



52nd

ANNUAL CONVOCATION &
INVESTITURE OF
STUDENT LAUREATES
TO THE LINCOLN ACADEMY
OF ILLINOIS

**Saturday, the Twenty-fourth of October
Two thousand Twenty-six**

**Old State Capitol
Representatives Hall
Springfield**



*“Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed
is more important than any other thing.”*

—ABRAHAM LINCOLN
16th United States President

THE LINCOLN ACADEMY OF ILLINOIS

Call to Order

Graham Grady, Regent

Processional

The Officers of the Academy
Academic Trustees
Regents & Rectors
General Trustees
Class of 2026 Student Laureates

Opening of the Convocation

Harold Oakley, Vice Chancellor

Speaking on behalf of the Student Laureates

Nyla McClinton, Dominican University
Ameilia Ko'u Anela Ann Hopkins, University of Illinois Springfield

Presentation of the Abraham Lincoln Civic Engagement Awards Class of 2026 Student Laureates

Harold Oakley, Vice Chancellor
Edgar Curtis, Lincoln Laureate
Hon. Rita B. Garman (ret.), Lincoln Laureate

Speaking on behalf of Lincoln Laureates

Dr. Reginald Petty, Lincoln Laureate
Jean Driscoll, Lincoln Laureate

Remarks

Harold Oakley, Vice Chancellor

Recessional

Millikin String Duo, Shane Sutton and Henry Koonce

THE LINCOLN ACADEMY OF ILLINOIS
HISTORY OF THE ACADEMY

The Lincoln Academy was established by proclamation of the Governor of Illinois in 1964, shortly after the New York World's Fair. During the World's Fair a reception was given for some of our state's most celebrated sons and daughters, which impressed Governor Otto Kerner and gave birth to a program to recognize distinguished Illinoisans annually through the establishment of the Order of Lincoln.

The medallion design is based on that of the French Legion of Honor. The colors represent the State symbols: red for the cardinal; deep purple for the violet; and green for the leaves of the oak tree. The motto, "Palmarum Qui Meruit, Ferat" ("Let him who merits bear the palm") is based on that of Horatio Viscount Nelson.

The first Convocation and Investiture of Laureates was held on Lincoln's birthday, February 12, 1965, at the Chicago Historical Society and convocations have been held in locations across the state every year since then. During the Bicentennial of Lincoln's birth in 2009, a special Bicentennial Edition of the Order of Lincoln was established, and thirty distinguished Lincoln scholars, collectors, artists, and curators from around the world were honored.

In 1992, Governor Jim Edgar, President of the Lincoln Academy, initiated the creation of a Hall of Fame of Historic Illinoisans whose achievements and contributions were made prior to the establishment of the Lincoln Academy in 1964. Fifty Hall of Fame Honorees were selected. In 2018, in recognition of the Bicentennial of Illinois, the Academy re-constituted the Hall of Fame and additional Historic Illinoisans have been selected.

The mission of the Lincoln Academy was expanded in 1975 by the Student Laureate Program, in which an outstanding senior from each of the four-year degree-granting colleges and universities in Illinois and one student representing our state's community colleges are honored. **Thus, the Lincoln Academy honors the Great Citizens of Today and Celebrates the Great Citizens of Tomorrow.**

The 21st Century has welcomed a world of change and diversity. The sons and daughters of the Twenty-first State continue to make their imprint on history, and in the main, help to make this a better world for their own and future generations.

THE LINCOLN ACADEMY OF ILLINOIS
2026 STUDENT LAUREATES

Student Laureate	Institution	Academic Trustee
Olivia James Fleming	Augustana College	Andrea K. Talentino
Riley Doggett	Aurora University	Susana Rivera-Mills
Mahnoor Fatani	Benedictine University	Joseph J. Foy
DaNautica Williams	Blackburn College	Larry Lee
Caleb Robert Hollis	Bradley University	James Shadid
Kaden C. Pickard	Carl Sandburg College	
Alyssa Jasmine Perea	Chicago State University	Zaldwaynaka "Z" Scott
Rebeca Adelaida Urzua Canela	Columbia College Chicago	Shantay Bolton
Sarah Elizabeth Redhage	Concordia University Chicago	Russell Dawn
Sara Elizabeth Maloney Hughes	DePaul University	Robert L. Manuel
Nyla McClinton	Dominican University	Glena Temple
Laney LeeAnn Wright	Eastern Illinois University	Jay D. Gatrell
Jamaya Ariel Fullilove	East-West University	M. Wasiullah Khan
Kristin Rosario Bukata	Elmhurst University	Troy D. VanAken
Maleah Hill	Eureka College	Jamel Wright
Amber M. Whitted	Governors State University	Joyce Ester
William Warman	Greenville University	Suzanne Davis
Emma Dunsworth	Illinois College	Barbara Farley
Jilliana Dawn Pilutti	Illinois Institute of Technology	Raj Echambadi
Neer U. Jain	Illinois State University	Aondover Tarhule
Mannat Kaur Kandal	Illinois Wesleyan University	Sheahon Zenger
Gracie A. Lockett	Judson University	Gene C. Crume
Elena Marie King	Knox College	C. Andrew McGadney
Anika McKinney Kinnear	Lake Forest College	Mike Sosulski
Mary E. Lee	Lewis University	David J. Livingston
Victoria Prause	Loyola University Chicago	Mark C. Reed
Kelsey Dionna Lyles	McKendree University	Daniel C. Dobbins
Alayna Diane Schultz	Millikin University	Dean Pribbenow
Claire Elyse LaBadie	Monmouth College	Patricia Draves
Nurtilek Raimzhanov	National Louis University	Eddie Phillips
Miranda Analiah Dominguez	North Central College	Abiodun Goke-Pariola
Jorge Ricardo Rodriguez Barletta	North Park University	Mary Karsten Surridge

