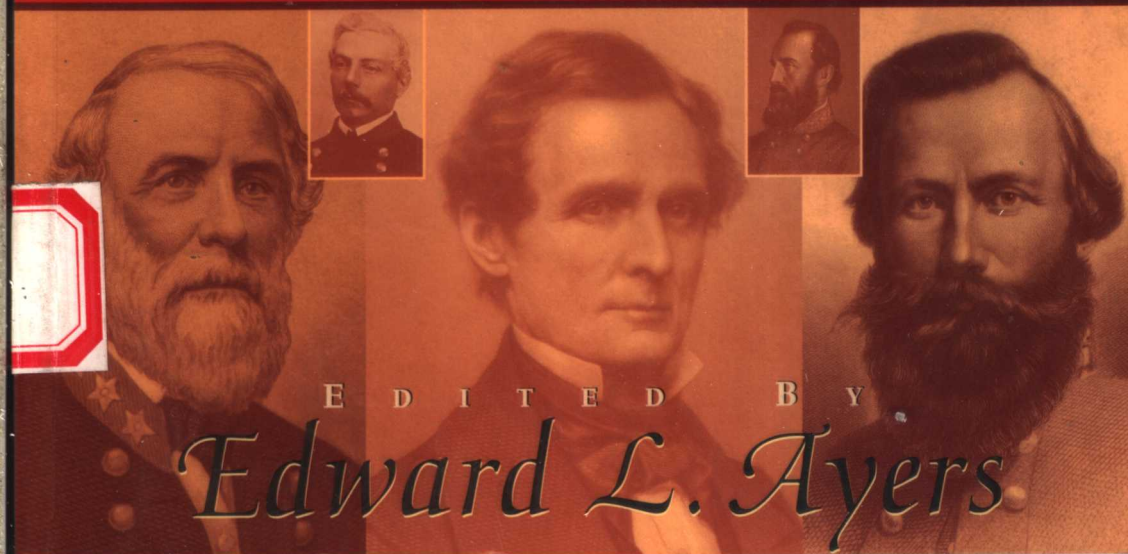


“A House Divided...”

A Century of Great Civil War Quotations



EDITED BY

Edward L. Ayers

"A House Divided..."



A Century of Great Civil War Quotations



Edited by Edward L. Ayers
Researched and Compiled by Kate Cohen

John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
New York • Chichester • Weinheim • Brisbane • Singapore • Toronto

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Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Produced by Amaranth, 379 Eighth Street, Brooklyn, N.Y. 11215

Designed and typeset by Logic Comp, Albany, N.Y.

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Photo Researcher: Karl Johnson

Research Assistant: K. Alexia Meyers

ISBN 0-471-19264-3

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Introduction



The people in this book speak directly to us. We hear the voice of command and the voice of the common soldier. We hear those who speak without hope and others who hope even when they have every reason to give up. We hear the weariness of older people and the confusion of the young. We hear the voice of sympathy across the battle lines and the voice of vengeance and hatred. We hear the resignation of the wounded and the despair of those who survive. We hear the pride of victorious generals and the crushing doubt of those who sacrificed lives in a losing cause. Some of the words have become famous while others have passed from our collective memory.

We have organized this book so that we can follow these complicated conversations more easily. The topics range from the battlefield to the homefront, from the hospital tent to the prison cell, from New England to Texas. Men and women, black and white, soldier and civilian, all get their say. Secessionists and Unionists, heroes and deserters, warriors and peacemakers speak their minds.

The chapters also follow a chronological sequence. People chose different words as the years unfolded, as they saw more of what this war meant. The cockiness of 1860 rapidly became the fury of 1861, the horror of 1862, the wild determination of 1863, the resoluteness of 1864, and the mingled sadness and relief of 1865.

A book of quotations such as this one, juxtaposing words and phrases across battle lines and across years, shows the importance of words themselves. The words stand not merely as vehicles of emotion, but define and evoke emotions. Just as the open battlefields of First Manassas became replaced with the trenches of Cold Harbor, muskets with rifles, and volunteers with conscripts, so did some words displace others. Early in the conflict, words such as *decisive*, *glory*, *brilliant*, and *gallant* punctuated the hopeful pronouncements and predictions of both

sides. As the war unfolded, people spoke more of *vengeance*, *subjugation*, and *humiliation*. They mixed images of *peace* with images of *extermination* and *devastation*, sometimes in the same letter. Anything that would end the killing.

