

MORALITY, FREEDOM AND JUSTICE THROUGH THE CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

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ABSTRACT

This study explores Abraham Lincoln's leadership through the principles of morality, freedom, and justice, focusing on how these values shaped his decisions and actions during the Civil War. Lincoln's moral evolution, particularly his stance on slavery, is examined through his speeches, writings, and legislative actions, such as the Emancipation Proclamation and his support for the 13th Amendment. This paper analyzes how Lincoln's personal integrity and moral beliefs influenced his leadership style and political strategy. The study also draws connections between Lincoln's principles and modern struggles for social justice, illustrating how his leadership continues to inspire contemporary political and civil rights movements. By examining Lincoln's moral development and its impact on American democracy, the study evaluates the enduring relevance of his commitment to freedom and justice in shaping the nation's ideals and legacy.

Keywords: Abraham Lincoln, morality, freedom, justice, Emancipation Proclamation.

1. INTRODUCTION

Abraham Lincoln, the 16th President of the United States, is widely regarded as one of the nation's greatest leaders, particularly for his role in guiding the country through its Civil War and for his moral leadership in addressing the nation's deeply entrenched institution of slavery. Elected in 1860, Lincoln's presidency was marked by the division of the nation between the North and South, primarily due to the issue of slavery. The Civil War, which began in 1861 and ended in 1865, was rooted in the struggle over slavery and the future of the United States, as well as broader questions regarding freedom, justice, and national unity. While the Union fought to preserve its existence, the South fought to maintain its economic and social order, which was heavily reliant on slavery. These competing forces created a moral and political dilemma for Lincoln, who had to navigate the complexities of preserving the Union while addressing the morally contentious issue of slavery. According to **David Herbert Donald** in *Lincoln* (1995), Lincoln viewed the preservation of the Union as paramount, but his moral convictions eventually led him to confront slavery, understanding it as a national issue of moral urgency.

Lincoln's personal moral beliefs about slavery were central to his leadership during this period. Initially, he focused on containing slavery within its current borders, not advocating for its immediate abolition. However, as the war progressed, his views evolved, ultimately leading him to issue the **Emancipation Proclamation** in 1863, which declared all slaves in Confederate-held territory to be free. This shift is well-documented by **Eric Foner** in *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (2010), where he explains how Lincoln's stance evolved from a political necessity to a moral imperative. Lincoln's moral conviction was further solidified with

his support for the **13th Amendment**, which abolished slavery in the United States. This shift in his stance was not simply a political action; it was rooted in his personal moral convictions, shaped by his upbringing, self-education, and a deep belief in the principles of liberty and equality enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. **Garry Wills**, in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992), highlights how Lincoln's speeches, especially the Gettysburg Address, redefined the fight for the Union as a moral battle for freedom and equality, aligning the nation's cause with the moral imperatives of human dignity.

This study aims to explore how Lincoln's principles of **morality**, **freedom**, and **justice** shaped his leadership during the Civil War. By examining the evolution of his views on slavery and his commitment to justice, this research provides insight into how Lincoln navigated the political and moral complexities of his time. Furthermore, it assesses how his personal integrity influenced his decision-making, particularly in moments of national crisis, and how his leadership continues to impact contemporary discussions on justice, equality, and civil rights. **Doris Kearns Goodwin** in *Team of Rivals* (2005) illustrates Lincoln's ability to maintain his moral compass while working with a divided cabinet, emphasizing his leadership through collaboration and moral clarity despite political opposition.

The primary objective of this study is to explore how Lincoln's moral convictions influenced his decisions as president, particularly with regard to slavery and freedom. The specific objectives are: to examine Lincoln's evolving views on slavery and freedom, to assess the role of his personal integrity in shaping his decisions, and to analyze the long-term impact of his leadership on modern discussions of justice and equality, particularly in the context of social justice movements. **Foner's analysis** emphasizes that Lincoln's evolving stance on slavery directly impacted the Civil War's course and the broader fight for justice, leading to an eventual national commitment to abolish slavery.

The research is guided by the following questions:

1. How did Abraham Lincoln's personal moral values influence his stance on slavery and freedom?
2. In what ways did Lincoln's leadership contribute to the fight for justice and equality during the Civil War?
3. How do Lincoln's principles of morality, freedom, and justice continue to influence contemporary political leadership and social justice movements?

These questions are critical in understanding how Lincoln's moral evolution influenced key decisions such as the **Emancipation Proclamation** and the **13th Amendment**, and how those decisions have continued to impact American society in its ongoing struggle for racial equality and justice.

Understanding Lincoln's moral development and leadership provides valuable insights into the challenges faced by leaders when navigating moral and political dilemmas. This study contributes to the broader discourse on leadership, morality, and justice, especially in the context of civil rights movements. Lincoln's commitment to freedom and justice, despite the tremendous political pressure and moral opposition, serves as an enduring model for contemporary leaders who face similar challenges in balancing personal convictions with political expediency. As **Goodwin** notes, Lincoln's ability to remain true to his values while making difficult political compromises remains a key lesson in leadership.

