



AMERICAN TEMPLE



Many visitors to the Lincoln Memorial remark on the former president’s hands, one open, the other closed, representing different aspects of Lincoln’s character.

COURTESY PHOTOS | NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Lincoln Memorial turns 100

Modeled on the Greek Parthenon and dedicated on May 30, 1922, the Lincoln Memorial quickly became so much more than a tribute to Abraham Lincoln.

Today, the Lincoln Memorial on the National Mall in Washington, D.C., is as much a symbol of the United States as the nearby White House, U.S. Capitol, or the Statue of Liberty in New York City.

Among the 50,000 people present for the dedication were President Warren Harding, former President and then Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court, William Howard Taft, who also chaired the Lincoln Memorial Commission, and Abraham Lincoln’s sole surviving son, Robert Todd Lincoln.

The “American Temple,” as

it was called, honored the 16th President, who led the United States through the Civil War, and who, in 1848 as a member of Congress, had been present when the cornerstone was laid nearby for the nearby Washington Monument.

The Memorial is surrounded by 36 columns — one for each state in the Union at the time of Lincoln’s death in 1865 — and divided into three chambers. One chamber contains the words of Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address in 1863, and the other the words of his Second Inaugural Address in 1865. In the center is the statue of a seated Lincoln, one hand open, the other closed.

Supervising sculptor Daniel Chester French focused on the two sides of Lincoln’s character, according to the National

Park Service: “His strength combined with his compassionate nature. ... French depicted the president as a worn but strong individual who had endured many hardships. He positioned Lincoln’s hands in a manner that displayed his two leading qualities. One of the president’s hands is clenched, representing his strength and determination to see the war through to a successful conclusion. The other hand is a more open, slightly more relaxed hand representing his compassionate, warm nature.”

Rangers like to note the hands, and sometimes reference Lincoln biographer Carl Sandburg, who wrote: “Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on Earth who is both steel and velvet, who is hard as a rock and soft as a drifting fog, who holds in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and

peace unspeakable and perfect.”

Dr. Robert Russa Moton, president of the Tuskegee Institute, delivered the keynote address for the dedication, emphasizing dual dimensions of American history.

“While the Mayflower was riding at anchor preparing for her voyage from Plymouth, another ship had already arrived at Jamestown,” Moton said. “The first was to bear the pioneers of freedom ... the latter had already borne the pioneers of bondage. Here, then, upon American soil within a year met the two great forces that were to shape the destiny of the Nation. ... In the process of time, as was inevitable, these great forces of liberty and the forces of bondage from the ships at Plymouth and Jamestown met in open conflict upon the field of battle.”

‘In this temple
as in the hearts of the people
for whom he saved the union
the memory of Abraham Lincoln
is enshrined forever’

Inscription in Statuary Chamber by New York
Herald Tribune writer Royal Cortissoz

Memorial facts

- **THE STATUE** of Abraham Lincoln was originally going to be just 10 feet tall, but it was later enlarged. If Lincoln were standing he would be 28 feet tall.
- **THE STATUE** of Lincoln is made from white marble from Georgia and weighs 175 tons.
- **THERE ARE TWO** murals in the Memorial. The one on the South Wall is titled “Emancipation, and shows an angel releasing slaves from bondage. The North mural is titled “Unity” and shows an angel joining hands of two figures, representing North and South.
- **THE REFLECTING POOL** was not completed when the Lincoln Memorial was dedicated in 1922.
- **U.S. REPS.** Shelby M. Cullom and Joseph G. Cannon - both of whom knew Lincoln from Illinois - pushed through the legislation to create a memorial to honor the 16th president.
- **THE MEMORIAL** is about 190 feet long, 120 feet wide, 99 feet tall and made with stone from many states, including granite from Massachusetts, limestone from Indiana, and marble from Colorado, Tennessee and Alabama.

SOURCES: NATIONAL PARK SERVICE,
ABRAHAMLINCOLNONLINE.COM

Moments from the Memorial

Marian Anderson performs outdoor concert

SEVENTEEN YEARS after its dedication, on Easter Sunday, April 9, 1939, the Lincoln Memorial became the stage for a protest against racism, after singer Marian Anderson had been denied by the Daughters of the American Revolution a chance to sing at nearby Constitution Hall because she was Black. At the behest of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, it was arranged for Anderson to perform an outdoor concert at the Memorial.

PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL PARK SERVICE



Harry Truman addresses NAACP

ON JUNE 29, 1947, Harry Truman became the first president to address the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) when he spoke at the Lincoln Memorial during their convention. In that speech, before 10,000 people, carried nationally on radio, Truman laid out the need to end discrimination and his proposed civil rights legislation.



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Martin Luther King Jr. delivers historic speech

ON AUG., 28, 1963, the Lincoln Memorial was the site of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, and on that day, Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his “I Have A Dream” speech, which called on America to live up to its own promises

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