Northerners and Southerners, we see, often used identical words to express their deepest motives and emotions. Words such as *God* and *Christian* grace the diaries, letters, and editorials of those on both sides. Both felt certain that their side bore the highest divine sanction. They habitually linked the spiritual and the secular, calling their causes and their sacrifices *righteous* and *sacred*.

Both Union and Confederate soldiers also spoke repeatedly, ritualistically, of *duty*, *country*, *liberty*, *patriotism*, and *honor*. Both sides invoked *courage* and *blood*, *manliness* and *nobility* at every opportunity. All these words people knew to be the language of warfare, the language they had learned from the Bible, their history books, and the speeches they heard on election day. They instinctually turned to this stirring rhetoric when lesser words seemed pale and inadequate.

Despite the language they shared, however, those in the Union and those in the Confederacy also chose words they deemed especially suited to their cause. Northerners rallied to the call of *Union* and *Constitution*; identifying their enemies as *traitors*, *rebels*, and *aristocrats*, their opponents' actions as *rebellion* and *crime*. Those above the Mason-Dixon line saw themselves as fighting for order and the rule of law, for the peaceful transfer of power through open elections. They pictured themselves as the heirs to the nation created by the Founding Fathers.

Southerners, for their part, pictured themselves as the heirs of the Revolution itself, of the struggle for independence. In their eyes, the nation was not as important as the principles for which they thought it stood; the nation was merely a vehicle for their freedom. The key words in the Confederate lexicon leaped from the Revolutionary struggle. Southerners saw themselves as *patriots* fighting for *independence* from the *unconstitutional aggression* and *invasion* of a *tyrannical* and *arrogant* central government, just as their forefathers had three generations earlier. They were proud to call themselves *rebels*, though in their eyes there was nothing of treason involved in their actions. The considered themselves rebels just as George Washington had been a rebel.

Confederates thought that Northerners had usurped the federal government for their own selfish ends, violating the spirit of the Constitution on which the states had agreed. Southerners, whether they thought it was wise or not, believed that they had the right to leave the Union if they so chose. And when they did, they became, in their own eyes, *defenders* of their *independence* and *pride* from the *submission* and *slavery* the North would inflict upon them. Northerners at the time and many people ever since have refused to accept the sincerity of white Southerners who could use such words when they themselves were a slaveholding people. Even though most white Southern families did not themselves own slaves, virtually all were supporters of the system both in fact and in theory. Few white Southerners spoke against the evils of slavery in the three decades before the Civil War. Their diaries, letters, and sermons showed few pangs of private regret or guilt, seldom mentioning slaves or slavery at all.

White Southerners explained the apparent inconsistency between their freedom and the slavery they oversaw with the words of race. In their eyes, the descendants of the English were naturally fitted for freedom by blood, by heritage, and by struggle. White Southerners explained the bondage of African Americans by bondage itself; because black people were held in slavery they were fit only for slavery. Whites turned to the Bible and to antiquity for sanction of slavery. Whites took the color of skin as evidence of something deeper, of character and depth of feeling and longing for freedom.

The role of slavery in the North's cause was not always clear. As the quotes in this book show, at the beginning of the Civil War few white Northerners proclaimed themselves fighting a war to abolish slavery. They wanted to stop the spread of slavery, to be sure, for they viewed slaveholders as petty tyrants and non-slaveholding white Southerners as dupes for tolerating slavery in their midst. But this distaste and disdain for white Southerners did not translate into respect or even into concern for black Southerners. While those who wanted to begin the end of slavery immediately spoke out in the North from the 1830s on, they were by no means a majority in 1860. Most white Northerners seemed contemptuous of black people, sometimes violently so.

This ambiguity of purpose tore at the Union throughout the war. Abraham Lincoln viewed slavery with deep and genuine distaste, but he wanted above all to win the war and to keep the Union together. Over the course of the war he and some of his generals began to understand that the best way to defeat the Confederacy was to turn slavery, a potential strength of the South, against the enemy. Slavery could be used to help woo English or French support by identifying the North with the cause of freedom. Slavery could be used to weaken the Southern economy by allowing Union generals to accept runaway slaves into their camps. Slavery could be used to strengthen the North by recruiting 180,000 African American soldiers to fight against the Confederates, saving white Northern lives while demonstrating the enormous hunger of black Americans for freedom. Nevertheless, many white Northerners remained skeptical of ending slavery immediately. As late as 1864, only a victory by William T. Sherman in Atlanta ensured that Lincoln would win reelection as president. The man who ran against him, George McClellan, wanted to bring the war to an end, leaving slavery in place.

