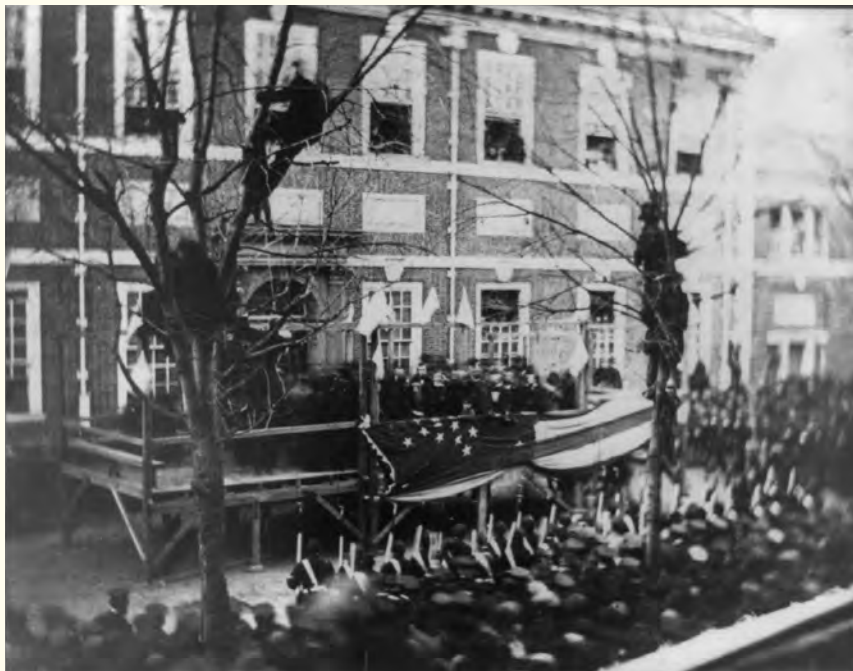


### 3. “Without Guile, and with Pure Purpose”



One of the few full-length photographs of Lincoln, taken on August 26, 1858, a few days after the first Lincoln-Douglas debate in Ottawa, Illinois.



President-elect Abraham Lincoln raising a flag at Independence Hall, Philadelphia, on February 22, 1861, during his journey to Washington for the inauguration.

After his victory in the presidential election of 1860, Lincoln was greeted with the near-immediate secession of South Carolina from the Union. Within weeks, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas followed South Carolina's lead. Lincoln's name had not even appeared on the ballot in Southern states.

On March 4, 1861, the new president delivered his first inaugural address (p. 000), a conciliatory speech dedicated to reassuring Southern states that slavery within their borders would not be threatened, appealing to "the mystic chords of memory" and "the better angels of our nature" to maintain the ties of the Union.

To no one's surprise, Lincoln's speech utterly failed to persuade the seceded states to return to the Union. Within weeks, Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter, in Charleston Harbor, South Carolina, on April 12 after Lincoln, in consultation with his cabinet, sent forces to resupply the federal fort. The first shots of the Civil War had been fired.

William Seward (1801–1872) was the favorite for the Republican presidential nomination in 1860. A popular former governor of New York, later a U.S. senator from that state, and a vocal opponent of slavery, Seward reluctantly but graciously accepted his defeat at the Republican National Convention and campaigned vigorously for Lincoln. When Lincoln appointed him secretary of state, Seward at first chafed under Lincoln's authority, but eventually came to accept and respect him. In 1865, Seward, who had been a target of the group of conspirators led by John Wilkes Booth, was seriously wounded in his home on the evening of Lincoln's assassination by one of Booth's co-conspirators. He recovered from his injuries and continued to serve as secretary of state under Andrew Johnson.



The men whom Lincoln had selected to make up his cabinet—William H. Seward, his secretary of state; Salmon P. Chase at treasury; Simon Cameron, secretary of war; Edward Bates, attorney general among them— had all been contenders for the 1860 Republican presidential nomination, and they tested him as well. It seemed that they sometimes needed reminding that Lincoln, for all his affability, was in charge. His letter to Seward of April 1, 1861 left no doubt about this, and shows the firmness and resolve that would serve Lincoln well both within and outside of his administration. Southern states were treated to the display of Lincoln's determination when he ordered a blockade of their ports and a suspension of habeas corpus in contested areas. Lincoln presented the legal rationale (as well as the strategic necessity) for these actions in his message to a special session of Congress held on July 4, 1861 (p. 000).