This study primarily focuses on Lincoln's presidency, with particular emphasis on key moments such as the **Emancipation Proclamation** and the **13th Amendment**, both of which were pivotal

in shaping the future of the nation. These events, analyzed by **Foner** and **Goodwin**, underscore the transformation of Lincoln's leadership from a pragmatist to a moral visionary. The study also examines primary sources such as Lincoln's speeches, writings, and correspondence to better understand his moral evolution. Lincoln's letters, such as his **Letter to Horace Greeley** (1862), reveal his evolving commitment to abolition, shedding light on his internal moral conflicts and political calculations. The limitations of the study include the availability and interpretation of primary sources, as Lincoln's personal beliefs and actions have been subject to differing scholarly interpretations. Some scholars, such as **Wills**, argue that Lincoln's actions were driven by political necessity rather than moral clarity, while others, such as **Foner**, stress the centrality of moral conviction in his leadership.

This study provides a comprehensive examination of Abraham Lincoln's leadership, offering an in-depth analysis of how his principles of morality, freedom, and justice guided his decisions and continue to resonate today. Through exploring Lincoln's moral journey, the paper highlights the ways in which his character helped shape the course of American history and left an enduring legacy of justice and equality. As **Goodwin** argues, Lincoln's leadership in the face of moral crises continues to serve as a touchstone for leadership in contemporary political contexts.

2. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Defining Key Concepts

Philosophical Perspectives on Morality

Morality refers to the principles that govern right and wrong conduct, and it has been the subject of intense philosophical debate for centuries. Immanuel Kant's conception of morality is rooted in his **categorical imperative**, which asserts that individuals should act in a way that their actions could be universalized as a law applicable to all rational beings. According to Kant, morality is independent of individual desires or external consequences, focusing instead on duty and the inherent dignity of human beings (Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*). This framework aligns with a **deontological** view of ethics, where the morality of an action is determined by adherence to a rule or duty rather than by the outcomes it produces.

In contrast, **James Rachels** in *The Elements of Moral Philosophy* argues for **moral relativism**, suggesting that moral principles vary across cultures and contexts. He emphasizes that while some core moral values may be universal, much of morality is shaped by social norms and individual circumstances. Rachels' perspective challenges Kant's notion of universal morality, suggesting instead that ethical judgments are often contingent upon cultural or personal beliefs.

Thomas Nagel presents a third perspective on morality, focusing on the **impartial** nature of moral reasoning. In *The View from Nowhere*, Nagel argues that morality requires individuals to adopt a perspective that is detached from their own personal interests, considering the well-being of others in a manner that transcends subjective biases (Nagel, *The View from Nowhere*). This approach aligns with the **contractarian** theories of morality, which focus on fairness and mutual respect.

Definitions of Freedom

Freedom is another central concept in political philosophy, with diverse interpretations depending on context. **Isaiah Berlin**, in his essay *Two Concepts of Liberty*, introduced the distinction between **negative** and **positive freedom**. **Negative freedom** refers to the absence of external interference, allowing individuals to act without being obstructed by others or the state. This view aligns with

classical liberalism, which emphasizes **individual autonomy** and **non-interference** (Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*).

In contrast, **positive freedom** is the freedom to realize one's potential, which requires more than simply the absence of obstacles—it demands conditions that enable self-mastery and personal fulfillment. Berlin notes that this kind of freedom involves the empowerment of individuals, which can include access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunity, all of which contribute to meaningful self-determination.

John Stuart Mill, in *On Liberty*, emphasizes the importance of personal liberty as the right to **self-expression** and **individual choice**, as long as those choices do not harm others. Mill's **harm principle** is a key component of his understanding of freedom, asserting that the state should only intervene when an individual's actions directly harm others (Mill, *On Liberty*). Mill's approach to freedom promotes a balance between individual liberty and societal harm, reinforcing the idea that freedom is a **fundamental human right**.

Justice as Fairness and Equality

Justice is often understood as the principle of fairness in the distribution of goods, opportunities, and rights in society. **John Rawls**, in *A Theory of Justice*, defines justice as fairness, proposing the **original position** and the **veil of ignorance** as thought experiments to determine just principles for society. Rawls asserts that individuals, when deprived of knowledge about their own personal circumstances, would choose principles that ensure fairness and protect the least advantaged members of society. His **difference principle** allows for social and economic inequalities only if they benefit the least well-off (Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*). This framework has been hugely influential in contemporary political philosophy, particularly in debates about inequality and distributive justice.

Aristotle, on the other hand, takes a different view of justice. In *Nicomachean Ethics*, he argues that justice involves giving people what they **deserve** based on their contribution to society and their role within it. Aristotle emphasizes a **proportional** approach to justice, where individuals receive what is due to them based on merit and need. Unlike Rawls, who focuses on ensuring fairness for the least advantaged, Aristotle's view focuses more on **deservedness** and the balance of benefits across society.

David Miller, in *Principles of Social Justice*, suggests a **liberal approach** to justice that includes both **distributive justice** (fair distribution of resources) and **recognition justice** (acknowledgment of individual needs and capabilities). Miller integrates aspects of both Aristotle and Rawls, advocating for fairness in distribution while acknowledging that individuals' different needs and contributions must be accounted for in any fair system (Miller, *Principles of Social Justice*).

