



LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY

The American Calendar

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THE MEANING OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY

The American Calendar

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* Suitable for students grades 5–8

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Lincoln's Birthday:
An American Holiday

The Origins and Traditions of Lincoln's Birthday Holiday

Many Americans would be surprised to learn that Abraham Lincoln's birthday, February 12, 1809, has never been celebrated as a federal holiday. The day is often associated (erroneously) with Presidents Day, officially Washington's Birthday and celebrated on the third Monday in February.¹

On February 12, 1866, ten months after his assassination, the first address commemorating Lincoln's birthday was given to Congress. Historian and statesman George Bancroft wrote in his memorial remarks that Lincoln was "to be remembered through all time by his countrymen."² Seven years later, a holiday celebrating Lincoln was proposed by Julius Francis, a shopkeeper from Buffalo, New York. Francis began sending Congress elaborate memorial pamphlets as part of his campaign to establish a legal holiday for Lincoln on February 12. These memorials, signed by 50 residents of Buffalo, were placed "on parchment, backed with blue silk, with 50 white stars, and exquisite needlework border, inserted in a folding case of French walnut, and enclosed in a Russia leather case."³ A year later, Francis organized the first public celebration of Lincoln's birth in Buffalo, which was celebrated each year until Francis's death in 1881. This event included many readings in honor of Lincoln, as well as an official address, singing, prayer, and instrumental music.⁴ Francis also incorporated the original Lincoln Birthday Association on December 24, 1877.

But this sentiment was not shared by all Americans, nor acted upon at the federal level. Lincoln's legacy remained controversial and tied to the bitter politics of Reconstruction. The South, which made up one-fifth of the U.S. population at the time, was still occupied by the U.S. military. While many Southerners sincerely grieved over Lincoln's death, with notable expressions of regret by Jefferson Davis and Robert E. Lee, others were unable to put the bitterness of the war behind them. As Southern diarist Kate Stone wrote, "What torrents of blood Lincoln has caused to flow, and how Seward has aided him in his bloody work. I cannot be sorry for their fate. They deserve it. They have reaped their just reward."⁵

The North-South split was not the only obstacle to designating Lincoln's birthday as a national holiday. With the American centennial fast approaching, George Washington overshadowed Lincoln in the public memory. Beyond pointing to the practical problem of their birthdays being just ten days apart, critics argued that honoring Lincoln would be to depreciate Washington's unique place in American history. As the *New York Times* argued, "It may be doubted, whether the distinctive honor conferred on the memory of Washington should be divided even in the case of Abraham Lincoln."⁶

¹ For more about Washington's Birthday, see our ebook, *The Meaning of Washington's Birthday*, www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-american-calendar/the-meaning-of-washingtons-birthday.

² A free copy of the address can be found at <http://archive.org/details/abrahamlincolnme00banc>.

³ Julius E. Francis, *The Lincoln Memorial Collection*, 25.

⁴ *Lincoln Memorial Collection*, 26.

⁵ For more about the debate of Lincoln's Legacy, read *Smithsonian Magazine's* "Lincoln's Contested Legacy," www.smithsonianmag.com/history-archaeology/Lincolns-Contested-Legacy.html.

⁶ *Forge of National Memory*, 101.

This concern did not deter Hannibal Hamlin, Lincoln's vice president from 1861–65 and the former governor of Maine, from taking up the cause. In an 1887 letter to the Republican Club of New York, expressing his regrets at being unable to attend a dinner marking the occasion, he wrote:

Your club has well and wisely acted in making this the commencement of an annual observance of Mr. Lincoln's Birthday. The day should be made national like the Birth day of Washington. Let each be appropriately observed, as one of the best things to inculcate upon those who, in the ages, shall come after us. It is patriotic to do so, and it serves to promote a love of country and keep alive and fresh a memory of Patriotic men.⁷

In 1951, a Presidents Day National Committee was formed by Harold Stonebridge Fischer. He lobbied for the creation of a day honoring all presidents to be celebrated March 4, the original inauguration date. This act was defeated in the Senate Judiciary Committee, on the grounds that the holiday would be too close to Lincoln's and Washington's birthdays. Though not federally enacted, many state governors liked the idea and proclaimed Presidents Day a holiday.

Establishing Lincoln's birthday as a federal holiday was further complicated by the passing of the 1968 Uniform Holiday Act, which moved several federal holidays, including Memorial Day and Washington's Birthday, to specific Mondays throughout the year in order to create more three-day weekends.

Eventually, individual states created their own Presidents Day holidays to be observed on the third Monday in February. This celebration has been enacted in some fashion by 38 states, though never federally, and each varies by state. While some mark the day as a specific remembrance of Washington and Lincoln (like Arizona), others view it as a day of general recognition for all U.S. presidents. Alabama celebrates Washington and Jefferson as opposed to the more common combination of Washington and Lincoln. A few states observe Washington's Birthday in February and then celebrate Presidents Day in a different month, for example, the day after Thanksgiving in New Mexico and December 24 in Indiana and Georgia. Eighteen states don't specify at all what Presidents Day celebrates.⁸ Presidents Day has also gained some national recognition from retailers, who use the long weekend to offer sales.⁹

A few state governments have enacted legislation recognizing Lincoln's birthday on February 12 as its own official holiday. Most notably, Illinois, the "Land of Lincoln" and his adopted home state, celebrates Lincoln's birthday as an official school holiday,¹⁰ along with a few other states including New York, Connecticut, and Missouri. However, this

⁷ A copy of the original letter sent from Hamlin is located at www.shapell.org/manuscript.aspx?hannibal-hamlin-proposes-lincoln-birthday-national-observance.

⁸ A state-by-state breakdown of the holiday can be found at <http://geometrx.com/2012/02/presidents-day-or-washingtons-birthday-which-states-observe-which-holiday/>.

⁹ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln in the Post-Heroic Era: History and Memory in Late Twentieth-Century America*, 198–99.

¹⁰ The state laws of Illinois can be found at www.ilga.gov/legislation/ilcs/documents/010500050k24-2.htm.

number has declined in recent years, when both California and New Jersey ended the celebration of Lincoln's birthday as paid holidays to cut budgetary costs. Unfortunately, more states now celebrate Black Friday, the day after Thanksgiving, as a holiday for state employees than celebrate Lincoln's birthday.

Even without an official national holiday, Lincoln remains among the most admired American presidents. His face is printed on the five-dollar bill and stamped on the penny. He has national shrines in three states, including one of America's most iconic landmarks—the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC.

Though not federally recognized, Lincoln's birthday is still commemorated by Americans. Wreaths are laid at notable Lincoln landmarks throughout the United States, including his birthplace in Kentucky, his tomb in Springfield, Illinois, and the Lincoln Memorial—the walls of which are still inscribed with this promise:

In this Temple
As In The Hearts Of The People
For Whom He Saved The Union
The Memory of Abraham Lincoln
Is Enshrined Forever.

Lincoln Centennial Address

THEODORE ROOSEVELT

The centennial celebration of Lincoln's birth—February 12, 1909—was recognized and observed across the country with parades, concerts, school programs, and oratory. Gun salutes were fired at New York Harbor and National Guard batteries. At public schools, students read aloud the Gettysburg Address. In Boston, Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910), author of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” presented a new poem, “A Vision,” to a joint session of the Massachusetts House and Senate.

In Hodgenville, Kentucky, Lincoln's birthplace, President Theodore Roosevelt (1858–1919) delivered the keynote remarks and later applied the first trowel of mortar on the cornerstone of the temple John Russell Pope would build to shelter the tiny log cabin. Why does Roosevelt hold up Lincoln, along with George Washington, as one of the “greatest of our public men”? What virtues does he ascribe to Lincoln? What is his “supreme vision”? Do you agree with Roosevelt's claim that Lincoln saw the same “high qualities” in both the North and the South? Should we today feel “an equal pride” in those who fought, regardless of the side they fought for?

We have met here to celebrate the hundredth anniversary of the birth of one of the two greatest Americans; of one of the two or three greatest men of the nineteenth century; of one of the greatest men in the world's history. This rail splitter, this boy who passed his ungainly youth in the dire poverty of the poorest of the frontier folk, whose rise was by weary and painful labor, lived to lead his people through the burning flames of a struggle from which the nation emerged, purified as by fire, born anew to a loftier life. After long years of iron effort and of failure that came more often than victory, he at last rose to the leadership of the Republic at the moment when that leadership had become the stupendous world task of the time. He grew to know greatness, but never ease. Success came to him, but never happiness, save that which springs from doing well a painful and a vital task. Power was his, but not pleasure. The furrows deepened on his brow, but his eyes were undimmed by either hate or fear. His gaunt shoulders were bowed, but his steel thews never faltered as he bore for a burden the destinies of his people. His great and tender heart shrank from giving pain, and the task allotted him was to pour out like water the lifeblood of the young men and to feel in his every fiber the sorrow of the women. Disaster saddened but never dismayed him. Triumph was his at the last, and barely had he tasted it before murder found him, and the kindly, patient, fearless eyes were closed forever.

As a people we are indeed beyond measure fortunate in the characters of the two greatest of our public men, Washington and Lincoln. They were alike in essentials—they were alike in the great qualities which rendered each able to render service to his nation and to all mankind such as no other man of his generation could or did render. There have been other men as great and other men as good, but in all the history of mankind there are no other two great men as good as these, no other two good men as great. Widely though the problems of today differ from the problems set for solution to Washington when he

founded this nation, to Lincoln when he saved it and freed the slave, yet the qualities they showed in meeting these problems are exactly the same as those we should show in doing our work today.

Lincoln saw into the future with the prophetic imagination usually vouchsafed only to the poet and the seer. He had in him all the lift toward greatness of the visionary, without any of the visionary's fanaticism or egotism, without any of the visionary's narrow jealousy of the practical man and inability to strive in practical fashion for the realization of an ideal. No more practical man ever lived than this homely backwoods idealist, but he had nothing in common with those practical men whose consciences are warped until they fail to distinguish between good and evil, fail to understand that strength, ability, shrewdness, whether in the world of business or of politics, only serve to make their possessor a more noxious, a more evil member of the community, if they are not guided and controlled by a fine and high moral sense.

We of this day must try to solve many social and industrial problems requiring to an especial degree the combination of indomitable resolution with cool headed sanity. We can profit by the way in which Lincoln used both these traits as he strove for reform. We can learn much of value from the very attacks which following that course brought upon his head, attacks alike by the extremists of revolution and by the extremists of reaction. He never wavered in devotion to his principles, in his love for the Union and in his abhorrence of slavery. Timid and lukewarm people were always denouncing him because he was too extreme; but, as a matter of fact, he never went to extremes.

Yet perhaps the most wonderful thing of all, and, from the standpoint of the America of today and of the future, the most vitally important, was the extraordinary way in which Lincoln could fight valiantly against what he deemed wrong and yet preserve undiminished his love and respect for the brother from whom he differed. In the hour of a triumph that would have turned any weaker man's head, in the heat of a struggle which spurred many a good man to dreadful vindictiveness, he said truthfully that so long as he had been in his office he had never willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom and besought his supporters to study the incidents of the trial through which they were passing as philosophy from which to learn wisdom and not as wrongs to be avenged, ending with the solemn exhortation that, as the strife was over, all should reunite in a common effort to save their common country.

He lived in days that were great and terrible, when brother fought against brother for what each sincerely deemed to be the right, in a contest so grim the strong men who alone can carry it through are rarely able to do justice to the deep convictions of those with whom they grapple in mortal strife. At such times men see through a glass darkly. To only the rarest and loftiest spirits is vouchsafed that clear vision which gradually comes to all, even to the lesser, as the struggle fades into distance and wounds are forgotten and peace creeps back to the hearts that were hurt. But to Lincoln was given this supreme vision. He did not hate the man from whom he differed. Weakness was as foreign as wickedness to his strong, gentle nature. But his courage was of a quality so high that it needed no bolstering of dark passion. He saw clearly that the same high qualities, the same courage and willingness for

self sacrifice and devotion to the right as it was given them to see the right, belonged both to the men of the north and to the men of the south. As the years roll by, and as all of us, wherever we dwell, grow to feel an equal pride in the valor and self devotion, alike of the men who wore the blue and the men who wore the gray, so this whole nation will grow to feel a peculiar sense of pride in the mightiest of the mighty men who mastered the mighty days, the lover of his country and of all mankind, the man whose blood was shed for the union of his people and for the freedom of a race, Abraham Lincoln.

Address on Abraham Lincoln

BOOKER T. WASHINGTON

At another celebration of Lincoln's centennial birthday, the African American educator and leader Booker T. Washington (1856–1915) addressed the Republican Club of New York City. As Washington movingly narrates in these remarks, he was born a slave on a Virginia tobacco plantation—the son of the plantation's cook and a white father he would never know. As a nine-year-old boy, Washington would learn that he and his family were free, three years after the first issuing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

What accomplishments does Washington ascribe to Lincoln? Why does Washington attribute higher importance to “the freedom of the soul” over “the freedom of the body”? Do you agree—why or why not? What does Lincoln's example teach us, and what lessons does it have, in particular for African Americans, according to Washington? Do you agree with his claim that “no one can degrade us except ourselves; that if we are worthy, no influence can defeat us”? Why do you think Washington ends his speech with praise of the “brave and true white men of the South”?

Mr. Chairman, Ladies and Gentlemen: You ask that which he found a piece of property and turned into a free American citizen to speak to you tonight on Abraham Lincoln. I am not fitted by ancestry or training to be your teacher tonight for, as I have stated, I was born a slave.

My first knowledge of Abraham Lincoln came in this way: I was awakened early one morning before the dawn of day, as I lay wrapped in a bundle of rags on the dirt floor of our slave cabin, by the prayers of my mother, just before leaving for her day's work, as she was kneeling over my body earnestly praying that Abraham Lincoln might succeed, and that one day she and her boy might be free. You give me the opportunity here this evening to celebrate with you and the nation the answer to that prayer.

Says the Great Book somewhere, “Though a man die, yet shall he live.” If this is true of the ordinary man, how much more true is it of the hero of the hour and the hero of the century—Abraham Lincoln! One hundred years of the life and influence of Lincoln is the story of the struggles, the trials, ambitions, and triumphs of the people of our complex American civilization. Interwoven into the warp and woof of this human complexity is the moving story of men and women of nearly every race and color in their progress from slavery to freedom, from poverty to wealth, from weakness to power, from ignorance to intelligence. Knit into the life of Abraham Lincoln is the story and success of the nation in the blending of all tongues, religions, colors, races into one composite nation, leaving each group and race free to live its own separate social life, and yet all a part of the great whole.

If a man die, shall he live? Answering this question as applied to our martyred President, perhaps you expect me to confine my words of appreciation to the great boon which, through him, was conferred upon my race. My undying gratitude and that of ten

millions of my race for this and yet more! To have been the instrument used by Providence through which four millions of slaves, now grown into ten millions of free citizens, were made free would bring eternal fame within itself, but this is not the only claim that Lincoln has upon our sense of gratitude and appreciation.

By the side of Armstrong and Garrison, Lincoln lives today. In the very highest sense he lives in the present more potently than fifty years ago; for that which is seen is temporal, that which is unseen is eternal. He lives in the 32,000 young men and women of the Negro race learning trades and useful occupations; in the 200,000 farms acquired by those he freed; in the more than 400,000 homes built; in the forty-six banks established and 10,000 stores owned; in the \$550,000,000 worth of taxable property in hand; in the 28,000 public schools existing, with 30,000 teachers; in the 170 industrial schools and colleges; in the 23,000 ministers and 26,000 churches.

But, above all this, he lives in the steady and unalterable determination of ten millions of black citizens to continue to climb year by year the ladder of the highest usefulness and to perfect themselves in strong, robust character. For making all this possible, Lincoln lives.

But, again, for a higher reason he lives tonight in every corner of the republic. To set the physical man free is much. To set the spiritual man free is more. So often the keeper is on the inside of the prison bars and the prisoner on the outside.

As an individual, grateful as I am to Lincoln for freedom of body, my gratitude is still greater for freedom of soul—the liberty which permits one to live up in that atmosphere where he refuses to permit sectional or racial hatred to drag down, to warp and narrow his soul.

The signing of the Emancipation Proclamation was a great event, and yet it was but the symbol of another, still greater and more momentous. We who celebrate this anniversary should not forget that the same pen that gave freedom to four millions of African slaves at the same time struck the shackles from the souls of twenty-seven millions of Americans of another color.

In any country, regardless of what its laws say, wherever people act upon the idea that the disadvantage of one man is the good of another, there slavery exists. Wherever in any country the whole people feel that the happiness of all is dependent upon the happiness of the weakest, there freedom exists.

In abolishing slavery, Lincoln proclaimed the principle that, even in the case of the humblest and weakest of mankind, the welfare of each is still the good of all. In reestablishing in this country the principle that, at bottom, the interests of humanity and of the individual are one, he freed men's souls from spiritual bondage; he freed them to mutual helpfulness. Henceforth no man of any race, either in the North or in the South, need feel constrained to fear or hate his brother.

By the same token that Lincoln made America free, he pushed back the boundaries of freedom everywhere, gave the spirit of liberty a wider influence throughout the world, and reestablished the dignity of man as man.

By the same act that freed my race, he said to the civilized and uncivilized world that man everywhere must be free, and that man everywhere must be enlightened, and the Lincoln spirit of freedom and fair play will never cease to spread and grow in power till throughout the world all men shall know the truth, and the truth shall make them free.

Lincoln in his day was wise enough to recognize that which is true in the present and for all time: that in a state of slavery and ignorance man renders the lowest and most costly form of service to his fellows. In a state of freedom and enlightenment he renders the highest and most helpful form of service.

The world is fast learning that of all forms of slavery there is none that is so harmful and degrading as that form of slavery which tempts one human being to hate another by reason of his race or color. One man cannot hold another man down in the ditch without remaining down in the ditch with him. One who goes through life with his eyes closed against all that is good in another race is weakened and circumscribed, as one who fights in a battle with one hand tied behind him. Lincoln was in the truest sense great because he unfettered himself. He climbed up out of the valley, where his vision was narrowed and weakened by the fog and miasma, onto the mountain top, where in a pure and unclouded atmosphere he could see the truth which enabled him to rate all men at their true worth. Growing out of this anniversary season and atmosphere, may there crystallize a resolve throughout the nation than on such a mountain the American people will strive to live.

We owe, then, to Lincoln physical freedom, moral freedom, and yet this is not all. There is a debt of gratitude which we as individuals, no matter of what race or nation, must recognize as due Abraham Lincoln—not for what he did as chief executive of the nation, but for what he did as a man. In his rise from the most abject poverty and ignorance to a position of high usefulness and power, he taught the world one of the greatest of all lessons. In fighting his own battle up from obscurity and squalor, he fought the battle of every other individual and race that is down, and so helped to pull up every other human who was down. People so often forget that by every inch that the lowest man crawls up he makes it easier for every other man to get up. Today, throughout the world, because Lincoln lived, struggled, and triumphed, every boy who is ignorant, is in poverty, is despised or discouraged, holds his head a little higher. His heart beats a little faster, his ambition to do something and be something is a little stronger, because Lincoln blazed the way.

To my race, the life of Abraham Lincoln has its special lesson at this point in our career. In so far as his life emphasizes patience, long suffering, sincerity, naturalness, dogged determination, and courage—courage to avoid the superficial, courage to persistently seek the substance instead of the shadow—it points the road for my people to travel.

As a race we are learning, I believe, in an increasing degree that the best way for us to honor the memory of our Emancipator is by seeking to imitate him. Like Lincoln, the Negro

race should seek to be simple, without bigotry and without ostentation. There is great power in simplicity. We as a race should, like Lincoln, have moral courage to be what we are, and not pretend to be what we are not. We should keep in mind that no one can degrade us except ourselves; that if we are worthy, no influence can defeat us. Like other races, the Negro will often meet obstacles, often be sorely tried and tempted; but we must keep in mind that freedom, in the broadest and highest sense, has never been a bequest; it has been a conquest.

In the final test, the success of our race will be in proportion to the service that it renders to the world. In the long run, the badge of service is the badge of sovereignty.

With all his other elements of strength, Abraham Lincoln possessed in the highest degree patience and, as I have said, courage. The highest form of courage is not always that exhibited on the battlefield in the midst of the blare of trumpets and the waving of banners. The highest courage is of the Lincoln kind. It is the same kind of courage, made possible by the new life and the new possibilities furnished by Lincoln's Proclamation, displayed by thousands of men and women of my race every year who are going out from Tuskegee and other Negro institutions in the South to lift up their fellows. When they go, often into lonely and secluded districts, with little thought of salary, with little thought of personal welfare, no drums beat, no banners fly, no friends stand by to cheer them on; but these brave young souls who are erecting schoolhouses, creating school systems, prolonging school terms, teaching the people to buy homes, build houses, and live decent lives are fighting the battles of this country just as truly and bravely as any persons who go forth to fight battles against a foreign foe.

In paying my tribute of respect to the Great Emancipator of my race, I desire to say a word here and now in behalf of an element of brave and true white men of the South who, though they saw in Lincoln's policy the ruin of all they believed in and hoped for, have loyally accepted the results of the Civil War, and are today working with a courage few people in the North can understand to uplift the Negro in the South and complete the emancipation that Lincoln began. I am tempted to say that it certainly required as high a degree of courage for men of the type of Robert E. Lee and John B. Gordon to accept the results of the war in the manner and spirit in which they did, as that which Grant and Sherman displayed in fighting the physical battles that saved the Union.

Lincoln was also a Southern man by birth, but he was one of those white men, of whom there is a large and growing class, who resented the idea that in order to assert and maintain the superiority of the Anglo-Saxon race it was necessary that another group of humanity should be kept in ignorance.

Lincoln was not afraid or ashamed to come into contact with the lowly of all races. His reputation and social position were not of such a transitory and transparent kind that he was afraid that he would lose them by being just and kind, even to a man of dark skin. I always pity from the bottom of my heart any man who feels that somebody else must be kept down or in ignorance in order that he may appear great by comparison. It requires no courage for a strong man to kick a weak one down.

Lincoln lives today because he had the courage which made him refuse to hate the man at the South or the man at the North when they did not agree with him. He had the courage as well as the patience and foresight to suffer in silence, to be misunderstood, to be abused, to refuse to revile when reviled. For he knew that, if he was right, the ridicule of today would be the applause of tomorrow. He knew, too, that at some time in the distant future our nation would repent of the folly of cursing our public servants while they live and blessing them only when they die. In this connection I cannot refrain from suggesting the question to the millions of voices raised today in his praise: "Why did you not say it yesterday?" Yesterday, when one word of approval and gratitude would have meant so much to him in strengthening his hand and heart.

As we recall tonight his deeds and words, we can do so with grateful hearts and strong faith in the future for the spread of righteousness. The civilization of the world is going forward, not backward. Here and there for a little season of progress of mankind may seem to halt or tarry by the wayside, or even appear to slide backward, but the trend is ever onward and upward, and will be until someone can invent and enforce a law to stop the progress of civilization. In goodness and liberality the world moves forward. It goes forward beneficently, but it moves forward relentlessly. In the last analysis the forces of nature are behind the moral progress of the world, and these forces will crush into powder any group of humanity that resists this progress.

As we gather here, brothers all, in common joy and thanksgiving for the life of Lincoln, may I not ask that you, the worthy representatives of seventy millions of white Americans, join heart and hand with the ten millions of black Americans—these ten millions who speak your tongue, profess your religion—who have never lifted their voices or hands except in defense of their country's honor and their country's flag—and swear eternal fealty to the memory and the traditions of the sainted Lincoln? I repeat, may we not join with your race, and let all of us here highly resolve that justice, good will, and peace shall be the motto of our lives? If this be true, in the highest sense Lincoln shall not have lived and died in vain.

And, finally, gathering inspiration and encouragement from this hour and Lincoln's life, I pledge to you and to the nation that my race, in so far as I can speak for it, which in the past, whether in ignorance or intelligence, whether in slavery or in freedom, has always been true to the Stars and Stripes and to the highest and best interests of this country, will strive to so deport itself that it shall reflect nothing but the highest credit upon the whole people in the North and in the South.

Address on Lincoln's 200th Birthday

BARACK OBAMA

On the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birthday—February 12, 2009—President Barack Obama (b. 1961), newly inaugurated, made these remarks at Lincoln's resting place of Springfield, Illinois. Why does President Obama emphasize "Lincoln the man" in his remarks? What lesson(s) does Lincoln as a man have to teach us? Note the theme of "union" in the speech. What is "union," and how can it be achieved? Do you find President Obama's discussion of union persuasive? Why or why not?

It is wonderful to be back in Springfield, the city where I got my start in elected office, where I served for nearly a decade, and where I launched my candidacy for President two years ago, this week—on the steps of the Old State Capitol where Abraham Lincoln served and prepared for the presidency.

It was here, nearly one hundred and fifty years ago, that the man whose life we are celebrating today bid farewell to this city he had come to call his own. On a platform at a train station not far from where we're gathered, Lincoln turned to the crowd that had come to see him off, and said, "To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything." Being here tonight, surrounded by all of you, I share his sentiments.

