

Abraham Lincoln

(1861-1865)



*“The nation, 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.”*

Introduction

Abraham Lincoln was born in Hodgenville, Kentucky, on February 12, 1809. He grew up in extreme poverty in a small log cabin. He had two siblings, Sarah, who lived to twenty and Thomas who passed away as a baby.

When Lincoln was eight years old, his father moved to Indiana, taking the family with him. A year after their arrival in Indiana, Lincoln's mother died of an illness she acquired from drinking unpasteurized milk. Lincoln's father mourned, but six months later decided to marry Sarah Johnston.

In his youth Lincoln only attended less than a year of school. He

became an autodidact and taught himself by reading anything he could. Poverty made obtaining books difficult, but Lincoln's family owned a bible which he read constantly. He would also travel long and far to borrow books, being most intrigued by texts on the Founding Fathers.



At sixteen Lincoln began to work. He held jobs from farm laborer to ferryboat rower. The job as a rower proved to be his most important work in his youth, as he took trips to New Orleans which exposed him to urban life and slavery. When he took his second trip to New Orleans in the early 1830s, Lincoln realized his hatred of slavery after witnessing the terror of the torture and bondage forced upon blacks.

In 1830 Lincoln's father moved again, this time to Salem, Illinois. Lincoln accompanied the family during the move, but shortly after arriving in Illinois decided to leave home and become independent. Lincoln settled down and volunteered in a local militia formed to serve in the Black Hawk War. Lincoln was elected their captain and stayed in the militia for three months but saw no combat. After serving in the militia, Lincoln ran for the state legislature but lost.

He decided to trade politics for business and opened a general store. The store went out of business quickly, leaving Lincoln with debt for nearly two decades. Shortly after the business debacle, Lincoln decided he wanted to learn more about law. He had to walk to Springfield to borrow law books which Salem did not have.

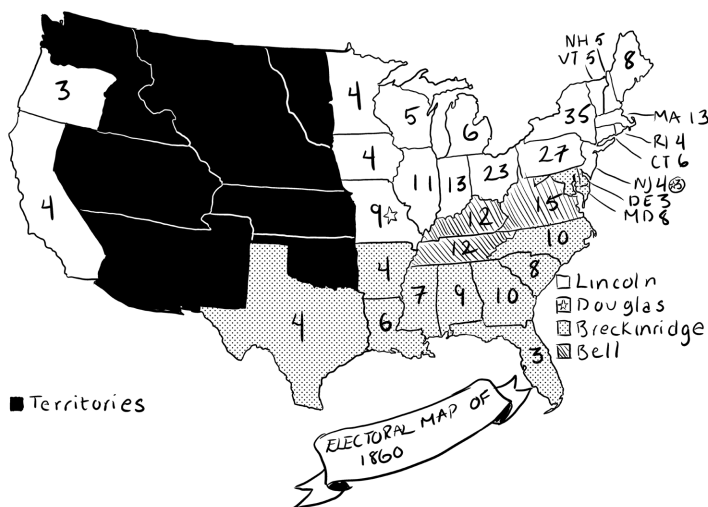
In 1834, Lincoln joined the new Whig party and secured a seat in the state legislature. Lincoln was drawn to the Whigs because of his disdain for slavery, but also because he thought greatly of Henry Clay, even saying of Clay that he “is my idea of a great man.” It was in 1834 that Lincoln also met Ann Rutledge, a local girl whom he fell in love with. She died in 1835, leaving Lincoln heartbroken. Lincoln was used to loss throughout his life, but the loss of his mother, siblings, and Ann Rutledge solidified a great melancholy that lasted throughout the rest of his life. People who knew Lincoln or met him seemed to comment that he was a sad but great man.

In 1836 Lincoln received his license to practice law and was reelected to the legislature. He voted in favor of moving the state capitol to Springfield, Illinois, and decided to move there from Salem. He became law partners with John T. Stuart and became engaged to Mary Todd in 1840. However, Lincoln had second thoughts and seemed to be nearing a mental breakdown from 1841-1842. Friends even worried that Lincoln was so depressed that he had become suicidal. Despite the bout of depression Lincoln recovered by 1842.