2.2 Review of Literature

The character and moral evolution of Abraham Lincoln have been the subject of extensive scholarly inquiry. **David Herbert Donald** in *Lincoln* (1995) provides a comprehensive biography, emphasizing how Lincoln's personal beliefs evolved throughout his presidency. Donald argues that Lincoln's moral convictions were initially shaped by a pragmatic desire to preserve the Union, yet he came to see the abolition of slavery as a moral necessity, particularly as the war progressed. Donald's work offers a detailed account of how Lincoln navigated the political and moral dilemmas of his time, showing how his evolving views on slavery were influenced by the events of the Civil War.

Garry Wills, in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992), explores the pivotal moment of the Gettysburg Address, arguing that it marked a moral transformation in Lincoln's leadership. Wills contends that the address reframed the Civil War as a moral crusade for equality, not simply a fight for political unity. Lincoln's use of the Declaration of Independence in this speech connected the Union's cause to the ideals of freedom and equality, making the war about the nation's moral commitment to these principles rather than merely preserving the Union.

Eric Foner provides an analysis of Lincoln's views on slavery in *The Fiery Trial* (2010), where he argues that Lincoln's stance on slavery evolved from an initial position of limiting its spread to a firm commitment to its abolition. Foner's work highlights Lincoln's shifting political and moral considerations, showing how the war transformed his understanding of slavery, freedom, and justice. Foner emphasizes that Lincoln's decision to issue the **Emancipation Proclamation** was not just a military necessity but also a moral act rooted in a broader vision of justice for all people.

Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals* (2005) focuses on Lincoln's leadership style, particularly his ability to unite individuals with differing views. Goodwin shows that Lincoln's moral leadership was not only about his stance on slavery but also about his capacity for empathy, political skill, and moral vision in guiding the nation through one of its most difficult periods. By bringing together political adversaries into his cabinet, Lincoln demonstrated a commitment to the greater good of the Union, demonstrating how his moral integrity guided his decisions in a politically divided nation.

Lincoln's evolving views on slavery and freedom were shaped by pivotal events such as the **Kansas-Nebraska Act** (1854), which allowed for the possibility of slavery in newly formed territories. Lincoln strongly opposed the Act, arguing that it violated the principles of freedom and equality embedded in the Constitution. The **Lincoln-Douglas debates** (1858) further highlighted his opposition to the expansion of slavery, with Lincoln emphasizing the moral wrongness of slavery and its incompatibility with the nation's founding ideals. The debates helped position Lincoln as a leading figure in the anti-slavery movement, setting the stage for his presidential run. As President, Lincoln's position on slavery continued to evolve. The **Emancipation Proclamation** of 1863, which declared all slaves in Confederate-held territories free, marked a turning point in Lincoln's leadership. According to **Foner**, this was a decision deeply rooted in Lincoln's moral convictions, reflecting his belief that slavery was not only a political issue but also a **moral evil** that had to be eradicated. The passage of the **13th Amendment** in 1865, which permanently abolished slavery in the United States, was the culmination of Lincoln's moral and political evolution, marking a victory for freedom and justice.

In summary, the literature on Abraham Lincoln's moral development and leadership reveals that his views on slavery and freedom evolved significantly over the course of his presidency. Scholars like **Donald**, **Wills**, **Foner**, and **Goodwin** highlight how Lincoln's personal integrity, moral beliefs, and leadership style shaped his decisions and ultimately contributed to the abolition of slavery. The study of Lincoln's leadership provides important insights into the moral and political challenges leaders face when dealing issues of justice, freedom, and equality.

3. MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

3.1 Background: Early Life, Education, and Personal Influences

Abraham Lincoln's early life was marked by hardship, limited formal education, and a series of formative experiences that shaped his moral beliefs. Born in a log cabin in Hardin County, Kentucky, on February 12, 1809, Lincoln grew up in a family that struggled to make ends meet. His parents, Thomas and Nancy Lincoln, were poor farmers, and the family moved several times, eventually settling in Indiana, and later Illinois. Lincoln's early years were characterized by poverty, but they also provided him with opportunities to develop a strong work ethic and an appreciation for self-reliance. In *Lincoln: A Life of Purpose and Power*, **Richard Carwardine** highlights how Lincoln's humble beginnings gave him a sense of empathy for the struggles of ordinary people, a quality that would later inform his moral reasoning and leadership during the Civil War.

Despite his limited formal education—he attended school for only a year in total—Lincoln was a voracious reader. He taught himself to read and write by using any materials available, including the Bible, the works of George Washington, and law books. His stepmother, Sarah Bush Johnston, played a key role in nurturing his intellectual development. According to **David Herbert Donald** in *Lincoln* (1995), Sarah was a significant influence in Lincoln's life, encouraging him to read and pursue knowledge, which shaped his belief in the power of education as a tool for personal and moral development. His exposure to religious texts, particularly the Bible, also had a lasting impact on his moral framework. Lincoln often cited biblical passages in his speeches, reflecting his belief in the moral authority of scripture and its influence on his sense of justice.

