

**Lincoln Essay Contest**

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"Although Abraham Lincoln was President over a century and a half ago (1861-1865), he is still considered to be one of our greatest Presidents, and his legacy remains important for the nation today."

### Lincoln's Legacy

By the late 1800s, sectional tensions in America had led to a split between the Northern and Southern states. During the Antebellum period, the North became more industrialized as the South increased its agricultural production. The two sections developed differing economies and ideas and by April 14, 1861, at Fort Sumter, the tensions came to a head as the American Civil War began. Skillfully guiding the nation through this time of hardship and considered one of the greatest presidents in American history, Abraham Lincoln left a legacy that lives on in America today due to his preservation of the Union, clash with slavery, and innate leadership in times of crisis.

Although Abraham Lincoln served the nation over a century and a half ago, his adamant belief in the preservation of the Union strongly influenced the development of the United States of America. In 1860, when Lincoln was inaugurated as president, the South had already claimed secession from the Union. Citing irreconcilable differences between the two regions, Virginia, Arkansas, North Carolina and other states felt the need to leave the Union and form their own Confederacy between 1861 and 1864. In his inaugural speech, President Lincoln announced his supreme goal of maintaining and perfecting a perpetual Union. His agreement to allow slavery where it already existed and to enforce the Fugitive Slave Act demonstrated his ability, as a leader, to make compromises for the benefit of the nation. Seeking to avoid war, Lincoln invited the Southern states to rethink their decisions and stay in the Union. He never acknowledged their existence as a separate nation, and Lincoln considered the Civil War a domestic insurrection

rather than a war. His unyielding position on the preservation of the Union can be seen today as the nation is now known as the United States of America and includes the Southern regions that attempted to secede in the 1860s.

Preserving the Union, however, was only one of the accomplishments of Lincoln that still has an impact today. In the 1820s, with the rise of expansion and agriculture in the South, slavery increased in America. During the Antebellum period, slavery continued to be a controversial issue dividing the North and the South and driving the diverging developments of the nation. With additional expansion in the 1840s, the question of expansion of slavery again raised sectional tensions and Northern radicals called for abolition while Southern radicals, or fire-eaters, called for secession from the Union. Lincoln's original position on allowing slavery changed over the course of his presidency, and by the 1860s, Lincoln aligned himself with the abolitionists, calling for the immediate abolition of slavery. After the Battle of Antietam, on September 22, 1862, Lincoln announced his decision to abolish slavery in the states that claimed secession, and on January 1, 1863, Lincoln formally signed the Emancipation Proclamation. With this law, all slaves in the Confederacy were freed, and later those in the Border States and Union states were also freed with the institution of the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment. These advancements toward more equality for African Americans greatly impacted the civil rights movement in the mid-late 1900s. During the 1900s, many African American and white leaders fought for racial equality and rights for African Americans. In their struggle for equality, the Fourteenth Amendment was passed on July 9, 1868, and it stated that all native born people would be considered citizens in the United States, and they would have equal benefits and rights under the Civil Rights Act of 1866. Today, the effects of the Emancipation Proclamation and Lincoln's work to free slaves are still felt as there is no more slavery in the United States of America and

African Americans have worked their way up the ladder and today are seen as equals in American society. Not only have African Americans successfully assimilated, but also have held important governmental positions, such as the current president Barack Obama.

Lastly, Lincoln's leadership and courage in the times of crisis has had a lasting impact on American society. Inaugurated for his first term as president, in 1860 Abraham Lincoln was a relatively inexperienced politician, faced with the secession crisis of the South and the mounting sectional tensions. Lincoln was able to quickly take control of the situation by appointing an able cabinet and giving an inaugural speech laced with compromises with the South. He made attempts to reconcile with the Southern states and tried to please both Northerners and Southerners. Undertaking this difficult task with coolness and collection, Lincoln led the country to unity following the civil war. His numerous speeches, such as the Gettysburg Address and his first inaugural speech, allowed him to voice his opinions and air his ideas to the American citizens. Lincoln persevered in his defense of the Union and abolition of slavery, and during the war, he never gave up hope of winning the war. In his Gettysburg Address, Lincoln addressed the soldiers who were still alive, persuading them to keep on fighting for the unity of the nation and dedication of the dead soldiers. After the assassination of Lincoln on April 15, 1865, and during his lifetime, many leaders looked to Lincoln for leadership qualities and courage. The current president, Barack Obama, looks up to Lincoln as his political idol. Obama, inspired by Lincoln, believes that oratory and rhetoric can change the minds of people and have significant influence. In Obama's inauguration address, he directly quotes Lincoln's Gettysburg Address: "A New Birth of Freedom."

In conclusion, Lincoln's incredible efforts to preserve the Union, his confrontation with slavery, and his natural leadership still have a lasting impact on the nation today. Beginning with

his inauguration, Lincoln devoted his presidency to preserving the Union and inspiring others with his speeches. Eventually taking a strong stance against slavery and formally declaring the slaves in Confederate states free, Lincoln succeeded in stopping the expansion of slavery and took one step forward in the advancement of freedom and rights for African Americans. As Lincoln once said, “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.”

## Works Cited

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