But looking out at this room, full of so many who did so much for me, I'm also reminded of what Lincoln once said to a favor-seeker who claimed it was his efforts that made the difference in the election. Lincoln asked him, "So you think you made me President?" "Yes," the man replied, "under Providence, I think I did." "Well," said Lincoln, "it's a pretty mess you've got me into. But I forgive you."

It is a humbling task, marking the bicentennial of our 16th President's birth—humbling for me in particular, I think, for the presidency of this singular figure in so many ways made my own story possible.

Here in Springfield, it is easier, perhaps, to reflect on Lincoln the man rather than the marble giant, before Gettysburg and Antietam, Fredericksburg and Bull Run, before emancipation was proclaimed and the captives were set free. In 1854, Lincoln was simply a Springfield lawyer, who'd served just a single term in Congress. Possibly in his law office, his feet on a cluttered desk, his sons playing around him, his clothes a bit too small to fit his uncommon frame, he put some thoughts on paper for what purpose we do not know:

"The legitimate object of government," he wrote, "is to do for the people what needs to be done, but which they can not, by individual effort, do at all, or do so well, by themselves."

To do for the people what needs to be done but which they cannot do on their own. It is a simple statement. But it answers a central question of Abraham Lincoln's life. Why did he land on the side of union? What was it that made him so unrelenting in pursuit of victory that he was willing to test the Constitution he ultimately preserved? What was it that led this man to give his last full measure of devotion so that our nation might endure?

These are not easy questions to answer, and I cannot know if I am right. But I suspect that his devotion to union came not from a belief that government always had the answer. It came not from a failure to understand our individual rights and responsibilities. This rugged rail-splitter, born in a log cabin of pioneer stock; who cleared a path through the woods as a boy; who lost a mother and a sister to the rigors of frontier life; who taught himself all he knew—this man, our first Republican President, knew, better than anyone, what it meant to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. He understood that strain of personal liberty and self-reliance at the heart of the American experience.

But he also understood something else. He recognized that while each of us must do our part, work as hard as we can, and be as responsible as we can—in the end, there are certain things we cannot do on our own. There are certain things we can only do together. There are certain things only a union can do.

Only a union could harness the courage of our pioneers to settle the American west, which is why he passed a Homestead Act giving a tract of land to anyone seeking a stake in our growing economy.

Only a union could foster the ingenuity of our farmers, which is why he set up land-grant colleges that taught them how to make the most of their land while giving their children an education that let them dream the American dream.

Only a union could speed our expansion and connect our coasts with a transcontinental railroad, and so, even in the midst of civil war, he built one. He fueled new enterprises with a national currency, spurred innovation, and ignited America's imagination with a national academy of sciences, believing we must, as he put it, add "the fuel of interest to the fire of genius in the discovery . . . of new and useful things." And on this day, that is also the bicentennial of Charles Darwin's birth, let us renew that commitment to science and innovation once more.

Only a union could serve the hopes of every citizen—to knock down the barriers to opportunity and give each and every person the chance to pursue the American dream. Lincoln understood what Washington understood when he led farmers, craftsmen, and shopkeepers to rise up against an empire. What Roosevelt understood when he lifted us from Depression, built an arsenal of democracy, and created the largest middle-class in history with the GI Bill. It's what Kennedy understood when he sent us to the moon.

All these presidents recognized that America is—and always has been—more than a band of thirteen colonies, more than a bunch of Yankees and Confederates, more than a collection of Red States and Blue States. We are the United States of America and there

isn't any dream beyond our reach, any obstacle that can stand in our way, when we recognize that our individual liberty is served, not negated, by a recognition of the common good.

That is the spirit we are called to show once more. The challenges we face are very different now. Two wars, and an economic crisis unlike any we have seen in our lifetime. Jobs have been lost. Pensions are gone. Families' dreams have been endangered. Health care costs are exploding. Schools are falling short. And we have an energy crisis that is hampering our economy, threatening our planet, and enriching our adversaries.

And yet, while our challenges may be new, they did not come about overnight. Ultimately, they result from a failure to meet the test that Lincoln set. To be sure, there have been times in our history when our government has misjudged what we can do by individual effort alone, and what we can only do together; when it has done things that people can—or should—do for themselves. Our welfare system, for example, too often dampened individual initiative, discouraging people from taking responsibility for their own upward mobility. With respect to education, we have all too frequently lost sight of the role of parents, rather than government, in cultivating a thirst for knowledge and instilling those qualities of a good character—hard work, discipline, and integrity—that are so important to educational achievement and professional success.

But in recent years, we've seen the pendulum swing too far in the opposite direction. It's a philosophy that says every problem can be solved if only government would step out of the way; that if government were just dismantled, divvied up into tax breaks, and handed out to the wealthiest among us, it would somehow benefit us all. Such knee-jerk disdain for government—this constant rejection of any common endeavor—cannot rebuild our levees or our roads or our bridges. It cannot refurbish our schools or modernize our health care system; lead to the next medical discovery or yield the research and technology that will spark a clean energy economy.

Only a nation can do these things. Only by coming together, all of us, and expressing that sense of shared sacrifice and responsibility—for ourselves and one another—can we do the work that must be done in this country. That is the very definition of being American.

It is only by rebuilding our economy and fostering the conditions of growth that willing workers can find a job, companies can find capital, and the entrepreneurial spirit that is the key to our competitiveness can flourish. It is only by unleashing the potential of alternative fuels that we will lower our energy bills and raise our industries' sights, make our nation safer and our planet cleaner. It is only by remaking our schools for the 21st century that our children will get those good jobs so they can make of their lives what they will. It is only by coming together to do what people need done that we will, in Lincoln's words, "lift artificial weights from all shoulders [and give] all an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life."

That is what is required of us—now and in the years ahead. We will be remembered for what we choose to make of this moment. And when posterity looks back on our time, as

we are looking back on Lincoln's, I do not want it said that we saw an economic crisis, but did not stem it. That we saw our schools decline and our bridges crumble, but did not rebuild them. That the world changed in the 21st century, but America did not lead it. That we were consumed with small things when we were called to do great things. Instead, let them say that this generation—our generation—of Americans rose to the moment and gave America a new birth of freedom and opportunity in our time.

These are trying days and they will grow tougher in the months to come. There will be moments when our doubts rise and our hopes recede. But let's always remember that we, as a people, have been here before. There were times when our revolution itself seemed altogether improbable, when the union was all but lost, and fascism seemed set to prevail. And yet, what earlier generations discovered—what we must rediscover right now—is that it is precisely when we are in the deepest valley, precisely when the climb is steepest, that Americans relearn how to take the mountaintop. Together. As one nation. As one people. That is how we will beat back our present dangers. That is how we will surpass what trials may come. And that is how we will do what Lincoln called on us to do, and “nobly save . . . the last best hope of earth.” Thank you, God Bless you, and may God Bless America.

2



The Career of
Abraham Lincoln

A Timeline of Abraham Lincoln

1809: February 12, Born in Kentucky.

1834: August 4th, elected to the Illinois House of Representatives as a representative for Sangamon County.

1836: August 1st, Lincoln elected to the Illinois legislature again.

1838: January 27th, Lincoln gives address to the Springfield Young Men's Lyceum on "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions."

1838: August 6th, Lincoln elected to the Illinois legislature for the third time.

1842: November 4th, Lincoln and Mary Todd are married.

1846: August 3rd, elected to the U.S. House of Representatives.

1854: October 16th, Lincoln gives Peoria speech on his opposition to the Kansas-Nebraska Act.

1857: June 26th, Lincoln gives speech in Springfield, IL, against the *Dred Scott* decision.

1858: June 16th, Lincoln gives his "House Divided" speech in Springfield, IL, to the Illinois State Republican Convention after accepting the Republican nomination to run against Stephen A. Douglas for his U.S. Senate seat.

1860: February 27th, gives Cooper Union address on slavery and the founders of the Constitution in New York, New York.

1860: May 18th, wins Republican nomination for president.

1860: November 6th, Lincoln elected as 16th President of the United States and first Republican President.

1860: December 20th, South Carolina secedes from the Union in response.

1861: February 9th, The South sets up the Confederate States, and elects Jefferson Davis their president. By this time, South Carolina, Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas had already seceded. They would soon be followed by Virginia, Arkansas, Tennessee, and North Carolina in the next three months.

1861: March 4th, Lincoln's inauguration, gives First Inaugural Address.

1861: April 12th, Confederates fire on Fort Sumter, beginning the Civil War.

1861: April 15th, President Lincoln calls forth “the Militia of the several States of the Union to the aggregate number of seventy-five thousand.” He also convenes Congress to meet in extra session on July 4th.

1861: July 4th, Lincoln’s war message communicated to Congress as an official government document.

1862: August 22nd, Lincoln writes “I would save the Union” response letter to the *New York Tribune* editorial. It was published on August 25th.

1863: January 1st, Lincoln issues the final Emancipation Proclamation declaring slaves held in the states in rebellion free.

1863: July 1st-3rd, The Confederate invasion of Pennsylvania under General Robert E. Lee is defeated by General Meade at Gettysburg.

1863: July 30th, Issues the Order of Retaliation, punishing the South for their treatment of black Union soldiers.

1863: August 10th, Lincoln meets with abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass, who pushes for the full equality among Union troops. This would be the first of many visits by Douglass to the White House.

1863: November 19th, Lincoln delivers the Gettysburg Address at the ceremony dedicating the battlefield as a National Cemetery.

1863: December 8th, The President issues a Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction, a plan to restore the Union.

1864: March 12th, Ulysses S. Grant is appointed by Lincoln as General-in-Chief of all the federal armies.

1864: June 8th, Lincoln is nominated for a second term as president by a coalition of Republicans and War Democrats.

1864: August 31st, Lincoln makes a speech to the 148th Ohio Regiment, reiterating his thoughts from the Gettysburg Address.

1864: November 8th, Lincoln is re-elected as president, winning 212 of the 233 electoral votes and 55 percent of the popular vote from the states that remained in the Union.

1864: December 21st, Sherman reaches Savannah, completing his “March to the Sea” and leaving a large path of destruction of the South’s resources throughout Georgia.

1865: March 4th, After winning re-election, Lincoln delivers his Second Inaugural Address.

A Timeline of Abraham Lincoln

1865: April 9th, At Appomattox Court House in Virginia, Lee agrees to Grant's terms of surrender, officially ending the Civil War.

1865: April 11th, Lincoln makes his last public speech, focusing on the problems of Reconstruction.

1865: April 14th, Lincoln is shot by John Wilkes Booth while attending the play "Our American Cousin" at Ford's Theatre in Washington's Penn Quarter.

1865: April 15th, Lincoln dies at 7:22 in the morning at the Peterson Boarding House in Washington, DC.

1865: April 19th, A funeral service is held for Lincoln at the White House, with thousands of Americans watching the procession.

1865: April 21st, Lincoln's funeral train departs, traveling the country for 12 days until it reaches Lincoln's final resting place in Springfield, Illinois.



Young Lincoln



The Kentucky Home

from *Four Great Americans*

JAMES BALDWIN

This story of Lincoln's early life was included in educator James Baldwin's (1841-1925) 1897 collection Four Great Americans: Washington, Franklin, Webster, Lincoln—A Book for Young Americans. This selection tells the story of Lincoln's humble beginnings in a small one-room cabin on a farm in central Kentucky. Lincoln's parents—Thomas and Nancy Lincoln—moved to the farm in 1808, and Lincoln lived there until the age of seven when his family left for Indiana. Two years later, his mother died of milk-sickness, an illness caused by drinking contaminated milk. The next year, Thomas married Sarah Bush Johnson, a widow with three children.

How did these early hardships affect Lincoln, in Baldwin's telling? Lincoln himself cautioned his biographers of making much of his early life: "It is great folly to attempt to make anything out of my early life. It can all be condensed to a single sentence, and that sentence you will find in Gray's Elegy: 'The short and simple annals of the poor.'" Do you agree with Lincoln? Describe Lincoln's childhood education: What kinds of books did he read? How might they have influenced him? In particular, what does the example of George Washington mean to Lincoln?

Not far from Hodgenville, in Kentucky, there once lived a man whose name was Thomas Lincoln. This man had built for himself a little log cabin by the side of a brook, where there was an ever-flowing spring of water.

There was but one room in this cabin. On the side next to the brook there was a low doorway; and at one end there was a large fireplace, built of rough stones and clay.

The chimney was very broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. It was made of clay, with flat stones and slender sticks laid around the outside to keep it from falling apart.

In the wall, on one side of the fireplace, there was a square hole for a window. But there was no glass in this window. In the summer it was left open all the time. In cold weather a deerskin, or a piece of coarse cloth, was hung over it to keep out the wind and the snow.

At night, or on stormy days, the skin of a bear was hung across the doorway; for there was no door on hinges to be opened and shut.

There was no ceiling to the room. But the inmates of the cabin, by looking up, could see the bare rafters and the rough roof-boards, which Mr. Lincoln himself had split and hewn.

There was no floor, but only the bare ground that had been smoothed and beaten until it was as level and hard as pavement.

For chairs there were only blocks of wood and a rude bench on one side of the fireplace. The bed was a little platform of poles, on which were spread the furry skins of wild animals, and a patchwork quilt of homespun goods.

In this poor cabin, on the 12th of February, 1809, a baby boy was born. There was already one child in the family—a girl, two years old, whose name was Sarah.

The little boy grew and became strong like other babies, and his parents named him Abraham, after his grandfather, who had been killed by the Indians many years before.

When he was old enough to run about, he liked to play under the trees by the cabin door. Sometimes he would go with his little sister into the woods and watch the birds and the squirrels.

He had no playmates. He did not know the meaning of toys or playthings. But he was a happy child and had many pleasant ways.

Thomas Lincoln, the father, was a kind-hearted man, very strong and brave. Sometimes he would take the child on his knee and tell him strange, true stories of the great forest, and of the Indians and the fierce beasts that roamed among the woods and hills.

For Thomas Lincoln had always lived on the wild frontier; and he would rather hunt deer and other game in the forest than do anything else. Perhaps this is why he was so poor. Perhaps this is why he was content to live in the little log cabin with so few of the comforts of life.

But Nancy Lincoln, the young mother, did not complain. She, too, had grown up among the rude scenes of the backwoods. She had never known better things.

And yet she was by nature refined and gentle; and people who knew her said that she was very handsome. She was a model housekeeper, too; and her poor log cabin was the neatest and best-kept house in all that neighborhood. . . .

There was still another thing that she could do—she could read; and she read all the books that she could get hold of. She taught her husband the letters of the alphabet; and she showed him how to write his name. For Thomas Lincoln had never gone to school, and he had never learned how to read.

As soon as little Abraham Lincoln was old enough to understand, his mother read stories to him from the Bible. Then, while he was still very young, she taught him to read the stories for himself.

The neighbors thought it a wonderful thing that so small a boy could read. There were very few of them who could do as much. Few of them thought it of any great use to learn how to read.

SCHOOL AND BOOKS

Just how Abraham Lincoln stood in his classes I do not know; but I must believe that he studied hard and did everything as well as he could. In the arithmetic which he used, he wrote these lines:

“Abraham Lincoln,
His hand and pen,
He will be good,
But God knows when.”

In a few weeks, Azel Dorsey's school came to a close; and Abraham Lincoln was again as busy as ever about his father's farm. After that he attended school only two or three short terms. If all his school days were put together they would not make a twelve-month.

But he kept on reading and studying at home. His stepmother said of him: “He read everything he could lay his hands on. When he came across a passage that struck him, he would write it down on boards, if he had no paper, and keep it until he had got paper. Then he would copy it, look at it, commit it to memory, and repeat it.”

Among the books that he read were the Bible, the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and the poems of Robert Burns. One day he walked a long distance to borrow a book of a farmer. This book was Weems's *Life of Washington*. He read as much as he could while walking home.

By that time it was dark, and so he sat down by the chimney and read by fire light until bedtime. Then he took the book to bed with him in the loft, and read by the light of a tallow candle.

In an hour the candle burned out. He laid the book in a crevice between two of the logs of the cabin, so that he might begin reading again as soon as it was daylight.

But in the night a storm came up. The rain was blown in, and the book was wet through and through.

In the morning, when Abraham awoke, he saw what had happened. He dried the leaves as well as he could, and then finished reading the book.

As soon as he had eaten his breakfast, he hurried to carry the book to its owner. He explained how the accident had happened.

“Mr. Crawford,” he said, “I am willing to pay you for the book. I have no money; but, if you will let me, I will work for you until I have made its price.”

Mr. Crawford thought that the book was worth seventy-five cents, and that Abraham's work would be worth about twenty-five cents a day. And so the lad helped the farmer gather corn for three days, and thus became the owner of the delightful book.

He read the story of Washington many times over. He carried the book with him to the field, and read it while he was following the plow.

From that time, Washington was the one great hero whom he admired. Why could not he model his own life after that of Washington? Why could not he also be a doer of great things for his country?

A Stepmother's Recollection

WILLIAM H. HERNDON

Sarah Bush Lincoln (1788–1869), the second wife of Thomas Lincoln, was much beloved by her stepson, Abraham. Although illiterate herself, she encouraged his education and supported him in his love of books and learning. One of the last things Lincoln did before leaving Illinois for the White House was to visit “mama,” as he always called her. This recollection of Lincoln is taken from an interview Lincoln’s Springfield law partner William Herndon (1818–91) conducted with Sarah on September 8, 1865, at her home eight miles south of Charleston, Illinois. It was later included in his 1889 biography, Herndon’s Lincoln: The True Story of a Great Life, coauthored with Jesse W. Weik (1857–1930).

Compare this recollection with Baldwin’s story above. How are they similar? How are they different? What was Lincoln like as a stepson, student, and friend, according to Sarah? What things did he care for most?

Abe was about nine years of age when I landed in Indiana. The country was wild, and desolate. Abe was a good boy; he didn’t like physical labor, was diligent for knowledge, wished to know, and if pains and labor would get it, he was sure to get it. He was the best boy I ever saw. He read all the books he could lay his hands on. I can’t remember dates nor names, am about seventy-five years of age; Abe read the Bible some, though not as much as said; he sought more congenial books suitable for his age. I think newspapers were had in Indiana as early as 1824 and up to 1830 when we moved to Illinois. Abe was a constant reader of them. I am sure of this for the years of 1827-28-29-30. The name of the *Louisville Journal* seems to sound like one.

Abe read history papers and other books, can’t name any one, have forgotten. Abe had no particular religion, didn’t think of that question at that time, if he ever did. He never talked about it. He read diligently, studied in the daytime, didn’t after night much, went to bed early, got up early, and then read, eat his breakfast, got to work in the field with the men. Abe read all the books he could lay his hands on, and when he came across a passage that struck him, he would write it down on boards if he had no paper and keep it there till he did get paper, then he would rewrite it, look at it, repeat it. He had a copybook, a kind of scrapbook, in which he put down all things and then preserved them. He ciphered on boards when he had no paper or no slate, and when the board would get too black, he would shave it off with a drawing knife and go on again. When he had paper, he put his lines down on it. His copybook is here now or was lately.

Abe, when old folks were at our house, was a silent and attentive observer, never speaking or asking questions till they were gone, and then he must understand everything, even to the smallest thing, minutely and exactly; he would then repeat it over to himself again and again, sometimes in one form and then in another, and when it was fixed in his mind to suit him, he became easy and he never lost that fact or his understanding of it.

Sometimes he seemed perturbed to give expression to his ideas and got mad, almost, as one who couldn't explain plainly what he wanted to convey.

He would hear sermons preached, come home, take the children out, get on a stump or log, and almost repeat it word for word. He made other speeches, such as interested him and the children. His father had to make him quit sometimes, as he quit his own work to speak and made the other children as well as the men quit their work. As a usual thing Mr. Lincoln never made Abe quit reading to do anything if he could avoid it. He would do it himself first. Mr. Lincoln could read a little and could scarcely write his name; hence he wanted, as he himself felt the uses and necessities of educating, his boy Abraham to learn, and he encouraged him to do it in all ways he could.

Abe was a good boy, and I can say what scarcely one woman, a mother, can say in a thousand and it is this: Abe never gave me a cross word or look and never refused in fact, or even in appearance, to do anything I requested him. I never gave him a cross word in all my life. He was kind to everybody and to everything and always accommodated others if he could, would do so willingly if he could. His mind and mine, what little I had, seemed to run together, more in the same channel. Abe could easily learn and long remember, and when he did learn anything he learned it well and thoroughly.

What he thus learned he stored away in his memory, which was extremely good. What he learned and stored away was well defined in his own mind, repeated over and over again and again, till it was so defined and fixed firmly and permanently in his memory. He rose early, went to bed early, not reading much after night. Abe was a moderate eater, and I now have no remembrance of his special dish; he sat down and ate what was set before him, making no complaint; he seemed careless about this. I cooked his meals for nearly fifteen years. He always had good health, never was sick, was very careful of his person, was tolerably neat and clean only, cared nothing for clothes, so that they were clean and neat, further cut no figure with him, nor color, new stuff, nor material; was careless about these things. He was more fleshy in Indiana than ever in Illinois.

I saw him every year or two. He was here after he was elected President of the United States. As company would come to our house Abe was a silent listener, wouldn't speak, would sometimes take a book and retire aloft, go to the stable or field or woods, and read. Abe was always fond of fun, sport, wit, and jokes. He was sometimes very witty indeed. He never drank whisky or other strong drink, was temperate in all things, too much so, I thought sometimes. He never told me a lie in his life, never evaded, never quarreled, never dodged nor turned a corner to avoid any chastisement or other responsibility. He never swore or used profane language in my presence nor in others' that I now remember of. He duly revered old age, loved those best about his own age, played with those under his age; he listened to the aged, argued with his equals, but played with the children. He loved animals generally and treated them kindly; he loved children well, very well. There seemed to be nothing unusual in his love for animals or his own kind, though he treated everybody and everything kindly, humanely.

Abe didn't care much for crowds of people; he chose his own company, which was always good. He was not very fond of girls, as he seemed to me. He sometimes attended church. He would repeat the sermon over again to the children. The sight of such a thing amused all and did especially tickle the children. When Abe was reading, my husband took particular care not to disturb him, would let him read on and on till Abe quit of his own accord. He was dutiful to me always; he loved me truly, I think. I had a son John who was raised with Abe. Both were good boys, but I must say, both now being dead, that Abe was the best boy I ever saw or ever expect to see. I wish I had died when my husband did.

I did not want Abe to run for President, did not want him elected, was afraid somehow or other, felt it in my heart that something would happen to him, and when he came down to see me after he was elected President I still felt that something told me that something would befall Abe and that I should see him no more. Abe and his father are in Heaven, I have no doubt, and I want to go to them, go where they are. God bless Abraham.

Letter to J. W. Fell

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Jesse W. Fell (1808–87) was an Illinois businessman and close friend of Lincoln. As Lincoln became active in national politics in the mid-1850s, Fell convinced him that writing a short autobiographical sketch would boost his chances of becoming a serious presidential candidate. After much prodding, Lincoln agreed to pen the short piece below on December 20, 1859, which gives a brief account of his early years. Lincoln describes his frontier origins, his selection as captain in the Black Hawk War (an 1832 conflict between Illinois and Michigan settlers and the Native Americans), his legal and political career in Springfield, and his return to political life, spurred by the crisis over slavery's expansion into the Western territories. He ends with a humorous and self-deprecating description of his ungainly physical appearance.

Why might Lincoln want this sketch to be “modest?” Why does he emphasize certain events in his life (e.g., his military service, his political loss in 1832)? Why does he end with a humorous aside about his physical appearance? What does this sketch tell you about Lincoln as a man and political leader? Imagine that you were a voter in the 1850s, how would you react to Lincoln's account of his life? Would you want to vote for him? Why or why not? Considering both Baldwin's story and Sarah's remembrance, what personal qualities and circumstances do you think were most important to Lincoln's rise to the presidency?

My dear Sir: Herewith is a little sketch, as you requested. There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me. If anything be made out of it, I wish it to be modest, and not to go beyond the material. If it were thought necessary to incorporate anything from any of my speeches, I suppose there would be no objection. Of course it must not appear to have been written by myself.

Yours very truly,
A. Lincoln.

I was born February 12, 1809, in Hardin County, Kentucky. My parents were both born in Virginia, of undistinguished families—second families, perhaps I should say. My mother, who died in my tenth year, was of a family of the name of Hanks, some of whom now reside in Adams, and others in Macon County, Illinois. My paternal grandfather, Abraham Lincoln, emigrated from Rockingham County, Virginia, to Kentucky about 1781 or 1782, where a year or two later he was killed by the Indians, not in battle, but by stealth, when he was laboring to open a farm in the forest. His ancestors, who were Quakers, went to Virginia from Berks County, Pennsylvania. An effort to identify them with the New England family of the same name ended in nothing more definite than a similarity of Christian names in both families, such as Enoch, Levi, Mordecai, Solomon, Abraham, and the like.

My father, at the death of his father, was but six years of age, and he grew up literally without education. He removed from Kentucky to what is now Spencer County, Indiana, in my eighth year. We reached our new home about the time the State came into the Union. It was a wild region, with many bears and other wild animals still in the woods. There I grew up. There were some schools, so called, but no qualification was ever required of a teacher beyond “readin’, writin’, and cipherin’” to the rule of three. If a straggler supposed to understand Latin happened to sojourn in the neighborhood, he was looked upon as a wizard. There was absolutely nothing to excite ambition for education. Of course, when I came of age I did not know much. Still, somehow, I could read, write, and cipher to the rule of three, but that was all. I have not been to school since. The little advance I now have upon this store of education, I have picked up from time to time under the pressure of necessity.

