



Abraham Lincoln, A Voice for the Ages*

BY CAMERON S. BROWN

What would we make of Abraham Lincoln if he emerged on the scene today? On the political stage of his day, he made an awkward appearance at best. When he looked at you, you saw he had an unusual gaze. He had a *trick* left eye that focused at a different level than the other.¹ He was disproportionately tall and lanky, and he wore ill-fitting clothes. He spoke with a high-pitched Kentucky twang, not the rich baritone of movie impersonators. He laughed heartily at his own rough humor, and he preferred his complete first name, not the shortened nickname others called him. In today's world of klieg lights and Hollywood polish, he would not be central casting's first choice for primetime TV.

Yet there was a certain quality that could not be overlooked by nineteenth-century observers, for within the soul of this ungainly statesman was the heartbeat of liberty, and when he spoke of democracy, the heart of America listened.

To the people of Michigan, he said, "*We stand at once the wonder and admiration of the whole world, and we must enquire what it is that has given us so much prosperity, and we shall understand that to give up that one thing, would be to give up all future prosperity. This cause is that every man can make himself.*"²

Abraham Lincoln understood the purpose of America to be a redeemer nation—a land of freedom for the oppressed, a land of opportunity for the rest. A purpose rooted in the belief that men and women, by God's grace, are to live free.

In the life and labor of our sixteenth president, we find all the attributes of a prophet-leader calling America to accountability, and to a return to the core values of our National Scriptures—the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. And while he understood that people and governments are imperfect, he knew the principles of freedom and liberty are perfect.

With little formal training, he stepped out of the backwoods of America and onto the national scene with a voice for the ages piercing right through the hypocrisy of American slavery. "*Right makes might,*" he said, "*not might makes right.*"³ In speaking out against the evils of slavery, he became the champion of a new political party, and the conscience of the nation.

If he could have foreseen the tumult of events that would carry him past farm fields and split-rail fence to the eye of a terrible storm, would he have so willingly followed his driving ambition? Would he have been so eager to lead a divided nation had he known how costly it all would be—600,000 lives plus one?⁴

The legacy of Abraham Lincoln is the relevance of character—the saving grace of a nation.

From state house to the White House, his words inspire us even today. From his moving elegy at Gettysburg to the prophetic eloquence of his Second Inaugural Address, we too "*take increased devotion to that cause for which [he] gave the last full measure of devotion.*"⁵

In the shadow of our sixteenth president, we take our leave, and weave into the furrows of freedom's soil our own work and toil to win an approving *amen* for our allotted "*three score and ten.*"⁶

* Text to the companion video, *Abraham Lincoln, A Voice for the Ages*.

NOTES

1 Lincoln's contemporaries noticed his left eye tended to drift upward independent of his right eye, an ocular misalignment condition called Hypertropic Strabismus. This condition results in the inability of both eyes to focus in the same direction at the same level, and at the same time. Recent studies led by Dr. Ronald Fishman have suggested Lincoln's smaller left eye socket may have displaced the muscle that controls vertical movement. When Lincoln was ten, he was kicked in the head by a horse, which may have caused nerve damage leading to a mild paralysis of his eyelid. He also occasionally suffered from double vision.

2 From Lincoln's anti-slavery speech given in Bronson Park in Kalamazoo, Michigan on August 27, 1856.

3 From Lincoln's *Cooper Union Speech* given in New York City on February 27, 1860. Most historians credit this speech as the springboard that launched Lincoln's successful national campaign for president. One of Lincoln's longest speeches, the *New York Tribune* opined it was "*one of the most happiest and most convincing*

political arguments ever made in this City . . . No man ever made such an impression on his first appeal to a New-York audience."

4 The Civil-War-soldier death toll has long been accepted to be 620,000. In a new study published in *Civil War History* in 2011, Binghamton University history demographics professor J. David Hacker claims the number is actually closer to 750,000. Source: Associated Press, "*Death toll from Civil War close to 750,000, not 620,000, historian claims in new study.*" NYDailyNews.com/U.S., Monday, May 28, 2012, 11:28 PM (<http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/death-toll-civil-war-close-750-000-620-000-historian-claims-new-study-article-1.1085859>).

5 From Lincoln's Gettysburg Address given November 19, 1863.

6 From *Psalms* 90:10, KJV: "*The days of our years are threescore years and ten . . .*"