A pleasant surprise for Lincoln was that his erstwhile political nemesis, Stephen Douglas, remained steadfast in his loyalty to the Union. Douglas attempted to negotiate with Southern leaders to accept Lincoln's election, and went on a public speaking campaign in support of the Union. But as Douglas died suddenly in June 1861 (see letter to his widow, p. 000). Lincoln had the White House draped in black to honor his lifelong rival.

Ever the cautious lawyer, Lincoln took considerable fire from the abolitionist wing of the Republican party for reversing the emancipation order issued by General John C. Frémont in September 1861. His abiding respect for the rule of law is on display in his letter to Orville H. Browning of September 22, 1861, in which he explains his rationale for reversing the order (p. 000). "If the General needs [slaves]," wrote Lincoln, "he can seize them, and use them; but when the need is past, it is not for him to fix their permanent future condition. That must be settled according to laws made by law-makers, and not by military proclamations."

For many, it is jarring to speak of Lincoln and Karl Marx in the same breath. Yet they were contemporaries, and even had a brief correspondence toward the end of the Civil War. Given his personal biography, it seems quite natural that

Photograph of the inauguration of Abraham Lincoln in front of the east façade of the unfinished U.S. Capitol building, March 4, 1861. Lincoln is standing under the wood canopy, at the front, midway between the left and center posts. His face is in shadow but the white shirtfront is visible.

Lincoln had a clear sympathy for the workingman, though with typical even-handedness, he respected the role of capital and capitalists as well. Still, in his Annual Message to Congress in December 1861 (p. 000), Lincoln shows a surprising familiarity with the ideas of Marx, going so far as to tell Congress that "Labor is prior to, and independent of, capital. . . . Labor is the superior of capital, and deserves much the higher consideration."

Lincoln's principal preoccupation during his presidency very quickly became his role as commander-in-chief of the armed forces. He spent a great deal of time and effort studying military strategy, reading, among other works, General Henry Halleck's *Elements of Military Arts*. In his communications with his generals, Lincoln was nearly always deferential ("Whenever, if at all, in your



judgment, to save yourself and command, a capitulation becomes a necessity, you are authorized to make it”), he wrote to the commander at Fort Sumter on April 4, 1861 (p. 000). As the war progressed and the Union army experienced demoralizing defeats, Lincoln became increasingly confident in offering strategic suggestions and commands, even expressing his frustration to General John C. Frémont for his lack of progress in attacking the railroad near Knoxville (p. 000).

Touchingly, Lincoln always managed to find time for correspondence of a more personal nature. When a famous Union officer who had worked in his law office in Springfield was killed in Virginia, Lincoln wrote a heartfelt personal condolence note to the officer’s parents (p. 000). To Lincoln’s chagrin, the necessity for this kind of correspondence increased over the course of the war, and the relentless loss of life wore on him as it wore on the nation.

### *First inaugural address, final text, “the better angels of our nature.”*

March 4, 1861

Fellow citizens of the United States:

In compliance with a custom as old as the government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly, and to take, in your presence, the oath prescribed by the Constitution of the United States, to be taken by the President “before he enters on the execution of his office.”

I do not consider it necessary, at present, for me to discuss those matters of administration about which there is no special anxiety, or excitement.

Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern States, that by the accession of a Republican Administration, their property, and their peace, and personal security, are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed, and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you.

I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no

inclination to do so.” Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this, and many similar declarations, and had never recanted them.

... I take the official oath to-day, with no mental reservations, and with no purpose to construe the Constitution or laws, by any hypercritical rules. And while I do not choose now to specify particular acts of Congress as proper to be enforced, I do suggest, that it will be much safer for all, both in official and private stations, to conform to, and abide by, all those acts which stand unrepealed, than to violate any of them, trusting to find impunity in having them held to be unconstitutional.