I was raised to farm work, which I continued till I was twenty-two. At twenty-two I came to Illinois, Macon County. Then I got to New Salem, at that time in Sangamon, now in Menard County, where I remained a year as a sort of clerk in a store. Then came the Black Hawk war; and I was elected a captain of volunteers, a success which gave me more pleasure than any I have had since. I went the campaign, was elated, ran for the legislature the same year (1832), and was beaten—the only time I ever have been beaten by the people. The next and three succeeding biennial elections I was elected to the legislature. I was not a candidate afterward. During this legislative period I had studied law, and removed to Springfield to practice it. In 1846 I was once elected to the lower House of Congress. Was not a candidate for reelection. From 1849 to 1854, both inclusive, practiced law more assiduously than ever before. Always a Whig in politics: and generally on the Whig electoral tickets, making active canvasses. I was losing interest in politics when the repeal of the Missouri compromise aroused me again. What I have done since then is pretty well known.

If any personal description of me is thought desirable, it may be said I am, in height, six feet four inches, nearly; lean in flesh, weighing on an average one hundred and eighty pounds; dark complexion, with coarse black hair and grey eyes. No other marks or brands recollected.

Lyceum Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

One of Lincoln's earliest published speeches, the Lyceum Address was delivered when Lincoln was just 28 years old and newly arrived in Springfield, Illinois. A little-known lawyer serving as a state representative, Lincoln spoke before a gathering of young men and women on January 27, 1838 about "the perpetuation of our political institutions." Prompted by the murder of an abolitionist printer in Illinois two months earlier, he worried that Americans were increasingly inclined to take the law into their own hands. In the grip of strong passions, they were substituting vigilante justice for the justice of law.

In addition to tracing the dangerous effects of this slide into lawlessness and mob rule, Lincoln speaks about the dangers of ambitious men. At the end, he proposes a solution: "Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others. . . . Let reverence for the laws . . . become the political religion of the nation." Well aware of the dilemma posed by unjust laws, Lincoln nonetheless insists on law-abidingness: "bad laws, if they exist, should be repealed as soon as possible, still while they continue in force, for the sake of example, they should be religiously observed." Such "reverence for the constitution and laws," Lincoln argues, is one of the new pillars of the temple of liberty, indispensable for preserving our political institutions and retaining the attachment of the citizens, now that the founding generation had gone to rest. Only an attached and law-revering citizenry, Lincoln suggests, can withstand the threats to liberty posed by men of colossal ambition, those who belong "to the family of the lion, or the tribe of the eagle," men who, in order to achieve distinction, would as soon enslave free men as emancipate slaves.

What is "reverence for the laws"? Does it differ from fear of punishment? Is reverence (or political religion) necessary to the preservation of our political institutions? Is it sufficient for binding citizens to the Republic? Is it sufficient for containing people of great ambition? If not, what else might be needed? Is Lincoln right that disobedience always undermines respect for law? In a democracy (where laws are arrived at by majority rule), must we obey bad laws in order not to undercut good laws or law itself? What is the relation between "political religion" (reverence for the laws) and religion as most citizens know it (reverence for God)? What happens if the two conflict? Is Lincoln right to worry about men of colossal political ambitions? What light might his reflections on these people shed on Lincoln's understanding of his own ambitions?

As a subject for the remarks of the evening, *the perpetuation of our political institutions*, is selected.

In the great journal of things happening under the sun, we, the American People, find our account running, under date of the nineteenth century of the Christian era.—We find ourselves in the peaceful possession, of the fairest portion of the earth, as regards extent of

territory, fertility of soil, and salubrity of climate. We find ourselves under the government of a system of political institutions, conducing more essentially to the ends of civil and religious liberty, than any of which the history of former times tells us. We, when mounting the stage of existence, found ourselves the legal inheritors of these fundamental blessings. We toiled not in the acquirement or establishment of them—they are a legacy bequeathed us, by a *once* hardy, brave, and patriotic, but *now* lamented and departed race of ancestors. Theirs was the task (and nobly they performed it) to possess themselves, and through themselves, us, of this goodly land; and to uprear upon its hills and its valleys, a political edifice of liberty and equal rights; 'tis ours only, to transmit these, the former, unprofaned by the foot of an invader; the latter, undecayed by the lapse of time and untorn by usurpation, to the latest generation that fate shall permit the world to know. This task of gratitude to our fathers, justice to ourselves, duty to posterity, and love for our species in general, all imperatively require us faithfully to perform.

How then shall we perform it?—At what point shall we expect the approach of danger? By what means shall we fortify against it?—Shall we expect some transatlantic military giant, to step the Ocean, and crush us at a blow? Never!—All the armies of Europe, Asia and Africa combined, with all the treasure of the earth (our own excepted) in their military chest; with a Buonaparte for a commander, could not by force, take a drink from the Ohio, or make a track on the Blue Ridge, in a trial of a thousand years.

At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad. If destruction be our lot, we must ourselves be its author and finisher. As a nation of freemen, we must live through all time, or die by suicide.

I hope I am over wary; but if I am not, there is, even now, something of ill-omen, amongst us. I mean the increasing disregard for law which pervades the country; the growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions, in lieu of the sober judgment of Courts; and the worse than savage mobs, for the executive ministers of justice. This disposition is awfully fearful in any community; and that it now exists in ours, though grating to our feelings to admit, it would be a violation of truth, and an insult to our intelligence, to deny. Accounts of outrages committed by mobs, form the every-day news of the times. They have pervaded the country, from New England to Louisiana;—they are neither peculiar to the eternal snows of the former, nor the burning suns of the latter;—they are not the creature of climate—neither are they confined to the slave-holding, or the non-slave-holding States. Alike, they spring up among the pleasure hunting masters of Southern slaves, and the order loving citizens of the land of steady habits.—Whatever, then, their cause may be, it is common to the whole country.

It would be tedious, as well as useless, to recount the horrors of all of them. Those happening in the State of Mississippi, and at St. Louis, are, perhaps, the most dangerous in example and revolting to humanity. In the Mississippi case, they first commenced by hanging the regular gamblers; a set of men, certainly not following for a livelihood, a very useful, or very honest occupation; but one which, so far from being forbidden by the laws, was actually licensed by an act of the Legislature, passed but a single year before. Next,

negroes, suspected of conspiring to raise an insurrection, were caught up and hanged in all parts of the State: then, white men, supposed to be leagued with the negroes; and finally, strangers, from neighboring States, going thither on business, were, in many instances subjected to the same fate. Thus went on this process of hanging, from gamblers to negroes, from negroes to white citizens, and from these to strangers; till, dead men were seen literally dangling from the boughs of trees upon every road side; and in numbers almost sufficient, to rival the native Spanish moss of the country, as a drapery of the forest.

Turn, then, to that horror-striking scene at St. Louis. A single victim was only sacrificed there. His story is very short; and is, perhaps, the most highly tragic, if anything of its length, that has ever been witnessed in real life. A mulatto man, by the name of McIntosh, was seized in the street, dragged to the suburbs of the city, chained to a tree, and actually burned to death; and all within a single hour from the time he had been a freeman, attending to his own business, and at peace with the world.

Such are the effects of mob law; and such as the scenes, becoming more and more frequent in this land so lately famed for love of law and order; and the stories of which, have even now grown too familiar, to attract any thing more, than an idle remark.

But you are, perhaps, ready to ask, "What has this to do with the perpetuation of our political institutions?" I answer, it has much to do with it. Its direct consequences are, comparatively speaking, but a small evil; and much of its danger consists, in the proneness of our minds, to regard its direct, as its only consequences. Abstractly considered, the hanging of the gamblers at Vicksburg, was of but little consequence. They constitute a portion of population, that is worse than useless in any community; and their death, if no pernicious example be set by it, is never matter of reasonable regret with any one. If they were annually swept, from the stage of existence, by the plague or small pox, honest men would, perhaps, be much profited, by the operation.—Similar too, is the correct reasoning, in regard to the burning of the negro at St. Louis. He had forfeited his life, by the perpetuation of an outrageous murder, upon one of the most worthy and respectable citizens of the city; and had not he died as he did, he must have died by the sentence of the law, in a very short time afterwards. As to him alone, it was as well the way it was, as it could otherwise have been.—But the example in either case, was fearful.—When men take it in their heads to day, to hang gamblers, or burn murderers, they should recollect, that, in the confusion usually attending such transactions, they will be as likely to hang or burn some one who is neither a gambler nor a murderer as one who is; and that, acting upon the example they set, the mob of to-morrow, may, and probably will, hang or burn some of them by the very same mistake. And not only so; the innocent, those who have ever set their faces against violations of law in every shape, alike with the guilty, fall victims to the ravages of mob law; and thus it goes on, step by step, till all the walls erected for the defense of the persons and property of individuals, are trodden down, and disregarded. But all this even, is not the full extent of the evil.—By such examples, by instances of the perpetrators of such acts going unpunished, the lawless in spirit, are encouraged to become lawless in practice; and having been used to no restraint, but dread of punishment, they thus become, absolutely unrestrained.—Having ever regarded Government as their deadliest bane, they make a jubilee of the suspension of its operations; and pray for nothing so much, as its total

annihilation. While, on the other hand, good men, men who love tranquility, who desire to abide by the laws, and enjoy their benefits, who would gladly spill their blood in the defense of their country; seeing their property destroyed; their families insulted, and their lives endangered; their persons injured; and seeing nothing in prospect that forebodes a change for the better; become tired of, and disgusted with, a Government that offers them no protection; and are not much averse to a change in which they imagine they have nothing to lose. Thus, then, by the operation of this mobocratic spirit, which all must admit, is now abroad in the land, the strongest bulwark of any Government, and particularly of those constituted like ours, may effectually be broken down and destroyed—I mean the *attachment* of the People. Whenever this effect shall be produced among us; whenever the vicious portion of population shall be permitted to gather in bands of hundreds and thousands, and burn churches, ravage and rob provision-stores, throw printing presses into rivers, shoot editors, and hang and burn obnoxious persons at pleasure, and with impunity; depend on it, this Government cannot last. By such things, the feelings of the best citizens will become more or less alienated from it; and thus it will be left without friends, or with too few, and those few too weak, to make their friendship effectual. At such a time and under such circumstances, men of sufficient talent and ambition will not be wanting to seize the opportunity, strike the blow, and overturn that fair fabric, which for the last half century, has been the fondest hope, of the lovers of freedom, throughout the world.

I know the American People are *much* attached to their Government;—I know they would suffer *much* for its sake;—I know they would endure evils long and patiently, before they would ever think of exchanging it for another. Yet, notwithstanding all this, if the laws be continually despised and disregarded, if their rights to be secure in their persons and property, are held by no better tenure than the caprice of a mob, the alienation of their affections from the Government is the natural consequence; and to that, sooner or later, it must come.

Here then, is one point at which danger may be expected.

The question recurs, “how shall we fortify against it?” The answer is simple. Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never to tolerate their violation by others. As the patriots of seventy-six did to the support of the Declaration of Independence, so to the support of the Constitution and Laws, let every American pledge his life, his property, and his sacred honor;—let every man remember that to violate the law, is to trample on the blood of his father, and to tear the character of his own, and his children's liberty. Let reverence for the laws, be breathed by every American mother, to the lisping babe, that prattles on her lap—let it be taught in schools, in seminaries, and in colleges; let it be written in Primers, spelling books, and in Almanacs;—let it be preached from the pulpit, proclaimed in legislative halls, and enforced in courts of justice. And, in short, let it become the *political religion* of the nation; and let the old and the young, the rich and the poor, the grave and the gay, of all sexes and tongues, and colors and conditions, sacrifice unceasingly upon its altars.

While ever a state of feeling, such as this, shall universally, or even, very generally prevail throughout the nation, vain will be every effort, and fruitless every attempt, to subvert our national freedom.

When I so pressingly urge a strict observance of all the laws, let me not be understood as saying there are no bad laws, nor that grievances may not arise, for the redress of which, no legal provisions have been made.—I mean to say no such thing. But I do mean to say, that, although bad laws, if they exist, should be repealed as soon as possible, still while they continue in force, for the sake of example, they should be religiously observed. So also in unprovided cases. If such arise, let proper legal provisions be made for them with the least possible delay; but, till then, let them, if not too intolerable, be borne with.

There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress by mob law. In any case that arises, as for instance, the promulgation of abolitionism, one of two positions is necessarily true; that is, the thing is right within itself, and therefore deserves the protection of all law and all good citizens; or, it is wrong, and therefore proper to be prohibited by legal enactments; and in neither case, is the interposition of mob law, either necessary, justifiable, or excusable.

But, it may be asked, why suppose danger to our political institutions? Have we not preserved them for more than fifty years? And why may we not for fifty times as long?

We hope there is *no sufficient* reason. We hope all dangers may be overcome; but to conclude that no danger may ever arise, would itself be extremely dangerous. There are now, and will hereafter be, many causes, dangerous in their tendency, which have not existed heretofore; and which are not too insignificant to merit attention. That our government should have been maintained in its original form from its establishment until now, is not much to be wondered at. It had many props to support it through that period, which now are decayed, and crumbled away. Through that period, it was felt by all, to be an undecided experiment; now, it is understood to be a successful one.—Then, all that sought celebrity and fame, and distinction, expected to find them in the success of that experiment. Their *all* was staked upon it:—their destiny was *inseparably* linked with it. Their ambition aspired to display before an admiring world, a practical demonstration of the truth of a proposition, which had hitherto been considered, at best no better, than problematical; namely, *the capability of a people to govern themselves*. If they succeeded, they were to be immortalized; their names were to be transferred to counties and cities, and rivers and mountains; and to be revered and sung, and toasted through all time. If they failed, they were to be called knaves and fools, and fanatics for a fleeting hour; then to sink and be forgotten. They succeeded. The experiment is successful; and thousands have won their deathless names in making it so. But the game is caught; and I believe it is true, that with the catching, end the pleasures of the chase. This field of glory is harvested, and the crop is already appropriated. But new reapers will arise, and *they*, too, will seek a field. It is to deny, what the history of the world tells us is true, to suppose that men of ambition and talents will not continue to spring up amongst us. And, when they do, they will as naturally seek the gratification of their ruling passion, as others have so done before them. The question then, is, can that gratification be found in supporting and maintaining an

edifice that has been erected by others? Most certainly it cannot. Many great and good men sufficiently qualified for any task they should undertake, may ever be found, whose ambition would inspire to nothing beyond a seat in Congress, a gubernatorial or a presidential chair; *but such belong not to the family of the lion, or the tribe of the eagle*. What! think you these places would satisfy an Alexander, a Caesar, or a Napoleon?—Never! Towering genius distains a beaten path. It seeks regions hitherto unexplored.—It sees *no distinction* in adding story to story, upon the monuments of fame, erected to the memory of others. It *denies* that it is glory enough to serve under any chief. It *scorns* to tread in the footsteps of *any* predecessor, however illustrious. It thirsts and burns for distinction; and, if possible, it will have it, whether at the expense of emancipating slaves, or enslaving freemen. Is it unreasonable then to expect, that some man possessed of the loftiest genius, coupled with ambition sufficient to push it to its utmost stretch, will at some time, spring up among us? And when such a one does, it will require the people to be united with each other, attached to the government and laws, and generally intelligent, to successfully frustrate his designs.

Distinction will be his paramount object, and although he would as willingly, perhaps more so, acquire it by doing good as harm; yet, that opportunity being past, and nothing left to be done in the way of building up, he would set boldly to the task of pulling down.

Here, then, is a probable case, highly dangerous, and such a one as could not have well existed heretofore.

Another reason which *once was*; but which, to the same extent, is *now no more*, has done much in maintaining our institutions thus far. I mean the powerful influence which the interesting scenes of the revolution had upon the *passions* of the people as distinguished from their judgment. By this influence, the jealousy, envy, and avarice, incident to our nature, and so common to a state of peace, prosperity, and conscious strength, were, for the time, in a great measure smothered and rendered inactive; while the deep-rooted principles of *hate*, and the powerful motive of *revenge*, instead of being turned against each other, were directed exclusively against the British nation. And thus, from the force of circumstances, the basest principles of our nature, were either made to lie dormant, or to become the active agents in the advancement of the noblest cause—that of establishing and maintaining civil and religious liberty.

But this state of feeling *must fade, is fading, has faded*, with the circumstances that produced it.

I do not mean to say, that the scenes of the revolution *are now or ever will* be entirely forgotten; but that like every thing else, they must fade upon the memory of the world, and grow more and more dim by the lapse of time. In history, we hope, they will be read of, and recounted, so long as the bible shall be read;—but even granting that they will, their influence *cannot be* what it heretofore has been. Even then, they *cannot be* so universally known, nor so vividly felt, as they were by the generation just gone to rest. At the close of that struggle, nearly every adult male had been a participator in some of its scenes. The consequence was, that of those scenes, in the form of a husband, a father, a son or brother,

a *living history* was to be found in every family— a history bearing the indubitable testimonies of its own authenticity, in the limbs mangled, in the scars of wounds received, in the midst of the very scenes related—a history, too, that could be read and understood alike by all, the wise and the ignorant, the learned and the unlearned.—But *those* histories are gone. They *can* be read no more forever. They *were* a fortress of strength; but, what invading foeman could *never do*, the silent artillery of time *has done*; the leveling of its walls. They are gone.—They *were* a forest of giant oaks; but the all-resistless hurricane has swept over them, and left only, here and there, a lonely trunk, despoiled of its verdure, shorn of its foliage; unshading and unshaded, to murmur in a few gentle breezes, and to combat with its mutilated limbs, a few more ruder storms, then to sink, and be no more.

They *were* the pillars of the temple of liberty; and now, that they have crumbled away, that temple must fall, unless we, their descendants, supply their places with other pillars, hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason. Passion has helped us; but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason, must furnish all the materials for our future support and defence.—Let those materials be moulded into *general intelligence, sound morality*, and in particular, *a reverence for the constitution and laws*: and, that we improved to the last; that we remained free to the last; that we revered his name to the last; that, during his long sleep, we permitted no hostile foot to pass over or desecrate his resting place; shall be that which to learn the last trump shall awaken our WASHINGTON.

Upon these let the proud fabric of freedom rest, as the rock of its basis; and as truly as has been said of the only greater institution, “*the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.*”



*Lincoln and the
Slavery Question*



Excerpt from the Eulogy of Henry Clay

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

On July 6, 1852, at the Statehouse in Springfield, Abraham Lincoln delivered a stirring eulogy for the Kentucky Senator Henry Clay (1777–1852), who Lincoln regarded as his “beau ideal of a statesman.” From 1803 until 1848, Clay was an active statesman, serving in the House of Representatives, the Senate, as Speaker of the House, and as Secretary of State. He is most known for his role in brokering a series of compromises that prevented the North and South from splitting. His most important legislative events include: the Missouri Compromise of 1820, the Nullification Crisis, and the Compromise of 1850, for which he was called out of retirement. Although a slave-owner, Clay favored the gradual elimination of slavery.

How does Lincoln describe “the Great Compromiser?” What were his “leading qualities,” and why did they make him so “rare”? In his speech, Lincoln praises Clay’s role as preserver of the Union. What did the “Union” mean to Clay, and why did he give so much of his life to it, according to Lincoln? What is the relationship between Union and liberty? What does Lincoln say about Clay’s views on slavery? How can Clay be deeply devoted to “the cause of human liberty” yet be a slave-owner? What does Lincoln say his audience should learn from Clay’s example, and how should they act in regard to the “late slavery question”? Why does Lincoln end the eulogy with an appeal to “Divine Providence”?

On the fourth day of July, 1776, the people of a few feeble and oppressed colonies of Great Britain, inhabiting a portion of the Atlantic coast of North America, publicly declared their national independence, and made their appeal to the justice of their cause, and to the God of battles, for the maintenance of that declaration. That people were few in numbers, and without resources, save only their own wise heads and stout hearts. Within the first year of that declared independence, and while its maintenance was yet problematical—while the bloody struggle between those resolute rebels, and their haughty would-be-masters, was still waging, of undistinguished parents, and in an obscure district of one of those colonies, Henry Clay was born. The infant nation, and the infant child began the race of life together. For three quarters of a century they have travelled hand in hand. They have been companions ever. The nation has passed its perils, and is free, prosperous, and powerful. The child has reached his manhood, his middle age, his old age, and is dead. In all that has concerned the nation the man ever sympathized; and now the nation mourns for the man. .

..

[T]he period from the beginning of Mr. Clay’s official life, in 1803, to the end of it in 1852, is but one year short of half a century; and that the sum of all the intervals in it, will not amount to ten years. But mere duration of time in office, constitutes the smallest part of Mr. Clay’s history. Throughout that long period, he has constantly been the most loved, and most implicitly followed by friends, and the most dreaded by opponents, of all living American politicians. In all the great questions which have agitated the country, and

particularly in those great and fearful crises, the Missouri question—the Nullification question, and the late slavery question, as connected with the newly acquired territory, involving and endangering the stability of the Union, his has been the leading and most conspicuous part. . . . The spell—the long enduring spell—with which the souls of men were bound to him, is a miracle. Who can compass it? It is probably true he owed his pre-eminence to no one quality, but to a fortunate combination of several. He was surpassingly eloquent; but many eloquent men fail utterly; and they are not, as a class, generally successful. His judgment was excellent; but many men of good judgment, live and die unnoticed. His will was indomitable; but this quality often secures to its owner nothing better than a character for useless obstinacy. These then were Mr. Clay's leading qualities. No one of them is very uncommon; but all taken together are rarely combined in a single individual; and this is probably the reason why such men as Henry Clay are so rare in the world.

Mr. Clay's eloquence did not consist, as many fine specimens of eloquence does [do], of types and figures—of antithesis, and elegant arrangement of words and sentences; but rather of that deeply earnest and impassioned tone, and manner, which can proceed only from great sincerity and a thorough conviction, in the speaker of the justice and importance of his cause. This it is, that truly touches the chords of sympathy; and those who heard Mr. Clay never failed to be moved by it, or ever afterwards, forgot the impression. All his efforts were made for practical effect. He never spoke merely to be heard. He never delivered a Fourth of July oration, or an eulogy on an occasion like this. As a politician or statesman, no one was so habitually careful to avoid all sectional ground. Whatever he did, he did for the whole country. In the construction of his measures he ever carefully surveyed every part of the field, and duly weighed every conflicting interest. Feeling, as he did, and as the truth surely is, that the world's best hope depended on the continued Union of these States, he was ever jealous of, and watchful for, whatever might have the slightest tendency to separate them.

Mr. Clay's predominant sentiment, from first to last, was a deep devotion to the cause of human liberty—a strong sympathy with the oppressed everywhere, and an ardent wish for their elevation. With him, this was a primary and all controlling passion. Subsidiary to this was the conduct of his whole life. He loved his country partly because it was his own country, but mostly because it was a free country; and he burned with a zeal for its advancement, prosperity and glory, because he saw in such, the advancement, prosperity and glory, of human liberty, human right and human nature. He desired the prosperity of his countrymen partly because they were his countrymen, but chiefly to show to the world that freemen could be prosperous.

That his views and measures were always the wisest, needs not to be affirmed; nor should it be, on this occasion, where so many, thinking differently, join in doing honor to his memory. A free people, in times of peace and quiet—when pressed by no common danger—naturally divide into parties. At such times the man who is of neither party, is not—cannot be, of any consequence. Mr. Clay, therefore, was of a party. Taking a prominent part, as he did, in all the great political questions of his country for the last half century, the wisdom of his course on many, is doubted and denied by a large portion of his

countrymen; and of such it is not now proper to speak particularly. But there are many others, about his course upon which, there is little or no disagreement amongst intelligent and patriotic Americans. Of these last are the War of 1812, the Missouri question, Nullification, and the now recent compromise measures. . . .

Having been led to allude to domestic slavery so frequently already, I am unwilling to close without referring more particularly to Mr. Clay's views and conduct in regard to it. He ever was on principle and in feeling, opposed to slavery. The very earliest, and one of the latest public efforts of his life, separated by a period of more than fifty years, were both made in favor of gradual emancipation of the slaves in Kentucky. He did not perceive, that on a question of human right, the negroes were to be excepted from the human race. And yet Mr. Clay was the owner of slaves. Cast into life where slavery was already widely spread and deeply seated, he did not perceive, as I think no wise man has perceived, how it could be at once eradicated, without producing a greater evil, even to the cause of human liberty itself. His feeling and his judgment, therefore, ever led him to oppose both extremes of opinion on the subject. Those who would shiver into fragments the Union of these States; tear to tatters its now venerated constitution; and even burn the last copy of the Bible, rather than slavery should continue a single hour, together with all their more halting sympathizers, have received, and are receiving their just execration; and the name, and opinions, and influence of Mr. Clay, are fully, and, as I trust, effectually and enduringly, arrayed against them. But I would also, if I could, array his name, opinions, and influence against the opposite extreme—against a few, but an increasing number of men, who, for the sake of perpetuating slavery, are beginning to assail and to ridicule the white man's charter of freedom—the declaration that “all men are created free and equal.” So far as I have learned, the first American, of any note, to do or attempt this, was the late John C. Calhoun; and if I mistake not, it soon after found its way into some of the messages of the Governors of South Carolina. . . .

