Nation's Wounds

VII. To Bind Up the Nation's Wounds Summary and Analysis

"So Costly a Sacrifice Upon the Altar of Freedom" - Lincoln writes to Boston widow Lydia Bixby, who he believed had lost five sons in the war. Lincoln's words here are exceptionally poignant, and the letter was subject to many popular reprints then and after.

"An Issue Which Can Only Be Decided by Victory" - By December 1864, the end of the Civil War was in sight but not yet attained. In his last large annual address, Lincoln stresses the Union's resolve to pursue complete victory in the war, and he turns his attention to specific problems in Reconstruction.

"The Honor is All Yours" - Lincoln thanks General Sherman for his "Christmas gift" of the city of Savannah, which Sherman captured on Christmas 1864. The editor praises Lincoln for his willingness to give generous credit to his military commanders.

"Time is More Important Than Ever Before" - In response to Sherman's statement that he wished to rest his army in Savannah and prepare, Lincoln instead urges him to press on and give the enemy chase.

"My Son Wishes to See Something of the War" - By the end of 1864, Lincoln's college-aged son Robert wanted to get a taste of war and enlist in the army. Lincoln personally reaches out to General Grant in this letter to ask if Robert could have some nominal rank in Grant's army, and away from the real fighting, since the Lincolns had already lost two sons in the war by then.

"Three Things are Indispensable" - By January 1865, Jefferson Davis was seeking to surrender. Lincoln impressed upon his ambassadors that three things were necessary for an end to the war: that the United States be whole again; that slavery remain abolished; and that no Confederate army could remain in place.

"A King's Cure for All the Evils" - On the doorstep to the passage of the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery, Lincoln calls the amendment a fitting end to the Civil War, and a "King's cure for all the evils."

"With Charity for All" - Lincoln chose to make his second Inaugural Address on March 4, 1865. In it, he speaks eloquently to the justifications for entering the war in the first place, and he pleads for peace and reconciliation.

"A Truth Which I Thought Needed to Be Told" - In response to flattery of his second Inaugural Address, Lincoln states that he believes the speech was better than anything he had produced to that point, and that it will have a lasting impact.



"Let the Thing Be Pressed" - In a telegram, Lincoln instructs General Grant to keep up his relentless pressure on Lee's army.

"No Exclusive, and Inflexible Plan Can Safely Be Prescribed" - Lincoln's final speech occurred on April 11, 1865, after Lee's surrender and the end of the Civil War. Lincoln stresses that there is no "one size fits all" solution to the problem of Southern reconstruction. For the first time, Lincoln publicly endorses his idea for limited black suffrage throughout the South. An actor in the audience, John Wilkes Booth, was shocked and outraged at the idea of black suffrage, and he decided to kill the president. During a performance at Ford's Theater, Booth assassinated President Lincoln on April 14, 1865.



Characters

Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln was the sixteenth president of the United States. Lincoln was born in 1809 in Hardin County, Kentucky. Kentucky was a wild country then which was only beginning the process of entering the United States. Lincoln's family led a very rural existence, and beyond basic grammar school, Lincoln never had formal education.

After several years of being a largely self-taught lawyer, Lincoln became interested in politics. He entered the Illinois state legislature in 1834, and was eventually elected to the House of Congress in 1846. After a five year retirement from politics, Lincoln was drawn in to politics again by his indignation with respect to the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, drafted by his political opponent Stephen Douglas. From then on, Lincoln made opposition to slavery his key issue. After a famous series of debates in 1858, Lincoln lost the Senatorial election to Douglas, but he defeated Douglas in the 1860 presidential election.

Lincoln's antislavery stance enraged southern politicians, and soon states were seceding and the Civil War had begun. Lincoln worked tirelessly to placate grumbling generals and criticizing congressman. Throughout, he remained steadfastly committed to the abolition of slavery and the reconstitution of the Union. He had a significant hand in Union military strategy, and he guided the Union to victory by the early months of 1865.

Lincoln is remembered as a great leader and rhetorician. Under Lincoln, the United States survived a Civil War and abolished slavery.

Stephen Douglas

Douglas was an Illinois congressman, and a leader of the Northern Democratic party. He emerged as Lincoln's key political adversary until Lincoln beat him decisively in the 1860 presidential election.

