

**The 42nd Annual Student Laureate Convocation
The Lincoln Academy of Illinois
Hall of Representatives – Old State Capitol
November 12, 2016**

*“We Are All the Children of Abraham Lincoln”
Excerpts of Remarks Delivered by Chancellor Stephanie Pace Marshall*



Good morning everyone — students, families, academic partners and distinguished guests —and welcome to the 42nd Student Laureate Convocation of the Lincoln Academy of Illinois.

I am Stephanie Pace Marshall, Chancellor of the Lincoln Academy and President Emerita of the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, and it is my privilege to welcome you to the Old State Capitol — one of the most historic buildings in Illinois — to add the names of 56 remarkable young men and women to our distinguished roster of Student Laureates.

One hundred and fifty eight years ago, Abraham Lincoln stood in this very room to accept his party’s nomination for U.S. Senate during a very fractured and fragile time in our nation’s history. And as we know, the patterns of history often have a way of repeating themselves.

Our highly contentious presidential election has concluded. We now have a new president-elect. Yet the long campaign cycle illuminated our country’s continuing struggles as “a house divided” on a number of fundamental issues.

As it was in Mr. Lincoln’s time, our path forward is far from certain or clear — yet our opportunity to courageously and wisely engage in creating it together is unparalleled.

As we recognize and honor you, the future leaders of our state, our nation and our world, I ask that you reflect for a moment on how the lessons learned from our 16th President can be brought to life now — as we create a new national narrative, seek deeper and more inclusive commitments to social justice and design creative strategies for equity, prosperity and hope for all.

The Lincoln Academy was created in 1964 by Illinois governor Otto Kerner to honor the state's most celebrated citizens — those whose uncommon achievements simply made us better.

Today, we are privileged to welcome our governor, the president of the Lincoln Academy, Governor Bruce Rauner, and First Lady Diana Rauner, and we thank them for honoring us by their presence this morning. Thank you both...

To fulfill our mission, the Lincoln Academy bestows The Order of Lincoln on distinguished individuals from Illinois whose exemplary achievements contributed to the betterment of humanity in the spirit of Abraham Lincoln. This is our state's highest honor — and it is presented annually at a convocation held in cities across the state.

Recipients have included:

- public servants such as President Ronald Reagan, Secretary of Transportation Ray LaHood and Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton;
- journalists such as Mike Royko and Scott Simon;
- scientists such as Leon Lederman and Walter Massey;
- performers such as Charlton Heston and Mahalia Jackson;
- and sports figures such as Ernie Banks and Mike Krzyzewski.

We view these sons and daughters of Illinois as our great citizens of today. And we view you as our great citizens of tomorrow. As Student Laureates, you are, of course, all high academic achievers; but that's not sufficient for wisely shaping the world.

As I read your biographies, and I have read each one, I was filled with tremendous gratitude to see the incredible tapestry you have woven of campus leadership and community service as well as an unapologetic drive and passion to make things better in the lives of those in your communities and beyond...

Astronomer, astrophysicist, space and planetary pioneer and author Carl Sagan, whom I was privileged to welcome to the Illinois Mathematics and Science Academy, said, "Somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known."

Dr. Sagan knew our curiosity is exponential and never ending; there is always something to explore, to unravel, to discover. And that is how he lived — still wondering up until his death about the possibility of intelligent life beyond planet Earth.

Lincoln embodied Dr. Sagan's belief that the richest rewards come from pursuing questions and solving problems that really matter. So in the spirit of Abraham Lincoln, put your name on impossible causes and resist anything and anyone who is too small for your imagination.

You are here today, in part, because of your own tenacious commitment to learning and your outstanding leadership and service. Along with our Lincoln Laureates, you bring honor to our state and to the Lincoln Academy and we are all very proud of you. I am certain Mr. Lincoln would be proud of you, as well.

In a moment you will each be called to the well of this chamber. And here — on the same ground where Mr. Lincoln once stood — you will receive the Lincoln Medal and a formal declaration signed by the Governor bearing the Great Seal of the State of Illinois, declaring you to be a Student Laureate of the Lincoln Academy...

Mr. Lincoln assumed his presidency with an almost impossible mission: to save the Union. He accomplished this through uncommon leadership that challenged conventional wisdom and what it meant to be a good leader. And he did so with a clear and grounded moral compass.

He sought to understand the human struggle just as deeply as he did military strategy. He invited rivals onto his team and through this integration of wise governance, military acumen, and strategic leadership, he saved the Union and ended slavery.

Those defining elements of his presidential legacy are studied by scholars and often viewed in awe by people around the world.

But here's what I'd like you to remember — legacies are complex and the stories that created them live long after the life of their author so they leave unfinished business — but they also represent invitations to leave mandates and they offer opportunities for the future.

The dynamics are different now, but the struggles of Mr. Lincoln's time — the struggles for human dignity, inclusion and equality — are also reflected in our time.

But rather than pose a burden, I encourage you to view them as new possibilities and to consider who you are becoming and what it means now for you and for your name to be connected with the legacy of Abraham Lincoln.

So ask yourself: What has my name on it now? What is it that I am passionate about and now feel called to do? What might I write, build, design, create, or solve to make lives better?

We are all the children of Abraham Lincoln and we must carry his moral compass in our pocket.

On February 26, 1965, Martin Luther King spoke at Temple Israel in Hollywood. It was during this sermon that he said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice.” Almost fifty years later, at the foot of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., President Obama drew upon Dr. King’s words and said: “The arc of the moral universe may bend toward justice, but it doesn’t bend on its own.”

So use your unique talents, determination and passion to bend this arc in the ways that only you can and carry Mr. Lincoln’s legacy into our contemporary struggles.

And who better to join you on this journey than your fellow Student Laureates? Lean on one another for ideas, support and courage; walk together.

Help us to help you to stay connected to one another...