But Henry Clay is dead. His long and eventful life is closed. Our country is prosperous and powerful; but could it have been quite all it has been, and is, and is to be, without Henry Clay? Such a man the times have demanded, and such, in the providence of God was given us. But he is gone. Let us strive to deserve, as far as mortals may, the continued care of Divine Providence, trusting that, in future national emergencies, He will not fail to provide us the instruments of safety and security.

Excerpt from the Peoria Speech

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Admitted to the Illinois Bar in 1837, at the age of twenty-eight, having served four terms in the State Legislature and a single term in Congress (1846–48), Abraham Lincoln retired from politics between 1849 and 1854 to practice law in Springfield, Illinois. But the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act in May 1854 rekindled his political ambitions. This act, authored by Illinois Democrat Stephen A. Douglas (1813–61), repealed the Missouri Compromise of 1820, which prohibited slavery in the former Louisiana Territory north of the parallel 36°30' north. Douglas hoped that his principle of “popular sovereignty,” which allowed settlers to decide the issue of slavery in the territories, would put slavery to rest as a national issue.

On October 16, 1854, Lincoln and Douglas delivered competing speeches in Peoria, Illinois. While not a direct rebuttal of Douglas, Lincoln’s remarks (here excerpted) attacked the morality of slavery’s extension and of slavery itself. What arguments does Lincoln make against the spread of slavery to the territories? What is his view of slavery? If Lincoln knows slavery to be a “great evil,” why does he not favor immediate emancipation? In thinking about this question, pay close attention to what Lincoln says about the role of “universal” feelings in public life. What is Lincoln’s interpretation of the Declaration of Independence? How does the principle of popular sovereignty undercut the “sacred right of self-government,” according to Lincoln? Imagine you were in the audience, would this speech persuade you?

The repeal of the Missouri Compromise, and the propriety of its restoration, constitute the subject of what I am about to say.

As I desire to present my own connected view of this subject, my remarks will not be, specifically, an answer to Judge Douglas; yet, as I proceed, the main points he has presented will arise, and will receive such respectful attention as I may be able to give them.

I wish further to say, that I do not propose to question the patriotism, or to assail the motives of any man, or class of men; but rather to strictly confine myself to the naked merits of the question.

I also wish to be no less than National in all the positions I may take; and whenever I take ground which others have thought, or may think, narrow, sectional and dangerous to the Union, I hope to give a reason, which will appear sufficient, at least to some, why I think differently.

And, as this subject is no other, than part and parcel of the larger general question of domestic slavery, I wish to MAKE and to KEEP the distinction between the EXISTING institution, and the EXTENSION of it, so broad, and so clear, that no honest man can misunderstand me, and no dishonest one, successfully misrepresent me.

In order to get a clear understanding of what the Missouri Compromise is, a short history of the preceding kindred subjects will perhaps be proper. When we established our independence, we did not own, or claim, the country to which this compromise applies. . . . We were then living under the Articles of Confederation, which were superseded by the Constitution several years afterwards. The question of ceding these territories to the general government was set on foot. Mr. Jefferson, the author of the Declaration of Independence, and otherwise a chief actor in the revolution; then a delegate in Congress; afterwards twice President; who was, is, and perhaps will continue to be, the most distinguished politician of our history; a Virginian by birth and continued residence, and withal, a slave-holder; conceived the idea of taking that occasion, to prevent slavery ever going into the north-western territory. He prevailed on the Virginia Legislature to adopt his views, and to cede the territory, making the prohibition of slavery therein, a condition of the deed. Congress accepted the cession, with the condition; and in the first Ordinance (which the acts of Congress were then called) for the government of the territory, provided that slavery should never be permitted therein. This is the famed ordinance of '87 so often spoken of. Thenceforward, for sixty-one years, and until in 1848, the last scrap of this territory came into the Union as the State of Wisconsin, all parties acted in quiet obedience to this ordinance. It is now what Jefferson foresaw and intended—the happy home of teeming millions of free, white, prosperous people, and no slave amongst them. . . .

But now new light breaks upon us. Now congress declares this ought never to have been; and the like of it, must never be again. The sacred right of self-government is grossly violated by it! We even find some men, who drew their first breath, and every other breath of their lives, under this very restriction, now live in dread of absolute suffocation, if they should be restricted in the “sacred right” of taking slaves to Nebraska. That perfect liberty they sigh for—the liberty of making slaves of other people—Jefferson never thought of; their own father never thought of; they never thought of themselves, a year ago. How fortunate for them, they did not sooner become sensible of their great misery! Oh, how difficult it is to treat with respect, such assaults upon all we have ever really held sacred.

But to return to history. In 1803 we purchased what was then called Louisiana, of France. It included the now states of Louisiana, Arkansas, Missouri, and Iowa; also the territory of Minnesota, and the present bone of contention, Kansas and Nebraska. Slavery already existed among the French at New Orleans; and, to some extent, at St. Louis. In 1812 Louisiana came into the Union as a slave state, without controversy. In 1818 or '19, Missouri showed signs of a wish to come in with slavery. This was resisted by northern members of Congress; and thus began the first great slavery agitation in the nation. This controversy lasted several months, and became very angry and exciting; the House of Representatives voting steadily for the prohibition of slavery in Missouri, and the Senate voting as steadily against it. Threats of breaking up the Union were freely made; and the ablest public men of the day became seriously alarmed. At length a compromise was made, in which, like all compromises, both sides yielded something. It was a law passed on the 6th day of March, 1820, providing that Missouri might come into the Union with slavery, but that in all the remaining part of the territory purchased of France, which lies north of 36 degrees and 30 minutes north latitude, slavery should never be permitted. . . .

Thus originated the Missouri Compromise; and thus has it been respected down to 1845. . . .

During this long period of time Nebraska had remained, substantially an uninhabited country, but now emigration to, and settlement within it began to take place. It is about one third as large as the present United States, and its importance so long overlooked, begins to come into view. The restriction of slavery by the Missouri Compromise directly applies to it; in fact, was first made, and has since been maintained, expressly for it. In 1853, a bill to give it a territorial government passed the House of Representatives, and, in the hands of Judge Douglas, failed of passing the Senate only for want of time. This bill contained no repeal of the Missouri Compromise. Indeed, when it was assailed because it did not contain such repeal, Judge Douglas defended it in its existing form. On January 4th, 1854, Judge Douglas introduces a new bill to give Nebraska territorial government. He accompanies this bill with a report, in which last, he expressly recommends that the Missouri Compromise shall neither be affirmed nor repealed.

Before long the bill is so modified as to make two territories instead of one; calling the Southern one Kansas.

Also, about a month after the introduction of the bill, on the judge's own motion, it is so amended as to declare the Missouri Compromise inoperative and void; and, substantially, that the people who go and settle there may establish slavery, or exclude it, as they may see fit. In this shape the bill passed both branches of congress, and became a law.

This is the repeal of the Missouri Compromise. The foregoing history may not be precisely accurate in every particular; but I am sure it is sufficiently so, for all the uses I shall attempt to make of it, and in it, we have before us, the chief material enabling us to correctly judge whether the repeal of the Missouri Compromise is right or wrong.

I think, and shall try to show, that it is wrong; wrong in its direct effect, letting slavery into Kansas and Nebraska—and wrong in its prospective principle, allowing it to spread to every other part of the wide world, where men can be found inclined to take it.

This declared indifference, but as I must think, covert real zeal for the spread of slavery, I cannot but hate. I hate it because of the monstrous injustice of slavery itself. I hate it because it deprives our republican example of its just influence in the world—enables the enemies of free institutions, with plausibility, to taunt us as hypocrites—causes the real friends of freedom to doubt our sincerity, and especially because it forces so many really good men amongst ourselves into an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty—criticizing the Declaration of Independence, and insisting that there is no right principle of action but self-interest.

Before proceeding, let me say I think I have no prejudice against the Southern people. They are just what we would be in their situation. If slavery did not now exist amongst them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist amongst us, we should not instantly

give it up. This I believe of the masses north and south. Doubtless there are individuals, on both sides, who would not hold slaves under any circumstances; and others who would gladly introduce slavery anew, if it were out of existence. We know that some southern men do free their slaves, go north, and become tip-top abolitionists; while some northern ones go south, and become most cruel slave-masters.

When southern people tell us they are no more responsible for the origin of slavery, than we; I acknowledge the fact. When it is said that the institution exists; and that it is very difficult to get rid of it, in any satisfactory way, I can understand and appreciate the saying. I surely will not blame them for not doing what I should not know how to do myself. If all earthly power were given me, I should not know what to do, as to the existing institution. My first impulse would be to free all the slaves, and send them to Liberia,—to their own native land. But a moment's reflection would convince me, that whatever of high hope, (as I think there is) there may be in this, in the long run, its sudden execution is impossible. If they were all landed there in a day, they would all perish in the next ten days; and there are not surplus shipping and surplus money enough in the world to carry them there in many times ten days. What then? Free them all, and keep them among us as underlings? Is it quite certain that this betters their condition? I think I would not hold one in slavery, at any rate; yet the point is not clear enough for me to denounce people upon. What next? Free them, and make them politically and socially, our equals? My own feelings will not admit of this; and if mine would, we well know that those of the great mass of white people will not. Whether this feeling accords with justice and sound judgment, is not the sole question, if indeed, it is any part of it. A universal feeling, whether well or ill-founded, cannot be safely disregarded. We cannot, then, make them equals. It does seem to me that systems of gradual emancipation might be adopted; but for their tardiness in this, I will not undertake to judge our brethren of the south. . . .

Equal justice to the south, it is said, requires us to consent to the extending of slavery to new countries. That is to say, inasmuch as you do not object to my taking my hog to Nebraska, therefore I must not object to you taking your slave. Now, I admit this is perfectly logical, if there is no difference between hogs and negroes. But while you thus require me to deny the humanity of the negro, I wish to ask whether you of the south yourselves, have ever been willing to do as much? It is kindly provided that of all those who come into the world, only a small percentage are natural tyrants. That percentage is no larger in the slave States than in the free. The great majority, south as well as north, have human sympathies, of which they can no more divest themselves than they can of their sensibility to physical pain. These sympathies in the bosoms of the southern people, manifest in many ways, their sense of the wrong of slavery, and their consciousness that, after all, there is humanity in the negro. If they deny this, let me address them a few plain questions. In 1820 you joined the north, almost unanimously, in declaring the African slave trade piracy, and in annexing to it the punishment of death. Why did you do this? If you did not feel that it was wrong, why did you join in providing that men should be hung for it? The practice was no more than bringing wild negroes from Africa, to sell to such as would buy them. But you never thought of hanging men for catching and selling wild horses, wild buffaloes or wild bears. . . .

But one great argument in the support of the repeal of the Missouri Compromise, is still to come. That argument is “the sacred right of self-government. . . .”

I trust I understand, and truly estimate the right of self-government. My faith in the proposition that each man should do precisely as he pleases with all which is exclusively his own, lies at the foundation of the sense of justice there is in me. I extend the principles to communities of men, as well as to individuals. I so extend it, because it is politically wise, as well as naturally just; politically wise, in saving us from broils about matters which do not concern us. Here, or at Washington, I would not trouble myself with the oyster laws of Virginia, or the cranberry laws of Indiana.

The doctrine of self-government is right—absolutely and eternally right—but it has no just application, as here attempted. Or perhaps I should rather say that whether it has such just application depends upon whether a negro is not or is a man. If he is not a man, why in that case, he who is a man may, as a matter of self-government, do just as he pleases with him. But if the negro is a man, is it not to that extent, a total destruction of self-government, to say that he too shall not govern himself? When the white man governs himself that is self-government; but when he governs another man, that is more than self-government—that is despotism. If the negro is a man, why then my ancient faith teaches me that “all men are created equal;” and that there can be no moral right in connection with one man’s making a slave of another.

Judge Douglas frequently, with bitter irony and sarcasm, paraphrases our argument by saying “The white people of Nebraska are good enough to govern themselves, but they are not good enough to govern a few miserable negroes!!”

Well, I doubt not that the people of Nebraska are, and will continue to be as good as the average of people elsewhere. I do not say the contrary. What I do say is, that no man is good enough to govern another man, without that other’s consent. I say this is the leading principle—the sheet anchor of American republicanism. Our Declaration of Independence says:

We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, *deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed.*

I have quoted so much at this time merely to show that according to our ancient faith, the just powers of governments are derived from the consent of the governed. Now the relation of masters and slaves is, *pro tanto*, a total violation of this principle. The master not only governs the slave without his consent; but he governs him by a set of rules altogether different from those which he prescribes for himself. Allow *all* the governed an equal voice in the government, and that, and that only is self-government. . . .

But you say this question should be left to the people of Nebraska, because they are more particularly interested. If this be the rule, you must leave it to each individual to say

for himself whether he will have slaves. What better moral right have thirty-one citizens of Nebraska to say, that the thirty-second shall not hold slaves, than the people of the thirty-one States have to say that slavery shall not go into the thirty-second State at all?

Another important objection to this application of the right of self-government, is that it enables the first FEW, to deprive the succeeding MANY, of a free exercise of the right of self-government. The first few may get slavery IN, and the subsequent many cannot easily get it OUT. How common is the remark now in the slave States—“If we were only clear of our slaves, how much better it would be for us.” They are actually deprived of the privilege of governing themselves as they would, by the action of a very few, in the beginning. The same thing was true of the whole nation at the time our constitution was formed. . . .

But Nebraska is urged as a great Union-saving measure. Well I too, go for saving the Union. Much as I hate slavery, I would consent to the extension of it rather than see the Union dissolved, just as I would consent to any *great* evil, to avoid a *greater* one. But when I go to Union saving, I must believe, at least, that the means I employ has some adaptation to the end. To my mind, Nebraska has no such adaptation.

“It hath no relish of salvation in it.”

It is an aggravation, rather, of the only one thing which ever endangers the Union. When it came upon us, all was peace and quiet. The nation was looking to the forming of new bonds of Union; and a long course of peace and prosperity seemed to lie before us. In the whole range of possibility, there scarcely appears to me to have been any thing, out of which the slavery agitation could have been revived, except the very project of repealing the Missouri compromise. Every inch of territory we owned, already had a definite settlement of the slavery question, and by which, all parties were pledged to abide. Indeed, there was no uninhabited country on the continent, which we could acquire; if we except some extreme northern regions, which are wholly out of the question. In this state of case, the genius of Discord himself, could scarcely have invented a way of again getting us by the ears, but by turning back and destroying the peace measures of the past. The councils of that genius seem to have prevailed, the Missouri compromise was repealed; and here we are, in the midst of a new slavery agitation, such, I think, as we have never seen before.

Who is responsible for this? Is it those who resist the measure; or those who, causelessly, brought it forward, and pressed it through, having reason to know, and, in fact, knowing it must and would be so resisted? It could not but be expected by its author, that it would be looked upon as a measure for the extension of slavery, aggravated by a gross breach of faith. Argue as you will, and long as you will, this is the naked *front* and *aspect*, of the measure. And in this aspect, it could not but produce agitation. Slavery is founded in the selfishness of man’s nature—opposition to it, in his love of justice. These principles are an eternal antagonism; and when brought into collision so fiercely, as slavery extension brings them, shocks, and throes, and convulsions must ceaselessly follow. Repeal the Missouri compromise—repeal all compromises—repeal the declaration of independence—repeal all past history, you still cannot repeal human nature. It still will be

the abundance of man's heart, that slavery extension is wrong; and out of the abundance of his heart, his mouth will continue to speak. . . .

Fellow countrymen—Americans south, as well as north, shall we make no effort to arrest this? Already the liberal party throughout the world, express the apprehension “that the one retrograde institution in America, is undermining the principles of progress, and fatally violating the noblest political system the world ever saw.” This is not the taunt of enemies, but the warning of friends. Is it quite safe to disregard it—to despise it? Is there no danger to liberty itself, in discarding the earliest practice, and first precept of our ancient faith? In our greedy chase to make profit of the negro, let us beware, lest we “cancel and tear to pieces” even the white man's charter of freedom.

Our republican robe is soiled, and trailed in the dust. Let us repurify it. Let us turn and wash it white, in the spirit, if not the blood, of the Revolution. Let us turn slavery from its claims of “moral right,” back upon its existing legal rights, and its arguments of “necessity.” Let us return it to the position our fathers gave it; and there let it rest in peace. Let us re-adopt the Declaration of Independence, and with it, the practices, and policy, which harmonize with it. Let north and south—let all Americans—let all lovers of liberty everywhere—join in the great and good work. If we do this, we shall not only have saved the Union; but we shall have so saved it, as to make, and to keep it, forever worthy of the saving. We shall have so saved it, that the succeeding millions of free happy people, the world over, shall rise up, and call us blessed, to the latest generations.

House Divided Speech

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

On June 16, 1858 Abraham Lincoln was chosen as the Illinois Republican Party's candidate for the U.S. Senate, running against Democrat Stephen A. Douglas. Upon receiving the nomination, Lincoln delivered these remarks to his Republican colleagues in the Hall of Representatives. While not predicting civil war, Lincoln argues that the Union cannot be divided by slavery forever. He then goes on to describe the crisis of a nation torn apart by slavery, blaming the Kansas-Nebraska Act (1854), and its author Douglas, for opening the door to the extension of slavery. Lincoln was also alarmed by the recent Dred Scott v. Sandford decision (1857), in which the Supreme Court held that Congress lacked the power to prohibit slavery in the territories.

This speech is most remembered for Lincoln's quotation of the biblical phrase, "A house divided against itself cannot stand" (Mark 3:25). What do these words mean? What is the "house" Lincoln is speaking of? What does it mean to say that it must become "all one thing, or all the other"? Why wouldn't the restoration of the Missouri Compromise (which Lincoln desires) leave the nation a house divided?

The second part of the speech concerns the "tendency" or direction in which the nation is headed. What is this "tendency," and why does it concern Lincoln? How do the Kansas-Nebraska Act and Douglas' policy of "squatter sovereignty" advance the "tendency" Lincoln decries? According to Lincoln, what will be the end result of adopting a policy of quarantine (preventing slavery from spreading into the territories)? Why? What result will follow from the alternative policy of allowing slavery to spread?

Finally, what does Lincoln counsel his fellow Republicans? How should they act in response to this tendency? Imagine yourself as one of the Republican listeners in the hall, would this speech persuade you to support Lincoln over Douglas or another candidate? Why or why not?

Mr. President and Gentlemen of the Convention.

If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could then better judge what to do, and how to do it.

We are now far into the fifth year, since a policy was initiated, with the avowed object, and confident promise, of putting an end to slavery agitation.

Under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented.

In my opinion, it will not cease, until a crisis shall have been reached, and passed.

“A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free.

I do not expect the Union to be dissolved—I do not expect the house to fall—but I do expect it will cease to be divided.

It will become all one thing or all the other.

Either the opponents of slavery, will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in the course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward, till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new—North as well as South.

Have we no tendency to the latter condition?

Let any one who doubts, carefully contemplate that now almost complete legal combination—piece of machinery so to speak—compounded of the Nebraska doctrine, and the *Dred Scott* decision. Let him consider not only what work the machinery is adapted to do, and how well adapted; but also, let him study the history of its construction, and trace, if he can, or rather fail, if he can, to trace the evidence of design and concert of action, among its chief architects, from the beginning.

But, so far, Congress only, had acted; and an indorsement by the people, real or apparent, was indispensable, to save the point already gained, and give chance for more.

The new year of 1854 found slavery excluded from more than half the States by State Constitutions, and from most of the national territory by congressional prohibition.

Four days later, commenced the struggle, which ended in repealing that congressional prohibition.

This opened all the national territory to slavery, and was the first point gained.

This necessity had not been overlooked; but had been provided for, as well as might be, in the notable argument of “squatter sovereignty,” otherwise called “sacred right of self government,” which latter phrase, though expressive of the only rightful basis of any government, was so perverted in this attempted use of it as to amount to just this: That if any one man, choose to enslave another, no third man shall be allowed to object.

That argument was incorporated into the Nebraska bill itself, in the language which follows: “It being the true intent and meaning of this act not to legislate slavery into any Territory or state, not to exclude it therefrom; but to leave the people thereof perfectly free to form and regulate their domestic institutions in their own way, subject only to the Constitution of the United States.”

Then opened the roar of loose declamation in favor of “Squatter Sovereignty,” and “Sacred right of self-government.”

“But,” said opposition members, “let us be more specific—let us amend the bill so as to expressly declare that the people of the territory may exclude slavery.” “Not we,” said the friends of the measure; and down they voted the amendment.

While the Nebraska Bill was passing through Congress, a law case involving the question of a negro’s freedom, by reason of his owner having voluntarily taken him first into a free state and then a territory covered by the congressional prohibition, and held him as a slave, for a long time in each, was passing through the U.S. Circuit Court for the District of Missouri; and both Nebraska bill and law suit were brought to a decision in the same month of May, 1854. The negro’s name was “Dred Scott,” which name now designates the decision finally made in the case.

Before the then next Presidential election, the law case came to, and was argued in, the Supreme Court of the United States; but the decision of it was deferred until after the election. Still, before the election, Senator Trumbull, on the floor of the Senate, requests the leading advocate of the Nebraska bill to state his opinion whether the people of a territory can constitutionally exclude slavery from their limits; and the latter answers: “That is a question for the Supreme Court.”

The election came. Mr. Buchanan was elected, and the indorsement, such as it was, secured. That was the second point gained. The indorsement, however, fell short of a clear popular majority by nearly four hundred thousand votes, and so, perhaps, was not overwhelmingly reliable and satisfactory.

The outgoing President, in his last annual message, as impressively as possible, echoed back upon the people the weight and authority of the indorsement.

The Supreme Court met again; did not announce their decision, but ordered a re-argument.

The Presidential inauguration came, and still no decision of the court; but the incoming President, in his inaugural address, fervently exhorted the people to abide by the forthcoming decision, whatever might be.

Then, in a few days, came the decision.

The reputed author of the Nebraska Bill finds an early occasion to make a speech at this capital indorsing the *Dred Scott* Decision, and vehemently denouncing all opposition to it.

The new President, too, seizes the early occasion of the Silliman letter to indorse and strongly construe that decision, and to express his astonishment that any different view had ever been entertained.

At length a squabble springs up between the President and the author of the Nebraska Bill, on the mere question of fact, whether the Lecompton constitution was or was not, in any just sense, made by the people of Kansas; and in that squabble the latter declares that all he wants is a fair vote for the people, and that he cares not whether slavery be voted down or voted up. I do not understand his declaration that he cares not whether slavery be voted down or voted up, to be intended by him other than as an apt definition of the policy he would impress upon the public mind—the principle for which he declares he has suffered much, and is ready to suffer to the end.

And well may he cling to that principle. If he has any parental feeling, well may he cling to it. That principle, is the only shred left of his original Nebraska doctrine. Under the *Dred Scott* decision, “squatter sovereignty” squatted out of existence, tumbled down like temporary scaffolding—like the mould at the foundry served through one blast and fell back into loose sand—helped to carry an election, and then was kicked to the winds. His late joint struggle with the Republicans, against the Lecompton Constitution, involves nothing of the original Nebraska doctrine. That struggle was made on a point, the right of a people to make their own constitution, upon which he and the Republicans have never differed.

The several points of the *Dred Scott* decision, in connection with Senator Douglas’ “care-not” policy, constitute the piece of machinery, in its present state of advancement. This was the third point gained.

The working points of that machinery are:

First, that no negro slave, imported as such from Africa, and no descendant of such slave can ever be a citizen of any State, in the sense of that term as used in the Constitution of the United States.

This point is made in order to deprive the negro, in every possible event, of the benefit of this provision of the United States Constitution, which declares that—

“The citizens of each State shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States.”

Secondly, that “subject to the Constitution of the United States,” neither Congress nor a Territorial Legislature can exclude slavery from any United States Territory.

This point is made in order that individual men may fill up the territories with slaves, without danger of losing them as property, and thus to enhance the chances of permanency to the institution through all the future.

Thirdly, that whether the holding a negro in actual slavery in a free State, makes him free, as against the holder, the United States courts will not decide, but will leave to be decided by the courts of any slave State the negro may be forced into by the master.

This point is made, not to be pressed immediately; but, if acquiesced in for a while, and apparently indorsed by the people at an election, then to sustain the logical conclusion that what Dred Scott's master might lawfully do with Dred Scott, in the free State of Illinois, every other master may lawfully do with any other one, or one thousand slaves, in Illinois, or in any other free State.

Auxiliary to all this, and working hand in hand with it, the Nebraska doctrine, or what is left of it, is to educate and mould public opinion, at least Northern public opinion, to not care whether slavery is voted down or voted up.

This shows exactly where we now are; and partially, also, whither we are tending.