2.2 Moral Stance on Slavery

Lincoln's early opposition to the expansion of slavery was shaped by his moral convictions, which developed as he gained exposure to the political and social debates of his time. Initially, Lincoln did not advocate for immediate abolition but focused on preventing the spread of slavery into new territories. His views on slavery were largely influenced by his strong belief in the principles of liberty and equality that were enshrined in the Declaration of Independence. In the **Lincoln-Douglas debates** of 1858, Lincoln famously argued that while he did not wish to interfere with slavery where it already existed, he believed that "this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free." According to **Eric Foner** in *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (2010), this statement captured Lincoln's belief that slavery's expansion threatened the nation's moral and political unity, laying the foundation for his later calls for abolition.

Over time, Lincoln's stance on slavery evolved, especially as the Civil War progressed. He came to view slavery not only as a political issue but as a **moral wrong** that needed to be eradicated. This moral evolution culminated in the **Emancipation Proclamation** of 1863, which declared all slaves in Confederate-held territory to be free. Lincoln's decision to issue the Proclamation was influenced by both political and moral considerations. As **Garry Wills** argues in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992), the Proclamation was Lincoln's response to the moral crisis posed by slavery, as he recognized that the fight to preserve the Union could no longer be separated from the moral imperative to abolish slavery. This shift reflects Lincoln's deepening moral commitment to the principle that **all men are created equal**, a belief rooted in the ideals of the American Revolution. By the time he pushed for the **13th Amendment** in 1865, Lincoln had fully embraced the cause of abolition. According to **David Blight** in *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (2001), Lincoln viewed the passage of the 13th Amendment as the fulfillment of the nation's moral duty to correct the injustice of slavery. His support for the amendment, despite significant political opposition, underscores his commitment to **justice and equality**. In a letter to **Horace Greeley** in

1862, Lincoln wrote that his primary goal was to save the Union, but he also stated, “If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it.” This statement reflects the tension Lincoln felt between political necessity and moral conviction. Over time, however, his moral clarity led him to see the abolition of slavery as inseparable from the Union’s survival.

3.3 Speeches and Writings Reflecting Lincoln's Moral Reasoning

Lincoln’s speeches are a testament to his moral reasoning and the evolution of his views on slavery and equality. One of his most famous speeches, the “**House Divided**” speech delivered in 1858, articulated his belief that the nation could not continue to exist half slave and half free. In this speech, Lincoln said, “A house divided against itself cannot stand,” emphasizing that the nation’s moral and political future was at stake. **Garry Wills**, in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992), argues that this speech represented a turning point in Lincoln’s political career, marking his transition from a politician concerned primarily with preserving the Union to a leader deeply committed to **moral clarity** and the principles of liberty and equality.

The **Emancipation Proclamation** of 1863 is another key document that reflects Lincoln’s moral reasoning. In the proclamation, Lincoln justified the freeing of slaves in Confederate territories as a military necessity but also framed it as a moral imperative. Lincoln’s moral convictions were evident in the Proclamation’s language, as he explicitly linked the abolition of slavery with the preservation of the Union and the fulfillment of America’s founding ideals. According to **Eric Foner**, Lincoln saw the Proclamation as a way to not only weaken the Confederacy but also to bring the nation closer to its moral ideals by finally ending slavery.

Perhaps the most famous example of Lincoln’s moral reasoning is the **Gettysburg Address** of 1863. Delivered during the Civil War, this speech reframed the war as a struggle not just to preserve the Union but to uphold the moral principles of equality and liberty. In this brief but powerful address, Lincoln stated that the nation was dedicated to “the proposition that all men are created equal,” aligning the war effort with the moral imperative of human dignity and equality. **David Herbert Donald** in *Lincoln* (1995) notes that the Gettysburg Address transformed the Civil War from a military conflict into a moral crusade, redefining the war as the final battle to secure freedom and equality for all Americans, particularly African Americans.

3.4 Personal Integrity

Lincoln’s personal integrity was central to his leadership and moral development. Known as “Honest Abe,” Lincoln’s reputation for honesty shaped his political career, particularly in his legal practice and his presidency. As a lawyer, Lincoln gained a reputation for being straightforward and fair in his dealings, qualities that became central to his moral and political persona. **Doris Kearns Goodwin**, in *Team of Rivals* (2005), emphasizes how Lincoln’s reputation for honesty and integrity played a crucial role in his ability to bring together a divided cabinet. Goodwin argues that Lincoln’s moral credibility allowed him to work with a range of political figures, some of whom were initially opposed to his presidency, thereby fostering cooperation and unity during the national crisis of the Civil War.

Lincoln’s moral integrity also shaped his decision-making during the Civil War. As **Eric Foner** points out, Lincoln’s ability to maintain his personal honesty and ethical standards, even in the face of immense political pressure, allowed him to make difficult decisions, such as issuing the **Emancipation Proclamation**. He was acutely aware of the moral stakes of the war, and his ability

to stay true to his principles, even when faced with political opposition, earned him the respect of his peers and cemented his place in history as a morally courageous leader. Lincoln's personal integrity was not just a matter of personal reputation; it was the foundation of his leadership during one of the most morally complex periods in American history.

In sum, Abraham Lincoln's moral development was shaped by his early experiences, his evolving views on slavery, and his commitment to personal integrity. His moral reasoning is reflected in his speeches, writings, and decisions, particularly during the Civil War. Lincoln's personal journey from a politician focused on preserving the Union to a leader committed to the abolition of slavery exemplifies the evolution of his moral convictions. His leadership continues to serve as a model for modern leaders navigating complex moral and political issues, demonstrating the enduring power of personal integrity and moral clarity in shaping history.