THE LINCOLN ACADEMY OF ILLINOIS
2026 STUDENT LAUREATES *(continued)*

Student Laureate	Institution	Academic Trustee
Hannah Grace Havel	Northern Illinois University	Lisa C. Freeman
Kris Soojin Yun	Northwestern University	Henry S. Bienen
Rafael Armando Ascencio Garcia	Principia College	Meggan Madden
Megan Marie Schill	Quincy University	Brian McGee
Saidi Ishmail	Rockford University	Patricia Lynott
Alejandro Pina Jr.	Roosevelt University	Ali Malekzadeh
Aine Siobhan Kelly	Saint Xavier University	Keith Elder
Anisa Vida Lopez	School of the Art Institute of Chicago	Jiseon Lee Isbara
Kaitlynne Franklin	Southern Illinois University Carbondale	Austin A. Lane
Jennifer Emery	Southern Illinois University Edwardsville	James T. Minor
Michelle Claire Du	University of Chicago	Paul Alivisatos
Arseny Acosta Nunez	University of Illinois Chicago	Marie Lynn Miranda
Ameilia Ko'u Anela Ann Hopkins	University of Illinois Springfield	Janet L. Gooch
Madison Christine Fanning	University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign	Charles Lee Isbell, Jr.
Skyler Kandyce Yazum	University of St. Francis	Ryan Hendrickson
Lizbeth Rodriguez	VanderCook College of Music	Kimberly Farris
Kylie Marie Kinser	Western Illinois University	Kristi Mindrup
Elizabeth Grace Clawson	Wheaton College	Philip G. Ryken

Trustees at Large

Timothy L. Killeen
University of Illinois

Daniel F. Mahony
Southern Illinois University

Brian Durham, Executive Director
Illinois Community College Board

THE LINCOLN ACADEMY OF ILLINOIS
CLASS OF 2026
STUDENT LAUREATE LEGACY STATEMENTS

Augustana College – Olivia James Fleming

Although he was the president of the U.S more than 150 years ago, Lincoln's commitment to equality in his political policies and community relationships is still needed in our country today. We can use his actions as examples to stand up for oppressed groups, lift up marginalized populations, and engage in our communities in meaningful ways. The fight for equality is ongoing, but each time someone speaks up for equality, we take a step forward, whether it's a president banning slavery or a college student working to ensure everyone on campus is respected. Every action, no matter how large or small, brings us closer to equality for everyone.

Aurora University – Riley Doggett

Lincoln's Leadership Legacy is a reminder that it only takes one person to make one small change to make a difference in the world. Being involved in the community, whether it is on or off campus, is a daily choice that I get to make and will continue to make because of how important that work can be to somebody. Not everyone has the ability to help; some people need the help. I will use my platform and my privilege to live a civic-minded life of service and commit to always contribute to the greater good. This award is an honor, a blessing, and will be my daily reminder to always help, lead, and be the good in this world.

Benedictine University – Mahnoor Fatani

President Abraham Lincoln's legacy reminds me that leadership is not defined by the position you hold, but by the responsibility you have to serve others and contribute to something greater than yourself. This is the value I have tried to carry throughout my time at Benedictine University.

As President of the Accounting Club at Benedictine University, I have worked to create opportunities for students to learn, connect, and prepare for their futures. Through the Student Senate (student government), I have had the opportunity to represent and advocate for my fellow peers and help strengthen our campus community. As co-founder of the Global Justice Club, I have worked alongside others to create conversations and opportunities that encourage students to engage with issues beyond themselves. Each of these experiences has shown me that leadership is, at its heart, about service. What I admire most about Lincoln is his ability to lead with perseverance, humility, and a commitment to unity even during times of division. I hope to carry those qualities into my future career and community by listening to others, bringing people together, and using my voice and opportunities to help others succeed.

Being a Lincoln Laureate is both an honor and a responsibility. I hope to honor Lincoln's legacy by making service a lifelong commitment and by measuring my success not only by what I accomplish, but by the people I empower and the communities I help strengthen.

Blackburn College – DaNautica Williams

Abraham Lincoln's legacy reminds me that leadership is not simply about holding a position, it is about using your voice, experiences, and opportunities to make a meaningful difference in the lives of others. As a Criminal Justice major with a minor in Psychology, I want to carry that lesson with me by remaining committed to service, compassion, advocacy, and creating positive change within my community.

Throughout my college experience, I have learned that civic engagement begins with being willing to show up for others. As a three-year Orientation Leader, former Vice President of the Black Student Union, member of my campus's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging Core Team, Women's Basketball Manager, and Student Representative on the Alumni Association Board, I have had the opportunity to serve and connect with people from many different backgrounds. Each experience has taught me that meaningful leadership requires listening, understanding, and creating opportunities for others to feel supported and included.

Lincoln's leadership legacy will guide me by reminding me to lead with integrity, remain committed during difficult moments, and use my education and experiences to serve a purpose greater than myself. I hope to become a leader who not only creates positive change but also encourages others to recognize their own ability to make a difference.

Bradley University – Caleb Robert Hollis

As I continue my commitment to public service, the legacy of President Abraham Lincoln will always help guide me. Throughout the Civil War, Lincoln made it his goal to unify the fractured country and to improve the rights of slaves. Keeping this in mind, I will continue to use my position to fight for the improvement of the lives of those who cannot do so for themselves. I will also remember to practice honesty in all areas of my life in order to morally achieve my goals, even if being honest is not in my best self-interest, much like "Honest Abe". President Lincoln also had a tremendous amount of humility, a trait that is key to effective collaboration with those who do not see eye-to-eye with one's self.

Carl Sandburg College – Kaden C. Pickard

As an education major who intends to teach Social Science, Lincoln's impact as a leader and the legacy he left behind mean a great deal to me. I aspire to be someone who, like Lincoln, becomes a leader who leaves a meaningful legacy behind, one that is greater than myself, whether it be through my volunteer work, teaching my future students, or small acts of kindness. I have dedicated myself to seeing through goals and ambitions that benefit others, more than they benefit myself. Through my leadership roles with Men of Distinction, the Student Ambassador program and TRIO SSS, I have compiled over 200 hours of community service through various civic engagement programs. I regularly visit the local schools in my community, giving students a resource that provides encouragement, support, and motivation. Lincoln's legacy in leadership has taught me that being a leader is not just a title, but something that you actively demonstrate through your own actions, service, and true commitment to the betterment of society.

Chicago State University – Alyssa Jasmine Perea

Lincoln's leadership legacy reminds me that true leadership is rooted in service, compassion, and a commitment to something greater than oneself. As a Criminal Justice major at Chicago State University and an Honors College student, I have learned that leadership is not simply about holding a position, but about using my voice and opportunities to uplift others and create meaningful change.

Through my involvement on campus, including serving as President and Secretary of the Organization of Latin American Students, a Wellness Ambassador, and a RISE Academy Peer Mentor, I have had the opportunity to support, advocate for, and connect with other students. These experiences have strengthened my belief that civic engagement begins with being willing to listen, serve, and take action within your own community.