It will throw additional light on the latter, to go back, and run the mind over the string of historical facts already stated. Several things will now appear less dark and mysterious than they did when they were transpiring. The people were to be left "perfectly free" "subject only to the Constitution." What the Constitution had to do with it, outsiders could not then see. Plainly enough now, it was an exactly fitted niche, for the *Dred Scott* decision to afterward come in, and declare the perfect freedom of the people, to be just no freedom at all.

Why was the amendment, expressly declaring the right of the people to exclude slavery, voted down? Plainly enough now, the adoption of it would have spoiled the niche for the *Dred Scott* decision.

Why was the court decision held up? Why even a Senator's individual opinion withheld, till after the presidential election? Plainly enough now, the speaking out then would have damaged the "perfectly free" argument upon which the election was to be carried.

Why the outgoing President's felicitation on the indorsement? Why the delay of a re-argument? Why the incoming President's advance exhortation in favor of the decision?

These things look like the cautious patting and petting of a spirited horse, preparatory to mounting him, when it is dreaded that he may give the rider a fall.

And why the hasty after indorsements of the decision by the President and others?

We can not absolutely know that all these exact adaptations are the result of preconcert. But when we see a lot of framed timbers, different portions of which we know have been gotten out at different times and places and by different workmen—Stephen, Franklin, Roger, and James, for instance—and when we see these timbers joined together, and see they exactly make the frame of a house or a mill, all the tenons and mortices exactly fitting, and all the lengths and proportions of the different pieces exactly adapted to their respective places, and not a piece too many or too few—not omitting even scaffolding—or, if a single piece be lacking, we can see the place in the frame exactly fitted and prepared to yet bring such piece in—in such a case, we find it impossible not to believe that Stephen and Franklin

and Roger and James all understood one another from the beginning, and all worked upon a common plan or draft drawn up before the first lick was struck.

It should not be overlooked that, by the Nebraska Bill, the people of a State, as well as Territory, were to be left “perfectly free” “subject only to the Constitution.”

Why mention a State? They were legislating for territories, and not for or about States. Certainly the people of a State are and ought to be subject to the Constitution of the United States; but why is mention of this lugged into this merely territorial law? Why are the people of a territory and the people of a state therein lumped together, and their relation to the Constitution therein treated as being precisely the same?

While the opinion of the Court, by Chief Justice Taney, in the *Dred Scott* case, and the separate opinions of all the concurring Judges, expressly declare that the Constitution of the United States neither permits Congress nor a Territorial legislature to exclude slavery from any United States territory, they all omit to declare whether or not the same Constitution permits a state, or the people of a State, to exclude it.

Possibly, this is a mere omission; but who can be quite sure, if McLean or Curtis had sought to get into the opinion a declaration of unlimited power in the people of a state to exclude slavery from their limits, just as Chase and Macy sought to get such declaration, in behalf of the people of a territory, into the Nebraska bill—I ask, who can be quite sure that it would not have been voted down, in the one case, as it had been in the other.

The nearest approach to the point of declaring the power of a State over slavery, is made by Judge Nelson. He approaches it more than once, using the precise idea, and almost the language too, of the Nebraska act. On one occasion his exact language is, “except in cases where the power is restrained by the Constitution of the United States, the law of the State is supreme over the subject of slavery within its jurisdiction.”

In what cases the power of the states is so restrained by the U.S. Constitution, is left an open question, precisely as the same question, as to the restraint on the power of the territories was left open in the Nebraska act. Put that and that together, and we have another nice little niche, which we may, ere long, see filled with another Supreme Court decision, declaring that the Constitution of the United States does not permit a state to exclude slavery from its limits.

And this may especially be expected if the doctrine of “care not” whether slavery be voted down or voted up, shall gain upon the public mind sufficiently to give promise that such a decision can be maintained when made.

Such a decision is all that slavery now lacks of being alike lawful in all the States.

Welcome, or unwelcome, such decision is probably coming, and will soon be upon us, unless the power of the present political dynasty shall be met and overthrown.

We shall lie down pleasantly dreaming that the people of Missouri are on the verge of making their State free; and we shall awake to the reality, instead, that the Supreme Court has made Illinois a slave State.

To meet and overthrow the power of that dynasty, is the work now before all those who would prevent that consummation.

This is what we have to do.

But how can we best do it?

There are those who denounce us openly to their own friends, and yet whisper us softly, that Senator Douglas is the aptest instrument there is, with which to effect that object. They wish us to infer all, from the facts, that he now has a little quarrel with the present head of the dynasty; and that he has regularly voted with us, on a single point, upon which, he and we, have never differed.

They remind us that he is a great man, and that the largest of us are very small ones. Let this be granted. But “a living dog is better than a dead lion.” Judge Douglas, if not a dead lion for this work, is at least a caged and toothless one. How can he oppose the advances of slavery? He don’t care anything about it. His avowed mission is impressing the “public heart” to care nothing about it.

A leading Douglas Democratic newspaper thinks Douglas’ superior talent will be needed to resist the revival of the African slave trade.

Does Douglas believe an effort to revive that trade is approaching? He has not said so. Does he really think so? But if it is, how can he resist it? For years he has labored to prove it a sacred right of white men to take negro slaves into the new territories. Can he possibly show that it is less a sacred right to buy them where they can be bought cheapest? And, unquestionably they can be bought cheaper in Africa than in Virginia.

He has done all in his power to reduce the whole question of slavery to one of a mere right of property; and as such, how can he oppose the foreign slave trade—how can he refuse that trade in that “property” shall be “perfectly free”—unless he does it as a protection to the home production? And as the home producers will probably not ask the protection, he will be wholly without a ground of opposition.

Senator Douglas holds, we know, that a man may rightfully be wiser to-day than he was yesterday—that he may rightfully change when he finds himself wrong.

But can we, for that reason, run ahead, and infer that he will make any particular change, of which he, himself, has given no intimation? Can we safely base our action upon any such vague inference?

Now, as ever, I wish not to misrepresent Judge Douglas' position, question his motives, or do ought that can be personally offensive to him.

Whenever, if ever, he and we can come together on principle so that our great cause may have assistance from his great ability, I hope to have interposed no adventitious obstacle.

But clearly, he is not now with us—he does not pretend to be—he does not promise to ever be.

Our cause, then, must be entrusted to, and conducted by its own undoubted friends—those whose hands are free, whose hearts are in the work—who do care for the result.

Two years ago the Republicans of the nation mustered over thirteen hundred thousand strong.

We did this under the single impulse of resistance to a common danger, with every external circumstance against us.

Of strange, discordant, and even, hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds, and formed and fought the battle through, under the constant hot fire of a disciplined, proud, and pampered enemy.

Did we brave all then to falter now?—now—when that same enemy is wavering, dissevered and belligerent?

The result is not doubtful. We shall not fail—if we stand firm, we shall not fail.

Wise councils may accelerate or mistakes delay it, but, sooner or later the victory is sure to come.

Excerpt from the Cooper Union Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

After his U.S. Senate defeat to Democrat Stephen A. Douglas in January 1859, Lincoln began considering a presidential run. Invited to speak in New York City by the clergyman Henry Ward Beecher (1813–87), Lincoln began drafting one of the longest and most important speeches of his political career. On February 27, 1860, the dark-horse candidate faced an audience of 1,500 spectators, including such luminaries as the editor of the antislavery New York Tribune, Horace Greeley (1811–72). The next day, 170,000 copies of the speech were in circulation through the newspapers, and less than ten weeks later, Lincoln secured the Republican nomination for president.

In his speech, Lincoln responds to Douglas' claim that popular sovereignty was the great principle of the republic. Appealing to the original intent of the framers of the Constitution, Lincoln argues that the federal government can prevent the spread of slavery into the federal territories. How does Lincoln establish that the Framers agreed with the Republican rather than the Democratic view of the powers of the federal government respecting slavery in the territories? Why does he address Southerners in a speech to New York City Republicans? What is Lincoln's message to the Southerners? Finally, what does he instruct Republicans to do? What is their "duty"? Imagine you were in the audience, would this speech persuade you?

Watch a performance of the speech by the actor Sam Waterston at www.youtube.com/watch?v=aQ2De8VcSLw.

Mr. President and fellow citizens of New York:

The facts with which I shall deal this evening are mainly old and familiar; nor is there anything new in the general use I shall make of them. If there shall be any novelty, it will be in the mode of presenting the facts, and the inferences and observations following that presentation.

In his speech last autumn, at Columbus, Ohio, as reported in "The New-York Times," Senator Douglas said:

"Our fathers, when they framed the Government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now."

I fully indorse this, and I adopt it as a text for this discourse. I so adopt it because it furnishes a precise and an agreed starting point for a discussion between Republicans and that wing of the Democracy headed by Senator Douglas. It simply leaves the inquiry: "What was the understanding those fathers had of the question mentioned?"

What is the frame of government under which we live?

The answer must be: “The Constitution of the United States.” That Constitution consists of the original, framed in 1787, (and under which the present government first went into operation,) and twelve subsequently framed amendments, the first ten of which were framed in 1789.

Who were our fathers that framed the Constitution? I suppose the “thirty-nine” who signed the original instrument may be fairly called our fathers who framed that part of the present Government. It is almost exactly true to say they framed it, and it is altogether true to say they fairly represented the opinion and sentiment of the whole nation at that time. Their names, being familiar to nearly all, and accessible to quite all, need not now be repeated.

I take these “thirty-nine,” for the present, as being “our fathers who framed the Government under which we live.”

What is the question which, according to the text, those fathers understood “just as well, and even better than we do now?”

It is this: Does the proper division of local from federal authority, or anything in the Constitution, forbid our *Federal Government* to control as to slavery in *our Federal Territories*?

Upon this, Senator Douglas holds the affirmative, and Republicans the negative. This affirmation and denial form an issue; and this issue—this question—is precisely what the text declares our fathers understood “better than we.”

Let us now inquire whether the “thirty-nine,” or any of them, ever acted upon this question; and if they did, how they acted upon it—how they expressed that better understanding?

In 1784, three years before the Constitution—the United States then owning the Northwestern Territory, and no other, the Congress of the Confederation had before them the question of prohibiting slavery in that Territory; and four of the “thirty-nine” who afterward framed the Constitution, were in that Congress, and voted on that question. Of these, Roger Sherman, Thomas Mifflin, and Hugh Williamson voted for the prohibition, thus showing that, in their understanding, no line dividing local from federal authority, nor anything else, properly forbade the Federal Government to control as to slavery in federal territory. The other of the four—James M’Henry—voted against the prohibition, showing that, for some cause, he thought it improper to vote for it.

In 1787, still before the Constitution, but while the Convention was in session framing it, and while the Northwestern Territory still was the only territory owned by the United States, the same question of prohibiting slavery in the territory again came before the Congress of the Confederation; and two more of the “thirty-nine” who afterward signed the Constitution, were in that Congress, and voted on the question. . . .

The question of federal control of slavery in the territories, seems not to have been directly before the Convention which framed the original Constitution; and hence it is not recorded that the “thirty-nine,” or any of them, while engaged on that instrument, expressed any opinion on that precise question.

In 1789, by the first Congress which sat under the Constitution, an act was passed to enforce the Ordinance of '87, including the prohibition of slavery in the Northwestern Territory. The bill for this act was reported by one of the “thirty-nine,” Thomas Fitzsimmons, then a member of the House of Representatives from Pennsylvania. It went through all its stages without a word of opposition, and finally passed both branches without yeas and nays, which is equivalent to a unanimous passage. . . .

This shows that, in their understanding, no line dividing local from federal authority, nor anything in the Constitution, properly forbade Congress to prohibit slavery in the federal territory; else both their fidelity to correct principle, and their oath to support the Constitution, would have constrained them to oppose the prohibition.

Again, George Washington, another of the “thirty-nine,” was then President of the United States, and, as such approved and signed the bill; thus completing its validity as a law, and thus showing that, in his understanding, no line dividing local from federal authority, nor anything in the Constitution, forbade the Federal Government, to control as to slavery in federal territory. . . .

No great while after the adoption of the original Constitution, North Carolina ceded to the Federal Government the country now constituting the State of Tennessee; and a few years later Georgia ceded that which now constitutes the States of Mississippi and Alabama. In both deeds of cession it was made a condition by the ceding States that the Federal Government should not prohibit slavery in the ceded territory. Besides this, slavery was then actually in the ceded country. Under these circumstances, Congress, on taking charge of these countries, did not absolutely prohibit slavery within them. But they did interfere with it—take control of it—even there, to a certain extent. . . .

The sum of the whole is, that of our thirty-nine fathers who framed the original Constitution, twenty-one—a clear majority of the whole—certainly understood that no proper division of local from federal authority, nor any part of the Constitution, forbade the Federal Government to control slavery in the federal territories; while all the rest probably had the same understanding. Such, unquestionably, was the understanding of our fathers who framed the original Constitution; and the text affirms that they understood the question “better than we.”

But, so far, I have been considering the understanding of the question manifested by the framers of the original Constitution. In and by the original instrument, a mode was provided for amending it; and, as I have already stated, the present frame of “the Government under which we live” consists of that original, and twelve amendatory articles framed and adopted since. Those who now insist that federal control of slavery in federal territories violates the Constitution, point us to the provisions which they suppose it thus

violates; and, as I understand, that all fix upon provisions in these amendatory articles, and not in the original instrument. The Supreme Court, in the *Dred Scott* case, plant themselves upon the fifth amendment, which provides that no person shall be deprived of “life, liberty or property without due process of law;” while Senator Douglas and his peculiar adherents plant themselves upon the tenth amendment, providing that “the powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution” “are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.”

Now, it so happens that these amendments were framed by the first Congress which sat under the Constitution—the identical Congress which passed the act already mentioned, enforcing the prohibition of slavery in the Northwestern Territory. Not only was it the same Congress, but they were the identical, same individual men who, at the same session, and at the same time within the session, had under consideration, and in progress toward maturity, these Constitutional amendments, and this act prohibiting slavery in all the territory the nation then owned. . . .

Now, and here, let me guard a little against being misunderstood. I do not mean to say we are bound to follow implicitly in whatever our fathers did. To do so, would be to discard all the lights of current experience—to reject all progress—all improvement. What I do say is, that if we would supplant the opinions and policy of our fathers in any case, we should do so upon evidence so conclusive, and argument so clear, that even their great authority, fairly considered and weighed, cannot stand; and most surely not in a case whereof we ourselves declare they understood the question better than we.

If any man at this day sincerely believes that a proper division of local from federal authority, or any part of the Constitution, forbids the Federal Government to control as to slavery in the federal territories, he is right to say so, and to enforce his position by all truthful evidence and fair argument which he can. But he has no right to mislead others, who have less access to history, and less leisure to study it, into the false belief that “our fathers who framed the Government under which we live” were of the same opinion—thus substituting falsehood and deception for truthful evidence and fair argument. If any man at this day sincerely believes “our fathers who framed the Government under which we live,” used and applied principles, in other cases, which ought to have led them to understand that a proper division of local from federal authority or some part of the Constitution, forbids the Federal Government to control as to slavery in the federal territories, he is right to say so. But he should, at the same time, brave the responsibility of declaring that, in his opinion, he understands their principles better than they did themselves; and especially should he not shirk that responsibility by asserting that they “understood the question just as well, and even better, than we do now.”

But enough! *Let all who believe that “our fathers, who framed the Government under which we live, understood this question just as well, and even better, than we do now,” speak as they spoke, and act as they acted upon it. This is all Republicans ask—all Republicans desire—in relation to slavery. As those fathers marked it, so let it be again marked, as an evil not to be extended, but to be tolerated and protected only because of and so far as its actual presence among us makes that toleration and protection a necessity.*

Let all the guarantees those fathers gave it, be, not grudgingly, but fully and fairly, maintained. For this Republicans contend, and with this, so far as I know or believe, they will be content. . . .

And now, if they would listen—as I suppose they will not—I would address a few words to the Southern people.

I would say to them:—You consider yourselves a reasonable and a just people; and I consider that in the general qualities of reason and justice you are not inferior to any other people. Still, when you speak of us Republicans, you do so only to denounce us as reptiles, or, at the best, as no better than outlaws. You will grant a hearing to pirates or murderers, but nothing like it to “Black Republicans.” In all your contentions with one another, each of you deems an unconditional condemnation of “Black Republicanism” as the first thing to be attended to. Indeed, such condemnation of us seems to be an indispensable prerequisite—license, so to speak—among you to be admitted or permitted to speak at all. Now, can you, or not, be prevailed upon to pause and to consider whether this is quite just to us, or even to yourselves? Bring forward your charges and specifications, and then be patient long enough to hear us deny or justify.

You say we are sectional. We deny it. That makes an issue; and the burden of proof is upon you. You produce your proof; and what is it? Why, that our party has no existence in your section—gets no votes in your section. The fact is substantially true; but does it prove the issue? If it does, then in case we should, without change of principle, begin to get votes in your section, we should thereby cease to be sectional. You cannot escape this conclusion; and yet, are you willing to abide by it? If you are, you will probably soon find that we have ceased to be sectional, for we shall get votes in your section this very year. You will then begin to discover, as the truth plainly is, that your proof does not touch the issue. The fact that we get no votes in your section, is a fact of your making, and not of ours. And if there be fault in that fact, that fault is primarily yours, and remains until you show that we repel you by some wrong principle or practice. If we do repel you by any wrong principle or practice, the fault is ours; but this brings you to where you ought to have started—to a discussion of the right or wrong of our principle. If our principle, put in practice, would wrong your section for the benefit of ours, or for any other object, then our principle, and we with it, are sectional, and are justly opposed and denounced as such. Meet us, then, on the question of whether our principle, put in practice, would wrong your section; and so meet it as if it were possible that something may be said on our side. Do you accept the challenge? No! Then you really believe that the principle which “our fathers who framed the Government under which we live” thought so clearly right as to adopt it, and indorse it again and again, upon their official oaths, is in fact so clearly wrong as to demand your condemnation without a moment's consideration. . . .

But you say you are conservative—eminently conservative—while we are revolutionary, destructive, or something of the sort. What is conservatism? Is it not adherence to the old and tried, against the new and untried? We stick to, contend for, the identical old policy on the point in controversy which was adopted by “our fathers who framed the Government under which we live;” while you with one accord reject, and scout,

and spit upon that old policy, and insist upon substituting something new. True, you disagree among yourselves as to what that substitute shall be. You are divided on new propositions and plans, but you are unanimous in rejecting and denouncing the old policy of the fathers. . . .

Again, you say we have made the slavery question more prominent than it formerly was. We deny it. We admit that it is more prominent, but we deny that we made it so. It was not we, but you, who discarded the old policy of the fathers. We resisted, and still resist, your innovation; and thence comes the greater prominence of the question. Would you have that question reduced to its former proportions? Go back to that old policy. What has been will be again, under the same conditions. If you would have the peace of the old times, readopt the precepts and policy of the old times.

You charge that we stir up insurrections among your slaves. We deny it; and what is your proof? Harper's Ferry! John Brown!! John Brown was no Republican; and you have failed to implicate a single Republican in his Harper's Ferry enterprise. If any member of our party is guilty in that matter, you know it or you do not know it. If you do know it, you are inexcusable for not designating the man and proving the fact. If you do not know it, you are inexcusable for asserting it, and especially for persisting in the assertion after you have tried and failed to make the proof. You need to be told that persisting in a charge which one does not know to be true, is simply malicious slander. . . .

Some of you admit that no Republican designedly aided or encouraged the Harper's Ferry affair, but still insist that our doctrines and declarations necessarily lead to such results. We do not believe it. We know we hold to no doctrine, and make no declaration, which were not held to and made by "our fathers who framed the Government under which we live." You never dealt fairly by us in relation to this affair. When it occurred, some important State elections were near at hand, and you were in evident glee with the belief that, by charging the blame upon us, you could get an advantage of us in those elections. The elections came, and your expectations were not quite fulfilled. Every Republican man knew that, as to himself at least, your charge was a slander, and he was not much inclined by it to cast his vote in your favor. Republican doctrines and declarations are accompanied with a continual protest against any interference whatever with your slaves, or with you about your slaves. Surely, this does not encourage them to revolt. True, we do, in common with "our fathers, who framed the Government under which we live," declare our belief that slavery is wrong; but the slaves do not hear us declare even this. For anything we say or do, the slaves would scarcely know there is a Republican party. I believe they would not, in fact, generally know it but for your misrepresentations of us, in their hearing. In your political contests among yourselves, each faction charges the other with sympathy with Black Republicanism; and then, to give point to the charge, defines Black Republicanism to simply be insurrection, blood and thunder among the slaves. . . .

But you will break up the Union rather than submit to a denial of your Constitutional rights.

That has a somewhat reckless sound; but it would be palliated, if not fully justified, were we proposing, by the mere force of numbers, to deprive you of some right, plainly written down in the Constitution. But we are proposing no such thing.

When you make these declarations, you have a specific and well-understood allusion to an assumed Constitutional right of yours, to take slaves into the federal territories, and to hold them there as property. But no such right is specifically written in the Constitution. That instrument is literally silent about any such right. We, on the contrary, deny that such a right has any existence in the Constitution, even by implication.

Your purpose, then, plainly stated, is that you will destroy the Government, unless you be allowed to construe and enforce the Constitution as you please, on all points in dispute between you and us. You will rule or ruin in all events.

This, plainly stated, is your language. Perhaps you will say the Supreme Court has decided the disputed Constitutional question in your favor. Not quite so. But waiving the lawyer's distinction between dictum and decision, the Court have decided the question for you in a sort of way. The Court have substantially said, it is your Constitutional right to take slaves into the federal territories, and to hold them there as property. When I say the decision was made in a sort of way, I mean it was made in a divided Court, by a bare majority of the Judges, and they not quite agreeing with one another in the reasons for making it; that it is so made as that its avowed supporters disagree with one another about its meaning, and that it was mainly based upon a mistaken statement of fact—the statement in the opinion that “the right of property in a slave is distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution.”

An inspection of the Constitution will show that the right of property in a slave is not “*distinctly* and *expressly* affirmed” in it. Bear in mind, the Judges do not pledge their judicial opinion that such right is *impliedly* affirmed in the Constitution; but they pledge their veracity that it is “*distinctly* and *expressly*” affirmed there—“distinctly,” that is, not mingled with anything else—“expressly,” that is, in words meaning just that, without the aid of any inference, and susceptible of no other meaning.

If they had only pledged their judicial opinion that such right is affirmed in the instrument by implication, it would be open to others to show that neither the word “slave” nor “slavery” is to be found in the Constitution, nor the word “property” even, in any connection with language alluding to the things slave, or slavery; and that wherever in that instrument the slave is alluded to, he is called a “person;”—and wherever his master’s legal right in relation to him is alluded to, it is spoken of as “service or labor which may be due,”—as a debt payable in service or labor. Also, it would be open to show, by contemporaneous history, that this mode of alluding to slaves and slavery, instead of speaking of them, was employed on purpose to exclude from the Constitution the idea that there could be property in man.

To show all this, is easy and certain.

When this obvious mistake of the Judges shall be brought to their notice, is it not reasonable to expect that they will withdraw the mistaken statement, and reconsider the conclusion based upon it?

And then it is to be remembered that “our fathers, who framed the Government under which we live”—the men who made the Constitution—decided this same Constitutional question in our favor, long ago—decided it without division among themselves, when making the decision; without division among themselves about the meaning of it after it was made, and, so far as any evidence is left, without basing it upon any mistaken statement of facts.

Under all these circumstances, do you really feel yourselves justified to break up this Government unless such a court decision as yours is, shall be at once submitted to as a conclusive and final rule of political action? But you will not abide the election of a Republican president! In that supposed event, you say, you will destroy the Union; and then, you say, the great crime of having destroyed it will be upon us! That is cool. A highwayman holds a pistol to my ear, and mutters through his teeth, “Stand and deliver, or I shall kill you, and then you will be a murderer!”

To be sure, what the robber demanded of me—my money—was my own; and I had a clear right to keep it; but it was no more my own than my vote is my own; and the threat of death to me, to extort my money, and the threat of destruction to the Union, to extort my vote, can scarcely be distinguished in principle.

A few words now to Republicans. *It is exceedingly desirable that all parts of this great Confederacy shall be at peace, and in harmony, one with another. Let us Republicans do our part to have it so. Even though much provoked, let us do nothing through passion and ill temper. Even though the southern people will not so much as listen to us, let us calmly consider their demands, and yield to them if, in our deliberate view of our duty, we possibly can.* Judging by all they say and do, and by the subject and nature of their controversy with us, let us determine, if we can, what will satisfy them.

Will they be satisfied if the Territories be unconditionally surrendered to them? We know they will not. In all their present complaints against us, the Territories are scarcely mentioned. Invasions and insurrections are the rage now. Will it satisfy them, if, in the future, we have nothing to do with invasions and insurrections? We know it will not. We so know, because we know we never had anything to do with invasions and insurrections; and yet this total abstaining does not exempt us from the charge and the denunciation.

The question recurs, what will satisfy them? Simply this: We must not only let them alone, but we must somehow, convince them that we do let them alone. This, we know by experience, is no easy task. We have been so trying to convince them from the very beginning of our organization, but with no success. In all our platforms and speeches we have constantly protested our purpose to let them alone; but this has had no tendency to convince them. Alike unavailing to convince them, is the fact that they have never detected a man of us in any attempt to disturb them.

