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Lincoln and Davis: Motivational Leaders

During the 1860s, tensions between the Northern and Southern states arose, and after the Battle of Fort Sumter, the Civil War began. Jefferson Davis was elected President of the Confederate States of America. He motivated and drove the Confederacy by claiming they were fighting for their freedoms and liberties. Lincoln was the driving force of the Union, using his political power and speaking abilities. Although the Union won the war, both Davis and Lincoln were shrewd, relentless leaders.

Lincoln was a very inspirational leader. He spoke very eloquently and justified his arguments very well, maintaining the trust of the Union supporters. Despite his flaws, he managed to win the Civil War by influencing the future of the United States and changing the course of history forever. Lincoln started off the war seemingly neutral to the issues of slavery and abolition in order to maintain the unity of the states and keep the Southern states from seceding. His goal and focus was unity until the Southern states seceded. After this occurred, Lincoln began to become more outspoken about the immortality and his opposition of slavery. He used this excerpt from the *Declaration of Independence (1776)* many times throughout the war: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.”(Jefferson, et. al). He claimed that this extended to African-American men and that, while he did not believe that African-American men should have the same rights as white men, they should have the opportunity to improve their socioeconomic status.

He also encouraged and supported the Union with perhaps the most significant motivation of the Union states: preventing the Southern states from seceding, therefore maintaining the unity of the United States of America. In his first Inaugural Address, Lincoln approaches the delicate dilemma of the splitting of the Union prior to the Civil War's beginning. He talks about when the union was first formed, stating that the union was formed well before The Constitution, and that to break the union would be an act of "revolution" and would indeed be a cause for civil war (Lincoln). However, at times he questioned his beliefs, but after he gave his Second Inaugural Address, he spoke of success, unity, and similarities between both sides (Lincoln). It was clear that his driving motive of unity was achieved after the Union's victory. This set the tone for the rebuilding and reunification of a war torn nation.

Another cause of Lincoln's success was the way he could inspire his supporters with his great ability to think deeply and speak with grace. He managed to tie his opinions into fact and keep his frustrations out. One of his most powerful speeches was his Gettysburg Address. He realized that he was asking a lot of the Union soldiers to risk their lives for a seemingly unreachable goal, though they should be fighting to honor the soldiers who knew it was worth it to fight and to sacrifice their lives.

Some examples of his wonderful public speaking is Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address. It is clear that he is proud and aware of the Union's upcoming victory. He speaks with such compassion for the Confederacy: "With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan -- to achieve and cherish a lasting peace among ourselves..." (Lincoln). It seems that

he speaks as the President of the United States, rather than the leader of the Union, for perhaps the first time since the Civil War began.

Jefferson Davis, another powerful force, was elected as the President of the Confederate States of America in November 1861. He was elected due to his leadership qualities and his military experience. The greatest way he motivated the Confederacy was with the support and justification of slavery, and an appeal to poor white farmers. The Southern economy was almost purely agrarian, and was successful due mainly to large plantations operated by slaves. He justified owning slaves by claiming slavery was a kind, “master-workman” (Davis) relationship. He also speaks of equality among white men due to the servant or slave class. This means that if slavery was abolished the lowest rung in social status would be the poor white man, a condition that was inconceivable to the majority of the Southern population: lower class white men who did not own slaves.

Another motivation for the Confederacy was unalienable rights. Jefferson Davis claimed that by abolishing slavery, the government was taking away their individual, unalienable rights of Southerners, thus violating the *Bill of Rights* and in doing so, violating the *Constitution of the United States of America*. In Jefferson Davis’ First Inaugural Address he states that the reason for secession was to “establish justice, insure domestic tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general welfare, and secure the blessings to ourselves and our posterity;”(Madison). The Confederacy was founded on this phrase and argued that the Union had wronged the Southern states and brought a revolution upon themselves. Another prominent thing that Davis talks about in his address, is how the Union is violating rights and compares them to the British Crown. He believed that the Union was not following the *Declaration of*

Independence (1776) and coming dangerously close to dictatorship. The confederacy was fighting a revolution against The United States of America.

Jefferson Davis motivated the Confederacy with his powerful speeches and arguments, however, he also supported the Confederacy by making successful military choices. He was a strong commander and made intelligent decisions about appointing military generals. This was one of his greatest advantages over Abraham Lincoln. Lincoln was a poor commander and had no military experience while Jefferson Davis was a colonel in the Mexican American War. Choosing to appoint Robert E. Lee was a very good decision made by Davis that essentially moved the war forward in the favor of the Confederacy, even if they did not win the war.

Both Jefferson Davis and Abraham Lincoln were strong, determine leaders. Both would do anything for their country and fought tooth and nail until the end. Lincoln used his power as the president to do things that were very ruthless and perhaps unconstitutional. He suspended Habeas Corpus, and silenced the press. Despite his unscrupulous values, Jefferson Davis fought for his beliefs and his clear love for what he thought America should be. Davis fought the war well even with his crippling chronic ocular inflammatory condition, that he lived through while leading the Confederacy.

Lincoln and Davis had a devotion to the country, and were willing to sacrifice everything to win the Civil War. Davis encouraged the Confederacy by referring back to ‘unalienable rights’(Jefferson, et. al) and the *Declaration of Independence (1776)*, while Lincoln used the premise of equality and unity throughout the war. Both men had flaws. Neither, however, lost sight of their original beliefs and values.

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