Lincoln's example will guide me to pursue a life centered on justice, equality, and service. As I continue my education and work toward a career in criminal justice, I want to use my knowledge and experiences to advocate for individuals and communities whose voices may otherwise go unheard. His legacy challenges me to lead with integrity, remain committed during difficult moments, and recognize that

meaningful change is built through service to others. I hope to carry that responsibility throughout my career and beyond, leaving a positive impact on the communities I serve.

Columbia College Chicago – Rebeca Adelaida Urzua Canela

I am sure that such a huge recognition as this award means that if we all were able to accomplish something like this, we can change the world that we live in today. Lincoln's leadership legacy reminds me that change is possible when people are willing to serve, work together, and commit themselves to something greater than themselves. Through this recognition, we have demonstrated that it is possible to make a difference, and I hope to continue carrying that belief with me by serving my community and contributing to a greater good.

Concordia University Chicago – Sarah Elizabeth Redhage

During my time at Concordia University Chicago, I have been blessed with so many opportunities to grow as a person, learn new things, and help others. My studies in Art have granted me valuable opportunities not only as an artist, but as a member of the Chicago community. Recently, I was part of an art show which collaborated with local nonprofits to raise support and awareness of their causes. As a member of CUC's Chamber Orchestra, I have helped to share music and God's Word to others through local and outreach concerts. Other service opportunities include serving community meals at a church downtown, and landscaping work at my local church. As a student in the Honors program, I have not only been able to take fascinating and valuable courses, but have also received a generous scholarship that makes all of these opportunities possible. In the future, I hope to continue my community involvement and service to others wherever I go, and carry with me everything that I have learned so far.

DePaul University – Sara Elizabeth Maloney Hughes

In every aspect of my life, both personal and professional, I value access to free resources and knowledge. Everyone deserves access to their basic needs, a third space, information about the past and present, whether through technology or books, and the opportunity to explore their hobbies and interests. I plan to continue Lincoln's Leadership Legacy by pursuing higher education in library science and ultimately work towards a career in the public library system. Through this career path, I hope to make sure that libraries can help provide equitable access to resources, information, and opportunities for learning. I am very passionate about fostering a community space where everyone is welcome, and individuals are able to be themselves. By promoting accessibility, knowledge, and unity, I hope that it can help communities grow and creating a lasting, positive impact.

Dominican University – Nyla McClinton

As a Behavioral Neuroscience student at Dominican University, I have come to understand that meaningful leadership is rooted in service to others. Through my experiences as a Schmitt Scholar, weekend youth instructor, and research assistant, I have seen how compassion, integrity, and a willingness to support others can create lasting change. These experiences have taught me that leadership is not simply about guiding others, but about listening, uplifting those around you, and working toward a greater good.

Lincoln's leadership legacy inspires me to approach my own path with courage, humility, and a commitment to serving my community. As I continue pursuing a career in psychology, I hope to use my education and experiences to advocate for mental health, empower others, and contribute to a more compassionate and equitable society.

Eastern Illinois University – Laney LeeAnn Wright

Abraham Lincoln's leadership legacy played a pivotal role in unifying the United States. He led with courage, integrity, and a steadfast commitment to the nation. As I earn a degree in marketing, I hope to follow his example by using communication to advance a mission greater than myself. I aim for my work in marketing to foster unity, reveal the Gospel, and upbuild the kingdom of God. I will enter my career with my values at the forefront of every decision, striving to create work that is authentic, honest, and rooted in faith.

Lincoln's example reminds me that true leadership is defined by humility, integrity, and service to others. I hope my work reflects those virtues while also extending beyond my profession through service to my community. Whether in my career or everyday life, I want to be someone who leads with compassion, encourages others, and contributes to a greater good.

East-West University – Jamaya Ariel Fullilove

Growing up, I was blessed to be raised by two parents who always worked hard and showed me the value of responsibility, determination, and perseverance. Although my parents divorced while I was in high school, they never stopped encouraging me to do my best. Adjusting to that change was difficult, and there were times when it affected me emotionally. Even through those challenges, I focused on my education because I wanted to make my parents proud and continue working toward my future. Neither of my parents had the opportunity to attend college but always reminded me that education could open doors they never had the chance to walk through. Their sacrifices have motivated me to pursue a bachelor's degree in Behavioral Science and build a career where I can make a meaningful difference in the lives of others.

My goal is to work for the Cook County Medical Examiner's Office as a crime scene investigator. I want to help families find answers during some of the hardest moments of their lives and play a role in bringing justice to those who need it most. This career combines my passion for helping others with my desire to serve my community in a meaningful way.

The values represented by the Lincoln Academy of Illinois are leadership, integrity, service, and commitment to others, reflecting the person I strive to become. Receiving this scholarship would not only help me continue my education, but it would also encourage me to keep working hard, give back to my community, and create opportunities for myself and others.

Elmhurst University – Kristin Rosario Bukata

Truthfully, it is hard to imagine how Abraham Lincoln would lead in today's society, but his continued strength under pressure is a lesson for all young people. Throughout a presidency filled with complex issues, he had to ignore the perpetual criticism directed at him. Lincoln did not allow these critiques to stop him from making decisions that he felt were best for the greater good. As I venture into the next phase of my life, teaching math and coaching basketball, I realize that there will be pressure from parents, students, administrators, and faculty. Decisions might be tough, but ultimately, I must remember my role as a leader for young people in my community and assist them on their way to a brighter future. I hope to be worthy of this distinguished award and carry on the Lincoln legacy.

Eureka College – Maleah Hill

I'm filled with gratefulness to accept the Lincoln Laureate award for leadership and it inspires me to continue my service beyond the halls of Eureka College. It's my last year and I'm excited to find new ways to impact my community for years to come.

Governors State University – Amber M. Whitted

As a non-traditional student/leader at Governors State University, I have come to understand that education is about more than earning a degree. It is about becoming better prepared to contribute to the world around me. Abraham Lincoln's leadership legacy offers a powerful example of what that contribution can look like: leading with integrity, remaining committed to one's principles, and recognizing that our individual lives are connected to a greater good.

At this stage of my life, I approach leadership with a deeper appreciation for purpose. I believe leadership is not limited to elected officials, executives, or people with impressive titles. It can be demonstrated in our workplaces, communities, churches, classrooms, and everyday relationships. It is found in how we treat people, often trading stature for service and using our voices to make room for others. Lincoln's example will guide me to remain mindful of the responsibility I have to contribute beyond myself. I want to use my education, professional experience, and creativity in ways that strengthen my community and encourage others to recognize their own possibilities.