Douglas defeated Lincoln in an 1858 Illinois Senatorial election after a famed series of seven debates around the state. The debates became famous as an example of two intellectually rigorous men providing, at least to contemporary audiences, compelling arguments for two very different political philosophies. Douglas felt that Lincoln was an abolitionist and someone who believed in equality between the black and white races. Douglas and the Northern Democrats were perfectly fine with the "status quo" of slavery as a Southern institution, and Douglas felt that Lincoln was unnecessarily antagonizing the South and threatening the integrity of the Union with his antislavery crusade.

By contrast, Lincoln painted Douglas as a man with no regard for morals who was ignoring the basic need for human decency at the heart of the slavery issue. While



Douglas tried to drag the debate away from any issue of morality, Lincoln relentlessly returned to the morality issue. Both men tried to paint the other as a dangerous extremist. Because Illinois was fairly proslavery in 1858, Douglas won the majority of voters in the state, and he took the Senatorial seat.

However, the Lincoln-Douglas debates made Lincoln a national figure, and Lincoln continued to support the antislavery cause even after his defeat. By 1860, the majority of the country had embraced Lincoln's antislavery stance, and he defeated Douglas in the presidential election. Douglas died one year later in 1861 of typhoid fever.

General Ulysses S. Grant

Grant was a general in Lincoln's Union army. Initially a general of forces in the Western theater, Grant came to earn the trust and respect of Lincoln, and by 1864 he was made commander of all Union forces. Through Grant's application of Lincoln's notion of victory by superior numbers, Grant was able to force the end of the Civil War.

General Robert E. Lee

Lee was the Confederacy's most important and most prominent general. He was in charge of forces in the Virginia area. Though outmatched in terms of manpower and resources, Lee was a superior tactician who harassed Union forces for several years. Eventually, he was forced to surrender by General Grant.

Henry Clay

In 1845, Lincoln lamented the fact that abolitionists had split the vote and elected Democrat James K. Polk instead of slaveowner and Whig Henry Clay. Lincoln's stance on Clay demonstrates that Lincoln evolved his stance on slavery as he grew older.

Grace Bedell

Grace Bedell was a young girl who wrote to Abraham Lincoln and suggested he grow a beard to compensate for his very thin face. Soon afterward, Lincoln grew the famous beard for which he is now known.

John Fremont

Fremont was a southern Union general who issued an order freeing slaves from all disloyal residents. Lincoln rescinded the order, angering abolitionists and many congressmen. The Fremont episode displayed that Lincoln was politically savvy and always ready to walk the moderate path.



George McClellan

McClellan was Lincoln's initial general in the crucial Virginia theater of the Civil War. Though well-respected among the soldiers, McClellan displayed a lack of urgency and aggression that irked Lincoln. McClellan insisted on focusing on capturing Richmond rather than pursuing General Lee's army. After many disappointments, Lincoln relieved McClellan of his post.

Joseph Hooker

Hooker was a Union general in charge of Potomac forces. Hooker had a reputation for being rebellious and headstrong, and Lincoln made it clear in a letter to Hooker that the man was being given a generalship in spite of, and not because of such undesirable qualities.

Clement Vallandigham

Vallandigham was a former congressman who spoke out vociferously against the Civil War and was jailed for being a dissident. His arrest and imprisonment caused some controversy, but Lincoln was adamant about clamping down on such dissidents.



Objects/Places

Sangamo County, Illinois

Lincoln began his political career in Sangamo County. He had a successful campaign there for the state legislature in 1834.

Hardin County, Kentucky

Lincoln was born in 1809 in the rural area of Hardin County. He grew up on a farm, and his rural life experiences strongly influenced his later political rhetoric.

Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854

The Kansas-Nebraska act created the states of Kansas and Nebraska and paved the way for them to become slave states. The act compelled Lincoln to re-enter politics and argue for an antislavery position.

The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

An 1858 Senatorial election set the stage for seven rigorous debates between Republican Abraham Lincoln and Democrat Stephen Douglas. Slavery became the central issue between the two men. Douglas went on to win the Senator's seat, but Lincoln scored the greater victory eventually by winning the presidential election of 1860.

Fort Sumter

Lincoln ordered 75,000 militia troops to Fort Sumter to put down what he perceived as a southern rebellion. Violence at Fort Sumter formed the unofficial start of the Civil War.