In sharp contrast, the language of black freedom echoed from the very outset of the conflict among black people themselves. The quotes in this book present their key words: *freedom*, *liberation*, *emancipation*, *rights*. Black people were not sure at the beginning of the war that the conflict would help bring those freedoms, for few white people in the North spoke in those terms. As the war progressed, however, African American leaders used every opportunity to impress upon Union leaders that the cause of Union could best be served by making it the cause of a more universal freedom. Arming black men to fight not only helped on the battlefield, it also helped in the black freedom struggle. Some white Northerners began to talk more of the evils of slavery and to

celebrate the general idea of freedom. What that talk might mean remained unclear from one year to the next, however, as events spun out of anyone's control in 1865 and 1866.

Throughout the war, women held the same political ideals as men. Some women seemed even more virulent and vitriolic than their husbands and sons; Northerners certainly accused white Southern women of being so. In other cases, women left to tend farms, plantations, and homes tired of the war earlier than did the men swept up in the camaraderie and excitement of the camp and battlefield. Women were more likely to speak of *mourning*, *hunger*, and *sacrifice* than their men, to speak more of family and children. For many women true manliness elevated family over political cause. It was no accident that desertion increased in the second half of the war.

The end of war brought no common language to North and South, black and white, male and female. Indeed, the end of the actual fighting seemed to unleash even harsher language. Freed from the common experience of battlefield suffering, Northerners and Southerners seemed to feel mainly contempt and anger toward one another. The Union blamed the South for starting a war that killed more than 600,000 Americans, but the South refused to accept the blame, then or for decades thereafter. In their eyes, Reconstruction showed the true purpose of the North from the very beginning: to destroy the economic and political power of the white South. Those former Confederates could see no purpose in Northern Republican support for black suffrage other than vindictiveness and petty cruelty. White Northerners, for their part, saw their worst opinions of white Southerners displayed in Reconstruction. The unwillingness to accept defeat and emancipation graciously, the North charged, showed the true character of the violent, deceitful, and arrogant South.

African Americans steered between the ambivalence of the white North and the bitterness of the white South as carefully as they could, looking for any opportunity to control their own lives. Black Southerners seized on the chance for political power offered by the North, but also sought to maintain peace with the white people among whom they lived and upon whom they depended for employment. The experiment of Reconstruction proved short-lived, white Southerners resisting with every means, the white North and the white South reconciling with one another at the expense of black Southerners. Within three decades of war's end, white veterans of both the Union and the Confederacy spoke of one another with respect born of common bravery and suffering while permitting segregation and disfranchisement to flourish.

The ambiguity of the war's beginning, fighting, and outcome have allowed Americans to argue about the Civil War for all the generations that have followed. People on both sides idealize the purposes of their ancestors and demean those of their opponents. White Southerners have been most visibly invested in the trappings of the Confederacy and in defending honor and heritage, but white Northerners have been invested as well. The war seems evidence to them of the nation's greatness, of its devotion to the ideals of freedom.

Black Americans, while never forgetful of their freedom and how it arrived, have been skeptical of the claims of both Southern and Northern whites. The differences among these three groups of Americans show little sign of disappearing.

This book can help us see the Civil War more clearly. It does so not by imposing an easy moral on the story, not by offering convenient answers to the persistent and troubling questions about the war's causes and outcomes. Rather, it helps us see that the war was, above all, war. It was confusion as well as certainty. It was self-deception and lying as well as nobility of purpose. It was blood of accident and brutality as well as of sacrifice. The war constantly changed within itself, redefined itself. And that process has not yet ended.

EDWARD L. AYERS,
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Brief Timeline of the Civil War



August 10, 1821 Missouri admitted as a slave state during the administration of James Monroe, 5th president of the United States. The Missouri Compromise of 1820 prohibits slavery elsewhere in the territory of the Louisiana Purchase north of 36° 30', the southern boundary of the state.

July 10, 1850 Millard Fillmore inaugurated as 13th president of the United States after the death of President Zachary Taylor in office on July 9, 1850.

August-September 1850 Senator Henry Clay introduces Senate debate leading to the Compromise of 1850 and the Fugitive Slave Act. The compromise admits California as a free state, creates New Mexico and Utah territories and gives them the option of adopting slavery on admission as states, abolishes the slave trade in the District of Columbia, and levies severe penalties for any individuals who interfere with the capture and return of escaped slaves.