A civic-minded life means understanding that personal achievement and service should never be separate. The goal is to live a life that extends beyond me—to leave communities better because I was willing to care. It is my hope that my leadership is not measured by the recognition I receive but by the good I leave behind.

Greenville University – William Warman

To me, living a civic-minded life means living for something greater than myself. It means using my gifts and opportunities to positively impact the lives of those around me. As I begin my education at Logan University to pursue a career in chiropractic, I am excited by the opportunity to help people improve their quality of life by encouraging healthier, more active lives.

Service extends beyond a career. In my Christian faith, I continually strive to model my life after Jesus, seeking to serve others before myself through humility, integrity, and perseverance. A commitment to the communities I am part of is a pillar of my life, and I hope to carry that commitment into every stage of my future.

My goal is to measure success not only by what I accomplish personally, but by the positive impact I have on the people and communities around me. I hope to use my career, my faith, and my abilities to serve others and contribute to something greater than myself.

Illinois College – Emma Dunsworth

I am honored to receive this award and inspired to continue a life of leadership and service. Abraham Lincoln's Leadership Legacy reminds me to focus on perseverance and empathy as pillars for servant leadership. Guided by his values, Lincoln faced many struggles but remained committed to his goals. Lincoln was especially skilled at bringing together people who had diverse perspectives and uniting them in a common goal. His example serves as a reminder that leadership is not always an easy path but is often a very rewarding journey.

When I enrolled in college, I chose to move far away from home to a campus where I did not know anyone. I experienced many moments of homesickness and even questioned my academic choices. With prayer and support from family and friends, I persevered while I found my footing on campus. Over time, I realized that I could continue to grow by stepping into a leadership role and being a compassionate resource for students. I focused on being empathetic and offering assistance to others who might quietly be struggling too. I learned that I can be a leader without being the loudest voice in a room. As I found my voice, I also became a nursing student class representative. In this role, I am mindful of making sure that all voices are heard and the common goal remains in focus.

Leadership in the spirit of Lincoln involves deep empathy, compassion and perseverance. I draw inspiration from Lincoln's story and aim to apply my own skills, building a community while empowering others to also find the strength to lead and write their own legacy.

Illinois Institute of Technology – Jilliana Dawn Pilutti

Empathy, humility, mentorship, and community service are all qualities of servant leadership, a style of leadership recognized in Abraham Lincoln's legacy. For the past three years, I have been a scholar in the M.A. & Lila Self Leadership Academy, a prestigious leadership development program at Illinois Institute of Technology. The primary focus of my leadership development within this program is embedded in developing these attributes. The Leadership Academy has instilled the belief that a leader's primary responsibility is to support, empower, and create opportunities for those they lead. Lincoln's unwavering commitment to the greater good thus serves as a model for how I aspire and will continue to lead. While pursuing a career in architecture and structural engineering, I am consistently designing with the human experience in mind. Architectural design, to me, is rooted in building communities and supporting them with innovation that can inspire. My primary responsibility as an architect, engineer, and dual citizen is to serve each community I am designing for. As I move forward in my career, I will continue to embody Lincoln's commitment to service by approaching leadership as a responsibility to improve the lives of those who experience and depend upon the spaces I design. Further, I will continue to design for communities all over the world, creating spaces that empower people to pursue their goals and provide the resources to do so.

I am honored to be considered for this award, and I am grateful for the mentors and peers whose support has shaped my growth as a leader.

Illinois State University – Neer U. Jain

When I first came to Illinois, I was far from home and unsure of where I belonged. I had goals for myself, but I did not yet understand how much the people and communities around me would shape them. Over time, I learned that belonging is not something we simply find. We build it through the responsibilities we accept, the people we learn from, and what we choose to give back.

What I admire most about Lincoln's legacy is his willingness to continue learning and growing through uncertainty. His life reminds me that service and leadership do not always require having the right answer. Sometimes, they begin with listening, questioning what we believe, and having the courage to act when the path forward is unclear.

My experiences at Illinois State have taught me much of the same. I have been a student, researcher, representative, mentor, and leader, but also someone who has failed, adjusted, and tried again. I have learned that leadership is less about being the person at the front and more about taking responsibility for the people around us. I have also been fortunate to have professors, peers, and a university community that invested in me before I always felt prepared for it.

I do not know exactly where my path will take me, and I have become comfortable admitting that. I want to remain curious, continue learning from those around me, and use the opportunities I receive to create opportunities for others. Lincoln's legacy will remind me that a meaningful life is defined not only by how far we go, but by what we contribute along the way.

Illinois Wesleyan University – Mannat Kaur Kandal

When I think about the one word that has defined my college experience, it is "community." When I first stepped into the United States as an international student three years ago, I was determined to find a

sense of belonging in the spaces around me. But in searching for my own community, I began finding ways to create it for others.

To me, Lincoln's leadership legacy is a reminder that leadership is ultimately about responsibility: the responsibility to listen, to stand up for others, and to leave a community better than you found it. I have learned that service does not always look like one grand act. More often, it means noticing who is being left out, creating space for people to be heard, and being willing to act on what you learn.

Studying psychology has deepened my understanding of how belonging, opportunity, and well-being are shaped by the communities and systems around us. Through student government, residential life, cultural organizations, research, and community-based work, I have tried to lead with empathy and curiosity while making the spaces I am part of more inclusive and responsive to the people within them.

Lincoln's example will continue to remind me that achievement means little if it serves only ourselves. As I move forward, I hope to build a life in which my education and career are connected to a greater purpose: understanding people and systems, advocating for voices that may be overlooked, and helping create communities where people feel seen, supported, and empowered. To me, a civic-minded life means continually choosing to use what I have learned in service of something larger than myself.

Judson University – Gracie A. Lockett

Abraham Lincoln's legacy as a leader teaches me the importance of moral courage and a commitment to serving others. Early in his career Lincoln witnessed John Quincy Adams fight for the end of slavery despite constant opposition, serving as an example of fighting for what is right even when it's not the easy thing to do. Lincoln carried forward these principles that we have a responsibility to step up as leaders when we see injustice. He reminds me that leaders don't just see problems but take action to address them. In my leadership at Judson University, I strive to have Lincoln's honesty, integrity, and compassion for the people around me. I will follow his example by serving others and working towards solutions that strengthen my community. His legacy inspires me to use my education and abilities for something greater than myself.