Emancipation Proclamation

In the January 1863 Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln declared that all slaves in the Union and the Confederacy, with some areas of exception, shall be free. This was obviously a controversial order, and Lincoln spent much of the rest of his political career defending the proclamation in terms of the preservation of the Union.



Bull Run

The Union suffered a disaster at Bull Run near Manassas, Virginia in 1861, and thereafter Lincoln orders the army to be much more trained and orderly, and not the ragtag groups of militiamen he had organized prior to Bull Run.

Gettysburg Address

In his famous address at Gettysburg to honor soldiers who died there, Lincoln defended the loss of life in the Civil War as necessary to protect the integrity of the Union for future generations.

Sherman's Christmas Gift

General Sherman captured Savannah, Georgia on Christmas of 1864 and offered it to Lincoln as a "Christmas Gift." Thereafter, Lincoln expressed his thanks for the gift in a letter. The capture of Savannah was a turning point in the war, and signaled the beginning of the end of the Confederacy.

Thirteenth Amendment

The Thirteenth Amendment was the first of the Reconstruction Amendments, and it officially abolished slavery in the United States. Lincoln called the Thirteenth Amendment a fitting end to the Civil War.



Themes

The Political Shrewdness of Lincoln

The writings of Abraham Lincoln consistently demonstrate that Lincoln had a nearly unmatched political acumen that often served him well and allowed him to attain and get re-elected to the highest political office in the country. From his earliest days in Sangamo County, Lincoln displayed an acute understanding of the mindset and temperament of his constituents. For example, while opposing President Polk's land grab in Mexico, Lincoln simultaneously voted 'yes' for every military spending bill because his constituents were pro-military.

In the case of opposing Stephen Douglas for the Senator's seat in 1858 and the presidency in 1860, Lincoln smartly positioned himself as a moderate occupied with the moral problems of slavery, thus positioning Douglas as an extremist with an amoral view of slavery. Lincoln understood the importance of public sentiment, and he knew that if he had any hope of getting elected, he had to make slavery a moral issue.

However, Lincoln made his antislavery stance more palatable by insisting that the stance was not about racial equality because the vast majority of voters felt blacks were inferior. Instead, Lincoln argued, emancipation was a means to an ultimate end, that of the reconstitution of the Union.

Many letters in the collection show Lincoln assuaging the various fears and hostilities of his generals as well as congressmen concerning his military strategy, stance on slavery, reconstruction policies, or other issues. In most cases, Lincoln seemed to know exactly what to say and how to say it to ruffle the least amount of feathers while still getting his point across.

The Military Shrewdness of Lincoln

The writings in the collection show an increasingly confident Lincoln with respect to the overall military strategy of the Civil War, though from the very start Lincoln possessed a correct assessment of the way to victory. Namely, Lincoln stressed that the Western theater was essential to ultimate victory. He soon realized that the Eastern theater, and particularly Virginia where Confederate General Lee operated, would be fought to a relative standstill, with neither side budging. Therefore, the West, and especially Tennessee, was a place where more substantial movement could be accomplished. This aligned well with the placing of his best general, Grant, in the Western theater prior to Grant's takeover of the entire army.

Lincoln correctly realized that General Lee was the proverbial glue that held the Confederate army together, since Lee was the Confederacy's most brilliant tactician. Lincoln urged one general after another to forget about acquiring territory and focus on harassing and driving Lee out of Virginia. However, generals like McClellan tried to



insist upon capturing Richmond and leaving Lee, an incorrect strategy that Lincoln repeatedly nixed. When McClellan failed time and again to pursue the correct objectives, Lincoln had him replaced, and in fact one of Lincoln's strengths was the ability to realize a general was not doing his job and then replacing him.

The editor also points to Lincoln's generosity with gratitude as a key to his military leadership. Lincoln was always quick to give credit to his generals for various battles or key objectives, and this raised the morale of generals as well as ordinary troops.

Finally, Lincoln also knew that the Union must and should exploit its superior manpower advantage. With Grant in control of all Union forces as of 1864, Grant took this advantage at Lincoln's behest and was able to finally force Lee to submit.

Lincoln's Theory of Race and Views on Slavery

Lincoln had a progressive view of race relations and slavery for his time. Very early in his political career, he opposed the expansion of slavery, and by the time of the Lincoln-Douglas debates of 1858, he framed slavery as a moral evil that must be expunged from the nation entirely. He linked blacks back to the Founding Fathers and the Declaration of Independence, and stated that the framers actually did intend for blacks to be entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness" and other basic rights.