4. FREEDOM AND JUSTICE THROUGH LINCOLN'S LEADERSHIP

4.1 Freedom

Abraham Lincoln's understanding of freedom evolved significantly throughout his presidency, mirroring his personal moral growth and the changing demands of the nation. Initially, Lincoln's stance on freedom was focused on the **preservation of the Union**, which, for him, was inseparable from the question of slavery's expansion. Lincoln's **early speeches** and public statements, such as his "**House Divided**" speech in 1858, articulated his belief that the nation could not continue to exist half slave and half free, but he did not initially advocate for immediate abolition. According to **Eric Foner** in *The Fiery Trial* (2010), Lincoln's early position was primarily centered on limiting the spread of slavery into new territories, reflecting his belief that slavery's expansion threatened the nation's political and economic future.

However, as the Civil War progressed, Lincoln's understanding of freedom deepened. The conflict, initially framed as a war to preserve the Union, increasingly became linked to the **moral fight for liberty**. **David Herbert Donald** in *Lincoln* (1995) explains that Lincoln's moral commitment to freedom grew stronger as he saw the necessity of connecting the survival of the Union with the abolition of slavery. Lincoln realized that the Union could not be preserved without addressing the moral wrong of slavery, which was incompatible with the nation's founding principles of liberty and equality. This evolving view culminated in the issuance of the **Emancipation Proclamation** in 1863, which declared that all slaves in Confederate-held territories were to be freed.

The Emancipation Proclamation was not just a military necessity but a reflection of Lincoln's growing moral understanding of freedom. As **Garry Wills** argues in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992), the proclamation fundamentally redefined the nature of the war. It transformed the Civil War from a struggle to preserve the Union into a moral crusade for freedom, setting the stage for a reimagined notion of **American liberty**—one that would include freedom for enslaved African Americans. Lincoln's personal evolution in understanding freedom is further underscored by his words in the **Gettysburg Address** (1863), where he articulated a vision of freedom that extended beyond mere political autonomy to include the principles of equality and self-determination.

In the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln famously declared that the nation was "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," drawing a direct line between the nation's founding principles and the moral imperative to end slavery. **Doris Kearns Goodwin** in *Team of Rivals* (2005) highlights how Lincoln's **moral clarity** about the meaning of freedom resonated deeply

with the public. The address redefined the war's purpose and reimagined the **American identity** as one rooted in equality and liberty for all, especially formerly enslaved individuals.

By the time Lincoln supported the **13th Amendment**, which abolished slavery permanently in the United States, his concept of freedom had evolved to encompass not only the freedom of African Americans but the notion that a nation built on the ideals of liberty and equality could no longer tolerate the existence of slavery. Lincoln's leadership in securing the passage of the 13th Amendment, despite significant political opposition, was the final expression of his belief that true freedom could only be achieved when the stain of slavery was removed from the nation.

4.2 Justice

Justice, for Lincoln, was inseparable from his moral commitment to freedom. His leadership during the Civil War, particularly through his support for the **13th Amendment**, reflected his deep sense of **justice**. The passage of the 13th Amendment was not simply a political victory; it was a moral triumph that marked the culmination of Lincoln's commitment to justice for all people, particularly African Americans. **Eric Foner** explains in *The Fiery Trial* (2010) that Lincoln's **moral evolution** during the Civil War led him to view justice as a duty not just to preserve the Union, but to ensure equality and liberty for all citizens, regardless of race.

Lincoln's commitment to justice was evident in his leadership style. Throughout the war, he grappled with the moral and political implications of his actions. As **David Blight** argues in *Race and Reunion* (2001), Lincoln's actions during the Civil War—such as his decision to issue the Emancipation Proclamation and his support for the 13th Amendment—were deeply intertwined with his moral beliefs about justice. Lincoln believed that true justice could only be achieved when the nation upheld its founding ideals of equality and liberty. **Garry Wills** emphasizes in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* that Lincoln's moral clarity about the meaning of justice was a key factor in the success of his leadership. By framing the war as a fight for justice, Lincoln redefined the war's objectives, linking military victory with the moral imperatives of freedom and equality.

In addition to his political and moral actions, Lincoln's personal integrity played a critical role in shaping his commitment to justice. His reputation for honesty and fairness, established during his legal career, influenced his decision-making as president. **Doris Kearns Goodwin** notes that Lincoln's ability to make difficult decisions, such as balancing the demands of wartime politics with his moral convictions, was rooted in his personal integrity and belief in justice. As president, Lincoln was keenly aware that the preservation of the Union required not only military success but also moral clarity in guiding the nation through the war's ethical dilemmas.

Lincoln's pursuit of justice was also evident in his efforts to ensure a just post-war reconstruction. After the passage of the 13th Amendment, Lincoln continued to advocate for the fair treatment of the South and for the inclusion of formerly enslaved people in the political and economic life of the nation. He sought to rebuild the nation on principles of fairness and equality, even as the nation's political landscape was divided. Lincoln's views on justice and equality were central to his vision for the Reconstruction era, though tragically, he was assassinated before he could see his plans fully realized.

