

*Abraham Lincoln*  
16th President

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Terms: 1861-1865

Political Party: Republican

First Lady: Mary Todd Lincoln

Vice President: Hannibal Hamlin, Andrew Johnson

Highlights from *The Time of the Lincolns* web site include:

- explore a [nation](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/lincolns-war/) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/general-article/lincolns-war/> deeply divided on the eve of war
- follow Confederate and Union soldiers [into battle](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/lincolns-camera/) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/photo-gallery/lincolns-camera/>
- tour a [slave cabin](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/virtual-tour/lincolns-quarters/) <www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/virtual-tour/lincolns-quarters/> and examine the conditions of slavery

Overview

Born: February 12, 1809, in Hardin (now Larue) County, Kentucky... Lincoln, an inexperienced, undereducated frontier lawyer, developed into a shrewd politician and military leader in time to weather the greatest crisis in American history. His election prompted the secession of 11 pro-slavery Southern states. [Civil War](#)

<www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/lincolns/> began soon after he took office.

The disarray of the federal government brought early missteps, but the leadership of Lincoln and General [Ulysses S. Grant](#)

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<[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-grant/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-grant/)> turned the tide for the Union Army. Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation and, in a departure from tradition, signed the 13th amendment, which abolished slavery. His second inaugural address projected a conciliatory tone to the wayward states but Lincoln's magnanimous vision of reconstruction was never realized following his assassination... Died: April 15, 1865

### The Era

- Confederate troops fire on Fort Sumter, a Union military post in South Carolina, beginning the Civil War (1861)
- Transcontinental telegraph line laid (1861)
- Yale University grants the first American Ph.D. (1861)
- Homestead Act (1862)
- Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables*, and Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* are published (1861, 1862, 1865)

### Domestic Policy

The restoration of the Union was Lincoln's overwhelming priority as president. He directed much of the early strategy in the Civil War and eventually found in Ulysses S. Grant a general he could trust. At the same time, Lincoln made some major changes to government policy that did not pass without resistance. He implemented a military draft that led to riots in New York City in 1863. Financing the war required the creation of the first income tax. Lincoln also suspended *habeas corpus* in some regions, allowing the government to imprison dissenters without a trial. Most significantly, he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, and followed that with a push for the 13th Amendment to the Constitution abolishing slavery.

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**Foreign Affairs**

The major foreign policy question of the day concerned whether major European nations would recognize the Confederacy as a sovereign state. Lincoln delicately handled matters such as the arrest of two Confederate diplomats on the British ship *Trent*, ordering the prisoners released. European neutrality, however, was primarily ensured by macroeconomic forces: crop failures made Union agriculture a necessary European import, Egypt and India supplied the cotton blocked from the American South, and any loss in textile exports was made up for by the Union's appetite for arms and other manufactured goods. There was no reason for any nation to recognize the Confederacy and risk throwing their rivals into alliance with the Union.

*“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.”*

– Abraham Lincoln, 1863

**Presidential Politics**

Following [James Buchanan's](#)

[www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-buchanan/](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/biography/presidents-buchanan/) feuds with Stephen Douglas, the Democratic Party was split in 1860, allowing Lincoln, whose only national service had been as a one-term congressman in the 1840s, to become president as the nominee of the new Republican party. As the Civil War dragged on, he was criticized by both abolitionists and by those who saw no reason to fight for the rights of black people. Lincoln won reelection in 1864, benefiting from recent Union military victories.



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