These natural, and apparently adequate means all failing, what will convince them? This, and this only: cease to call slavery *wrong*, and join them in calling it *right*. And this must be done thoroughly—done in *acts* as well as in *words*. Silence will not be tolerated—we must place ourselves avowedly with them. Senator Douglas' new sedition law must be enacted and enforced, suppressing all declarations that slavery is wrong, whether made in politics, in presses, in pulpits, or in private. We must arrest and return their fugitive slaves with greedy pleasure. We must pull down our Free State constitutions. The whole atmosphere must be disinfected from all taint of opposition to slavery, before they will cease to believe that all their troubles proceed from us.

I am quite aware they do not state their case precisely in this way. Most of them would probably say to us, "Let us alone, do nothing to us, and say what you please about slavery." But we do let them alone—have never disturbed them—so that, after all, it is what we say, which dissatisfies them. They will continue to accuse us of doing, until we cease saying.

I am also aware they have not, as yet, in terms, demanded the overthrow of our Free-State Constitutions. Yet those Constitutions declare the wrong of slavery, with more solemn emphasis, than do all other sayings against it; and when all these other sayings shall have been silenced, the overthrow of these Constitutions will be demanded, and nothing be left to resist the demand. It is nothing to the contrary, that they do not demand the whole of this just now. Demanding what they do, and for the reason they do, they can voluntarily stop nowhere short of this consummation. Holding, as they do, that slavery is morally right, and socially elevating, they cannot cease to demand a full national recognition of it, as a legal right, and a social blessing.

Nor can we justifiably withhold this, on any ground save our conviction that slavery is wrong. If slavery is right, all words, acts, laws, and constitutions against it, are themselves wrong, and should be silenced, and swept away. If it is right, we cannot justly object to its nationality—its universality; if it is wrong, they cannot justly insist upon its extension—its enlargement. All they ask, we could readily grant, if we thought slavery right; all we ask, they could as readily grant, if they thought it wrong. Their thinking it right, and our thinking it wrong, is the precise fact upon which depends the whole controversy. Thinking it right, as they do, they are not to blame for desiring its full recognition, as being right; but, thinking it wrong, as we do, can we yield to them? Can we cast our votes with their view, and against our own? In view of our moral, social, and political responsibilities, can we do this?

Wrong as we think slavery is, we can yet afford to let it alone where it is, because that much is due to the necessity arising from its actual presence in the nation; but can we, while our votes will prevent it, allow it to spread into the National Territories, and to overrun us here in these Free States? If our sense of duty forbids this, then let us stand by our duty, fearlessly and effectively. Let us be diverted by none of those sophistical contrivances wherewith we are so industriously plied and belabored—contrivances such as groping for some middle ground between the right and the wrong, vain as the search for a man who should be neither a living man nor a dead man—such as a policy of "don't care" on a question about which all true men do care—such as Union appeals beseeching true Union

men to yield to Disunionists, reversing the divine rule, and calling, not the sinners, but the righteous to repentance—such as invocations to Washington, imploring men to unsay what Washington said, and undo what Washington did.

Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the Government nor of dungeons to ourselves. LET US HAVE FAITH THAT RIGHT MAKES MIGHT, AND IN THAT FAITH, LET US, TO THE END, DARE TO DO OUR DUTY AS WE UNDERSTAND IT.

Farewell Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

On November 6, 1860, Abraham Lincoln was elected the 16th president of the United States. He was the first president from the Republican Party. Upon embarking on his inaugural journey from Springfield, Illinois, to Washington, DC, Lincoln paid tribute to his friends with a short impromptu speech on February 11, 1861. Now known as the "Farewell Address," these remarks were given as Lincoln boarded a special presidential train at the Great Western Railroad station. Reporters present at the time printed different variations of Lincoln's words; below is Lincoln's own account of his address.

Like the Gettysburg Address, this eloquent speech has a clear structure: the past (sentences 2-4), the present (sentence 5), and the future (sentences 6-9). Note, too, how he organizes his sentences with parallel structures (e.g., "Here my children have been born, and one is buried.") What tone or mood does Lincoln achieve through the use of these literary devices? What is Lincoln's mood as he takes leave of his hometown to assume the presidency? What does he foresee for the future? How is his task "greater than that which rested upon Washington?" Does the mood or tone of this speech surprise you? Why or why not?

My friends:

No one, not in my situation, can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of these people, I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century, and have passed from a young to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me, and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope in your prayers you will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.



*President and
Commander-in-Chief*



Article II

U.S. CONSTITUTION

Article Two of the U.S. Constitution creates the executive branch of the government, and outlines the powers and duties of the President. We include it here especially to serve as background for thinking about Lincoln's execution of the presidential office, guided as it always was by his devotion to the Constitution, as he understood it.

Reading carefully, ask yourself what exactly is the Office of the President? What is the structure of the Article? How does each section add to your understanding of the Office of President? What did the Framers of the Constitution mean by "executive power"? What are the President's constitutional responsibilities? What acts is the President permitted to perform? What is he prohibited from doing? What is the relation of executive power to constitutional government or the rule of law?

SECTION 1. The executive Power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America. He shall hold his Office during the Term of four Years, and, together with the Vice President, chosen for the same Term, be elected, as follows:

Each State shall appoint, in such Manner as the Legislature thereof may direct, a Number of Electors, equal to the whole Number of Senators and Representatives to which the State may be entitled in the Congress: but no Senator or Representative, or Person holding an Office of Trust or Profit under the United States, shall be appointed an Elector.

The Electors shall meet in their respective States, and vote by Ballot for two Persons, of whom one at least shall not be an Inhabitant of the same State with themselves. And they shall make a List of all the Persons voted for, and of the Number of Votes for each; which List they shall sign and certify, and transmit sealed to the Seat of the Government of the United States, directed to the President of the Senate. The President of the Senate shall, in the Presence of the Senate and House of Representatives, open all the Certificates, and the Votes shall then be counted. The Person having the greatest Number of Votes shall be the President, if such Number be a Majority of the whole Number of Electors appointed; and if there be more than one who have such Majority, and have an equal Number of Votes, then the House of Representatives shall immediately choose by Ballot one of them for President; and if no Person have a Majority, then from the five highest on the List the said House shall in like Manner choose the President. But in choosing the President, the Votes shall be taken by States, the Representation from each State having one Vote; A quorum for this Purpose shall consist of a Member or Members from two thirds of the States, and a Majority of all the States shall be necessary to a Choice. In every Case, after the Choice of the President, the Person having the greatest Number of Votes of the Electors shall be the Vice President. But if there should remain two or more who have equal Votes, the Senate shall choose from them by Ballot the Vice President.

The Congress may determine the Time of choosing the Electors, and the Day on which they shall give their Votes; which Day shall be the same throughout the United States.

No Person except a natural born Citizen, or a Citizen of the United States, at the time of the Adoption of this Constitution, shall be eligible to the Office of President; neither shall any person be eligible to that Office who shall not have attained to the Age of thirty five Years, and been fourteen Years a Resident within the United States.

In Case of the Removal of the President from Office, or of his Death, Resignation, or Inability to discharge the Powers and Duties of the said Office, the Same shall devolve on the Vice President, and the Congress may by Law provide for the Case of Removal, Death, Resignation or Inability, both of the President and Vice President, declaring what Officer shall then act as President, and such Officer shall act accordingly, until the Disability be removed, or a President shall be elected.

The President shall, at stated Times, receive for his Services, a Compensation, which shall neither be increased nor diminished during the Period for which he shall have been elected, and he shall not receive within that Period any other Emolument from the United States, or any of them.

Before he enter on the Execution of his Office, he shall take the following Oath or Affirmation:—"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

SECTION 2. The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, and of the Militia of the several States, when called into the actual Service of the United States; he may require the Opinion, in writing, of the principal Officer in each of the executive Departments, upon any Subject relating to the Duties of their respective Offices, and he shall have Power to grant Reprieves and Pardons for Offenses against the United States, except in Cases of Impeachment.

He shall have Power, by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, to make Treaties, provided two thirds of the Senators present concur; and he shall nominate, and by and with the Advice and Consent of the Senate, shall appoint Ambassadors, other public Ministers and Consuls, Judges of the supreme Court, and all other Officers of the United States, whose Appointments are not herein otherwise provided for, and which shall be established by Law: but the Congress may by Law vest the Appointment of such inferior Officers, as they think proper, in the President alone, in the Courts of Law, or in the Heads of Departments.

The President shall have Power to fill up all Vacancies that may happen during the Recess of the Senate, by granting Commissions which shall expire at the End of their next Session.

SECTION 3. He shall from time to time give to the Congress Information of the State of the Union, and recommend to their Consideration such Measures as he shall judge necessary and expedient; he may, on extraordinary Occasions, convene both Houses, or either of them, and in Case of Disagreement between them, with Respect to the Time of

Adjournment, he may adjourn them to such Time as he shall think proper; he shall receive Ambassadors and other public Ministers; he shall take Care that the Laws be faithfully executed, and shall Commission all the Officers of the United States.

SECTION 4. The President, Vice President and all civil Officers of the United States, shall be removed from Office on Impeachment for, and Conviction of, Treason, Bribery, or other high Crimes and Misdemeanors.

First Inaugural Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The First Inaugural Address was delivered on March 4, 1861, ten days after Abraham Lincoln's arrival in Washington, DC. Several southern states had already seceded from the Union, and Jefferson Davis (1808–89) had been inaugurated as the president of the Confederacy just two weeks before. Ignoring advice to the contrary, the former Illinois congressman (1809–65) rode with outgoing President James Buchanan (1791–1868) in an open carriage to the Capitol, where he took the oath of office from the East Portico steps.

Lincoln begins by affirming his Constitutional duty to preserve the Union while reassuring the South as to “the good will, conciliatory purposes, and Constitutional scruples of the new administration.” Why does Lincoln think the Union is perpetual? How does Lincoln define “secession”? Why is secession unconstitutional? What is the difference between what Lincoln calls “a government proper” and “an association of states in the nature of a contract merely”? Assuming that “the Union is unbroken,” what does Lincoln say is his constitutional responsibility as president regarding the laws of the Union?

In his famous last appeal, Lincoln expresses the hope—forlorn as it turned out—that the “mystic chords of memory” would draw the Union back together. This memorable expression invites us to think about how and why speech about the things we share is important for forming and cementing our loyalties, our affections, our commitments, and our common memories. What are the “mystic chords of memory”? Why are they important? What role do they play in uniting our country? Do they have limitations?

In compliance with a custom as old as the government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly, and to take in your presence the oath prescribed by the Constitution of the United States to be taken by the President “before he enters on the execution of his office.”

I do not consider it necessary at present for me to discuss those matters of administration about which there is no special anxiety or excitement.

Apprehension seems to exist among the people of the Southern States that by the accession of a Republican Administration their property and their peace and personal security are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension. Indeed, the most ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you. I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that—

I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so.

Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this and many similar declarations, and had never recanted them; and, more than this, they placed in the platform for my acceptance, and as a law to themselves and to me, the clear and emphatic resolution which I now read:

Resolved, That the maintenance inviolate of the rights of the States, and especially the right of each State to order and control its own domestic institutions according to its own judgment exclusively, is essential to that balance of power on which the perfection and endurance of our political fabric depend, and we denounce the lawless invasion by armed force of the soil of any State or Territory, no matter under what pretext, as among the gravest of crimes.

I now reiterate these sentiments; and, in doing so, I only press upon the public attention the most conclusive evidence of which the case is susceptible, that the property, peace, and security of no section are to be in any wise endangered by the now incoming Administration. I add, too, that all the protection which, consistently with the Constitution and the laws, can be given will be cheerfully given to all the States when lawfully demanded, for whatever cause—as cheerfully to one section as to another.

There is much controversy about the delivering up of fugitives from service or labor. The clause I now read is as plainly written in the Constitution as any other of its provisions:

No person held to service or labor in one State, under the laws thereof, escaping into another, shall in consequence of any law or regulation therein be discharged from such service or labor, but shall be delivered up on claim of the party to whom such service or labor may be due.

It is scarcely questioned that this provision was intended by those who made it for the reclaiming of what we call fugitive slaves; and the intention of the lawgiver is the law. All members of Congress swear their support to the whole Constitution—to this provision as much as to any other. To the proposition, then, that slaves whose cases come within the terms of this clause “shall be delivered up,” their oaths are unanimous. Now, if they would make the effort in good temper, could they not with nearly equal unanimity frame and pass a law by means of which to keep good that unanimous oath?

There is some difference of opinion whether this clause should be enforced by national or by State authority, but surely that difference is not a very material one. If the slave is to be surrendered, it can be of but little consequence to him or to others by which authority it is done. And should anyone in any case be content that his oath shall go unkept on a merely unsubstantial controversy as to *how* it shall be kept?

Again, in any law upon this subject ought not all the safeguards of liberty known in civilized and humane jurisprudence to be introduced, so that a free man be not in any case surrendered as a slave? And might it not be well at the same time to provide by law for the

enforcement of that clause in the Constitution which guarantees that “the citizens of each State shall be entitled to all privileges and immunities of citizens in the several States”?

I take the official oath to-day with no mental reservations and with no purpose to construe the Constitution or laws by any hypercritical rules; and while I do not choose now to specify particular acts of Congress as proper to be enforced, I do suggest that it will be much safer for all, both in official and private stations, to conform to and abide by all those acts which stand unrepealed than to violate any of them trusting to find impunity in having them held to be unconstitutional.

It is seventy-two years since the first inauguration of a President under our National Constitution. During that period fifteen different and greatly distinguished citizens have in succession administered the executive branch of the Government. They have conducted it through many perils, and generally with great success. Yet, with all this scope of precedent, I now enter upon the same task for the brief constitutional term of four years under great and peculiar difficulty. A disruption of the Federal Union, heretofore only menaced, is now formidably attempted.

I hold that in contemplation of universal law and of the Constitution the Union of these States is perpetual. Perpetuity is implied, if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments. It is safe to assert that no government proper ever had a provision in its organic law for its own termination. Continue to execute all the express provisions of our National Constitution, and the Union will endure forever, it being impossible to destroy it except by some action not provided for in the instrument itself.

Again: if the United States be not a government proper, but an association of States in the nature of contract merely, can it, as a contract, be peaceably unmade by less than all the parties who made it? One party to a contract may violate it—break it, so to speak—but does it not require all to lawfully rescind it?

Descending from these general principles, we find the proposition that, in legal contemplation the Union is perpetual confirmed by the history of the Union itself. The Union is much older than the Constitution. It was formed, in fact, by the Articles of Association in 1774. It was matured and continued by the Declaration of Independence in 1776. It was further matured, and the faith of all the then thirteen States expressly plighted and engaged that it should be perpetual, by the Articles of Confederation in 1778. And, finally, in 1787 one of the declared objects for ordaining and establishing the Constitution was “*to form a more perfect Union.*”

But if the destruction of the Union by one or by a part only of the States be lawfully possible, the Union is *less* perfect than before the Constitution, having lost the vital element of perpetuity.

It follows from these views that no State upon its own mere motion can lawfully get out of the Union; that *resolves* and *ordinances* to that effect are legally void; and that acts

of violence, within any State or States, against the authority of the United States, are insurrectionary or revolutionary, according to circumstances.

I therefore consider that in view of the Constitution and the laws the Union is unbroken, and to the extent of my ability, I shall take care, as the Constitution itself expressly enjoins upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the States. Doing this I deem to be only a simple duty on my part, and I shall perform it so far as practicable unless my rightful masters, the American people, shall withhold the requisite means or in some authoritative manner direct the contrary. I trust this will not be regarded as a menace, but only as the declared purpose of the Union that it *will* constitutionally defend and maintain itself.

In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence, and there shall be none unless it be forced upon the national authority. The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the government, and to collect the duties and imposts; but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion, no using of force against or among the people anywhere. Where hostility to the United States in any interior locality shall be so great and universal as to prevent competent resident citizens from holding the Federal offices, there will be no attempt to force obnoxious strangers among the people for that object. While the strict legal right may exist in the Government to enforce the exercise of these offices, the attempt to do so would be so irritating and so nearly impracticable withal that I deem it better to forego for the time the uses of such offices.

The mails, unless repelled, will continue to be furnished in all parts of the Union. So far as possible the people everywhere shall have that sense of perfect security which is most favorable to calm thought and reflection. The course here indicated will be followed unless current events and experience shall show a modification or change to be proper, and in every case and exigency my best discretion will be exercised, according to circumstances actually existing and with a view and a hope of a peaceful solution of the national troubles and the restoration of fraternal sympathies and affections.

That there are persons in one section or another who seek to destroy the Union at all events, and are glad of any pretext to do it, I will neither affirm nor deny; but if there be such, I need address no word to them. To those, however, who really love the Union may I not speak?

Before entering upon so grave a matter as the destruction of our national fabric, with all its benefits, its memories, and its hopes, would it not be wise to ascertain precisely why we do it? Will you hazard so desperate a step while there is any possibility that any portion of the ills you fly from have no real existence? Will you, while the certain ills you fly to are greater than all the real ones you fly from, will you risk the commission of so fearful a mistake?

All profess to be content in the Union if all constitutional rights can be maintained. Is it true, then, that any right plainly written in the Constitution has been denied? I think not.

Happily the human mind is so constituted that no party can reach to the audacity of doing this. Think, if you can, of a single instance in which a plainly written provision of the Constitution has ever been denied. If by the mere force of numbers a majority should deprive a minority of any clearly written constitutional right, it might in a moral point of view justify revolution; certainly would if such a right were a vital one. But such is not our case. All the vital rights of minorities and of individuals are so plainly assured to them by affirmations and negations, guarantees and prohibitions, in the Constitution that controversies never arise concerning them. But no organic law can ever be framed with a provision specifically applicable to every question which may occur in practical administration. No foresight can anticipate nor any document of reasonable length contain express provisions for all possible questions. Shall fugitives from labor be surrendered by national or by State authority? The Constitution does not expressly say. *May* Congress prohibit slavery in the Territories? The Constitution does not expressly say. *Must* Congress protect slavery in the Territories? The Constitution does not expressly say.

From questions of this class spring all our constitutional controversies, and we divide upon them into majorities and minorities. If the minority will not acquiesce, the majority must, or the Government must cease. There is no other alternative; for continuing the Government is acquiescence on one side or the other. If a minority in such case will secede rather than acquiesce, they make a precedent which in turn will divide and ruin them; for a minority of their own will secede from them whenever a majority refuses to be controlled by such minority. For instance, why may not any portion of a new confederacy a year or two hence arbitrarily secede again, precisely as portions of the present Union now claim to secede from it? All who cherish disunion sentiments are now being educated to the exact temper of doing this.

Is there such perfect identity of interests among the States to compose a new union as to produce harmony only and prevent renewed secession?

Plainly the central idea of secession is the essence of anarchy. A majority held in restraint by constitutional checks and limitations, and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it does of necessity fly to anarchy or to despotism. Unanimity is impossible. The rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible; so that, rejecting the majority principle, anarchy or despotism in some form is all that is left.

I do not forget the position assumed by some that constitutional questions are to be decided by the Supreme Court; nor do I deny that such decisions must be binding in any case upon the parties to a suit, as to the object of that suit, while they are also entitled to very high respect and consideration in all parallel cases by all other departments of the Government. And while it is obviously possible that such decision may be erroneous in any given case, still the evil effect following it, being limited to that particular case, with the chance that it may be overruled and never become a precedent for other cases, can better be borne than could the evils of a different practice. At the same time, the candid citizen must confess that if the policy of the Government upon vital questions affecting the whole people is to be irrevocably fixed by decisions of the Supreme Court, the instant they

are made in ordinary litigation between parties in personal actions the people will have ceased to be their own rulers, having to that extent practically resigned their Government into the hands of that eminent tribunal. Nor is there in this view any assault upon the court or the judges. It is a duty from which they may not shrink to decide cases properly brought before them, and it is no fault of theirs if others seek to turn their decisions to political purposes.

One section of our country believes slavery is *right* and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is *wrong* and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute. The fugitive-slave clause of the Constitution and the law for the suppression of the foreign slave trade are each as well enforced, perhaps, as any law can ever be in a community where the moral sense of the people imperfectly supports the law itself. The great body of the people abide by the dry legal obligation in both cases, and a few break over in each. This, I think, cannot be perfectly cured, and it would be worse in both cases *after* the separation of the sections than before. The foreign slave trade, now imperfectly suppressed, would be ultimately revived without restriction, in one section, while fugitive slaves, now only partially surrendered, would not be surrendered at all by the other.

Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced and go out of the presence and beyond the reach of each other, but the different parts of our country cannot do this. They can not but remain face to face, and intercourse, either amicable or hostile, must continue between them. Is it possible, then, to make that intercourse more advantageous or more satisfactory *after* separation than *before*? Can aliens make treaties easier than friends can make laws? Can treaties be more faithfully enforced between aliens than laws can among friends? Suppose you go to war, you can not fight always; and when, after much loss on both sides and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions, as to terms of intercourse, are again upon you.

This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing Government, they can exercise their *constitutional* right of amending it or their *revolutionary* right to dismember or overthrow it. I cannot be ignorant of the fact that many worthy and patriotic citizens are desirous of having the National Constitution amended. While I make no recommendation of amendments, I fully recognize the rightful authority of the people over the whole subject, to be exercised in either of the modes prescribed in the instrument itself; and I should, under existing circumstances, favor rather than oppose a fair opportunity being afforded the people to act upon it. I will venture to add that to me the convention mode seems preferable, in that it allows amendments to originate with the people themselves, instead of only permitting them to take or reject propositions originated by others, not especially chosen for the purpose, and which might not be precisely such as they would wish to either accept or refuse. I understand a proposed amendment to the Constitution—which amendment, however, I have not seen—has passed Congress, to the effect that the Federal Government shall never interfere with the domestic institutions of the States, including that of persons held to service. To avoid misconstruction of what I have said, I depart from my purpose not to speak of particular amendments so far as to say that, holding such a provision to now

be implied constitutional law, I have no objection to its being made express and irrevocable.

The Chief Magistrate derives all his authority from the people, and they have conferred none upon him to fix terms for the separation of the States. The people themselves can do this also if they choose; but the Executive as such has nothing to do with it. His duty is to administer the present Government, as it came to his hands and to transmit it unimpaired by him to his successor.

Why should there not be a patient confidence in the ultimate justice of the people? Is there any better or equal hope in the world? In our present differences, is either party without faith of being in the right? If the Almighty Ruler of Nations, with His eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth and that justice will surely prevail by the judgment of this great tribunal of the American people.

By the frame of the Government under which we live this same people have wisely given their public servants but little power for mischief, and have with equal wisdom provided for the return of that little to their own hands at very short intervals. While the people retain their virtue and vigilance no administration by any extreme of wickedness or folly can very seriously injure the Government in the short space of four years.

My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and *well* upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to *hurry* any of you in hot haste to a step which you would never take *deliberately*, that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it. Such of you as are now dissatisfied still have the old Constitution unimpaired, and, on the sensitive point, the laws of your own framing under it; while the new Administration will have no immediate power, if it would, to change either. If it were admitted that you who are dissatisfied hold the right side in the dispute, there still is no single good reason for precipitate action. Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty.

In *your* hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in *mine*, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail *you*. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. *You* have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the government, while I shall have the most solemn one to “preserve, protect, and defend it.”

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

Message to Congress in Special Session

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

With the firing on Fort Sumter in Charleston, South Carolina, on April 12, 1861, President Lincoln faced a rebellion “too powerful to be suppressed by the ordinary course of judicial proceedings.” Following the surrender of the fort, Lincoln initiated a number of military measures. He called up the militia, instituted a blockade of Southern ports, and suspended the writ of habeas corpus. He also convened Congress to meet in extra session on July 4, 1861, where he outlined the events that started the war and defended his actions.

How does Lincoln characterize the events leading up to the war? Who were the aggressors? Why does Lincoln think it necessary to resist secession? Why is there no right to secession, and how is it different from the right of revolution? How does Lincoln understand the nature of the American union and the nature of the office he filled? How, specifically, does he defend the suspension of habeas corpus? Did he have the authority to take the actions that he did?

Having been convened on an extraordinary occasion, as authorized by the Constitution, your attention is not called to any ordinary subject of legislation.

At the beginning of the present Presidential term, four months ago, the functions of the Federal Government were found to be generally suspended within the several States of South Carolina, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, and Florida, excepting only those of the Post Office Department.

Within these States, all the Forts, Arsenals, Dock-yards, Customhouses, and the like, including the movable and stationary property in, and about them, had been seized, and were held in open hostility to this Government, excepting only Forts Pickens, Taylor, and Jefferson, on, and near the Florida coast, and Fort Sumter, in Charleston harbor, South Carolina. The Forts thus seized had been put in improved condition; new ones had been built; and armed forces had been organized, and were organizing, all avowedly with the same hostile purpose.