However, Lincoln also knew that a radical abolitionist stance, akin to ending all slavery immediately, was not the stance of the majority of Americans, and that he could not be elected with such a stance. So he preached gradual emancipation as opposed to immediate emancipation even after the Emancipation Proclamation, which he knew was a largely symbolic statement. To assuage non-abolitionists, Lincoln also stated that abolition of slavery was only a means to an end, with the end being the preservation of the Union and the protection of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln emphasized that he was not trying to end slavery because he favored blacks or hated white southerners, but that he felt abolition would be the quickest way to bring the Confederacy back into the Union and end the war.

Lincoln's views on race were also fairly progressive, though somewhat difficult to digest for the modern reader. He felt whites were intellectually, physically, and morally superior to blacks, and that the two races could never truly co-exist. Early in his presidency, Lincoln advocated strongly for voluntary colonization of freed blacks to the Caribbean after the war, though this was never implemented. Lincoln was largely vague about the true legal status of blacks in the post-war society, other than to say blacks should be left alone and free to pursue their own interests. This vagueness anticipated the racism, confusion, and other problems in the Reconstruction-era South.



Style

Point of View

Perspective

Two perspectives should be discussed: that of the compiler and editor, William Gienapp, and that of Abraham Lincoln himself.

Gienapp was a well-respected Professor of History at Harvard University. He was noted as an authority on nineteenth century America and particularly the Civil War, so he was particularly appropriate to edit this collection of Lincoln's writings. At the same time This Fiery Trial was published (2002), he also released a full biography of Abraham Lincoln.

Gienapp has the benefit of decades of scholarly work on the Civil War and Lincoln, and is thus able to provide an overall historical perspective on the various correspondences. He chose letters and addresses which he felt were particularly revealing, and which tell a story of the Civil War and the significant part Lincoln played. Gienapp is also able to relate to the modern reader. For example, he points out that while Lincoln's theories of race were enlightened for his time, they fall far short of "progressive" for the modern reader.

As for Lincoln, he of course did not have the benefit of reflection or historical perspective, and he was often writing in moments of great urgency where he had to formulate rhetoric and make decisions quickly. He was a moderate with a strong moral certitude about the institution of slavery, and he held the integrity of the Union in the highest regard, and these are the qualities which guide his writing. His writings rarely reflect doubt or emotion, and are often measured and logical. Lincoln pulled from his experiences growing up on a rural farm, as well as his knowledge of classical literature like Shakespeare and the Bible.

Setting

Tone

As with perspective, the tone of Gienapp's writing and Lincoln's writing should be discussed separately.

Gienapp approaches the text with a scholarly eye. He provides historical context and explains the events surrounding each writing or address in an objective, detached, and formal manner. With the events of concern happening approximately 150 years ago, Gienapp has no acute personal or emotional investment in what is being described. His chief aim is to maintain a high level of veracity with respect to the chronology of the Civil War and the motivations behind Lincoln's rhetoric. Gienapp wishes to preserve the accuracy of the historical record and to provide enough context for the modern reader to



understand the importance of each writing, and the supplementary text reflects these objectives.

As for Lincoln, naturally the tone of the writings varies widely. There are several reasons for this. One is the wide-ranging chronology of the selection, from the early 1830s to Lincoln's death in 1865. Lincoln underwent a personal evolution. His political stances changed and his rhetoric became better and more polished. Secondly, the writings/addresses were crafted for sometimes very different reasons. In "The House Divided" speech, for example, Lincoln was addressing the Republican state convention, and was trying to convince political leaders of his electability. His tone is thus confident and "no-nonsense" with respect to sticking to policy issues. The speech has a very different purpose versus his correspondence to Lydia Bixby, who Lincoln thought lost five sons in the war. Trying to console a devastated widow, Lincoln's tone in this writing is appropriately tender, understanding, and elegiac.

Language and Meaning

None necessary for nonfiction

Structure

This Fiery Trial is a collection of many of Abraham Lincoln's public addresses, telegrams, letters, and similar correspondence picked from the entirety of his political career. Thus, among the first writings is a letter to the people of Sangamo County dated 1832, which expressed Lincoln's policy positions in anticipation of a run for the state legislature of Illinois. The final writing is Lincoln's last public address, dated April 11, 1865, during which he outlined his plans for Reconstruction.

