

In a nation founded for and dedicated to upholding the truths of equality and liberty inherent in each soul born to this world of promise and fearsome possibilities, there have passed many great leaders: from the birth of the United States of America with a population of approximately 4 million people to the booming continent we are today of more than 300 million. Which of these men elected at our head has made the most positive impact on this fair country? Could it be George Washington, the first and forerunner of presidents, a noble soldier and humble man, denying the power of office after only two years to avoid being seen a “monarch” and thus setting a standard followed thereafter by all but one? Could it be Franklin Delano Roosevelt, that 'one', staying in office a record of four terms, this admirable man led our country through WWII and the greatest depression it has ever known. Abraham Lincoln succeeded in keeping a country torn, together; at the same time abolishing the controversial, widely supported and so often cruel practice of slavery. Then there was Theodore Roosevelt who fought for so many of the green hills, ancient trees and snow swept mountainous horizons beheld along America's beautiful and varied landscapes. Last but not least, our current president: a man who simply through his inauguration has shattered the bonds of history; Barack Obama is able through his powerful words to send the hearts of his followers alight on courage and the hope of better days, reminding each citizen his duty and accountability to the success of our home and country. America has seen nearly two and a half centuries and 44 commander-in-chiefs, is it possible to pick just one man of so influential and diverse a number?

Yes. One man, his morals, values and determination, has helped to shape by incalculable measures the lives of so many, the shape of the United States today, and even the world. This 16th president, born in 1809, elected in 1860 was the first republican president and in 1865 the first to be assassinated, sealing a mark upon the world in his own blood. A good president is a tree rooted and grown from the seed of a good man: Abraham Lincoln was, to start with, a valiant gentleman, a faithful husband, father and son. Finding humor easily in life and all of it's curve balls, he is known for saying things such as: “A woman is the only thing I am afraid of that I know will not hurt me”, “How many legs does a dog have if you call a tail a leg? Five? Four, calling a tail a leg does not make it so” and even during a time of immense criticism and opposition, “If I were two-faced would I be wearing this one?” in reference to face worn in years, long, and bearing little of the feature's our modern world posts over billboards and celebrates in the glossy, retouched images across magazines. Abraham Lincoln had a character and outlook on life that not only helped to shield him from the stings of political disagreements, social disapprovals, but also the storms and tempests of separatism, stirring like burning brass at the heart of his country.

On April 12th 1861, shots were fired at Fort Sumpter, South Carolina and just like that the brass pot ignited, raging into flames: a civil war had started. Just over a month from being first sworn in as our nations president, Lincoln stood to face a conflict against eleven states and their nearly 10 million fighters. Lincoln, patriotic and devoted to his country until the end, held the unity of it at highest regard saying, “My dream is of a place and time where America will once again be seen as the last best hope on earth.” Despite a personality and background occupied by a belief in non-violence and lacking in abundant military knowledge*, Lincoln joined immediately in the campaign's preparation and planning. Though originally holding expectations to avert a war, Lincoln's words, and fears, seemed on the brink of realization, “America will never be destroyed from the outside. If we falter and lose our freedoms it will be because we destroyed ourselves”. It took four years and 620,000 lives to finally end the civil war; America had surely done itself a lot of damage but in his determination it's leader had succeeded, with the help of 'god and the good people' beside him, in saving and keeping united the greatest country in the world.

Abraham Lincoln said, “I was losing interest in politics, when the repeal of the Missouri

Compromise aroused me again.” Our 16th president, said of the law that repealed the Compromise's prohibition of slavery in Louisiana “[The Act has a] *declared* indifference, but as I must think, covert *real* zeal for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate it. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world — enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites — causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and especially because it forces so many really good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty — criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but *self-interest*”.* In a time where black slaves were, by census, counted only as 3/5 of a person, Lincoln saw the people, full and as whole as any other, despite a costume of flesh painted in different tones; human souls under injustice, in a country that prided itself on the nonexistence of just that. “As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy.” He saw the 4 1/2 million; 4 1/2 million that would go on in generations to create 37 million in little over 1000 years. I wonder at the little hands clasped in mother's palms, father's missing and estranged from the last thing to call their own—family, and eyes flecked in copper and brown glistening at the man and his words: like leaves falling in autumn, fluttering softly down on so many seeming forgotten and unappreciated ears; hitting the ground with the weight of certainty. They were free! The Emancipation Proclamation and Abraham Lincoln had made all in slavery free! Free to run, to watch the sky and shapes of clouds there, free to dance and sing all day, to search for loved ones lost; free from the sharp stings of a whip at their backs, free from unrelenting labor at their shoulders and the blisters at their hands, free to earn and work for their own wages and not another's. The mother would never have to stand on stage again, like a piece of merchandise, cattle, to watch as a child, the very consummation of her heart, was sold away, little hands never to hold again, small cheeks gone from a mother's loving kiss. September 22, 1862 was the beginning of a new day, a day in which America turned again on its way of 'becoming the last best hope on earth'; and where over 4 million slaves, by law, had again received their deserved and inherent liberty.

“In the end it is not the years in your life that count. It is the life in your years.” Lincoln in fulfillment of his own words, lived a life short, but full. Full of deeds and effects that echo from them and will continue to echo, throughout eternity. “Surely god would not have created such a being as man, with the ability to grasp the infinite, to exist only for a day! No, no, man was made for immortality.” And we do live, *he* does live. Abraham Lincoln lives in the faces of all the ancestors born from those 4 million, he lives in this country and the undivided 9,631,420 square kilometers that encompass it. Man is made for more; president or not, we each hold within ourselves an unrestrained potential for good, we each can impact the world, our world, for the better. Small or large in status, black or white, Abraham Lincoln upheld and confirmed the right of all in this grand country to freedom, liberty, the right and possibility to chase any dream no matter how unattainable it seems. “Fourscore 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”; this Presidents Day I hope we can all remember not only the great men who made this country possible, but the great man, Abraham Lincoln, who made possible the country we have today.

*http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abraham_Lincoln

---(all other quotes are Abraham Lincoln's and can be found at):

http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/abraham_lincoln.html