That year, Mary Todd wrote some political satire about James Shields, a Democrat in Springfield. Shields, believing it was Lincoln who wrote it, challenged him to a duel. Lincoln nervously and reluctantly accepted, but before the duel happened, Shields backed down. At the end of 1842, Lincoln married and purchased his home.

In 1843, Lincoln sought the Whig nomination for Congress but could not get nominated. However, he was able to secure the nomination in 1846 and won a seat in the House. He became a vocal critic of President Polk, denounced the Mexican War, and called for the abolition of slavery in Washington, DC. He became unpopular because of this and lost the Whig party support. Lincoln once again drifted back into focusing on his law practice, leaving politics aside.

In 1854, Lincoln was called back to politics by his outrage against the Kansas-Nebraska Act, promoted by Stephen A. Douglas. Lincoln believed that the bill, which repealed the Missouri Compromise, essentially allowed slavery back into the Northern states. Lincoln was nominated for the US Senate by the Republican Party and debated Stephen A. Douglas over the issue of slavery. The debates made Lincoln, a man who was unknown outside of Illinois, a national figure. Douglas won the Senate seat, but Lincoln won the presidency in 1860.



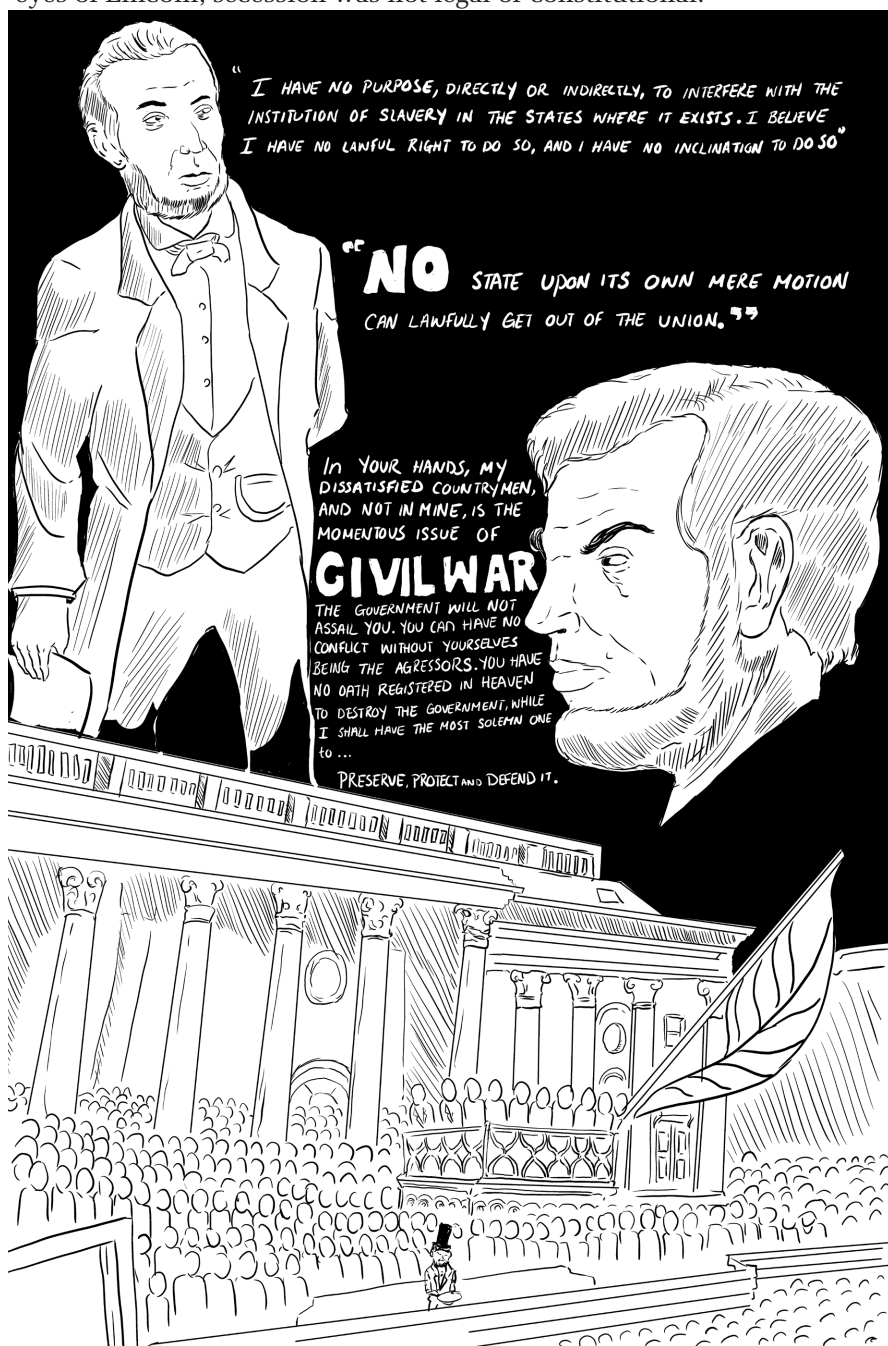
Election of 1860

The election of 1860 was a four-way election between Republican Abraham Lincoln, Democrat Stephen A. Douglas, Southern Democrat John C. Breckinridge, and Constitutional Party candidate John Bell. Lincoln's fight to the general election was uphill as he was not the frontrunner for the Republican nomination.

William Seward—eventually Lincoln's secretary of state—was the Republican frontrunner all the way to the convention. In fact, Seward had won the first ballot at the convention. Lincoln's reputation was only notable for his Lincoln-Douglas debates, he had done little as a congressman. However, Lincoln's campaign wizards outsmarted Seward's, promising cabinet appointments to any pro-Lincoln delegates—a tactic Lincoln stressed that his managers NOT use—giving Lincoln a victory and the nomination.

