Abraham Lincoln’s stature as an American cultural figure grows from his political legacy. In today’s milieu, the speeches he delivered as the sixteenth president of the United States have become synonymous with American progress, values, and exceptionalism. What makes Lincoln’s language so effective? Highlighting matters of style, affect, nationalism, and history in nineteenth-century America, this collection examines the rhetorical power of Lincoln’s prose – from the earliest legal decisions, stump speeches, anecdotes, and letters to the Gettysburg Address and the lingering power of the Second Inaugural Address. Through careful analysis of his correspondence with Civil War generals and his early poetry, the contributors, all literary and cultural critics, give readers a unique look into Lincoln’s private life. Their essays also examine Lincoln’s language in a larger sphere, including that of the Caribbean and Latin America, as well as Europe. Such a collection enables teachers, students, and readers of American history to assess the impact of this extraordinary writer – and rare politician – on the world’s stage.

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This series of Companions to key figures in American history and culture is aimed at students of American studies, history, and literature. Each volume features newly commissioned essays by experts in the field, with a chronology and guide to further reading.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Event</th>
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<tr>
<td>1809</td>
<td>Born February 12 in a one-room cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky, to Thomas Lincoln and Nancy Hanks Lincoln.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1818</td>
<td>Nancy Lincoln dies.</td>
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<td>1819</td>
<td>Thomas Lincoln marries Sarah Bush Johnston.</td>
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<td>1830</td>
<td>Lincoln family settles in Illinois.</td>
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<td>1831</td>
<td>Hired to take goods by boat to New Orleans, where he witnesses slavery firsthand.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1832</td>
<td>Buys a general store. Begins his political career by running for the Illinois General Assembly, an election he loses. Briefly serves as a captain in the Illinois militia during the Black Hawk War.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1834</td>
<td>Elected to the Illinois General Assembly as a Whig. Begins studying law.</td>
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<td>1842</td>
<td>Marries Mary Todd, member of a slaveholding Kentucky family, on November 4. They have four sons: Robert Todd Lincoln (1843–1926), Edward Baker Lincoln (1846–1850), William Wallace Lincoln (1850–1862), and Thomas Lincoln (1853–1871).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1846</td>
<td>Elected to a two-year term in the U.S. House of Representatives as a Whig.</td>
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<td>1848–1854</td>
<td>Returns to Springfield to practice law. Lincoln's most famous case occurs in 1858 when he defends accused murderer William “Duff” Armstrong.</td>
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1854
Returns to politics in response to the Kansas-Nebraska Act, signed into law on May 30, which allowed settlers to determine whether to allow slavery. On October 16, he delivers the “Peoria Speech,” declaring he is against slavery; late in the year he decides to run for the U.S. Senate. After losing, he helps form the new Republican Party.

1858
Nominated for the U.S. Senate at the Illinois state Republican Convention, where he delivers the “House Divided” speech on June 16. Later in the year he engages in a series of famous debates with opponent Stephen A. Douglas, who eventually received the legislature’s vote for the seat.

1860
Invited by the New York Republican Party to deliver a speech at Cooper Union on February 27, in which he argues against popular sovereignty. At the party convention on May 18, Lincoln receives the nomination for president. On November 6, he is elected president over Douglas, John C. Breckinridge, and John Bell. On December 20, South Carolina secedes from the Union, followed by a string of Southern states.

1861
The Civil War begins on April 12, when Confederate troops fire on Fort Sumter, South Carolina. As commander-in-chief, Lincoln imposes a blockade, suspends the writ of habeas corpus, and dispenses funds before appropriation by Congress.

1862
After the Union victory at Antietam in September, Lincoln announces that he will issue an Emancipation Proclamation to free slaves in states not under Union control. The Emancipation Proclamation goes into effect on January 1, 1863.

1863
Union troops defeat the Confederates at the Battle of Gettysburg in July. On November 19, Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address at the dedication of the national cemetery on the battlefield. After the Battle of Chattanooga later in the year, Lincoln names Ulysses S. Grant commander of the Union army.

1864
Wins a landslide reelection over Democratic candidate George B. McClellan. Grant wears down Confederate
CHRONOLOGY OF LINCOLN’S LIFE


1865

Delivers his Second Inaugural speech on March 4. Lee surrenders to Grant on April 9 at Appomattox, Virginia, effectively ending the war. On April 15, Lincoln dies after being shot the night before by Confederate sympathizer John Wilkes Booth while attending a play at Ford’s Theater in Washington, DC. Lincoln’s body leaves Washington, DC, on April 21 and is taken to Springfield, Illinois. Millions of Americans are estimated to have seen the train along its route. Lincoln is buried in Springfield on May 3.