It is seventy-two years since the first inauguration of a President under our national Constitution. During that period fifteen different and greatly distinguished citizens, have, in succession, administered the executive branch of the government. They have conducted it through many perils; and, generally, with great success. Yet, with all this scope for precedent, I now enter upon the same task for the brief constitutional term of four years, under great and peculiar difficulty. A disruption of the Federal Union heretofore only menaced, is now formidably attempted.

I hold, that in contemplation of universal law, and of the Constitution, the Union of these States is perpetual. Perpetuity is implied, if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments. It is safe to assert that no government proper, ever had a provision in its organic law for its own termination. Continue to execute all the express provisions of our national Constitution, and the Union will endure forever—it being impossible to destroy it, except by some action not provided for in the instrument itself.

Again, if the United States be not a government proper, but an association of States in the nature of contract merely, can it, as a contract, be peaceably unmade, by less than all the parties who made it? One party to a contract may violate it—break it, so to speak; but does it not require all to lawfully rescind it?

... In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence; and there shall be none, unless it be forced upon the national authority. The power confided to me, will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property, and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion—no using of force against, or among the people anywhere. Where hostility to the United States, in any interior locality, shall be so great and so universal, as to prevent competent resident citizens from holding the Federal offices, there will be no attempt to force obnoxious strangers among the people for that object. While the strict

legal right may exist in the government to enforce the exercise of these offices, the attempt to do so would be so irritating, and so nearly impracticable with all, that I deem it better to forego, for the time, the uses of such offices.

The mails, unless repelled, will continue to be furnished in all parts of the Union. So far as possible, the people everywhere shall have that sense of perfect security which is most favorable to calm thought and reflection. The course here indicated will be followed, unless current events, and experience, shall show a modification, or change, to be proper; and in every case and exigency, my best discretion will be exercised, according to circumstances actually existing, and with a view and a hope of a peaceful solution of the national troubles, and the restoration of fraternal sympathies and affections.

. . . All profess to be content in the Union, if all constitutional rights can be maintained. Is it true, then, that any right, plainly written in the Constitution, has been denied? I think not. Happily the human mind is so constituted, that no party can reach to the audacity of doing this. Think, if you can, of a single instance in which a plainly written provision of the Constitution has ever been denied. If, by the mere force of numbers, a majority should deprive a minority of any clearly written constitutional right, it might, in a moral point of view, justify revolution—certainly would, if such right were a vital one. But such is not our case. All the vital rights of minorities, and of individuals, are so plainly assured to them, by affirmations and negations, guaranties and prohibitions, in the Constitution, that controversies never arise concerning them. But no organic law can ever be framed with a provision specifically applicable to every question which may occur in practical administration. No foresight can anticipate, nor any document of reasonable length contain express provisions for all possible questions. Shall fugitives from labor be surrendered by national or by State authority? The Constitution does not expressly say. May Congress prohibit slavery in the territories? The Constitution does not expressly say. Must Congress protect slavery in the territories? The Constitution does not expressly say.

From questions of this class spring all our constitutional controversies, and we divide upon them into majorities and minorities. If the minority will not acquiesce, the majority must, or the government must cease. There is no other alternative; for continuing the government, is acquiescence on one side or the other. If a minority, in such case, will secede rather than acquiesce, they make a precedent which, in turn, will divide and ruin them; for a minority of their own will secede from them, whenever a majority refuses to be controlled by such minority. For instance, why may not any portion of a new confederacy, a year or two hence, arbitrarily secede again, precisely as portions of the present Union

now claim to secede from it. All who cherish disunion sentiments, are now being educated to the exact temper of doing this. Is there such perfect identity of interests among the States to compose a new Union, as to produce harmony only, and prevent renewed secession?

Plainly, the central idea of secession, is the essence of anarchy. A majority, held in restraint by constitutional checks, and limitations, and always changing easily, with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it, does, of necessity, fly to anarchy or to despotism. Unanimity is impossible; the rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy, or despotism in some form, is all that is left.