Douglas, the popular sovereignty supporting Democrat—and a moderate at that—quarreled bitterly with the conservative Southern Democrats that were pro-slavery. The result was a split in the party; Douglas ran in 1860 on popular sovereignty and Breckinridge ran on supporting slavery. The fourth party which entered into the election, the Constitutional Union Party, led by John Bell, ran on compromise and leaving the Constitution intact. Breckinridge had nearly no support in the North, but carried all the Southern states. Douglas contested Lincoln in the North, but lost in the popular vote. John Bell had the majority of his support from Border States, even carrying Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia. However, with a split Democratic Party, Lincoln garnered up a majority popular and electoral votes, making him president.

Abraham Lincoln delivered his first inaugural address on March 4, 1861. He made it as clear as he could to southerners that his main priority was holding the Union together, whether or not this meant the continued existence of slavery or its abolishment, did not matter. Moreover, in the eyes of Lincoln, secession was not legal or constitutional.





Cabinet

Lincoln's cabinet was central to the success of the Civil War. Presidents before him had many successes and failures that revolved around the competency of their cabinet members and Lincoln was set upon choosing a top team of men. Lincoln was careful in his choice of members assembling a group of both Republicans and Democrats, varying from moderate to conservative who used their brain trust to win the war.

Secretary of State, William Seward: Abraham Lincoln's right hand man and best friend, William Seward was the closest advisor to Lincoln. Seward was the constant reminder to Lincoln that the war was over slavery. Moreover, as Lincoln felt weak in the realm of foreign policy, Seward took charge of foreign affairs. No doubt it was wise to allow Seward this control, he kept peace with Great Britain when they wanted to intervene and aid the South, forced the Tsar of Russia to back down in Mexico in 1864, and advised Lincoln on smart foreign appointments, such as Charles Francis Adams as Minister to England. Seward also took up some of the more unpleasant work of the administration, such as dealing with the stripping of habeas corpus in some of the Border States, which almost got Seward assassinated.

Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase: Salmon Chase was Lincoln's great advisor on the issues of economics and fiscal solvency during the war. It was Chase who would come up with the idea of reinstating a national bank and printing greenbacks to fund the war.

Secretary of War, Edwin M. Stanton: A Democrat who served as attorney general in the Buchanan administration, Stanton was prone to fighting with Lincoln over policy and was headstrong at the War Department. Despite his occasional stubbornness, Stanton was a capable leader of the War Department and indispensable to Lincoln. He helped hold the Border States for the Union by the implementation of a somewhat radical policy that quieted the secessionist voices. Lincoln said of Stanton, "Without him I should be destroyed."

Secretary of the Navy, Gideon Welles: A former Democrat turned Republican, Welles was brought into the Department of the Navy and cleaned up a house he found to be in "disarray." Welles clashed with other cabinet members, often challenging their policy on the war, especially Seward's.

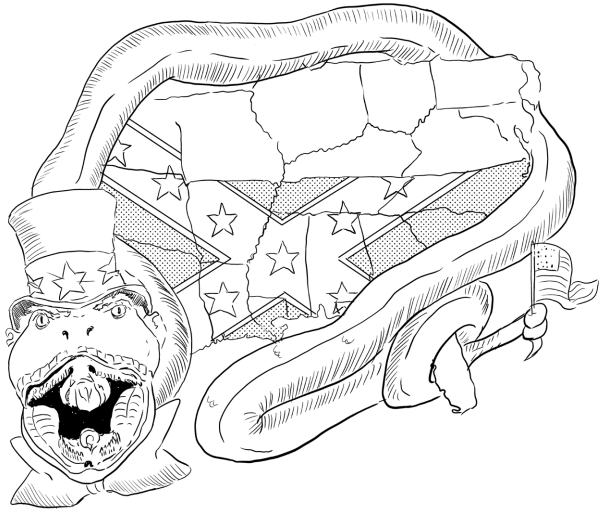
Start of the War

By the time Lincoln came into office, the Civil War had become inevitable. The majority of federal forts in rebel states had been taken by Confederate forces. However, this was not the case for Fort Sumter, located in Charleston, South Carolina. Lincoln, after notifying the South Carolina government of his intentions, supplied the fort. Confederates fired on Fort Sumter and captured it in two days after the supplies reached there. In response the government marched 75,000 troops to take back the fort.

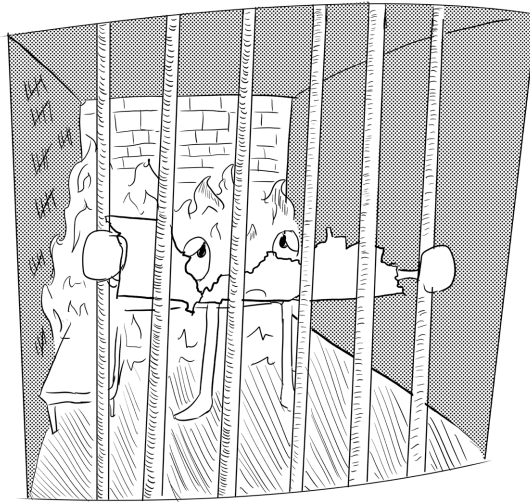
Thus the war began, a war that many hoped would be quick. Lincoln as well as much of the North had hoped for a fast and painless war and for the South to be overwhelmed in short time. However, that all fell apart at the Battle of Bull Run. The Union forces were beaten in a Confederate victory; the battle proved to Lincoln that the Civil War would be an uphill fight.

After Bull Run, Lincoln and his team of cabinet members and generals had to come up with a sound strategy for victory. Although the North fell short in the early stages of war due to its lack of talented generals,

their overall policy was genius. In 1861, General Winfield Scott—old, but still as bright as ever—developed the Anaconda plan. The plan was to crush the South through division and attrition, blockading the South to reduce their supplies and marching troops down the Mississippi to cut the South in two.



