

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N

Q U O T A T I O N S

SELECTED BY

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ABRAHAM LINCOLN: QUOTATIONS 1809 - 1865

“I go for all sharing the privileges of the government who assist in bearing its burdens.”

June 13, 1836

Letter to the Editor, Sangamon Journal, New Salem, IL

"There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law.

“Let reverence for the laws be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe that prattles on her lap; let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in Primmers, spelling books, and in almanacs; let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in halls of justice. And, in short, let become the political religion of the nation.

January 27, 1838

Speech to the Young Men’s Lyceum, Springfield, IL

“The probability that we may fall in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just; it shall not deter me.”

December 26, 1839

Speech on the Sub-Treasury, Illinois House of Representatives,

“I believe it is an established maxim in morals that he who makes an assertion without knowing whether it is true or false, is guilty of falsehood; and the accidental truth of the assertion, does not justify or excuse him.”

August 11, 1846

Letter to Allen N. Ford

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“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.”

July 1, 1850 [?]

Notes for a Law Lecture

“No man is good enough to govern another man without that other’s consent.”

October 16, 1854

Speech at Peoria, IL

“You know I dislike slavery; and you fully admit the abstract wrong of it.”

August 24, 1855

Letter to Joshua Speed

“Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." When the Know-Nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except Negroes and foreigners and Catholics." "When it comes to this I should prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretence of loving liberty -- to Russia, for instance, where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy [sic]."

August 24, 1855

Letter to Joshua Speed

"Always bear in mind that your own resolution to success is more important than any other one thing."

November 5, 1855 Advice to Aspiring Law Student

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“In my opinion, it (slavery) will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached, and passed.

A house divided against itself cannot stand. I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved – I do not expect the house to fall – but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other.

Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new -- North as well as South.”

June 16, 1858

“House Divided Speech”

Springfield, IL

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“I leave you, hoping that the lamp of liberty will burn in your bosoms until there shall no longer be a doubt that all men are created free and equal.” July 10, 1858

“Speech at Chicago, Illinois”

“As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy.”

August 1, 1858 Letter reported by Roy P. Basler
in The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln

“Public sentiment is everything. With public sentiment, nothing can fail; without it nothing can succeed.”

August 21, 1858 Lincoln-douglas Debate at Ottawa

“If you once forfeit the confidence of your fellow citizens, you can never regain their respect and esteem. It is true that you may fool all of the people some of the time; you can even fool some of the people all of the time; but you can't fool all of the people all of the time.”

September 8, 1858 Speech at Clinton, IL

“He who would be no slave, must consent to have no slave. Those who deny freedom to others, deserve it not for themselves; and, under a just God, cannot long retain it.”

April 6, 1859 Letter to Henry L. Pierce

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the Government nor of dungeons to ourselves. Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith, let us, to the end, dare to do our duty as we understand it.”

February 27, 1860

Address to Cooper Union Institute, New York

“You think slavery is right and should be extended; while we think slavery is wrong and ought to be restricted. That I suppose is the rub. It certainly is the only substantial difference between us.”

December 22, 1860

Letter to Alexander H. Stephens (future Confederate Vice-President)

"My friends, no one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when, or whether ever, I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of the Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell."

February 11, 1861

Farewell Address at the Great Western Depot in Springfield, Illinois

“I have stepped out upon this platform that I may see you and that you may see me, and in the arrangement I have the best of the bargain.”

February 16, 1861

Remarks at Painesville, Ohio

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“I have never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence.”

February 22, 1861

Address in Independence Hall

“One section of our country believes slavery is *right*, and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is *wrong*, and ought not to be extended . . .

In your hands, my dissatisfied countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. You can have no conflict, without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in Heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to ‘preserve, protect and defend’ it.

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.”

March 4, 1861

First Inaugural Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: QUOTATIONS 1809 - 1865

“I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. . .

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views.

I have here stated my purpose according to my view of *official* duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed *personal* wish that all men everywhere could be free.”

22 August 20, 1862 Letter

To Horace Greeley, Editor ‘New York Tribune’

“. . . I certainly know that if the war fails the administration fails, and that I will be blamed for it, whether I deserve it or not. And I ought to be blamed if I could do better. You think I could do better; therefore you blame me already. I think I could not do better; therefore I blame you for blaming me.”