. . . 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. This is the only substantial dispute.

. . . Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other, nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced, and go out of the presence, and beyond the reach of each other; but the different parts of our country cannot do this. They cannot but remain face to face; and intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them. Is it possible then to make that intercourse more advantageous, or more satisfactory, after separation than before? Can aliens make treaties easier than friends can make laws? Can treaties be more faithfully enforced between aliens, than laws can among friends? Suppose you go to war, you cannot fight always; and when, after much loss on both sides, and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions, as to terms of intercourse, are again upon you.

This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government, they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it, or their revolutionary right to dismember, or overthrow it. I can not be ignorant of the fact that many worthy, and patriotic citizens are desirous of having the national constitution amended. While I make no recommendation of amendments, I fully recognize the rightful authority of the people over the whole subject, to be exercised in either of the modes prescribed in the instrument itself; and I should, under existing circumstances, favor, rather than oppose, a fair opportunity being afforded the people to act upon it.

. . . Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better, or equal hope, in the world? In our present differences, is either party without faith of being in the right? If the Almighty

Ruler of nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth, and that justice, will surely prevail, by the judgment of this great tribunal, the American people.

... My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well, upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to hurry any of you, in hot haste, to a step which you would never take deliberately, that

*I close* We are not, we must not be enemies or enemies  
I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends.

*But fellow countrymen. Although passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly,*  
We must not be enemies. ¶ *Though passion may have strained, it must*  
*not break our bonds of affection. ¶ The mystic chords of memory,*  
*from so many battle-fields, and so many patriot graves, pass through all the hearts*  
*stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living*  
*heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet again harmonize*  
*in their ancient music when touched upon*  
*chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by*  
*the guardian angel of the nation.*  
the better angels of our nature.

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William Seward suggested to Lincoln that he close the inaugural address on a conciliatory note. His handwritten words are shown here, juxtaposed with the words that Lincoln ultimately chose.

improved, I make no recommendations of amendments. I am, rather, for the old ship, and the chart of the old pilots. If, however, the people desire a new, or an altered vessel, the matter is exclusively their own, and they can more in the premises, as well without as with an executive recommendation. I shall place no obstacle in the way of what may appear to be their wishes.

The Chief Magistrate derives all his authority from the people, and they have conferred none upon him to fix terms for the separation of the States. The people themselves can do this if they choose; but the executive, as such, has nothing to do with it. His duty is to administer the present government, as it came to his hands, and to transmit it, unimpaired by him, to his successor.

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope, in the world? In our present differences, is either party without faith, <sup>of being</sup> in the right? If the Almighty Ruler of nations, with his eternal truth and justice, be on <sup>our</sup> ~~our~~ <sup>side</sup> ~~side~~ of the North, or <sup>of the South,</sup> that truth, and that justice, will surely prevail, by the judgment of this great tribunal, the American people.

By the frame of the government under which we live, this same people have wisely given their public servants but little power for mischief and have, with equal wisdom, provided for the return of that little to their own hands at very short intervals.

While the people <sup>retain their virtue, and vigilance,</sup> ~~retain their virtue, and vigilance,~~ no administration <sup>can</sup> ~~can~~ by any extreme of wickedness or folly, can very seriously injure the government in the short space of four years.

My countrymen, one and all, <sup>think calmly and</sup> ~~think calmly and~~ well, upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. ~~Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time.~~

If there be an object to hurry any of you, in hot haste, to a step which you would never take ~~deliberately~~, that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it. Such of you as are now dissatisfied, still have the old Constitution unimpaired, and, on the sensitive point, the laws of your own framing under it; while the new administration will have no immediate power, if it would, to change either. If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied, hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him, who has never yet forsaken this favored land, are still competent to adjust, in the best way, all our present difficulty.

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The government will not assail you. ~~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. ~~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 loth 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 battle-field, 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.*

The final draft of Lincoln's first inaugural speech shows his handwritten emendations to the text, including the famous final paragraph invoking "the better angels of our nature."