June 5, 1851–April 1, 1852 Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, is serialized in the Washington anti-slavery paper, the *National Era*. Released in book form on March 20, 1852, the novel sells 10,000 copies in one week and over 300,000 copies that year. Over one million copies are sold in England.

March 4, 1853 Franklin Pierce inaugurated as 14th president of the United States.

May 30, 1854 President Pierce signs the Kansas-Nebraska Act into law. Sponsored by Illinois senator Stephen A. Douglas, the act authorizes the creation of the Kansas and Nebraska territories and voids the Missouri Compromise by placing slave or free status under the doctrine of "popular sovereignty."

March 4, 1857 James Buchanan inaugurated as 15th president of the United States.

March 6, 1857 Chief Justice Taney of the Supreme Court announces the Dred Scott decision in *Scott v. Sandford*, which renders the Missouri Compromise unconstitutional by determining that Congress has no power under the Constitution to forbid slavery in the territories; rules that blacks, not being citizens, cannot bring suits in federal courts; and holds that, as slaves are property, travel to free territories does not alter slave status.

- August 21–October 15, 1958** Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas participate in seven debates on slavery and issues of race as they compete for Douglas's Senate seat. Douglas defeats Lincoln in the November 1858 election.
- October 1859** Radical abolitionist John Bown leads a raid on a federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry. His band is captured; he is hanged December 2.
- November 6, 1860** Abraham Lincoln is elected 16th president of the United States.
- December 20, 1860** South Carolina votes to secede from the Union. Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas follow suit (January 9–February 1, 1861).
- February 4, 1861** The Confederate States of America is established at a Montgomery convention.
- April 12, 1861** South Carolina troops bomb Fort Sumter; Union Major Robert Anderson surrenders the fort on April 13.
- April 15, 1861** Lincoln calls for 75,000 three-month volunteers.
- April 17, 1861** Virginia secedes from the Union. One month later, its capital becomes the capital of the Confederacy.
- April 19, 1861** Union orders naval blockade of Confederate coastline.
- May 13, 1861** Queen Victoria announces Great Britain's neutrality.
- July 21, 1861** First Battle of Bull Run. Confederates under General Pierre Beauregard rout Union troops at Manassas Junction in a battle watched by Washington residents, who had come by carriage, expecting the war to end in one day.
- October 21, 1861** Battle of Ball's Bluff. Union roundly defeated.
- November 1, 1861** General George McClellan given command of the Union army.
- February 25, 1862** Union troops take Nashville without a struggle; Confederacy loses tons of supplies stockpiled there.
- March 9, 1862** Battle between the *Monitor* and the *Merrimac* ends in a draw.
- March 11, 1862** Because of McClellan's failure to act, Lincoln demotes him to commander of the Army of the Potomac; Union generals now report directly to the secretary of war.
- March–May 31, 1862** Union troops advance to outskirts of Richmond, where McClellan awaits reinforcements.
- April 1862** Confederate military conscription begins.
- April 6–7, 1862** Battle of Shiloh. In Tennessee, advancing Union troops under General Grant turn back Confederate counterattack under General Beauregard.
- May 1, 1862** New Orleans falls to Union forces led by Admiral Farragut and General Butler.

- June 1, 1862** Robert E. Lee named commander in chief of the Army of Northern Virginia.
- June 6, 1862** Memphis falls to Union troops.
- June 26–July 2, 1862** Seven Days' battles. Confederates under Lee force Union troops under McClellan to retreat, ending the Union threat to Richmond. Casualties high on both sides.
- August 28–30, 1862** Second Battle of Bull Run (Second Manassas). Confederates defeat Union forces under General Pope, a few miles south of Washington.
- September 17, 1862** Battle of Antietam. Union forces under McClellan meet Lee's army in Maryland, forcing them to abandon a general invasion of the North. Highest single day of casualties in the war: a combined 23,110 dead, wounded, or missing.
- October 8, 1862** Battle of Perryville. Confederate troops under Braxton Bragg fail to gain local support in Kentucky and are forced by Union troops under General Buell to retreat south.
- November 5, 1862** Lincoln replaces McClellan with General Burnside.
- December 13, 1862** Battle of Fredericksburg. Under Burnside, Union army routed with heavy casualties.
- December 31, 1862** Battle of Murfreesboro (Tennessee) begins; inconclusive, heavy casualties.
- January 1, 1863** President Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation.
- March 3, 1863** Lincoln signs first Conscription Act. Hired substitutes or payments of \$300 can be used for exemptions.
- May 1863** Bureau of Colored Troops established by the War Department to recruit black soldiers.
- May 2–4, 1863** Battle of Chancellorsville. Lee's forces defeat Hooker's Army of the Potomac in a major victory for the Confederacy. Stonewall Jackson mortally wounded by his own troops.
- May 22–July 4, 1863** Siege of Vicksburg. Union troops under General Grant attack Vicksburg to take control of the Mississippi. Confederates eventually starved into surrender.
- July 1–4, 1863** Battle of Gettysburg. Confederates under General Lee invade Pennsylvania, engaging larger Union force under General Meade. Successive Confederate charges fail to dislodge Union troops, forcing Confederate withdrawal.
- July 13–16, 1863** Draft riots. Mobs react violently to the Conscription Act in several cities throughout the Northeast. The worst riots are in New York City, where mostly Irish workingmen attack and lynch blacks.
- July 18, 1863** Fort Wagner. The first black regiment, the 54th Massachusetts Volunteers, assault Fort Wagner in Charleston harbor.
- November 19, 1863** President Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address.