4.3 Relevance in the 21st Century

Lincoln's leadership, particularly his moral commitment to freedom and justice, continues to have a profound impact on contemporary struggles for social justice and equality. Lincoln's vision of a nation dedicated to **equality** and **freedom** resonates deeply in today's world, where racial justice

and the fight for equality remain central issues. The **civil rights movements** of the 20th and 21st centuries, particularly in the United States, owe much to the legacy of Lincoln's leadership during the Civil War. As **Garry Wills** notes in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992), Lincoln's redefinition of American liberty and equality has served as an enduring source of inspiration for those advocating for civil rights, from the **Civil Rights Movement** of the 1960s to the present-day **Black Lives Matter** movement.

Lincoln's moral clarity and commitment to justice also continue to influence **political leadership** around the world. His ability to lead with integrity, to balance political necessity with moral duty, and to redefine the meaning of freedom and equality has become a model for leaders confronting social and political crises. **David Herbert Donald** in *Lincoln* (1995) highlights that Lincoln's moral leadership serves as a touchstone for contemporary political figures who seek to address issues of injustice, inequality, and division.

Moreover, Lincoln's ideas about **freedom** and **justice** have been central to the discourse on human rights worldwide. His emphasis on the equality of all individuals, regardless of race or background, aligns with global human rights principles, such as those articulated in the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** (UDHR). Lincoln's belief that the United States was founded on principles of equality and liberty has inspired movements for **social justice** and **human rights**, particularly in contexts where inequality and discrimination continue to persist.

As societies continue to wrestle with issues of racial inequality, immigration, and human rights, Lincoln's leadership provides valuable lessons. His ability to adapt to the changing political realities of his time, while maintaining a clear moral vision, demonstrates the importance of moral leadership in times of crisis. **Doris Kearns Goodwin** emphasizes in *Team of Rivals* that Lincoln's capacity for **empathy** and **moral leadership** was key to his ability to unite a divided nation. This aspect of Lincoln's leadership continues to resonate in the work of contemporary leaders who aim to address **social justice** issues in a complex and polarized world.

In conclusion, Lincoln's understanding of **freedom** and **justice** evolved throughout his presidency, culminating in a deep commitment to **abolition** and **equality**. His moral reasoning, as reflected in key speeches and political actions, transformed the nation's concept of liberty and laid the groundwork for modern civil rights struggles. Lincoln's leadership remains a source of inspiration for those committed to **justice** and **equality**, and his legacy continues to shape discussions of **freedom** and **social justice** in the 21st century. His ability to lead with moral clarity, integrity, and empathy offers enduring lessons for contemporary political leadership in times of crisis and division.

5. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Abraham Lincoln's leadership was fundamentally shaped by his moral values, particularly his understanding of **freedom**, **justice**, and **equality**. These principles guided his political decisions throughout his presidency, especially during the Civil War, when the nation was embroiled in one of its most significant moral and political crises. Lincoln's moral convictions not only led him to confront the institution of slavery but also redefined the nation's understanding of freedom and justice. The findings from this study demonstrate how Lincoln's evolving moral views on slavery, his leadership in the fight for justice and equality, and the lasting influence of his principles on contemporary political leadership contribute to our understanding of his legacy.

5.1 Influence of Lincoln's Moral Values on His Stance on Slavery and Freedom

Abraham Lincoln's **personal moral values** were crucial in shaping his evolving stance on slavery and freedom. Early in his political career, Lincoln's views on slavery were pragmatic rather than purely moral. He was committed to stopping the spread of slavery into new territories, which aligned with his **personal belief** in **liberty** and the equality of all men as stated in the **Declaration of Independence**. Initially, Lincoln did not advocate for immediate abolition, reflecting his political understanding that slavery was a divisive issue. This view is supported by **David Herbert Donald** in *Lincoln* (1995), who describes how Lincoln initially sought to **contain** slavery rather than eliminate it, believing this approach was politically necessary to preserve the Union.

However, Lincoln's personal **moral evolution** regarding slavery can be traced through his public statements and policy shifts. In the **Lincoln-Douglas debates** (1858), he made it clear that slavery was morally wrong, but he stopped short of advocating for full emancipation. By the time of the Civil War, Lincoln had moved beyond mere containment, driven by both the demands of war and his **moral convictions**. **Eric Foner** in *The Fiery Trial* (2010) emphasizes that Lincoln's decision to issue the **Emancipation Proclamation** in 1863 was not solely a military strategy but a moral choice to link the preservation of the Union with the moral imperative to abolish slavery. This moral clarity was further demonstrated by his support for the **13th Amendment**, which finally abolished slavery in the United States, a reflection of Lincoln's unwavering commitment to **justice** and freedom for all citizens, regardless of race.

As **Garry Wills** argues in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992), Lincoln's leadership was not merely political but deeply **moral**. His speeches, particularly the **Gettysburg Address**, redefined freedom as a **universal right**, advocating for a more expansive definition of liberty and equality, particularly for enslaved African Americans. The shift from a political stance to a **moral crusade** underscores how Lincoln's personal moral values influenced his stance on slavery and freedom, evolving from a **political necessity** to a **moral duty**.