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*Letter to William H. Seward,  
"When a general line of policy is adopted,  
I apprehend there is no danger of its  
being changed without good reason . . ."*

Seward, Lincoln's one-time political rival, was now secretary of state in Lincoln's cabinet.

Hon. W. H. Seward: Executive Mansion April 1, 1861

My dear Sir: Since parting with you I have been considering your paper dated this day, and entitled "Some thoughts for the President's consideration." The first proposition in it is, "1st. We are at the end of a month's administration, and yet without a policy, either domestic or foreign."

At the beginning of that month, in the inaugural, I said "The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy and possess the property and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties, and imposts." This had your distinct approval at the time; and, taken in connection with the order I immediately gave General Scott, directing him to employ every means in his power to strengthen and hold the forts, comprises the exact domestic policy you now urge . . .

When a general line of policy is adopted, I apprehend there is no danger of its being changed without good reason, or continuing to be a subject of unnecessary debate; still, upon points arising in its progress, I wish, and suppose I am entitled to have the advice of all the cabinet.<sup>75</sup>

Executive Mansion  
April 1, 1861  
Hon. W. H. Seward:  
My dear Sir:  
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At the beginning of that month, in the inaugural, I said "The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy and possess the property and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties, and imposts." This had your distinct approval at the time; and, taken in connection with the order I immediately gave General Scott, directing him to employ every means in his power to strengthen and hold the forts, comprises the exact domestic policy you now urge . . .

Lincoln's reply to a memorandum from Secretary of State William H. Seward shows the president's uncanny ability to simultaneously be assertive and humble. Seward had implied that Lincoln had yet to form a domestic or foreign policy, an assertion to which Lincoln took polite but firm exception.

*Orders to Robert Anderson, "Whenever, if at all, in your judgment, to save yourself and command, a capitulation becomes a necessity, you are authorized to make it."*

*Anderson was the commander of federal troops in South Carolina and, as such, was responsible for the defense of Fort Sumter. He was a proslavery Kentuckian who had remained loyal to the Union.*

[War Department] Washington, April 4, 1861

Sir: Your letter of the 1st. inst. occasions some anxiety to the President.

On the information of Capt. Fox, he had supposed you could hold out till the 15th. inst. without any great inconvenience; and had prepared an expedition to relieve you before that period.

Hoping still that you will be able to sustain yourself till the 11th. or 12th. inst. the expedition will go forward; and, finding your flag flying, will attempt to provision you, and, in case the effort is resisted, will endeavor also to reinforce you.

You will therefore hold out if possible till the arrival of the expedition.

It is not, however, the intention of the President to subject your command to any danger or hardship beyond what, in your judgement, would be usual in military life; and he has entire confidence that you will act as becomes a patriot and a soldier, under all circumstances.

Whenever, if at all, in your judgment, to save yourself and command, a capitulation becomes a necessity, you are authorized to make it. [Respectfully  
SIMON CAMERON.]

[To Major Robert Anderson  
U. S. Army]

This was sent by Capt. Talbot, on April 6, 1861, to be delivered to Maj. Anderson, if permitted. On reaching Charleston, he was refused permission to deliver it to Major Anderson.<sup>76</sup>

The White House copy of Lincoln's condolence letter, sent to the parents of Elmer Ellsworth in May 1861.

Washington D.C.  
May 25. 1861  
To the Father and Mother of Col. Elmer E.  
Ellsworth:  
My Dear Sir and Madam,  
In the untimely loss  
of your noble son, our affliction here is scarcely  
less than your own. So much of promised  
usefulness to our Country, and of bright  
hopes for our self and friends, have rarely  
been so suddenly dashed as in his fall.  
In size, in years, and in youthful appear-  
ance a boy only, his power to command  
men was surpassingly great. This  
power combined with a fine intellect,  
an indomitable energy, and a taste  
altogether military, constituted in him,  
as seemed to me the best natural talent,  
in that department, I ever knew.  
But yet he was singularly modest  
and deferential in social intercourse. My  
acquaintance with him began less than two years  
ago; yet through the latter half of the

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