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“The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just.” Lincoln first uttered these words early in his political career, at a time when the country as a whole was reeling from the effects of the recent Panic of 1837. Following the ruinous economic policies of Andrew Jackson, the country had headed into an economic downturn as Martin Van Buren took office. Hundreds of banks closed and defaulted on loans as grandiose public works projects gathered dust. For all intents and purposes, the country was at a standstill, and looking at the citizenry, one beheld many a shattered spirit and crushed dream. Van Buren, recognizing this, came up with a ludicrous remedy involving pulling even more money out of the financial system and locking it away in the government treasury. It was this insanity that Lincoln was addressing with his speech to the Illinois House of Representatives in 1839. Realizing the damage that Van Buren’s Treasury plan would do to the already ailing economy, Lincoln made an impassioned plea to his fellow legislators not to support this plan. It is evident that, even as a young man, Lincoln passionately supported the causes he believed to be just. The majority of those in the audience would belittle and shrug him off, but this did not deter Lincoln. Lincoln would carry this insurmountable spirit with him the rest of his life. With it, he faced many more great challenges that threatened the soul of our nation, and it was that spirit that allowed him to rise above them in triumph.

Lincoln's powerful words still ring true today in the Age of Information. The technology that now exists would have baffled and astounded Lincoln, and as a society America has come very far from the horrid sectionalism and rampant racism that plagued antebellum and Civil War America. Despite all these great advances, however, the world is not free of struggle. Close to 9 million people remain jobless in the United States of America, and Islamic extremists cleave out a bloody empire in the Middle East. Russia continues to send troops into eastern Ukraine, and every year more and more species that have lived on this earth for millennia plunge into extinction with rising temperature and ocean levels. It sometimes feels as if man is fighting a losing battle, that the human race has finally run out of luck.

It would not be surprising, though, if Abraham Lincoln felt the same way contemplating the disastrous state of the United States economy in his day, or upon viewing the dead piled high in Gettysburg. Lincoln encountered many great struggles with even greater probabilities of failure, and yet, true to word, he did not back down. Why then should we, faced with the dead of modern day Gettysburgs and the very fabric of society crumbling around us, back down from the struggle? In the words of Welsh poet Dylan Thomas, "Do not go gentle into that good night...Rage, rage against the dying of the light." Just because it may be easier to back down from a struggle that we fear we will lose, we must not. Man must rage against the odds to achieve what is right and just. This is what Lincoln told the Illinois state legislature and still tells us today. In a world calloused with sin and evil lurking behind many doors, man must struggle against the odds. Such a struggle defines our human nature.

Standing in front of his fellow legislators in the Illinois House of Representatives, Abraham Lincoln most likely felt apprehension. He knew that many of his colleagues would

likely disagree with and berate him. He did not back down, though. He faced the challenge in front of him and conquered it despite the harrowing odds, and as we know went on to become not only the driving force behind the removal of the greatest moral crime in American history, slavery, but also the steady hand that guided our Union through the most mammoth threat it has ever faced--the Civil War. Probability of failure did not enter Lincoln's mind when he locked arms with these struggles, and it most certainly did not deter him from his support of what he knew was just. For this reason, Abraham Lincoln is often regarded as one of the greatest United States presidents of all time, and no one can deny the good he did for our country. If we want to replicate that good in our lifetime, however, we must follow Lincoln's example. Man must rage on to support the just causes of our lifetime.