5.2 Lincoln's Leadership Contribution to Justice and Equality During the Civil War

Lincoln's **moral leadership** was a central force in advancing **justice and equality** during the Civil War. His decision to issue the **Emancipation Proclamation** was both a **military and moral decision**. The Proclamation, issued in 1863, declared all slaves in Confederate-held territories to be free, marking a decisive moment in Lincoln's leadership. While some have argued that the Proclamation was a **military necessity**, its moral significance cannot be overstated. **David Blight** in *Race and Reunion* (2001) suggests that Lincoln's primary motivation was not simply the military advantages of weakening the Confederacy, but his realization that the preservation of the Union was inseparable from the abolition of slavery, a profound moral issue.

Lincoln's support for the **13th Amendment** was another critical contribution to justice and equality. As **Foner** highlights in *The Fiery Trial* (2010), Lincoln's leadership in advocating for the passage of the amendment demonstrated his commitment to ensuring that the **end of slavery** was enshrined in the nation's constitution. Despite political opposition, Lincoln pushed through the 13th Amendment as part of his broader vision of a just nation, free from the stain of slavery. This was not just political maneuvering; it was a moral stand that underscored Lincoln's belief in **justice** and **equality**. **Doris Kearns Goodwin**, in *Team of Rivals* (2005), highlights that Lincoln's ability to align **moral clarity** with **political strategy** was key to his success. By advocating for the 13th Amendment, Lincoln ensured that the legal foundation for justice and equality would endure, even after the war ended.

Lincoln's commitment to justice extended beyond his legal and political actions. His leadership during the Civil War, particularly in his efforts to maintain Union support for the abolition of slavery, contributed to the moral transformation of the nation. As **Garry Wills** in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992) points out, Lincoln's ability to frame the war as a moral struggle for freedom gave the Union cause a moral justification that inspired both soldiers and civilians. The **Gettysburg Address**, delivered in November 1863, linked the fight for the Union with the ideals of equality and liberty, positioning the war as a battle not just to preserve the Union, but to fulfill the nation's promise of freedom for all.

5.3 Influence of Lincoln's Principles on Contemporary Political Leadership and Social Justice Movements

The moral leadership Lincoln exhibited during the Civil War continues to resonate in contemporary **political leadership** and **social justice movements**. Lincoln's principles of **freedom** and **justice** have inspired numerous **civil rights movements** throughout American history, particularly the **Civil Rights Movement** of the 1960s. As **Doris Kearns Goodwin** notes in *Team of Rivals* (2005), Lincoln's leadership during the Civil War and his commitment to justice laid the groundwork for the eventual **civil rights victories** that would follow nearly 100 years later. The struggles of African Americans for full equality and justice were fundamentally grounded in the **moral clarity** Lincoln displayed when he linked freedom and justice to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

Lincoln's leadership also continues to inform global discussions on **human rights** and **freedom**. The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights**, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, echoes Lincoln's commitment to **equality** and **liberty** as foundational human rights. **Garry Wills** in *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (1992) argues that Lincoln's speeches, particularly the **Gettysburg Address**, were not only central to the American understanding of freedom but also had a global influence. Lincoln's **vision of equality** and his insistence on universal freedom have served as a model for political leaders and social justice advocates worldwide.

In contemporary times, Lincoln's legacy continues to shape discussions of **racial justice** and **political leadership**. Movements like **Black Lives Matter** and other modern civil rights organizations draw from Lincoln's principles when advocating for equality under the law, freedom from oppression, and the moral responsibility of governments to protect the rights of all citizens. Lincoln's personal integrity, coupled with his **moral vision**, offers a guiding example for contemporary leaders facing **political crises** and **moral dilemmas**. His ability to reconcile political necessity with moral duty provides a powerful lesson for today's leaders who navigate complex social and political landscapes, particularly in the fight for **social justice** and **human rights**.

In conclusion, Lincoln's leadership in the Civil War, particularly through his moral commitment to freedom and justice, fundamentally transformed the nation's concept of liberty and equality. His stance on slavery and freedom was driven by deeply held moral beliefs, which, over time, evolved into a resolute commitment to the **abolition of slavery** and the **preservation of the Union**. Lincoln's leadership not only shaped the outcome of the Civil War but also set a moral standard for future generations. His principles continue to inspire contemporary movements for racial justice, civil rights, and freedom, demonstrating the enduring power of **moral clarity** and **integrity** in political leadership. Lincoln's legacy is a testament to the importance of **moral courage** in navigating national crises, ensuring that his leadership continues to serve as a touchstone for social justice movements worldwide.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has explored how Abraham Lincoln's **moral values**, particularly his evolving views on **freedom, justice, and equality**, shaped his leadership during the Civil War and beyond. From his early career as a politician to his presidency, Lincoln's personal convictions were integral to his decision-making process, especially in addressing the issue of slavery. Early in his political career, Lincoln's views on slavery were driven by his commitment to preserving the Union. However, as the Civil War escalated, his moral convictions evolved, pushing him toward a moral and political stance that sought the abolition of slavery as an essential component of the nation's survival.