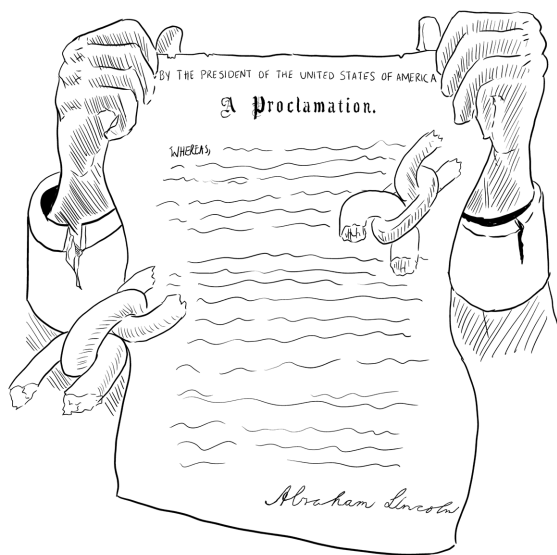
While the plan was eventually successful, in the early war years the plan was carried out poorly. Generals such as George B. McClellan—the man who eventually ran against Lincoln in 1864—were often timid in their battles against Confederates and ignored orders from the White House.



Holding the Border States and Presidential War Powers

One of Lincoln's greatest concerns at the beginning of the war was holding the four Border States of Delaware, Maryland, Kentucky, and Missouri. In one of Lincoln's most controversial acts, he stretched constitutional power and suppressed many rebel sympathizers and politicians, in part

by suspending habeas corpus. Lincoln, Seward, and Stanton imprisoned thousands of people and stripped them of their civil liberties. Lincoln was successful in holding the Border States, however, historians still debate how ethically sound Lincoln's policy was. Lincoln believed that the "Constitution is not a death pact" and felt that his war time powers as president were sufficient for his actions in the Border States.



The Middle War and Emancipation

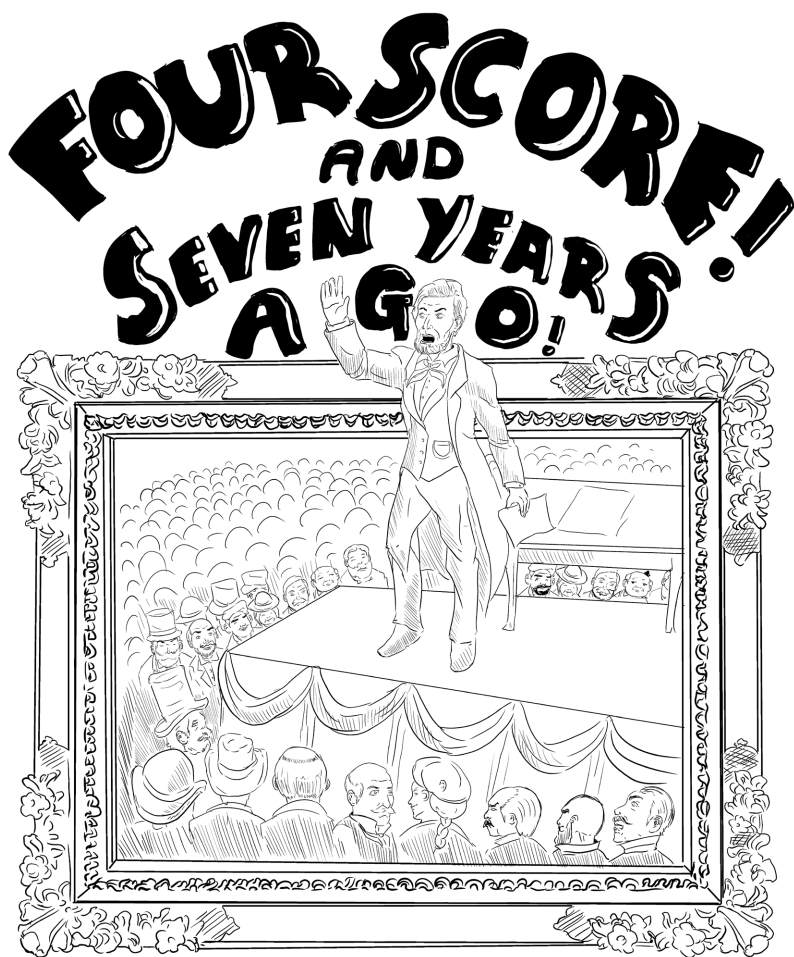
The most volatile years for the North were the middle years of the Civil War, years that marked the height of military defeat for the Union. The Second Battle of Bull Run in 1862 resulted in a Union loss, even though the Union army outnumbered the confederates 75,000 to 55,000. The only general to claim much victory during this time was the rising star Ulysses S. Grant who was still fairly unknown. His victory at the battle of Shiloh began to raise his notoriety.