Knox College – Elena Marie King

Taking courses in American Political Theory and being at a historic college that was not only a stop on the underground railroad but a site of the Lincoln-Douglas debates I have a deeper understanding of the legacy that Lincoln left for our nation. Lincoln was most concerned with uniting the nation and obtaining peace by ending the Civil War. He cared deeply about the values of natural justice seen in the Declaration of Independence and Constitution, and referred to the government in the Gettysburg Address as: "Of the people, by the people, and for the people."

After Knox I plan to attend law school with the hopes of protecting natural and constitutional law to ensure the quality and legitimacy of our democracy just as Lincoln did during his presidency. During time periods of extreme partisanship and polarization it is critical to remember the mission of Lincoln, as commitment to bettering the nation cannot be achieved if we do not first have unity within our country and active civic participation. This requires not only being an informed citizen myself, but encouraging others to get involved and have care and empathy for the people in and out of their communities. In all of my leadership opportunities, I have been most enriched by leaving things better for others, even if I myself did not directly benefit from the changes that were made. Lincoln understood that effective leadership often requires sacrifice and strategy, reflecting the kind life I work to lead.

Lake Forest College – Anika McKinney Kinnear

In a world of ever-growing divide, hostility, and turmoil, acting in the best interest for the greater good isn't always an easy choice. It sometimes means making the hard, unpopular decisions in order to stand for those who need it most. As Lincoln said, "It often requires more courage to dare to do right than to

fear to do wrong.” Even when wracked with angst about how to preserve the Union and whether or not to abolish slavery in order to do that, Lincoln still made his most well-known decision on the basis of what would benefit the country.

In my journey through college, there have been moments in sports, in the classroom, and even in the community, when I’ve had to choose to do the hard over the easy, because of my conviction that it was the best decision for the most unity in the long run. As a civic minded individual, through my work in environmental justice and African American Studies, I hope to help draft and institute policy changes, bravely stepping outside of the box to facilitate equity and justice for all. I hope to help amplify voices that have been silenced, stand for those who cannot, and foster a community of love, inclusion, and intentional care for our generation and generations to come. I hope, like Lincoln, to dare to do right and take the first step in building a better tomorrow, and I hope to help others do the same.

Lewis University – Mary E. Lee

I used to think leadership meant having the answers, making hard decisions, solving problems, or being the rock people turned to. Over time, I stopped seeing people as roles and started seeing them as an ecosystem of strengths. I realized my strengths as a leader were less about answers or decisions—but in helping someone see themselves a little differently than they did the day before. It was about watching the quietest person become the person that everyone else listened to. It was in developing others’ leadership strengths by helping them believe they had something worth contributing. That’s when I realized: leadership isn’t about directing people. It’s about discovering them. It’s about seeing them. Or, perhaps more accurately, helping them to see themselves. I stopped caring about being remembered as a good leader and started caring about helping people believe a little more in themselves than they did before we met. When people recognize the strengths within themselves, they start to realize that they have something meaningful to offer those around them. The more I look for and encourage the strengths in every person, the more they can start to see them in themselves.

When I think about Lincoln’s legacy, I think less about the problems he solved or the hard decisions he made than about the people he inspired long after he was gone. I hope my service in leadership is not measured by the people who followed me, but by the people who no longer needed to—because people who have been truly seen rarely stop seeing others. I hope to spend my life investing in people who outgrow me.

Loyola University Chicago – Victoria Prause

Abraham Lincoln’s legacy is one rooted in service to the community and to the greater good. He understood that the relationships we form with others and our communities are integral to being a leader. Through my experiences at Loyola as a group lead for Loyola4Chicago and as an outreach coordinator with the Whitney Research Lab, I have grown to understand that meaningful change does not happen all at once. It is through the combined efforts and small acts of many that we can better our community. While Lincoln was a strong leader guided by empathy and integrity, it was the efforts of the people that allowed his hopes for the country to become reality.

McKendree University – Kelsey Dionna Lyles

Lincoln’s Leadership Legacy reminds me that leadership reflects not only how we present ourselves, but also how we impact others. I have always been passionate about helping people, and my psychology studies have strengthened my desire to better understand and support others. My goal is to be able to contribute to society by supporting underserved communities whose members deserve mental health professionals with the highest level of clinical knowledge.

As an African American woman and first-generation college student, being recognized as a leader is something I do not take for granted. It represents an opportunity and a responsibility to lead by example in every academic and professional setting I enter. I want my journey to encourage other students, particularly those who have faced adversity, to recognize their own potential and become impactful leaders themselves.

Even when the world no longer remembers my name, I hope it will be better because I helped increase the representation of Black women in psychology and highlighted opportunities for others to follow. Lincoln's legacy will guide me to continue to lead with purpose and to leave every community I am part of stronger than I found it.

Millikin University – Alayna Diane Schultz

Eight score and three years ago, Abraham Lincoln gave his Gettysburg address, honoring the American Civil War dead and giving hope to a hopeless nation in the midst of war. This speech is famous for redefining the war, and reinforcing a drive in the American people to win the war for the equality of all. While I could always hope to, but never fulfill Lincoln's role, I know that my efforts are seen because of my selection to be Millikin University's Lincoln Laureate nominee.

As a student in the School of Education, my goal has always been to inspire youth to not just go through the motions of their education, but to be inspired to learn. I want to provide them with the tools they need to succeed and create meaningful relationships with my students that they will remember for years to come. These tools and connections are what Abraham Lincoln was all about: Inspiring people, and connecting with people. In my time in college, I have also taken on many leadership opportunities, including being a leader of the Fellowship of Christian athletes, a Delight Ministries leader, and a captain of the Track and Field team. All of these opportunities have contributed to my love for serving others, which is an integral part of Lincoln's Leadership Legacy.

While all these leadership opportunities look great on a resume, nothing can replace the lessons I have learned from all these experiences. Through Lincoln's guiding principles, I can not only use these experiences to my advantage, but more importantly to the advantage of others.

Monmouth College – Claire Elyse LaBadie

Lincoln's Leadership Legacy guides me to live a life rooted in the servant leadership he displayed while serving the greater good. One of my biggest takeaways from Lincoln is that he led by example. During the Civil War, Lincoln personally visited military hospitals and spoke with wounded soldiers. He did not simply ask others to care for soldiers; he showed up himself. Just as Lincoln made difficult decisions and put the needs of others before himself, I try to bring that civic mindset to my leadership on campus and my community.

As ASAP President, I have learned that leading means stepping in and doing the work. Whether I am helping to plan an event or sweeping floors during cleanup, I try to demonstrate the same commitment I expect from others. I want those I work with to know that I am willing to put in the effort alongside them. As a Business and Economics tutor, I lead through others' success. I have learned to be patient and work alongside students to help them find answers rather than simply giving them the solution. Seeing a student understand something they struggled with reminds me that leadership can be as simple as helping someone reach their goals.

