



## Lincoln's Eulogy of Henry Clay

On July 6, 1852, eight days after the death of Henry Clay, Abraham Lincoln eulogized the fallen Kentucky politician in the Illinois statehouse to an assembly of Whig Party members and other admirers. Lincoln had long esteemed Clay as "my beau ideal of a statesman."

Throughout his career, Lincoln proclaimed in his eulogy, Clay had "constantly been the most loved, and most implicitly followed by friends, and the most dreaded by opponents, of all living American politicians." "In all the great questions," Lincoln continued, "involving and endangering the stability of the Union, his was the most leading and conspicuous part."

Significantly, Lincoln took great inspiration from Clay's "devotion to the cause of human liberty." According to Lincoln, Clay "was on principle and in feeling, opposed to slavery." Indeed, "the very earliest, and one of the latest public efforts of his life, separated by a period of more than fifty years, were both made in favor of gradual emancipation of the slaves in Kentucky."

Lincoln saw a great parallel between Henry Clay's education and his own: "Mr. Clay's education, to the end of his life, was comparatively limited. I say 'to the end of his life,' because I have understood that, from time to time, he added something to his education during the greater part of his whole life. Mr. Clay's lack of a more perfect early education, however it may be regretted generally, teaches at least one profitable lesson; it teaches that in this country, one can scarcely be so poor, but that, if he *will*, he *can* acquire sufficient education to get through the world respectably."

Henry Clay (1777-1852), by William Fry, 1865  
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