November 24, 1862

Letter to General Carl Schurz;

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“The dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise -- with (to) the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew, and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves, and then we shall save our country.

“Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history. We of this Congress and this administration, will be remembered in spite of ourselves. No personal significance, or insignificance, can spare one or another of us. The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down in honor or dishonor to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget that we say this.

We know how to save the Union. The world knows we do know how to save it.

We -- even we here -- hold the power, and bear the responsibility.

In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free -- honorable alike in what we give, and what we preserve. We shall nobly save or meanly lose our last, best hope of earth.”

December 1, 1862

Annual Message to Congress

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“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 henceforward 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.”

January 1, 1863

Emancipation Proclamation

“If my name ever goes into history, it will be for this act”

January 1, 1863

Signing Emancipation Proclamation

“You dislike the emancipation proclamation; and, perhaps, would have it retracted. You say it is unconstitutional -- I think differently . .

But the proclamation, as law, either is valid, or is not valid. If it is not valid, it needs no retraction. If it is valid, it can not be retracted, any more than the dead can be brought to life.”

August 26, 1863

Letter to James Conkling

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“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.”

November 19, 1863 Gettysburg Address

“Common-looking people are the best in the world: that is the reason the Lord makes so many of them.”

December 24, 1863

Remarks made to Secretary John Hay

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“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.”

April 4, 1864

Letter to Albert Hodges

“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 while crossing streams'.”

June 9, 1864

Reply to Delegation from the National Union League

“We have, as all will agree, a free Government, where every man has a right to be equal with every other man. In this great struggle, this form of Government and every form of human right is endangered if our enemies succeed.”

August 18, 1864

Speech to One Hundred Sixty-Fourth Ohio Regiment

“I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has.” It is in order that each of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations.

It is for this the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthright – no only for one, but for two or three years. The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel”

August 22, 1864

Speech to One Hundred Sixty-Sixth Ohio Regiment

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came . . .

Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes . . .

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away . . .

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us the 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.”

March 4, 1865

Second Inaugural Speech

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“Whenever I hear any one arguing for slavery I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally.”

Speech to One Hundred Fortieth Indiana Regiment”

March 17, 1865

“Important principles may and must be inflexible.” “Bad promises are better broken than kept.”

Last public address Washington

April 11, 1865

“If I were to try to, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for any other business. I do the very best I know how, the very best I can, and I mean to keep doing so until the end. If the end brings me out all right, what is said against me won’t amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference.”

Abraham Lincoln

Quoted by Francis B. Carpenter in

The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: QUOTATIONS 1809 - 1865

“Well, if I were you and Colonel Sherman threatened to shoot, I would not trust him for, by Heaven, I believe he would do it.”

Statement to New York soldier (& former lawyer)
attempting to leave the Army without permission

“I am slow to learn and slow to forget that which I have learned. M mind is like a piece of steel, very hard to scratch anything on it and almost impossible after you get it there to rub it out.”

Comments to Joshua Speed

“We needed the strongest men of the party in the Cabinet. We needed to hold our own people together. I had looked the party over and concluded that these were the very strongest men. Then I had no right to deprive the country of their services.”

Response to Joseph Medill, Editor Chicago Tribune
Who asked why Lincoln had chosen
cabinet composed of enemies & opponents

“This government was instituted to secure the blessings of freedom. Slavery is an unqualified evil to the Negro, to the white man, to the soil, and to the State.”

“Character is like a tree and reputation like a shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing.”

“Ballots are the rightful, and peaceful, successors of bullets; and that when ballots have fairly, and constitutionally, decided, there can be no successful appeal, back to bullets; that there can be no successful appeal, except to ballots themselves, at succeeding elections.”

“Stand with anybody that stands right. Stand with him while he is right, and part with him when he goes wrong.”

A B R A H A M L I N C O L N : Q U O T A T I O N S 1809 - 1865

“Nearly all men can withstand adversity; if you want to test a man's character, give him power.”

“How many legs does a dog have if you call the tail a leg? Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg.”

“I have been told I was on the road to hell, but I had no idea it was just a mile down the road with a Dome on it.”