Lincoln's legacy will guide me beyond my time on campus by reminding me that civic leadership is a responsibility, not just a position. I want to remain engaged in my community by serving others and using my abilities to contribute to something greater than myself. Like Lincoln, I hope my actions reflect a lasting commitment to the people and communities I serve.

National Louis University – Nurtilek Raimzhanov

Abraham Lincoln's legacy reminds us that true leadership is measured not by personal achievement, but by the lives we uplift. As an international student from Kyrgyzstan, I came to the United States alone with a dream of creating opportunities through education, service, and innovation. Along the way, I learned that leadership begins with empathy, integrity, and a commitment to helping others succeed. Whether mentoring international students, strengthening community through the Kyrgyz Students Community and the Kyrgyz Community Center in Chicago, or building technology through my AI startup, SIML AI, I strive to create meaningful impact beyond myself. Receiving this honor reinforces my commitment to lead with humility, serve with purpose, and use innovation to improve lives. I hope to continue building bridges between communities, empowering others to reach their potential, and carrying forward Lincoln's legacy through a lifetime of civic engagement and service.

North Central College – Miranda Analiah Dominguez

Lincoln's leadership legacy reflects the core principle of service to one's community: every voice matters. His actions serve as a reminder that practicing empathy for those we serve is a strength in leadership, rather than an admission of weakness. As I continue to serve my own community, I will strive to consider perspectives beyond my own and acknowledge the lived experiences of those around me. As part of my commitment to a greater good, I will continue to advocate for social justice and ensure that my service contributes to a civic environment that values education, freedom, and human rights.

North Park University – Jorge Ricardo Rodriguez Barletta

Intellectual humility and hard work toward the common good are traits that define Lincoln's leadership. Born in Honduras but formed academically in the United States, my path has been guided by God and shaped by resilience and service. Throughout my journey as a young scientist, I have learned to accept criticism, discover the limits of my knowledge, and grow through adversity. In this way, my journey has taught me that Lincoln's legacy is neither confined by borders nor reserved for any one people. Instead, his legacy is one that inspires without distinction and can serve as a reference for how we work in science.

For my future, I seek to investigate novel treatments for challenging diseases and their commercialization. I understand that this goal requires cooperation with those around me and a commitment to the common good. I also understand that hard work is the tool through which I can honor the opportunities I have received, knowing that our paths find fulfillment in serving others. This is why I do not desire my success to be measured by the greatness of my achievements, but by what they make possible for those around me.

Northern Illinois University – Hannah Grace Havel

As a computational scientist and aspiring particle physicist, I see research not as an isolated intellectual pursuit, but as a civic responsibility. Abraham Lincoln understood that leadership is defined not by personal ambition, but by dedication to the common good and expanding opportunity for all. True progress relies on building accessible pathways, elevating future leaders, and applying scientific innovation to serve humanity.

As I prepare for doctoral studies in computational physics, I carry forward his conviction through a commitment to using computing to solve fundamental challenges in energy and science, while also opening doors for the next generation of researchers so that progress remains inclusive and dedicated to the betterment of our state, nation, and world.

Northwestern University – Kris Soojin Yun

Lincoln's Leadership Legacy will guide me to lead a life of service and civic engagement in technology policy. As a cybersecurity student, I want to live in a world where everyone feels safe online. This means protecting vulnerable communities from digital scams, threats, and agents of chaos. I believe in a future where technology can be leveraged to benefit society in every domain, across medicine to business to education and beyond. Rather than degrading public trust, endangering the availability of jobs, or maliciously attacking civilians, I see appropriately governed innovation as a path towards bettering every American's quality of life. I hope to pursue a career of service and am grateful for the opportunity.

Principia College – Rafael Armando Ascencio Garcia

Writing from the bottom of my heart, I've come to realize an uncomfortable truth: as leaders rise to unimaginable heights, we often leave behind or hurt those who have supported us from the beginning.

In our race towards saving the rest, we forget about those close to us, including ourselves. This can lead us to feel hopeless and lonely even when we are surrounded by those we work with.

The truth is that without a supporting circle of family, friends, and colleagues whom we can rely on and share our deepest thoughts with, we cannot operate with a genuine heart, turning ourselves into a desensitized machine whose goal is to get by every day instead of living this ephemeral life to its fullest.

Therefore, I invite us to remember those close to us who have lent us a helping hand in the past. Let's remind the close people in our lives how much we love them. Let's remind that friend of ours that we wouldn't be here without them. Let's remind ourselves of the importance of self-care.

A lamp that sheds no light is unable to guide anyone. Hence, let's revive our light by loving others, continuing to walk along the path of life with grace and compassion.

Quincy University – Megan Marie Schill

Abraham Lincoln's leadership was quiet, consistent, and unyielding. Lincoln was a man who held on to what he knew was true no matter the opposition he faced. His courage, humility, and empathy were among the strongest in US history, but what stands out to me most is his ability to lift the people around him to those same values. Lincoln never questioned the value of those around them and consistently met others with gentle yet consistent compassion. He lifted those around them simply by modeling the traits he believed in and trusting those around him would follow in his path. Lincoln created change not through mass instruction, but by practicing his values as a quiet example for those around him.

Whether in my personal or professional life, Lincoln is an example of the type of leader I want to be. I've been lucky to have great models growing up, starting with my parents. Throughout my mom's fifteen-year chronic illness, both of my parents kept volunteering for multiple organizations and showing up for other people however they could, never letting their own hardship become an excuse to stop caring for others. Just like Lincoln, they taught me to walk through life seeing the value in everyone around me, and to be the kind of person I'd want to be surrounded by. Leadership isn't in big actions or mass instruction. It's in consistently choosing to approach others with respect, empathy, and humility.

Rockford University – Saidi Ishmail

I'm not originally from Rockford. I grew up in Anchorage, Alaska, until my freshman year of high school, when I moved to Illinois. That move taught me early on what it means to build roots somewhere new. To go from being unfamiliar with a place to becoming genuinely invested in it. Rockford is where I came of age, and where I became the first in my family to attend college. Navigating that path without a roadmap taught me to seek out resources deliberately and to value the people and institutions that make access

possible a lesson that's part of what drew me to accounting and financial economics, not as an abstract discipline, but as a tool for building stability in communities.