- September 19–20, 1863** Battle of Chickamauga Creek. In bloodiest single battle of war, Confederates eventually force Union retreat.
- November 23–25, 1863** Battle of Chattanooga. Union troops gain control of Tennessee, opening way into Georgia.
- March 9, 1864** General Grant becomes commander of all Union armies.
- April 12, 1864** Fort Pillow massacre. General Forrest captures Tennessee fort on the Mississippi; in the aftermath over 300 black and 53 white soldiers are murdered.
- May 3, 1864** Grant begins advance into Virginia, driving toward Richmond.
- May 4, 1864** Sherman begins the march toward Atlanta.
- May 5–6, 1864** Battle of the Wilderness. Bloody but inconclusive battle.
- May 8–12, 1864** Battle of Spotsylvania. Attempting to maneuver around Lee, Grant's army is met in this Virginia town; five days of fighting lead to a stalemate.
- June 1–3, 1864** Battle of Cold Harbor. Grant assaults Lee's defenses, with heavy losses on both sides.
- June 15–18, 1864** Battle of Petersburg. Lee fights off Grant's attack, but Grant settles in to besiege the city.
- August 5, 1864** Battle of Mobile Bay. Union ships under Admiral Farragut engage the Confederate fleet and cut off Mobile's link to the sea.
- September 2, 1864** Battle of Atlanta. Union troops under General Sherman capture and burn the city.
- November 8, 1864** Lincoln wins reelection as president of the United States.
- November 14–December 22, 1864** Sherman's March to the Sea. Union troops march from Atlanta to Savannah on Georgia's Atlantic coast, devastating the countryside along the way.
- January 31, 1865** Congress passes the Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery. First state (Illinois) ratifies on February 1. The amendment is ratified December 13, 1865.
- February 17, 1865** Union troops under General Sherman take and burn Columbia, South Carolina.
- February 18, 1865** Union fleet captures Charleston.
- March 13, 1865** War-weary Confederacy, weakened by desertions, approves arming of slaves.
- April 1, 1865** Battle of Five Forks. In one of the last battles of the war, General Sheridan routs a Confederate force attacking the Union siege of Petersburg.
- April 3, 1865** Union forces enter Petersburg and Richmond. U.S. president Lincoln arrives to visit Richmond on April 5, is cheered by the city's former slaves, and sits in Confederate president Davis's chair.
- April 9, 1865** Confederate general Robert E. Lee formally surrenders to Union general Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia.