Most of the correspondence is comprised of public material rather than private; as editor Gienapp explains, Lincoln was very guarded, and his private letters are not particularly interesting or revealing. He lived for public service.

Before the reprint of each correspondence, which Gienapp has edited or otherwise cleaned up for the modern reader, Gienapp provides a brief explanatory paragraph. This paragraph provides historical context for the text to follow, providing the reader with a way to properly understand the importance of the material. Gienapp also explains why, in his scholarly opinion, the piece is important, whether it reveals the whimsical side of Lincoln or whether it demonstrates Lincoln's political or military acumen.

The book proceeds in chronological order, and so the letters essentially tell the story of the political career of Abraham Lincoln if read front to back. A Lincoln biographical timeline is also included, along with a selected bibliography for further reading.



Quotes

"Though he was largely self-educated, Abraham Lincoln's literary ability was extraordinary. There are many reasons historians are attracted to Lincoln, but one certainly is the elegance and power of his language." (Preface, page xv)

"Discourage litigation. Persuade your neighbors to compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how the nominal winner is often a real loser—in fees, expenses, and waste of time. As a peacemaker the lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man. There will still be business enough." ("Resolve to be honest," page 23)

"In this age, and this country, public sentiment is every thing. With it, nothing can fail; against it, nothing can succeed. Whoever moulds public sentiment, goes deeper than he who enacts statues, or pronounces judicial decisions." ("Public sentiment is every thing," pages 53-54)

"If slavery is right, all words, acts, laws, and constitutions against it, are themselves wrong, and should be silenced, and swept away. If it is right, we cannot justly object to its nationality—its universality; if it is wrong, they cannot justly insist upon its extension—its enlargement." ("Right makes might," page 80)

"[N]o State, upon its own mere motion, can lawfully get out of the Union—that resolves and ordinances to that effect are legally void; and that acts of violence, within any State or States, against the authority of the United States, are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstances." ("The Union is perpetual," page 91)

"The Union must be preserved, and hence, all indispensable means must be employed. We should not be in haste to determine that radical and extreme measures, which may reach the loyal as well as the disloyal, are indispensable." ("For a vast future also," page 112)

"And, once more let me tell you [General George McClellan], it is indispensable to you that you strike a blow. I am powerless to help this. You will do me the justice to remember I always insisted, that going down the Bay in search of a field, instead of fighting at or near Manassas, was only shifting, and not surmounting, a difficulty—that we would find the same enemy, and the same, or equal, entrenchments, at either place." ("But you must act," page 122)

"And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforth shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons." ("Are, and henceforth shall be free," page 152)



"Again, my dear general [General George Meade], I do not believe you appreciate the magnitude of the misfortune involved in Lee's escape. He was within your easy grasp, and to have closed upon him would, in connection with our other late successes, have ended the war. As it is, the war will be prolonged indefinitely." ("I am distressed immeasurably," page 168)

"I am naturally anti-slavery. If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong. I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel. And yet I have never understood that the Presidency conferred upon me an unrestricted right to act officially upon this judgment and feeling. 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." ("If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong," page 194)

"I have not permitted myself, gentlemen, to conclude that I am the best man in the country; but I am reminded, in this connection, of a story of an old Dutch farmer, who remarked to a companion once that 'it was not best to swap horses when crossing streams.'" ("Not best to swap horses when crossing streams," page 199)

"[Reconstruction] is fraught with great difficulty. Unlike the case of a war between independent nations, there is no authorized organ for us to treat with. No one man has authority to give up the rebellion for any other man. We simply must begin with, and mould from, disorganized and discordant elements." ("No exclusive, and no inflexible plan can safely be prescribed," page 223)



Topics for Discussion

What life experiences and education influenced the writings and rhetoric of Abraham Lincoln?

Compare and contrast the political philosophies of Lincoln and Stephen Douglas.

Why did Abraham Lincoln severely criticize General McClellan for much of the early part of the Civil War?

What reasons did Lincoln give for issuing the Emancipation Proclamation in the manner and at the time that he did?

What was Lincoln's theory of race, and how did it impact his stance on slavery?

What was Lincoln's philosophy with respect to reconstruction in the South and healing the wounds of war?

Why did Abraham Lincoln support the Free Labor theory, as opposed to the "mud-sill" theory?