As treasurer of the student government association at Rockford University, I've learned that leadership often looks less like grand gestures and more like careful stewardship, making sure resources are allocated fairly, transparently, and in ways that serve the people who depend on them. I've carried that same principle into my interest in ethical and faith-based finance, exploring how financial systems can be structured to reflect values, not just returns.

I want to bring these threads together in Rockford, the community that shaped who I've become, supporting its growth in a way that's inclusive and grounded in integrity, whether through entrepreneurship, community investment, or financial education for those who've been left out of those conversations, including first-generation students like me. Lincoln's Leadership Legacy reminds me that civic-minded service isn't separate from a career in finance; it's the foundation it should be built on. That's the lesson I intend to carry forward.

Roosevelt University – Alejandro Pina Jr.

Abraham Lincoln understood that true leadership isn't about personal elevation, but placing one's resources in service of others. Inspired by his focus on unity and equal access, I aim to bridge the gap between medical institutions and underserved communities. Lincoln proved that real leadership is rooted in listening, and I intend to honor that standard by bringing the resources, knowledge, and care our neighborhoods truly deserve.

Saint Xavier University – Aine Siobhan Kelly

Abraham Lincoln's legacy of leadership, is one of determination, innovation, and using a position of power to advance those without it. This legacy has impacted my own leadership, as I strive to use my privilege to create better opportunities for others. I hope to serve as an example of kindness and grace to those around me, and I hope to be ambitious and steadfast with my work. My goal is to inspire a younger generation to continue to serve their communities. As Abraham Lincoln stated in the Gettysburg Address, "It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus so far nobly advanced". It is our responsibility to continue the efforts of many great leaders, in order to advance our society. We have the responsibility to not only continue these efforts, but create new fights for justice, equity, and peace within our world. Abraham Lincoln is an example of a civil-minded leader, who utilized his position and privilege to learn and serve. He continued longstanding efforts to heal the great divide in the United States, while also creating new initiatives to better the country. I will embody this idea, by continuing my education, service, and leadership, in hopes to continue fights and create my own initiatives.

School of the Art Institute of Chicago – Anisa Vida Lopez

Receiving the Lincoln Leadership Award would strengthen my commitment to living a life rooted in assistance, advocacy, and meaningful actions. Lincoln's legacy reminds me that leadership is not defined by position or recognition, but by the willingness to stand alongside others, challenge injustice, and work toward a more sensible future. This award would encourage me to continue using both my voice and my art in service of my communities. As an artist pursuing a BFA in Interdisciplinary Fine Arts with a focus in Photography, I am committed to creating work that fosters belonging and makes people feel seen. Through my street photography books, I prioritize ethical representation, documenting individuals with care, dignity, and respect. My practice of painting on matte photographs explores the idea of sentimentality as a source of strength rather than vulnerability. I believe sentimentality reflects a

willingness to practice empathy, understanding, and compassion; all qualities that cultivate kinder, more sustainable communities where people feel valued and capable of healing together. Whether my work is experienced in a gallery, online, or through social media, I strive to make it accessible regardless of social class or financial circumstance.

Beyond my artistic practice, I am actively involved in political advocacy and community organizing, particularly in support of women's health, child development, and the Latinx and immigrant communities. In the future, I hope to continue combining art with civic engagement, using creativity to inspire dialogue, amplify underrepresented voices, and contribute to positive social change. This award would serve as a reminder that leadership is an ongoing responsibility, one that calls me to remain engaged, compassionate, and dedicated.

Southern Illinois University Carbondale – Kaitlynne Franklin

I've been involved in student government since elementary school and now in college. The passion behind this is because student government is a form of service to the students. There are many students from a multitude of different backgrounds, and they trust us as leaders to be able to represent them to the fullest capacity. And, that thought is what keeps me committed to the task. Abraham Lincoln was dedicated to serving and did in many different capacities—the basis of each one being to represent and lead the people. His job was to be of service to his constituents, to the people who aren't in the rooms where decisions are made. Lincoln remained dedicated, "to ameliorate the condition of those who have been subject to the hard usage of the world," meaning there's an importance and should be held in high regard to help those who traditionally aren't seen, and that stuck with me. There's something special about being able to take concerns of Others. That's what leadership is. It's not to build my resume, not to be the center of attention on campus—it's listening and acting with intention, making decisions for the betterment of everyone; it's having to take accountability for actions that you may not have even committed. Leadership is also creating connections, ensuring there is a safe space for everyone regardless of the circumstance, being able to serve your community, being able to connect with other communities. And that's the significance in leadership. Like Abraham Lincoln, I choose to live a life of service and remaining to be committed to contributing to the greater good.

Southern Illinois University Edwardsville – Jennifer Emery

Lincoln led the nation through one of the most difficult periods in its history. Even amid profound division, loss, and uncertainty, he remained unwavering in his commitment to a more equal and united nation. By holding firmly to his principles in the face of opposition, Lincoln demonstrated that meaningful leadership demands the courage to act, the strength to endure hardship, and the compassion to keep humanity at the center. His legacy guides my civic-minded work and reinforces my belief that access to nutritious food is fundamental to human dignity and should be treated as a right, not a privilege. My hands-on work with food pantries, on and off campus has exposed me to the realities of food insecurity, especially among students juggling classes, work, and financial challenges. I have learned how to support others with compassion, helping students access resources discreetly and with dignity. Seeing how basic access to food can change a student's ability to succeed has reinforced my belief that we must advocate for equity in health and food access. Lincoln's resilience, empathy, and dedication to the greater good will guide me throughout future endeavors. As I pursue a career as a dietitian, I will combine my knowledge of nutrition with compassionate service and advocacy for equitable food access. I hope to honor Lincoln's legacy by turning conviction into action, standing firm in my values, and continuing to serve alongside others to build healthier, more resilient communities.

University of Chicago – Michelle Claire Du

Lincoln's legacy emphasized the shared humanity of us all — in our local communities, in our state, in our nation, and the broader world. I aspire to be a connector across siloed communities, whether due to linguistic, cultural, political, or educational barriers, to bridge divides, as Lincoln did, and ultimately build a better future through shared understanding and celebration of diversity.

Furthermore, I am inspired by Lincoln's steadfast commitment and values-led leadership in the face of adversity. As an individual volunteering in and advocating for Asian Pacific Islander and Desi American (APIDA) communities in Chicago, as well as for expanded digital access and language access resources for immigrant communities, I have seen political support shift over time. I hope to embody Lincoln's perseverance and determination to continue fighting for causes I believe in, despite inevitable setbacks and failures.