The Forts remaining in the possession of the Federal government, in, and near, these States, were either besieged or menaced by warlike preparations; and especially Fort Sumter was nearly surrounded by well-protected hostile batteries, with guns equal in quality to the best of its own, and outnumbering the latter as perhaps ten to one. A disproportionate share, of the Federal muskets and rifles, had somehow found their way into these States, and had been seized, to be used against the government. Accumulations of the public revenue, lying within them, had been seized for the same object. The Navy was scattered in distant seas; leaving but a very small part of it within the immediate reach of the government. Officers of the Federal Army and Navy, had resigned in great numbers; and, of those resigning, and large proportion had taken up arms against the government. Simultaneously, and in connection, with all this, the purpose to sever the Federal Union,

was openly avowed. In accordance with this purpose, an ordinance had been adopted in each of these States, declaring the States, respectively, to be separated from the National Union. A formula for instituting a combined government of these states had been promulgated; and this illegal organization, in the character of confederate States was already invoking recognition, aid, and intervention, from Foreign Powers.

Finding this condition of things, and believing it to be an imperative duty upon the incoming Executive, to prevent, if possible, the consummation of such attempt to destroy the Federal Union, a choice of means to that end became indispensable. This choice was made; and was declared in the Inaugural address. The policy chosen looked to the exhaustion of all peaceful measures, before a resort to any stronger ones. It sought only to hold the public places and property, not already wrested from the Government, and to collect the revenue; relying for the rest, on time, discussion, and the ballot-box. It promised a continuance of the mails, at government expense, to the very people who were resisting the government; and it gave repeated pledges against any disturbance to any of the people, or any of their rights. Of all that which a president might constitutionally, and justifiably, do in such a case, everything was foreborne, without which, it was believed possible to keep the government on foot.

On the 5th of March, (the present incumbent's first full day in office) a letter of Major Anderson, commanding at Fort Sumter, written on the 28th of February, and received at the War Department on the 4th of March, was, by that Department, placed in his hands. This letter expressed the professional opinion of the writer, that reinforcements could not be thrown into that Fort within the time for his relief, rendered necessary by the limited supply of provisions, and with a view of holding possession of the same, with a force of less than twenty thousand good, and well-disciplined men. This opinion was concurred in by all the officers of his command; and their memoranda on the subject, were made enclosures of Major Anderson's letter. The whole was immediately laid before Lieutenant General Scott, who at once concurred with Major Anderson in opinion. On reflection, however, he took full time, consulting with other officers, both of the Army and the Navy; and, at the end of four days, came reluctantly, but decidedly, to the same conclusion as before. He also stated at the same time that no such sufficient force was then at the control of the Government, or could be raised, and brought to the ground, within the time when the provisions in the Fort would be exhausted. In a purely military point of view, this reduced the duty of the administration, in the case, to the mere matter of getting the garrison safely out of the Fort.

It was believed, however, that to so abandon that position, under the circumstances, would be utterly ruinous; that the necessity under which it was to be done, would not be fully understood—that, by many, it would be construed as a part of a voluntary policy—that, at home, it would discourage the friends of the Union, embolden its adversaries, and go far to insure to the latter, a recognition abroad—that, in fact, it would be our national destruction consummated. This could not be allowed. Starvation was not yet upon the garrison; and ere it would be reached, Fort Pickens might be reinforced. This last, would be a clear indication of policy, and would better enable the country to accept the evacuation of Fort Sumter, as a military necessity. An order was at once directed to be sent for the

landing of the troops from the Steamship Brooklyn, into Fort Pickens. This order could not go by land, but must take the longer, and slower route by sea. The first return news from the order was received just one week before the fall of Fort Sumter. The news itself was, that the officer commanding the Sabine, to which vessel the troops had been transferred from the Brooklyn, acting upon some quasi armistice of the late administration, (and of the existence of which, the present administration, up to the time the order was dispatched, had only too vague and uncertain rumors, to fix attention) had refused to land the troops. To now re-inforce Fort Pickens, before a crisis would be reached at Fort Sumter was impossible—rendered so by the near exhaustion of provisions in the latter-named Fort. In precaution against such a conjuncture, the government had, a few days before, commenced preparing an expedition, as well adapted as might be, to relieve Fort Sumter, which expedition was intended to be ultimately used, or not, according to circumstances. The strongest anticipated case, for using it, was now presented; and it was resolved to send it forward. As had been intended, in this contingency, it was also resolved to notify the Governor of South Carolina, that he might except an attempt would be made to provision the Fort; and that, if the attempt should not be resisted, there would be no effort to throw in men, arms, or ammunition, without further notice, or in case of an attack upon the Fort. This notice was accordingly given; whereupon the Fort was attacked, and bombarded to its fall, without even awaiting the arrival of the provisioning expedition.

It is thus seen that the assault upon, and reduction of, Fort Sumter, was, in no sense, a matter of self-defense on the part of the assailants. They well knew that the garrison in the Fort could, by no possibility, commit aggression upon them. They knew—they were expressly notified—that the giving of bread to the few brave and hungry men of the garrison, was all which would on that occasion be attempted, unless themselves, by resisting so much, should provoke more. They knew that this Government desired to keep the garrison in the Fort, not to assail them, but merely to maintain visible possession, and thus to preserve the Union from actual, and immediate dissolution—trusting, as herein-before stated, to time, discussion, and the ballot-box, for final adjustment; and they assailed, and reduced the Fort, for precisely the reverse object—to drive out the visible authority of the Federal Union, and thus force it to immediate dissolution.

That this was their object, the Executive well understood; and having said to them in the inaugural address, “You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors,” he took pains, not only to keep this declaration good, but also to keep the case so free from the power of ingenious sophistry, as that the world should not be able to misunderstand it. By the affair at Fort Sumter, with its surrounding circumstances, that point was reached. Then, and thereby, the assailants of the Government, began the conflict of arms, without a gun in sight, or in expectancy, to return their fire, save only the few in the Fort, sent to that harbor, years before, for their own protection, and still ready to give that protection, in whatever was lawful. In this act, discarding all else, they have forced upon the country, the distinct issue: “Immediate dissolution, or blood.”

And this issue embraces more than the fate of these United States. It presents to the whole family of man, the question, whether a constitutional republic, or a democracy—a government of the people, by the same people—can, or cannot, maintain its territorial

integrity, against its own domestic foes. It presents the question, whether discontented individuals, too few in numbers to control administration, according to organic law, in any case, can always, upon the pretenses made in this case, or on any other pretenses, or arbitrarily, without any pretense, break up their Government, and thus practically put an end to free government upon the earth. It forces us to ask: “Is there, in all republics, this inherent, and fatal weakness?” “Must a government, of necessity, be too strong for the liberties of its own people, or too weak to maintain its own existence?”

So viewing the issue, no choice was left but to call out the war power of the Government; and so to resist force, employed for its destruction, by force, for its preservation.

The call was made; and the response of the country was most gratifying; surpassing, in unanimity and spirit, the most sanguine expectation. Yet none of the States commonly called Slave states, except Delaware, gave a Regiment through regular State organization. A few regiments have been organized within some others of those states, by individual enterprise, and received into the government service. Of course the seceded States, so called, (and to which Texas had been joined about the time of the inauguration,) gave no troops to the cause of the Union. The border States, so called, were not uniform in their actions; some of them being almost for the Union, while in others—as Virginia, North Carolina, Tennessee, and Arkansas—the Union sentiment was nearly repressed, and silenced.

The course taken in Virginia was the most remarkable—perhaps the most important. A convention, elected by the people of that State, to consider this very question of disrupting the Federal Union, was in session at the capital of Virginia when Fort Sumter fell. To this body the people had chosen a large majority of professed Union men. Almost immediately after the fall of Sumter, many members of that majority went over to the original disunion minority, and, with them, adopted an ordinance for withdrawing the State from the Union. Whether this change was wrought by their great approval of the assault upon Sumter, or their great resentment at the government’s resistance to that assault, is not definitely known. Although they submitted the ordinance, for ratification, to vote of the people, to be taken on a day then somewhat more than a month distant, the convention, and the Legislature, (Which was also in session at the same time and place) with leading men of the State, not members of either, immediately commenced acting, as if the State were already out of the Union. They pushed military preparations vigorously forward all over the state. They seized the United States Armory at Harper’s Ferry, and the Navy-yard at Gosport, near Norfolk. They received—perhaps invited—into their state, large bodies of troops, with their warlike appointments, from the so-called seceded States. They formally entered into a treaty of temporary alliance, and co-operation with the so-called “Confederate States,” and sent members to their Congress at Montgomery. And, finally, they permitted the insurrectionary government to be transferred to their capital at Richmond.

The people of Virginia have thus allowed this giant insurrection to make its nest within her borders; and this government has no choice left but to deal with it, where it finds it.

And it has the less regret, as the loyal citizens have, in due form, claimed its protection. Those loyal citizens, this government is bound to recognize, and protect, as being Virginia.

In the border States, so called—in fact, the middle states—there are those who favor a policy which they call “armed neutrality”—that is, an arming of those states to prevent the Union forces passing one way, or the disunion, the other, over their soil. This would be disunion completed. Figuratively speaking, it would be the building of an impassable wall along the line of separation. And yet, not quite an impassable one; for, under the guise of neutrality, it would tie the hands of the Union men, and freely pass supplies from among them, to the insurrectionists, which it could not do as an open enemy. At a stroke, it would take all the trouble off the hands of secession, except only what proceeds from the external blockade. It would do for the disunionists that which, of all things, they most desire—feed them well, and give them disunion without a struggle of their own. It recognizes no fidelity to the Constitution, no obligation to maintain the Union; and while very many who have favored it are, doubtless, loyal citizens, it is, nevertheless, treason in effect.

Recurring to the action of the government, it may be stated that, at first, a call was made for seventy-five thousand militia; and rapidly following this, a proclamation was issued for closing the ports of the insurrectionary districts by proceedings in the nature of Blockade. So far all was believed to be strictly legal. At this point the insurrectionists announced their purpose to enter upon the practice of privateering. Other calls were made for volunteers, to serve three years, unless sooner discharged; and also for large additions to the regular Army and Navy. These measures, whether strictly legal or not, were ventured upon, under what appeared to be a popular demand, and a public necessity; trusting, then as now, that Congress would readily ratify them. It is believed that nothing has been done beyond the constitutional competency of Congress.

Soon after the first call for militia, it was considered a duty to authorize the Commanding General, in proper cases, according to his discretion, to suspend the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus; or, in other words, to arrest, and detain, without resort to the ordinary processes and forms of law, such individuals as he might deem dangerous to the public safety. This authority has purposely been exercised but very sparingly. Nevertheless, the legality and propriety of what has been done under it, are questioned; and the attention of the country has been called to the proposition that one who is sworn to “take care that the laws be faithfully executed,” should not himself violate them. Of course some consideration was given to the questions of power, and propriety, before this matter was acted upon. The whole of the laws which were required to be faithfully executed, were being resisted, and failing of execution, in nearly one-third of the States. Must they be allowed to finally fail of execution, even had it been perfectly clear, that by the use of the means necessary to their execution, some single law, made in such extreme tenderness of the citizen’s liberty, that practically, it relieves more of the guilty, than of the innocent, should, to a very limited extent, be violated? To state the question more directly, are all the laws, but one, to go unexecuted, and the government itself go to pieces, lest that one be violated? Even in such a case, would not the official oath be broken, if the government should be overthrown, when it was believed that disregarding the single law, would tend to preserve it? But it was not believed that this question was presented. It was not believed

that any law was violated. The provision of the Constitution that “The privilege of the writ of habeas corpus, shall not be suspended unless when, in cases of rebellion or invasion, the public safety may require it,” is equivalent to a provision—is a provision—that such privilege may be suspended when, in cases of rebellion, or invasion, the public safety does require it. It was decided that we have a case of rebellion, and that the public safety does require the qualified suspension of the privilege of the writ which was authorized to be made. Now it is insisted that Congress, and not the Executive, is vested with this power. But the Constitution itself, is silent as to which, or who, is to exercise the power; and as the provision was plainly made for a dangerous emergency, it cannot be believed the framers of the instrument intended, that in every case, the danger should run its course, until Congress could be called together; the very assembling of which might be prevented, as was intended in this case, by the rebellion.

No more extended argument is now offered; as an opinion, at some length, will probably be presented by the Attorney General. Whether there shall be any legislation upon the subject, and if any, what, is submitted entirely to the better judgment of Congress.

The forbearance of this government had been so extraordinary, and so long continued, as to lead some foreign nations to shape their action as if they supposed the early destruction of our national Union was probable. While this, on discovery, gave the Executive some concern, he is now happy to say that the sovereignty, and rights of the United States, are now everywhere practically respected by foreign powers; and a general sympathy with the country is manifested throughout the world.

The reports of the Secretaries of the Treasury, War, and the Navy, will give the information in detail deemed necessary, and convenient for your deliberation, and action; while the Executive, and all the Departments, will stand ready to supply omissions, or to communicate new facts, considered important for you to know.

It is now recommended that you give the legal means for making this contest a short, and a decisive one; that you place at the control of the government, for the work, at least four hundred thousand men, and four hundred millions of dollars. That number of men is about one tenth of those of proper ages within the regions where, apparently, all are willing to engage; and the sum is less than a twenty-third part of the money value owned by the men who seem ready to devote the whole. A debt of six hundred millions of dollars now, is a less sum per head, than was the debt of our revolution, when we came out of that struggle; and the money value in the country now, bears even a greater proportion to what it was then, than does the population. Surely each man has as strong a motive now, to preserve our liberties, as each had then, to establish them.

A right result, at this time, will be worth more to the world, than ten times the men, and ten times the money. The evidence reaching us from the country, leaves no doubt, that the material for the work is abundant; and that it needs only the hand of legislation to give it legal sanction, and the hand of the Executive to give it practical shape and efficiency. One of the greatest perplexities of the government, is to avoid receiving troops faster than it can

provide for them. In a word, the people will save their government, if the government itself, will do its part, only indifferently well.

It might seem, at first thought, to be of little difference whether the present movement at the South be called “secession” or “rebellion.” The movers, however, well understand the difference. At the beginning, they knew they could never raise their treason to any respectable magnitude, by any name which implies violation of law. They knew their people possessed as much of moral sense, as much of devotion to law and order, and as much pride in, and reverence for, the history, and government, of their common country, as any other civilized, and patriotic people. They knew they could make no advancement directly in the teeth of these strong and noble sentiments. Accordingly they commenced by an insidious debauching of the public mind. They invented an ingenious sophism, which, if conceded, was followed by perfectly logical steps, through all the incidents, to the complete destruction of the Union. The sophism itself is, that any state of the Union may, consistently with the national Constitution, and therefore lawfully, and peacefully, withdraw from the Union, without the consent of the Union, or of any other state. The little disguise that the supposed right is to be exercised only for just cause, themselves to be the sole judge of its justice, is too thin to merit any notice.

With rebellion thus sugar-coated, they have been drugging the public mind of their section for more than thirty years; and, until at length, they have brought many good men to a willingness to take up arms against the government the day after some assemblage of men have enacted the farcical pretense of taking their State out of the Union, who could have been brought to no such thing the day before.

This sophism derives much—perhaps the whole—of its currency, from the assumption, that there is some omnipotent, and sacred supremacy, pertaining to a State—to each State of our Federal Union. Our States have neither more, nor less power, than that reserved to them, in the Union, by the Constitution—no one of them ever having been a State out of the Union. The original ones passed into the Union even before they cast off their British colonial dependence; and the new ones each came into the Union directly from a condition of dependence, excepting Texas. And even Texas, in its temporary independence, was never designated a State. The new ones only took the designation of States, on coming into the Union, while that name was first adopted for the old ones, in, and by, the Declaration of Independence. Therein the “United Colonies” were declared to be “Free and Independent States”; but, even then, the object plainly was not to declare their independence of one another, or of the Union; but directly the contrary, as their mutual pledge, and their mutual action, before, at the time, and afterwards, abundantly show. The express plighting of faith, by each and all of the original thirteen, in the Articles of Confederation, two years later, that the Union shall be perpetual, is most conclusive. Having never been States, either in substance, or in name, outside of the Union, whence this magical omnipotence of “State rights,” asserting a claim of power to lawfully destroy the Union itself? Much is said about the “sovereignty” of the States; but the word, even, is not in the national Constitution; nor, as is believed, in any of the State constitutions. What is a “sovereignty,” in the political sense of the term? Would it be far wrong to define it “A political community, without a political superior”? Tested by this, no one of our States,

except Texas, ever was a sovereignty. And even Texas gave up the character on coming into the Union; by which act, she acknowledged the Constitution of the United States, and the laws and treaties of the United States made in pursuance of the Constitution, to be, for her, the supreme law of the land. The States have their status IN the Union, and they have no other legal status. If they break from this, they can only do so against law, and by revolution. The Union, and not themselves separately, procured their independence, and their liberty. By conquest, or purchase, the Union gave each of them, whatever of independence, and liberty, it has. The Union is older than any of the States; and, in fact, it created them as States. Originally, some dependent colonies made the Union; and, in turn, the Union threw off their old dependence, for them, and made them States, such as they are. Not one of them ever had a State constitution, independent of the Union. Of course, it is not forgotten that all the new States framed their constitutions, before they entered the Union; nevertheless, dependent upon, and preparatory to, coming into the Union.

Unquestionably the States have the powers, and rights, reserved to them in, and by the National Constitution; but among these, surely, are not included all conceivable powers, however mischievous, or destructive; but, at most, such only, as were known in the world, at the time, as governmental powers; and certainly, a power to destroy the government itself, had never been known as a governmental—as a merely administrative power. This relative matter of National power, and State rights, as a principle, is no other than the principle of generality, and locality. Whatever concerns the whole, should be confided to the whole—to the general government; while, whatever concerns only the State, should be left exclusively, to the State. This is all there is of original principle about it. Whether the National Constitution, in defining boundaries between the two, has applied the principle with exact accuracy, is not to be questioned. We are all bound by that defining, without question.

What is now combatted, is the position that secession is consistent with the Constitution—is lawful, and peaceful. It is not contended that there is any express law for it; and nothing should ever be implied as law, which leads to unjust, or absurd consequences. The nation purchased, with money, the countries out of which several of these States were formed. Is it just that they shall go off without leave, and without refunding? The nation paid very large sums, (in the aggregate, I believe, nearly a hundred millions) to relieve Florida of the aboriginal tribes. Is it just that she shall now be off without consent, or without making any return? The nation is now in debt for money applied to the benefit of these so-called seceding States, in common with the rest. Is it just, either that creditors shall go unpaid, or the remaining States pay the whole? A part of the present national debt was contracted to pay the old debts of Texas. Is it just that she shall leave, and pay no part of this herself?

Again, if one State may secede, so may another; and when all shall have seceded, none is left to pay the debts. Is this quite just to creditors? Did we notify them of this sage view of ours, when we borrowed their money? If we now recognize this doctrine, by allowing the seceders to go in peace, it is difficult to see what we can do, if others choose to go, or to extort terms upon which they will promise to remain.

The seceders insist that our Constitution admits of secession. They have assumed to make a National Constitution of their own, in which, of necessity, they have either discarded, or retained, the right of secession, as they insist, it exists in ours. If they have discarded it, they thereby admit that, on principle, it ought not to be in ours. If they have retained it, by their own construction of ours they show that to be consistent they must secede from one another, whenever they shall find it the easiest way of settling their debts, or effecting any other selfish, or unjust object. The principle itself is one of disintegration, and upon which no government can possibly endure.

If all the States, save one, should assert the power to drive that one out of the Union, it is presumed the whole class of seceder politicians would at once deny the power, and denounce the act as the greatest outrage upon State rights. But suppose that precisely the same act, instead of being called “driving the one out,” should be called “the seceding of the others from that one,” it would be exactly what the seceders claim to do; unless, indeed, they make the point, that the one, because it is a minority, may rightfully do, what the others, because they are a majority, may not rightfully do. These politicians are subtle, and profound, on the rights of minorities. They are not partial to that power which made the Constitution, and speaks from the preamble, calling itself “We, the People.”

It may well be questioned whether there is, to-day, a majority of the legally qualified voters of any State, except perhaps South Carolina, in favor of disunion. There is much reason to believe that the Union men are the majority in many, if not in every other one, of the so-called seceded States. The contrary has not been demonstrated in any one of them. It is ventured to affirm this, even of Virginia and Tennessee; for the result of an election, held in military camps, where the bayonets are all on one side of the question voted upon, can scarcely be considered as demonstrating popular sentiment. At such an election, all that large class who are, at once, for the Union, and against coercion, would be coerced to vote against the Union.

It may be affirmed, without extravagance, that the free institutions we enjoy, have developed the powers, and improved the condition, of our whole people, beyond any example in the world. Of this we now have a striking, and an impressive illustration. So large an army as the government has now on foot, was never before known, without a soldier in it, but who had taken his place there, of his own free choice. But more than this: there are many single Regiments whose members, one and another, possess full practical knowledge of all the arts, sciences, professions, and whatever else, whether useful or elegant, is known in the world; and there is scarcely one, from which there could not be selected, a President, a Cabinet, a Congress, and perhaps a Court, abundantly competent to administer the government itself. Nor do I say this is not true, also, in the army of our late friends, now adversaries, in this contest; but if it is, so much better the reason why the government, which has conferred such benefits on both them and us, should not be broken up. Whoever, in any section, proposes to abandon such a government, would do well to consider, in deference to what principle it is, that he does it—what better he is likely to get in its stead—whether the substitute will give, or be intended to give, so much of good to the people. There are some foreshadowings on this subject. Our adversaries have adopted some Declarations of Independence; in which, unlike the good old one, penned by

Jefferson, they omit the words “all men are created equal.” Why? They have adopted a temporary national constitution, in the preamble of which, unlike our good old one, signed by Washington, they omit “We, the People,” and substitute “We, the deputies of the sovereign and independent States.” Why? Why this deliberate pressing out of view, the rights of men, and the authority of the people?

This is essentially a People’s contest. On the side of the Union, it is a struggle for maintaining in the world, that form, and substance of government, whose leading object is, to elevate the condition of men—to lift artificial weights from all shoulders—to clear the paths of laudable pursuit for all—to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life. Yielding to partial, and temporary departures, from necessity, this is the leading object of the government for whose existence we contend.

I am most happy to believe that the plain people understand, and appreciate this. It is worthy of note, that while in this, the government’s hour of trial, large numbers of those in the Army and Navy, who have been favored with the offices, have resigned, and proved false to the hand which had pampered them, not one common soldier, or common sailor is known to have deserted his flag.

Great honor is due to those officers who remain true, despite the example of their treacherous associates; but the greatest honor, and most important fact of all, is the unanimous firmness of the common soldiers, and common sailors. To the last man, so far as known, they have successfully resisted the traitorous efforts of those, whose commands, but an hour before, they obeyed as absolute law. This is the patriotic instinct of the plain people. They understand, without an argument, that destroying the government, which was made by Washington, means no good to them.

Our popular government has often been called an experiment. Two points in it, our people have already settled—the successful establishing, and the successful administering of it. One still remains—its successful maintenance against a formidable [internal] attempt to overthrow it. It is now for them to demonstrate to the world, that those who can fairly carry an election, can also suppress a rebellion—that ballots are the rightful, and peaceful, successors of bullets; and that when ballots have fairly, and constitutionally, decided, there can be no successful appeal, back to bullets; that there can be no successful appeal, except to ballots themselves, at succeeding elections. Such will be a great lesson of peace; teaching men that what they cannot take by an election, neither can they take it by a war—teaching all, the folly of being the beginners of a war.

Lest there be some uneasiness in the minds of candid men, as to what is to be the course of the government, towards the Southern States, after the rebellion shall have been suppressed, the Executive deems it proper to say, it will be his purpose then, as ever, to be guided by the Constitution, and the laws; and that he probably will have no different understanding of the powers, and duties of the Federal government, relatively to the rights of the States, and the people, under the Constitution, than that expressed in the inaugural address.

He desires to preserve the government, that it may be administered for all, as it was administered by the men who made it. Loyal citizens everywhere, have the right to claim this of their government; and the government has no right to withhold, or neglect it. It is not perceived that, in giving it, there is any coercion, any conquest, or any subjugation, in any just sense of those terms.

The Constitution provides, and all the States have accepted the provision, that "The United States shall guarantee to every State in this Union a republican form of government." But, if a State may lawfully go out of the Union, having done so, it may also discard the republican form of government; so that to prevent its going out, is an indispensable means, to the end, of maintaining the guaranty mentioned; and when an end is lawful and obligatory, the indispensable means to it, are also lawful, and obligatory.

It was with the deepest regret that the Executive found the duty of employing the war-power, in defense of the government, forced upon him. He could but perform this duty, or surrender the existence of the government. No compromise, by public servants, could, in this case, be a cure; not that compromises are not often proper, but that no popular government can long survive a marked precedent, that those who carry an election, can only save the government from immediate destruction, by giving up the main point, upon which the people gave the election. The people themselves, and not their servants, can safely reverse their own deliberate decisions. As a private citizen, the Executive could not have consented that these institutions shall perish; much less could he, in betrayal of so vast, and so sacred a trust, as these free people had confided to him. He felt that he had no moral right to shrink; nor even to count the chances of his own life, in what might follow. In full view of his great responsibility, he has, so far, done what he has deemed his duty. You will now, according to your own judgment, perform yours. He sincerely hopes that your views, and your action, may so accord with his, as to assure all faithful citizens, who have been disturbed in their rights, of a certain, and speedy restoration to them, under the Constitution, and the laws. And having thus chosen our course, without guile, and with pure purpose, let us renew our trust in God, and go forward without fear, and with manly hearts.