By 1863, Lincoln's popularity was fading, the war seemed to be favoring the South and Lincoln needed to change something. He had been writing what became the Emancipation Proclamation, what he believed could change the face of the war. However, Lincoln knew that it would be politically impossible to announce the Proclamation without a military victory since public opinion was turning against him due to multiple defeats from the Union army. The opportunity came when George B. McClellan won a Pyrrhic victory at the Battle of Antietam, where although the Union army "won," the Confederates had decimated the Union forces' numbers. However, the victory—Pyrrhic or not—ignited a new hope in the North and gave Lincoln his opening to announce the Emancipation.

On January 1, 1863, Lincoln announced the Emancipation Proclamation. The presidential proclamation freed the slaves in the states in rebellion,

freeing 3,100,000 slaves in the South. As the Union army marched into rebelling states, they freed the slaves under the terms of the Emancipation. However, the Emancipation was a war measure, which meant that the future of those slaves was unsure after the war was over, leading Lincoln to pursue the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment which abolished all slavery.

One of the major turning points in the war came in July of 1863 when General Meade fought Robert E. Lee in the bloodiest battle of the Civil War at Gettysburg. It was a victory for the North and turned around a series of defeats, it also bolstered Lincoln's standing. A few months later on November 19, 1863, after a two-hour speech by Edward Everett in a dedication ceremony for the Soldier's National Cemetery, Abraham Lincoln delivered a very different kind of speech. Short but immensely powerful, Lincoln's Gettysburg address became one of the most famous in history.



Politics During the War

While the Southern states had left the Union, the House of Representatives and the Senate did not stop meeting. With Southern Democrats gone, the House and Senate became divided among three groups, radical Republicans—represented by House “dictator” Thaddeus Stevens and Senate Majority leader Charles Sumner—moderate Republicans, and Northern Democrats.

Lincoln had a domestic agenda and worked closely with all three factions to get his policies passed. Lincoln signed railroad acts in 1862 which brought about the creation of the transcontinental railroad. In that same year, Lincoln signed the Morrill Land-Grant Act which established land grant colleges throughout the nation. Moreover, Lincoln signed one of the most important bills ever passed, the Homestead Act, which allowed any non-rebel to settle a homestead in Western territory.

Lincoln, with his treasurer, Salmon Chase, began reestablishing a National Bank and printing Greenbacks in 1861 and 1862. Greenbacks became the inspiration for the currency we have today and Chase’s plan saved the Union from bankruptcy.

A common misconception about the domestic politics of the Civil War was that the House and Senate were overwhelmingly in favor of Lincoln and his proposals. This is largely untrue. Lincoln was in a difficult political climate and had to constantly face battles in the House and Senate where he cautiously dealt with radicals and conservatives. During 1862 and 1863 Lincoln became very unpopular throughout the North, being perceived as a failure and many believed he was guaranteed to lose in 1864. Without the turn around that occurred after the Emancipation, the victory in Gettysburg, and the appointment of General Grant to leading the Union army, Lincoln’s chances were slim for reelection.

