Learning from Abraham Lincoln on his birthday

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Tuesday would have been President Abraham Lincoln's 240th birthday.

Al Gini, a professor at Loyola University of Chicago, says Americans can learn many lessons from the late President, who had to raise an army while dealing with a divided nation. He says Lincoln believed in compromise.

"Lincoln would have said we either go forward together or we don't go forward at all," says Gini.

But not everyone shares the same view.

"Yes, there is a whole group of people that believe Lincoln was the greatest dictator in American politics," says Gini.

Gini says Lincoln believed in in extremis, a Latin phrase meaning "in the farthest reaches" or "at the point of death."

"It is a Roman idea that when you empower a leader in extreme times to take extreme measures to handle a problem that otherwise couldn't be handled; but they were then supposed to stand down," explains Gini.

Gini says Lincoln invaded the South without congressional approval, waived the rights of Habeus Corpus, and declared martial law because he believed he couldn't preserve the Union without taking extreme measures.

Lincoln also played politics and bent the rules.

"He understood that dirty politics is what you have to do and he did it to get the greater good," explains Gini.

And the final lesson from Lincoln:

"We make Lincoln, an icon, a legend, a martyr, and a saint and the one thing to take away from all of this is he wanted to be president because he thought he had a good idea that should be implemented. But he didn't need to be president. As a man he had ambition, but his ambition is for others and not just himself," says Gini.