

Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War

Abraham Lincoln grew up in the frontier states of Kentucky and Indiana. A self-educated man, Lincoln served in the Illinois state legislature and was later elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. Lincoln was a member of the Whig Party but joined the new Republican Party in the mid-1850s. A fierce opponent of slavery, he ran for president on a platform that included his belief that slavery should not extend into the western territory gained from Mexico.

The Civil War broke out quickly after Lincoln became president, and no other president before or since has exercised as much executive power as Lincoln in his efforts to preserve the Union. The war ripped the nation

apart for four years and left more than 600,000 dead. Halfway through the fighting, Lincoln freed all slaves within the Confederate states by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation, which did not free slaves in other states.

Killed by assassin John Wilkes Booth less than a week after the end of the fighting, Lincoln is regarded by almost all historians as the greatest U.S. president. He preserved the country, defended the Constitution, and wrote some of the most impacting messages in U.S. history, such as the Gettysburg Address, delivered at the National Cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, on November 19, 1863, four months after the bloody battle on that land.

The Gettysburg Address

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

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