Diplomacy During the War

While the Civil War is known more for its battles, the conflicts in diplomacy were just as significant. Throughout the early and middle years of the Civil War, Lincoln feared intervention by Great Britain. Bogged down by war on the home front—which was taking place less than a state away from the White House—Lincoln turned the power of foreign policy over to two men. The first was William Seward and the second was Charles Francis Adams, son of John Quincy Adams. Adams was Lincoln’s minister to England, an important position, as the

transatlantic cable—which was the primary means of communication between the White House and Parliament—had broken in 1859. It was up to Adams to keep the English neutral, which was difficult since the English wanted Southern cotton, which the North blockaded and would not let them export. Adams and Seward succeeded in their quest for neutrality and without this success in diplomacy, the English could



have acted as the French did during the Revolution, giving crucial support to the South and winning the war for the Confederacy.

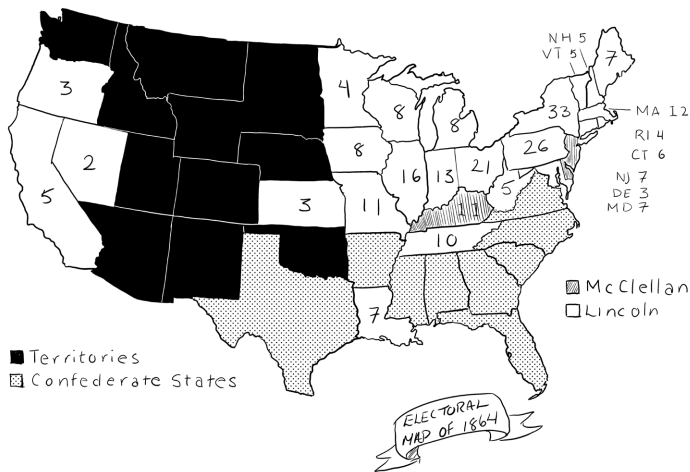
The Final Years, March to the Sea, and the Triumph of the North

Lincoln's discharge of failed generals, coupled with the Emancipation brought a new face to the Northern armies. Lincoln appointed the proven and competent generals Ulysses S. Grant and William T. Sherman to the highest positions available. Grant had not been the top of his class at West Point, but he had proven himself to be a man who could win the war—something which Lincoln recognized and caused him to make Grant general of all the Union forces. Sherman struck the heart of the South by marching into Atlanta—known as “Sherman's March to the Sea”—which broke the morale of the Confederacy but with harsh tactics, by burning down a significant portion of Georgia.

Election of 1864

With some victories behind him and confidence renewed, Lincoln ran again in 1864, this time under the National Union Party. Democrats chose the former general—dismissed by Lincoln—George B. McClellan as their candidate. Lincoln's vice president, Hannibal Hamlin, was replaced by Democrat Andrew Johnson who was a man from the South who refused to leave the Union.

The Democrats ran a less than satisfactory campaign. The Democratic platform called for an end to the war and for peace with the Confederacy, yet their candidate, McClellan, was openly against that platform and wanted to continue the war. However, the Democrats ignored their



own divisions and focused on attacking Lincoln, even labeling him “Abraham Africanus the 1st.” New York was an especially hard fought state, as New York City had rioted for a week over the draft and was still bitter toward Lincoln.

Lincoln beat McClellan with a comfortable margin of popular and electoral votes. However, many historians have commented that had General Sherman not taken Atlanta, Lincoln's chances may have been hurt, despite the fractured Democrats.

Lincoln was inaugurated for his second term and made his famous remarks at the end of his speech:

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 lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