I strive to continue to center empathy in my approach to community service, policymaking, and research. Whether it is through venturing to different community centers across Chicago to understand digital skills needs, elevating student voices across disciplines by organizing a regional conference, or traveling abroad to gain a better understanding of cultural dynamics and governance systems, I hope to approach my life and career with an open mind, curiosity, and idealism — guided by my belief in the goodness of humans. In today's rapidly evolving and unpredictable world, I wish to embody Lincoln's unwavering resolve and hold my values and mission close to my heart as I work to ensure technology is built, deployed, and governed in the service of the greater good.

University of Illinois Chicago – Arseny Acosta Nunez

The Lincoln Leadership Legacy will serve as a powerful reinforcement of my commitment to advancing the well-being of society. Being part of this legacy means more than recognition; it signifies a pledge to lead with intention. It affirms that the work I have already invested in my community is seen, valued, and connected to a broader tradition of service. It also challenges me to continue growing as a leader who listens carefully, acts ethically, and prioritizes justice and compassion in every space I enter.

University of Illinois Springfield – Ameilia Ko'u Anela Ann Hopkins

Through Lincoln's Leadership Legacy, I will be able to join a legacy of goodwill and civic mindedness that benefits all of Illinois. Since the age of eight, I have advocated for a safer and healthier world. Similar to Lincoln, I walked the steps of our state capitol in an effort to speak with elected officials regarding coal ash containment, hosted town hall meetings on efforts to protect vulnerable eco systems, and circulated petitions to raise awareness regarding the importance of legislative action to protect Illinois's beautiful landscape. Through these actions, I lobbied successfully for bills that later became law. Abraham Lincoln was committed to helping others by being a positive force for change. It is the same selfless motivation I carry to enhance the lives of others within Illinois and beyond. A passion that I hold close to my heart in wanting to help others.

These first young steps led me to continue my work nationally in Washington D.C., New York, and abroad in Europe speaking on conflict resolution and global peace through the Model United Nations and World Affairs Council. With Lincoln's Leadership Legacy, I know I can learn even more in building collaborations to make our community stronger and help enhance the lives of others. I believe there is always room to grow and learn from those who came before us. I am committed to my goal of living a civic-minded life of service and commitment to the greater good. I would love to join other leaders of excellence in working together to make the world a better place.

University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign – Madison Christine Fanning

Behind every great leader is a full range of human emotions and experiences. Abraham Lincoln was no exception to that. From his great love to Mary Todd Lincoln to the grief of losing his child William while in office, Lincoln balanced his personal and familial needs while being a leader in a polarizing, tumultuous time. As I experience the highs and lows of life, let him serve as a reminder of the full capabilities of humanity and how to keep going in moments of great hardship.

University of St. Francis – Skylar Kandyce Yazum

Many people believe the misconception that leadership is simply a title one is granted. For some time, I wondered what the word “leadership” truly meant to me. I have learned that people can be called “leaders” without truly being one. Leadership is not just a characteristic that defines someone; it is also a way of living. To me, a leader is someone who leaves a lasting impression far bigger than themselves. Decisions are made every day, yet it is leadership that provokes behavior and attitudes in others. By setting an example, we can inspire others to follow a bigger purpose.

When it comes to Lincoln’s Leadership Legacy, the main focus that stands out to me is the power of servant leadership. This ideal emphasizes acting for the greater good rather than personal gain. I believe Lincoln impacts me today because his character reminds me that all it takes is one individual to change the lives of others for the better. We can live by example and inspire those around us. Sometimes, all it takes is one person to guide you in a direction you love. At that point, your impact has already begun planting little seeds in their lives.

While Lincoln may be gone, his legacy carries on. As a leader, I hope to do the same by inspiring courage, passion, purpose, and unity in the lives of others.

VanderCook College of Music – Lizbeth Rodriguez

Throughout my educational career, I have had the privilege to serve in multiple leadership roles within my community. From being the president of the Tech Ninja Team in middle school to serving as the president of Mariachi VanderCook for an extensive period, every role I have filled has taught me several valuable lessons in leadership. Leadership is a people-first approach where every decision, easy or hard, is centered around the best interest of the individuals you serve. I approach leadership with an attitude of “today for you, tomorrow for me”. This is the approach that allows me to be proactive within my community; why wait for something to get done, when I have the ability to make change happen now. Helping others become their best self, allows them the chance to better help the community, building each other up as people. With a solution-based positive attitude, I am committed towards the betterment of my community by building people through music education. Teaching music has allowed me to see my students grow into wonderful human beings with an appreciation and deeper connection to humanity. Connecting with my community is my first priority whenever I am in a leadership role. As a future educator, I will make sure to create these connections through involving my students’ lives in the classroom, whether that is through involving their cultures and the rest of the community within the music-making process. Through my career I intend to build students who are able to fully express themselves and connect more deeply to their community due to having a shared appreciation for music.

Western Illinois University – Kylie Marie Kinser

Eight scores and some years ago, Abraham Lincoln left behind a legacy of leadership epitomized by integrity, inclusion, and empathy, during a time when moral compasses had gone askew. Embracing diversity, Lincoln’s authority remained grounded in human dignity, which mirrors the “patient values” pillar of evidence-based practice used in speech-language pathology. As a future clinician, I strive to

extend that legacy, offering compassionate and purpose-filled therapy that transcends clinical services and establishes personalized, nondiscriminatory care.

Wheaton College – Elizabeth Grace Clawson

Abraham Lincoln's leadership was often characterized by humility, sacrifice, and an unwavering commitment to something greater than himself. Such qualities resonate deeply with my Christian faith, which teaches that true greatness is found in love of God and service to others. For me, living a civic-minded life is ultimately an act of imitating Christ— it's loving my neighbor and showing up for my community, building meaningful relationships and using whatever gifts I've been given to lift others up. That might look like attending a 7th grade volleyball game to cheer on my WyldLife girls, helping to construct a roof for a church in need in Mexico, running a soccer clinic for children in the Dominican Republic, or simply praying for my roommate who's having a really hard day. Lincoln's legacy reminds me that leadership is not about title or recognition, but about steady, humble commitment to the common good, even when the work is unseen or unglamorous. As I move beyond Wheaton, I want to carry that same posture: to lead by serving, to show up day in and day out, and to let my faith shape a life oriented toward others. Whether through writing, mentorship, athletics, or continued community involvement, I hope to honor Lincoln's example and glorify the Lord by pursuing the greater good in small ways each day, long after this chapter ends.

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