A key finding of this study is that Lincoln's moral reasoning was not static. His understanding of freedom, initially focused on the preservation of the Union, gradually expanded to encompass the liberation of enslaved people. This shift was marked by pivotal moments in Lincoln's leadership, such as the **Emancipation Proclamation** of 1863, which declared all slaves in Confederate-held territories free, and his eventual support for the **13th Amendment**, which permanently abolished slavery in the United States. Lincoln's actions during these moments reflected his deepening moral commitment to **equality** and **freedom**, as he came to understand that the nation could not fully live up to its founding principles while slavery persisted.

Another significant insight is that Lincoln's leadership was not just driven by political strategy but by a deeply held belief in justice and human rights. Lincoln saw the Civil War as not just a battle for the Union but as a moral struggle for justice. His ability to align the fight to preserve the Union with the moral imperative to abolish slavery marked his leadership as both politically astute and morally courageous. This dual commitment to **justice** and **political necessity** underscores Lincoln's ability to navigate complex moral and political dilemmas while staying true to his fundamental beliefs in **freedom** and **equality**.

Furthermore, Lincoln's personal integrity, often celebrated in his reputation as "Honest Abe," was a cornerstone of his moral leadership. His ability to remain morally steadfast, even in the face of immense political pressure and national division, shaped the course of his presidency and earned him the respect of both allies and opponents. Lincoln's leadership demonstrated that personal integrity is essential for effective governance, particularly during times of moral crisis. His **honesty, empathy, and commitment to human dignity** enabled him to unite a fractured nation and push through monumental changes that would reshape the future of the United States.

Abraham Lincoln's leadership has left an indelible mark on American ideals of **freedom, justice, and equality**, and his legacy continues to resonate in contemporary discussions of human rights and political leadership. Lincoln's commitment to the **Abolition of Slavery** and the protection of individual freedoms reshaped the trajectory of the United States and set a moral example that would inspire future generations of Americans to fight for civil rights and social justice.

Lincoln's legacy is particularly important in shaping modern American values regarding **equality** and **justice**. His leadership during the Civil War and his dedication to ending slavery laid the foundation for future struggles for civil rights, particularly in the 20th century. **The Civil Rights Movement** of the 1960s, led by figures such as Martin Luther King Jr., was deeply influenced by the principles of equality and freedom that Lincoln advanced during his presidency. Lincoln's words in the **Gettysburg Address**, calling for a nation "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal," continue to serve as a foundational text in the ongoing fight for racial justice and equality in the United States.

Lincoln's vision of the United States as a **nation of liberty**, where all people are guaranteed equal protection under the law, has become an essential part of the American ethos. His moral leadership,

which bridged the divide between political expediency and personal integrity, serves as a beacon for contemporary leaders. As the United States faces ongoing challenges related to **racial inequality, economic disparity, and social justice**, Lincoln's legacy offers enduring lessons in the importance of upholding **moral clarity and justice** in the face of difficult political circumstances.

Furthermore, Lincoln's leadership has continued to inspire global movements for **human rights and freedom**. His belief that **freedom and equality** are universal rights has informed not only U.S. policy but also international discussions on the rights of marginalized groups. His commitment to ensuring that all individuals, regardless of race, enjoy the same **freedoms** under the law laid the groundwork for **international human rights frameworks** such as the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)** adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

The enduring relevance of Lincoln's moral vision is particularly evident in contemporary political and social movements. Movements like **Black Lives Matter** and **Me Too**, which advocate for justice, equality, and the dismantling of systemic oppression, draw from Lincoln's moral clarity and vision of a nation committed to **human dignity**. His ability to adapt his **moral stance** to the evolving needs of the nation demonstrates the enduring power of moral leadership in shaping public policy and national values.

While this study has examined Lincoln's leadership in relation to his moral values of **freedom, justice, and equality**, there is significant room for further exploration. One area for future research could involve examining the continued influence of Lincoln's moral principles on **modern political thought and leadership styles**. Lincoln's ability to balance **moral clarity** with **political pragmatism** offers valuable insights for contemporary leaders who face complex moral and ethical dilemmas. Future research could explore how political leaders today can draw from Lincoln's example to confront issues of inequality, civil rights, and political division in their own nations.

Additionally, further studies could focus on the **global impact** of Lincoln's moral leadership. While much of the scholarly focus has been on Lincoln's impact on the United States, his moral principles of freedom and justice have influenced political movements worldwide. Research could explore how Lincoln's leadership has been adopted by international human rights movements and whether his moral framework has informed **global policy decisions** related to **equality, immigration, and racial justice**.

Another avenue for future research could be the examination of **Lincoln's leadership style** and how it contributed to his success in dealing with the moral crises of his time. More detailed studies could investigate how Lincoln's **personal integrity, empathy, and communication skills** allowed him to unify a divided nation and enact monumental social and political changes. Understanding these aspects of Lincoln's leadership could provide important lessons for **contemporary leaders** facing similar societal challenges.

Lastly, exploring **Lincoln's influence on modern social justice movements** is another critical area of study. As movements for racial justice and human rights continue to evolve, understanding how Lincoln's moral leadership influenced these movements could help bridge the gap between historical leadership and contemporary activism. Lincoln's commitment to moral **principles of justice and equality** continues to provide a model for leaders today in their pursuit of a more just and equitable society.

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