10% Plan, the Thirteenth Amendment, and Wade-Davis

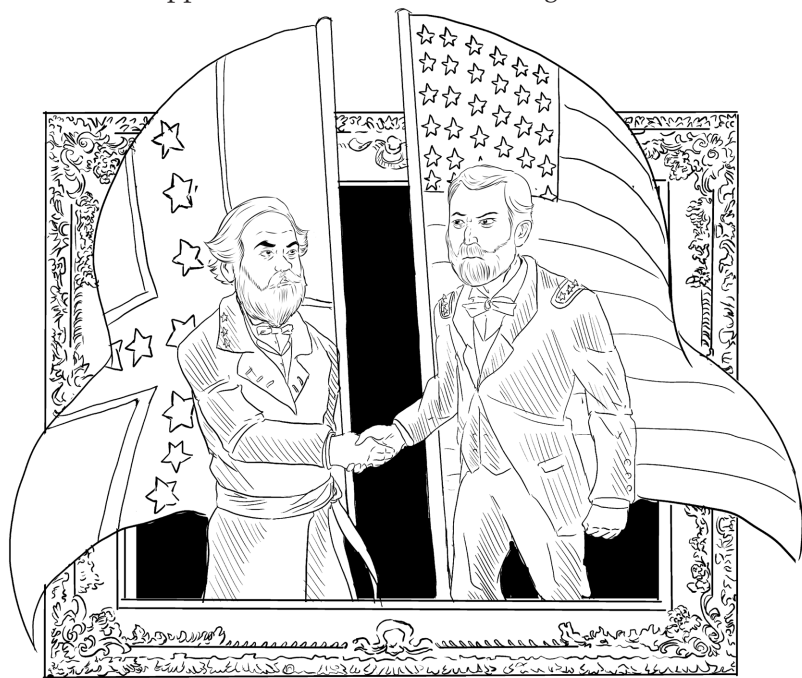
In 1863 Lincoln had outlined a plan for reinstating the states in rebellion. The plan called for 10% of the population in each rebelling state to pledge their allegiance to the Union and to emancipation before reentry into the Union. Radical Republicans decided this was too lenient towards the South and introduced the Wade-Davis Bill, proposing much harsher rules for reentry for rebelling states. Passed by both Houses, Lincoln pocket vetoed the bill.



Finally closing the issue of slavery once and for all, Lincoln put immense pressure on Congress and oversaw passage of the Thirteenth Amendment—aided in its passage by the all-powerful Congressman Thaddeus Stevens. The amendment abolished slavery and solved the question of emancipation forever.

Grant and Appomattox

In early 1865, Grant launched his final offensive against Richmond, Virginia, the political capital of the Confederacy. The president of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, fled Richmond and on April 9, 1865, after a successful push by Grant, Robert E. Lee surrendered unconditionally to Grant at the Appomattox Court House, ending the war.



Death

In Lincoln's final address to the public, he spoke in favor of voting rights for blacks. John Wilkes Booth, after hearing Lincoln's views on black voting rights, became convinced that the only way to stop President Lincoln was to kill him. Originally, Booth had planned a kidnapping, but the speech changed that. Moreover, Booth and his associates had planned to assassinate Lincoln, William Seward, Grant, and Vice President Johnson.

On April 14, 1865, Lincoln attended Ford Theatre to see *Our American Cousin*—his bodyguard was not with him. John Wilkes Booth fatally shot the president and escaped from the theatre. That same night, another assassin went to William Seward's house, made his way to Seward's room where he lay sick—he had fallen off his horse and injured himself less than a month before—and attempted to kill Seward with a knife. Seward's family fought off the assassin, but not before several cuts were inflicted upon Seward's face—he lived, but with massive scars. Andrew Johnson's assassin did not go through with his plan and Ulysses S. Grant had decided not to attend the theatre, thus missing his assassin.

Lincoln was brought to a bedroom across the street from the theatre where he lay in a coma for nine hours. Surrounded by a minister and Secretary of War Edwin Stanton, Lincoln died at 7:22 p.m. April 15. Stanton said when Lincoln passed away, "Now he belongs to the ages."

Few presidents can match the legacy of Lincoln. He is the president who held the Union together when it seemed that war would completely disintegrate and divide the nation. Leading the Union through civil war, diplomatic turmoil with Europe, and through the final resolution to the moral dilemma of slavery, Lincoln's resilience was essential during every step of the Civil War. And although Lincoln's main goal was to save the Union, he abolished slavery in the process, a system that crippled the United States in every way and degraded the image of a free nation. Lincoln freed not only slaves from bondage, but also the United States from the peril of the slavery question and allowed it to become more democratic, inclusive, industrious, and civil.

