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## DIVIDING A NATION

No period in our nation's history is so engrained in the minds of its citizens than the Civil War, or the War Between the States as it is sometimes called. Of all the conflicts in which these United States have been engaged, the Civil War has remained in the forefront of the minds of its citizens for over 143 years. The Civil War was unique because it was clearly a war of states. The engagements were fought not only by state militia and regular army from both sides, but also by men who fought their own relatives, friends and acquaintances. This nation suffered more casualties than those in any other wars combined until Vietnam. But significantly, unlike World Wars I and II, this war was fought exclusively on America's soil and exclusively between its own people. We were a developing nation during the early 1860s with a total population around 31.5 million people. But our emergence as a nation that would be changed forever from within shows its strong national character and its unwillingness to bend for the good of the whole.

For five years we had two nations within one—each with its own central government headed by its own president

## *Lincoln and Davis*

and cabinet. Each functioned under its own philosophy of what a nation should be, what its national character should be, and what its own interpretation of what the founding fathers meant by human rights when they wrote out the constitution.

How were the founding fathers' words to be interpreted? Could these learned men have intended to include all peoples, men and women? Did this principle include those in bondage and those who had inhabited this country long before the arrival of the first settlers in 1607, or was it their intent to leave it up to future generations to interpret?

The Confederate States of America (CSA) and the United States of America (USA) were significantly different in terms of population, economic base and their ability to produce goods and services. e.g. The CSA was mainly agrarian, relying almost exclusively upon bondage labor for planting and harvesting at very little cost. Its population totaled nearly 12 million in 1860, of which the slave population totaled almost four million<sup>1</sup>. The USA included industrialized states and a greater population base than the CSA. However, more importantly, the task of maintaining the integrity of one nation under God rested with the duly elected government of the USA and its president, Abraham Lincoln.

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<sup>1</sup> Ibid; pp. 598-599

In 1861, the mood of the United States could best be described as defiant, bold, and determination as displayed by the people on either side of the Mason-Dixon Line. Representing the CSA was a fellow Kentuckian of Abraham Lincoln, Jefferson Davis. It is ironic that two strong-willed individuals of simple upbringing and deep moral and religious convictions would emerge as two political giants who would play a pivotal role in a struggle that divided a nation.

These two politicians shaped the thinking of a bewildered nation trying to survive during troubled times. It is fitting then that we look at how Lincoln and Davis were thrown into a situation not totally of their making or choosing and emerged as the ones chosen to lead their nation back as one or to succumb to regionalism and deprive a nation of its birthright as written in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States of America

A study of Lincoln and Davis shows how Lincoln as president of the United States was determined to uphold the oath of office that he was sworn to defend. While Jefferson Davis, the chosen leader of the Confederacy, took an oath to uphold the seceded states' rights to self-government. The stage was set, the players selected and a divided nation waited for an outcome to be determined through war.