- April 14, 1865** John Wilkes Booth assassinates Abraham Lincoln at Ford's Theater. Vice-President Andrew Johnson takes the oath of office April 15 to become the 17th president of the United States.
- April 18, 1865** Confederate general Joseph Johnston surrenders to Union general Sherman, marking the formal end of Confederate resistance.
- April 16, 1865** John Wilkes Booth is shot and killed.
- May 10, 1865** Confederate president Jefferson Davis is captured in Georgia.
- May 24–25, 1865** Over 150,000 men participate in the Grand Review through Washington, D.C.
- May 29, 1865** President Andrew Johnson issues an Amnesty Proclamation granting pardons to "all persons who have, directly or indirectly, participated in the existing rebellion," excluding certain Confederate leaders.
- April 9, 1866** The nation's first Civil Rights Act is passed by the Thirty-ninth Congress over Johnson's veto and provides that "citizens of every race and color, without regard to any previous condition of slavery or involuntary servitude" shall have the same rights "as is enjoyed by white citizens." The act, however, does not extend to Native Americans.
- June 13, 1866** The Fourteenth Amendment to the Constitution is passed by Congress. The amendment grants citizenship to "all persons born or naturalized in the United States" and asserts that states may not deprive individuals of "life, liberty, or property without due process of law." The amendment is ratified on July 28, 1868.
- March 2, 1867** The First Reconstruction Acts are vetoed by President Johnson and passed by Congress over the veto on the same day.
- August 12, 1867** In direct defiance of the Tenure of Office Act, President Andrew Johnson removes Secretary of War Edwin Stanton from office and replaces him with Ulysses S. Grant. Johnson's intent is to control Radical Republicans in Congress and ensure Lincoln's reconstruction and reconciliation policies.
- January 3, 1868** Congress orders Stanton reinstated as head of the War Department. When Johnson defiantly replaces Stanton again on February 21, impeachment proceedings are instituted.
- March 13, 1868** Chief Justice Salmon P. Chase of the Supreme Court presides over impeachment proceedings brought against President Andrew Johnson. Johnson is acquitted on May 26, 1868, by a margin of one vote.
- February 26, 1869** The Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution is passed by Congress. The amendment guarantees the right to vote shall not be denied "on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." It is ratified on March 30, 1870.
- March 4, 1869** Ulysses S. Grant, former Union general, is inaugurated as 18th president of the United States.

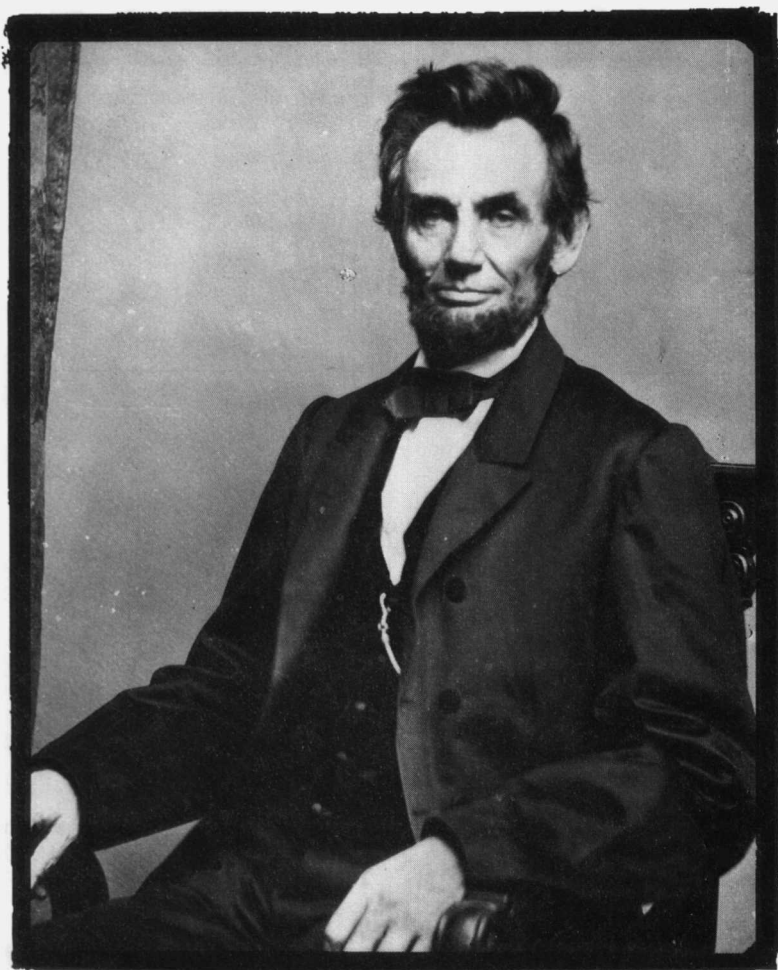
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Part I. Coming of the War



Abraham Lincoln, elected sixteenth president of the United States



Ex-slave, abolitionist, and statesman Frederick Douglass, celebrated in a Reconstruction-era poster

Politics



The Fugitive Slave Acts, The Missouri Compromise, and The Kansas-Nebraska Act

Slavery has within itself the seeds of its own destruction. Keep it within its limits, let it remain where it now is, and in time it will wear itself out.

David Wilmot, U.S. representative from Pennsylvania,
on his Proviso to keep slavery out of territory
gained from Mexico, 1846