Open Letter to Horace Greeley

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

In August 1862, Horace Greeley, a Lincoln supporter and abolitionist, published an editorial in his newspaper, the New York Tribune, in the form of an open letter to the president. The editorial, titled “The Prayer of Twenty Millions,” claimed to speak on behalf of Northern citizens loyal to the Union, and demanded that Lincoln take immediate action against slavery. Lincoln wrote this reply to Greeley, also published in the Tribune, while a draft of the Emancipation Proclamation already lay in his desk drawer.

Why is Lincoln’s “paramount objective” preserving the Union and not freeing the slaves? What does Lincoln mean by “the Union as it was”? Why might he think he had to first save the Union before emancipation could take place? What distinction does Lincoln make between “official” duty and “personal” wishes?

Executive Mansion,
Washington, August 22, 1862.

Hon. Horace Greeley:
Dear Sir.

I have just read yours of the 19th. addressed to myself through the *New-York Tribune*. If there be in it any statements, or assumptions of fact, which I may know to be erroneous, I do not, now and here, controvert them. If there be in it any inferences which I may believe to be falsely drawn, I do not now and here, argue against them. If there be perceptible in it an impatient and dictatorial tone, I waive it in deference to an old friend, whose heart I have always supposed to be right.

As to the policy I “seem to be pursuing” as you say, I have not meant to leave any one in doubt.

I would save the Union. I would save it the shortest way under the Constitution. The sooner the national authority can be restored; the nearer the Union will be “the Union as it was.” If there be those who would not save the Union, unless they could at the same time save slavery, I do not agree with them. If there be those who would not save the Union unless they could at the same time destroy slavery, I do not agree with them. My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it; and if I could save it by freeing some and leaving others alone I would also do that. What I do about slavery, and the colored race, I do because I believe it helps to save the Union; and what I forbear, I forbear because I do not believe it would help to save the Union. I shall do less whenever I shall believe what I am doing hurts the cause, and I shall do more whenever I shall believe doing more will help the cause. I

shall try to correct errors when shown to be errors; and I shall adopt new views so fast as they shall appear to be true views.

I have here stated my purpose according to my view of official duty; and I intend no modification of my oft-expressed personal wish that all men every where could be free.

Yours,
A. Lincoln.

Chiefly About War-Matters by a Peaceable Man

NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE

In March 1862, the novelist Nathaniel Hawthorne (1804–64), along with his publisher, traveled to Washington, DC to see firsthand the nation at war. A staunch Democrat, Hawthorne was ambivalent about the war, and in his essay, he recounts his journey with biting observations of the government, the military, and the conduct of the war. Published in The Atlantic under the pseudonym of “A Peaceable Man,” the essay was partially censored by the magazine’s editor. Among the sections that were removed is this humorous description of President Lincoln. “The sketch appears to have been written in a benign spirit,” noted the editor, “and perhaps conveys a not inaccurate impression of its august subject; but it lacks reverence.”

Why does Hawthorne dwell so long on Lincoln’s physical appearance, and why does he call the president “Uncle Abe”? How does Hawthorne’s choice of language (e.g., physiognomy, supernumeraries, deputation) serve to complete his portrait of the president? What do you make of the anecdote about the whip? Is Hawthorne’s unvarnished portrait of Lincoln entirely unfavorable? What, by the end, is Hawthorne’s overall impression of Lincoln? Do you think Lincoln would have objected to this portrayal? Why might Lincoln have cultivated such an image of himself?

By and by there was a little stir on the staircase and in the passage-way, and in lounged a tall, loose-jointed figure, of an exaggerated Yankee port and demeanor, whom (as being about the homeliest man I ever saw, yet by no means repulsive or disagreeable) it was impossible not to recognize as Uncle Abe.

Unquestionably, Western man though he be, and Kentuckian by birth, President Lincoln is the essential representative of all Yankees, and the veritable specimen, physically, of what the world seems determined to regard as our characteristic qualities. It is the strangest and yet the fittest thing in the jumble of human vicissitudes, that he, out of so many millions, unlooked for, unselected by any intelligible process that could be based upon his genuine qualities, unknown to those who chose him, and unsuspected of what endowments may adapt him for his tremendous responsibility, should have found the way open for him to fling his lank personality into the chair of state,—where, I presume, it was his first impulse to throw his legs on the council-table, and tell the Cabinet Ministers a story. There is no describing his lengthy awkwardness, nor the uncouthness of his movement, and yet it seemed as if I had been in the habit of seeing him daily, and had shaken hands with him a thousand times in some village street; so true was he to the aspect of the pattern American, though with a certain extravagance which, possibly, I exaggerated still further by the delighted eagerness with which I took it in. If put to guess his calling and livelihood, I should have taken him for a country schoolmaster as soon as anything else. He was dressed in a rusty black frock-coat and pantaloons, unbrushed, and worn so faithfully that the suit had adapted itself to the curves and angularities of his figure, and had grown to be an outer skin of the man. He had shabby slippers on his feet. His hair was

black, still unmixed with gray, stiff, somewhat bushy, and had apparently been acquainted with neither brush nor comb that morning, after the disarrangement of the pillow; and as to a night-cap, Uncle Abe probably knows nothing of such effeminacies. His complexion is dark and sallow, betokening, I fear, an insalubrious atmosphere around the White House; he has thick black eyebrows and an impending brow; his nose is large, and the lines about his mouth are very strongly defined.

The whole physiognomy is as coarse a one as you would meet anywhere in the length and breadth of the States; but, withal, it is redeemed, illuminated, softened, and brightened by a kindly though serious look out of his eyes, and an expression of homely sagacity, that seems weighted with rich results of village experience. A great deal of native sense; no bookish cultivation, no refinement; honest at heart, and thoroughly so, and yet, in some sort, sly,—at least, endowed with a sort of tact and wisdom that are akin to craft, and would impel him, I think, to take an antagonist in flank rather than to make a bull-run at him right in front. But, on the whole, I like this sallow, queer, sagacious visage, with the homely human sympathies that warmed it; and, for my small share in the matter, would as lief have Uncle Abe for a ruler as any man whom it would have been practicable to put in his place.

Immediately on his entrance the President accosted our member of Congress, who had us in charge, and, with a comical twist of his face, made some jocular remark about the length of his breakfast. He then greeted us all round, not waiting for an introduction, but shaking and squeezing everybody's hand with the utmost cordiality, whether the individual's name was announced to him or not. His manner towards us was wholly without pretense, but yet had a kind of natural dignity, quite sufficient to keep the forwardest of us from clapping him on the shoulder and asking him for a story. A mutual acquaintance being established, our leader took the whip out of its case, and began to read the address of presentation. The whip was an exceedingly long one, its handle wrought in ivory (by some artist in the Massachusetts State Prison, I believe), and ornamented with a medallion of the President, and other equally beautiful devices; and along its whole length there was a succession of golden bands and ferrules. The address was shorter than the whip, but equally well made, consisting chiefly of an explanatory description of these artistic designs, and closing with a hint that the gift was a suggestive and emblematic one, and that the President would recognize the use to which such an instrument should be put.

This suggestion gave Uncle Abe rather a delicate task in his reply, because, slight as the matter seemed, it apparently called for some declaration, or intimation, or faint foreshadowing of policy in reference to the conduct of the war, and the final treatment of the Rebels. But the President's Yankee aptness and not-to-be-caughtness stood him in good stead, and he jerked or wiggled himself out of the dilemma with an uncouth dexterity that was entirely in character; although, without his gesticulation of eye and mouth,—and especially the flourish of the whip, with which he imagined himself touching up a pair of fat horses,—I doubt whether his words would be worth recording, even if I could remember them. The gist of the reply was, that he accepted the whip as an emblem of peace, not punishment; and, this great affair over, we retired out of the presence in high good-humor, only regretting that we could not have seen the President sit down and fold up his legs (which is said to be a most extraordinary spectacle), or have heard him tell one of those

delectable stories for which he is so celebrated. A good many of them are afloat upon the common talk of Washington, and are certainly the aptest, pithiest, and funniest little things imaginable; though, to be sure, they smack of the frontier freedom, and would not always bear repetition in a drawing-room, or on the immaculate page of the Atlantic.

Good Heavens! what liberties have I been taking with one of the potentates of the earth, and the man on whose conduct more important consequences depend than on that of any other historical personage of the century! But with whom is an American citizen entitled to take a liberty, if not with his own chief magistrate? However, lest the above allusions to President Lincoln's little peculiarities (already well known to the country and to the world) should be misinterpreted, I deem it proper to say a word or two in regard to him, of unfeigned respect and measurable confidence. He is evidently a man of keen faculties, and, what is still more to the purpose, of powerful character. As to his integrity, the people have that intuition of it which is never deceived. Before he actually entered upon his great office, and for a considerable time afterwards, there is no reason to suppose that he adequately estimated the gigantic task about to be imposed on him, or, at least, had any distinct idea how it was to be managed; and I presume there may have been more than one veteran politician who proposed to himself to take the power out of President Lincoln's hands into his own, leaving our honest friend only the public responsibility for the good or ill success of the career. The extremely imperfect development of his statesmanly qualities, at that period, may have justified such designs. But the President is teachable by events, and has now spent a year in a very arduous course of education; he has a flexible mind, capable of much expansion, and convertible towards far loftier studies and activities than those of his early life; and if he came to Washington a back-woods humorist, he has already transformed himself into as good a statesman (to speak moderately) as his prime-minister.

Emancipation Proclamation

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The final version of Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation took effect on January 1, 1863. The document declares that, "all persons held as slaves . . . are, and henceforward shall be set free." Arguably the most provocative document in Lincoln's presidency, its signing was met with both hostility and jubilation. Although the Proclamation is often thought to have freed slaves throughout the country, it applied only to the states that had seceded from the Union, leaving slavery untouched in the loyal border states. Despite its limited scope, it fundamentally transformed the character of the Civil War. The Proclamation also opened the door for African Americans to enlist in the Union Army. Though he was at first unsure about the Proclamation's public reception, on the day he approved this final version, Lincoln noted, "I never, in my life, felt more certain that I was doing right, than I do in signing this paper."

Upon what authority does Lincoln issue this Proclamation? Why is emancipation proclaimed as a "fit and necessary war measure"? Why does the Proclamation only apply to slaves in certain states? What does Lincoln encourage these freed slaves to do and to refrain from doing? How are these provisions expected to contribute to the Union war effort? How does language of this document contrast with that of Lincoln's more famous speeches like the Gettysburg Address? Why might the language of the Proclamation be more appropriate in this situation and its purpose?

By the President of the United States of America:

A Proclamation.

Whereas, on the twenty-second day of September, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-two, a proclamation was issued by the President of the United States, containing, among other things, the following, to wit:

"That on the first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, all persons held as slaves within any State or designated part of a State, the people whereof shall then be in rebellion against the United States, shall be then, thenceforward, and forever free; and the Executive Government of the United States, including the military and naval authority thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of such persons, and will do no act or acts to repress such persons, or any of them, in any efforts they may make for their actual freedom.

"That the Executive will, on the first day of January aforesaid, by proclamation, designate the States and parts of States, if any, in which the people thereof, respectively, shall then be in rebellion against the United States; and the fact that any State, or the people thereof, shall on that day be, in good faith, represented in the Congress of the United States by members chosen thereto at elections wherein a majority of the qualified voters of such

State shall have participated, shall, in the absence of strong countervailing testimony, be deemed conclusive evidence that such State, and the people thereof, are not then in rebellion against the United States.”

Now, therefore I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, by virtue of the power in me vested as Commander-in-Chief, of the Army and Navy of the United States in time of actual armed rebellion against the authority and government of the United States, and as a fit and necessary war measure for suppressing said rebellion, do, on this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty-three, and in accordance with my purpose so to do publicly proclaimed for the full period of one hundred days, from the day first above mentioned, order and designate as the States and parts of States wherein the people thereof respectively, are this day in rebellion against the United States, the following, to wit:

Arkansas, Texas, Louisiana, (except the Parishes of St. Bernard, Plaquemines, Jefferson, St. John, St. Charles, St. James Ascension, Assumption, Terrebonne, Lafourche, St. Mary, St. Martin, and Orleans, including the City of New Orleans) Mississippi, Alabama, Florida, Georgia, South Carolina, North Carolina, and Virginia, (except the forty-eight counties designated as West Virginia, and also the counties of Berkley, Accomac, Northampton, Elizabeth City, York, Princess Ann, and Norfolk, including the cities of Norfolk and Portsmouth), and which excepted parts, are for the present, left precisely as if this proclamation were not issued.

And by virtue of the power, and for the purpose aforesaid, I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated States, and parts of States, are, and henceforward shall be free; and that the Executive government of the United States, including the military and naval authorities thereof, will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons.

And I hereby enjoin upon the people so declared to be free to abstain from all violence, unless in necessary self-defense; and I recommend to them that, in all cases when allowed, they labor faithfully for reasonable wages.

And I further declare and make known, that such persons of suitable condition, will be received into the armed service of the United States to garrison forts, positions, stations, and other places, and to man vessels of all sorts in said service.

And upon this act, sincerely believed to be an act of justice, warranted by the Constitution, upon military necessity, I invoke the considerate judgment of mankind, and the gracious favor of Almighty God.

In witness whereof, I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the City of Washington, this first day of January, in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty three, and of the Independence of the United States of America the eighty-seventh.

By the President: ABRAHAM LINCOLN
WILLIAM H. SEWARD, Secretary of State.

Letter to Erastus Corning and Others

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

This public letter, dated June 12, 1863, responds to a group of New York Democrats who, while professing loyalty to the Union, had criticized President Lincoln for the arrest of Ohio Congressman Clement Vallandigham (1820–71), leader of the antiwar Democrats, known as the Copperheads (named after the venomous snake). Vallandigham was arrested in May 1863 under General Order Number 38, an Army order that forbade public expression of sympathy for the Confederate States and their cause. The authority for this order came from Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus in September 24, 1862.

This letter to Congressman Erastus Corning (1794–1872) and others was a popular success. Lincoln sent it to key leaders around the country; he had it published in the New York Tribune, which guaranteed that it would be recopied in newspapers everywhere; and it appeared in pamphlet version as well, with a circulation in the hundreds of thousands.

How does Lincoln characterize his critics, and how does he justify his actions to them? Did he believe he was acting constitutionally? Or did he believe that the emergency justified strong measures, whether constitutional or not? Why does Lincoln not fear any permanent danger to the system from an action like suspending habeas corpus? What do we learn from this letter about Lincoln's understanding of executive prerogative? Was Lincoln justified in suspending civil liberties during the war? Would you have been persuaded by this letter? Was it important that Lincoln publicly stated the reasons for his actions?

Executive Mansion, Washington
June 12, 1863

Hon. Erastus Corning and Others.

Gentlemen:

Your letter of May 19, inclosing the resolutions of a public meeting held at Albany, New York, on the 16th of the same month, was received several days ago.

The resolutions, as I understand them, are resolvable into two propositions—first, the expression of a purpose to sustain the cause of the Union, to secure peace through victory, and to support the administration in every constitutional and lawful measure to suppress the rebellion; and, secondly, a declaration of censure upon the administration for supposed unconstitutional action, such as the making of military arrests. And from the two propositions a third is deduced, which is that the gentlemen composing the meeting are resolved on doing their part to maintain our common government and country, despite the folly or wickedness, as they may conceive, of any administration. This position is eminently patriotic, and as such I thank the meeting, and congratulate the nation for it. My

own purpose is the same; so that the meeting and myself have a common object, and can have no difference, except in the choice of means or measures for effecting that object.

And here I ought to close this paper, and would close it, if there were no apprehension that more injurious consequences than any merely personal to myself might follow the censures systematically cast upon me for doing what, in my view of duty, I could not forbear. The resolutions promise to support me in every constitutional and lawful measure to suppress the rebellion; and I have not knowingly employed, nor shall knowingly employ, any other. But the meeting, by their resolutions, assert and argue that certain military arrests, and proceedings following them, for which I am ultimately responsible, are unconstitutional. I think they are not. The resolutions quote from the Constitution the definition of treason, and also the limiting safeguards and guarantees therein provided for the citizen on trials for treason, and on his being held to answer for capital or otherwise infamous crimes, and in criminal prosecutions his right to a speedy and public trial by an impartial jury. They proceed to resolve “that these safeguards of the rights of the citizen against the pretensions of arbitrary power were intended more especially for his protection in times of civil commotion.” And, apparently to demonstrate the proposition, the resolutions proceed: “They were secured substantially to the English people after years of protracted civil war, and were adopted into our Constitution at the close of the revolution.” Would not the demonstration have been better if it could have been truly said that these safeguards had been adopted and applied during the civil wars and during our revolution, instead of after the one and at the close of the other? I, too, am devotedly for them after civil war, and before civil war, and at all times, “except when, in cases of rebellion or invasion, the public safety may require” their suspension. The resolutions proceed to tell us that these safeguards “have stood the test of seventy-six years of trial under our republican system, under circumstances which show that while they constitute the foundation of all free government, they are the elements of the enduring stability of the republic.”

No one denies that they have so stood the test up to the beginning of the present rebellion, if we except a certain matter at New Orleans hereafter to be mentioned; nor does any one question that they will stand the same test much longer after the rebellion closes. But these provisions of the Constitution have no application to the case we have in hand, because the arrests complained of were not made for treason—that is, not for the treason defined in the Constitution, and upon the conviction of which the punishment is death—nor yet were they made to hold persons to answer for any capital or otherwise infamous crimes; nor were the proceedings following, in any constitutional or legal sense, “criminal prosecutions.” The arrests were made on totally different grounds, and the proceedings following accorded with the grounds of the arrests. Let us consider the real case with which we are dealing, and apply to it the parts of the Constitution plainly made for such cases.

Prior to my installation here it had been inculcated that any State had a lawful right to secede from the national Union, and that it would be expedient to exercise the right whenever the devotees of the doctrine should fail to elect a president to their own liking. I was elected contrary to their liking; and, accordingly, so far as it was legally possible, they had taken seven States out of the Union, had seized many of the United States forts, and

had fired upon the United States Flag, all before I was inaugurated, and, of course, before I had done any official act whatever. The rebellion thus began soon ran into the present civil war; and, in certain respects, it began on very unequal terms between the parties. The insurgents had been preparing for it more than thirty years, while the government had taken no steps to resist them. The former had carefully considered all the means which could be turned to their account. It undoubtedly was a well-pondered reliance with them that in their own unrestricted effort to destroy Union, Constitution and law, all together, the government would, in great degree, be restrained by the same Constitution and law from arresting their progress. Their sympathizers pervaded all departments of the government and nearly all communities of the people. From this material, under cover of "liberty of speech," "liberty of the press," and "habeas corpus," they hoped to keep on foot amongst us a most efficient corps of spies, informers, suppliers, and aiders and abettors of their cause in a thousand ways. They knew that in times such as they were inaugurating, by the Constitution itself the "habeas corpus" might be suspended; but they also knew they had friends who would make a question as to who was to suspend it; meanwhile their spies and others might remain at large to help on their cause. Or if, as has happened, the Executive should suspend the writ without ruinous waste of time, instances of arresting innocent persons might occur, as are always likely to occur in such cases; and then a clamor could be raised in regard to this, which might be at least of some service to the insurgent cause. It needed no very keen perception to discover this part of the enemy's programme, so soon as by open hostilities their machinery was fairly put in motion. Yet, thoroughly imbued with a reverence for the guaranteed rights of individuals, I was slow to adopt the strong measures which by degrees I have been forced to regard as being within the exceptions of the Constitution, and as indispensable to the public safety. Nothing is better known to history than that courts of justice are utterly incompetent to such cases. Civil courts are organized chiefly for trials of individuals, or, at most, a few individuals acting in concert—and this in quiet times, and on charges of crimes well defined in the law. Even in times of peace bands of horse-thieves and robbers frequently grow too numerous and powerful for the ordinary courts of justice. But what comparison, in numbers, have such bands ever borne to the insurgent sympathizers even in many of the loyal States? Again, a jury too frequently has at least one member more ready to hang the panel than to hang the traitor. And yet again, he who dissuades one man from volunteering, or induces one soldier to desert, weakens the Union cause as much as he who kills a Union soldier in battle. Yet this dissuasion or inducement may be so conducted as to be no defined crime of which any civil court would take cognizance. Ours is a case of rebellion—so called by the resolutions before me—in fact, a clear, flagrant, and gigantic case of rebellion; and the provision of the Constitution that "the privilege of the writ of habeas corpus shall not be suspended unless when, in cases of rebellion or invasion, the public safety may require it," is the provision which specially applies to our present case. This provision plainly attests the understanding of those who made the Constitution that ordinary courts of justice are inadequate to "cases of rebellion"—attests their purpose that, in such cases, men may be held in custody whom the courts, acting on ordinary rules, would discharge. Habeas corpus does not discharge men who are proved to be guilty of defined crime; and its suspension is allowed by the Constitution on purpose that men may be arrested and held who cannot be proved to be guilty of defined crime, "when, in cases of rebellion or invasion, the public safety may require it."

This is precisely our present case—a case of rebellion wherein the public Safety does require the suspension. Indeed, arrests by process of courts and arrests in cases of rebellion do not proceed altogether upon the same basis. The former is directed at the small percentage of ordinary and continuous perpetration of crime, while the latter is directed at sudden and extensive uprisings against the government, which, at most, will succeed or fail in no great length of time. In the latter case arrests are made not so much for what has been done, as for what probably would be done. The latter is more for the preventive and less for the vindictive than the former. In such cases the purposes of men are much more easily understood than in cases of ordinary crime. The man who stands by and says nothing when the peril of his government is discussed, cannot be misunderstood. If not hindered, he is sure to help the enemy; much more if he talks ambiguously — talks for his country with “buts,” and “ifs” and “ands.” Of how little value the constitutional provision I have quoted will be rendered if arrests shall never be made until defined crimes shall have been committed, may be illustrated by a few notable examples: General John C. Breckenridge, General Robert E. Lee, General Joseph E. Johnston, General John B. Magruder, General William B. Preston, General Simon B. Buckner, and Commodore Franklin Buchanan, now occupying the very highest places in the rebel war service, were all within the power of the government since the rebellion began, and were nearly as well known to be traitors then as now. Unquestionably if we had seized and held them, the insurgent cause would be much weaker. But no one of them had then committed any crime defined in the law. Every one of them, if arrested, would have been discharged on habeas corpus were the writ allowed to operate. In view of these and similar cases, I think the time not unlikely to come when I shall be blamed for having made too few arrests rather than too many. By the third resolution the meeting indicate their opinion that military arrests may be constitutional in localities where rebellion actually exists, but that such arrests are unconstitutional in localities where rebellion or insurrection does not actually exist. They insist that such arrests shall not be made “outside of the lines of necessary military occupation and the scenes of insurrection.” Inasmuch, however, as the Constitution itself makes no such distinction, I am unable to believe that there is any such constitutional distinction. I concede that the class of arrests complained of can be constitutional only when, in cases of rebellion or invasion, the public safety may require them; and I insist that in such cases they are constitutional wherever the public safety does require them, as well in places to which they may prevent the rebellion extending, as in those where it may be already prevailing; as well where they may restrain mischievous interference with the raising and supplying of armies to suppress the rebellion, as where the rebellion may actually be; as well where they may restrain the enticing men out of the army, as where they would prevent mutiny in the army; equally constitutional at all places where they will conduce to the public safety, as against the dangers of rebellion or invasion. Take the particular case mentioned by the meeting. They assert in substance, that Mr. Vallandigham was, by a military commander, seized and tried “for no other reason than words addressed to a public meeting in criticism of the course of the administration, and in condemnation of the military orders of the general.” Now, if there be no mistake about this, if this assertion is the truth and the whole truth, if there was no other reason for the arrest, then I concede that the arrest was wrong. But the arrest, as I understand, was made for a very different reason. Mr. Vallandigham avows his hostility to the war on the part of the Union; and his arrest was made because he was laboring, with some effect, to prevent the raising of troops, to encourage desertions from

the army, and to leave the rebellion without an adequate military force to suppress it. He was not arrested because he was damaging the political prospects of the administration or the personal interests of the commanding general, but because he was damaging the army, upon the existence and vigor of which the life of the nation depends. He was warring upon the military, and this gave the military constitutional jurisdiction to lay hands upon him. If Mr. Vallandigham was not damaging the military power of the country, then his arrest was made on mistake of fact, which I would be glad to correct on reasonably satisfactory evidence. I understand the meeting whose resolutions I am considering to be in favor of suppressing the rebellion by military force — by armies. Long experience has shown that armies cannot be maintained unless desertion shall be punished by the severe penalty of death. The case requires, and the law and the Constitution sanction, this punishment. Must I shoot a simple-minded soldier boy who deserts, while I must not touch a hair of a wiley agitator who induces him to desert? This is none the less injurious when effected by getting a father, or brother, or friend into a public meeting, and there working upon his feelings till he is persuaded to write the soldier boy that he is fighting in a bad cause, for a wicked administration of a contemptible government, too weak to arrest and punish him if he shall desert. I think that, in such a case, to silence the agitator and save the boy is not only constitutional, but withal a great mercy. If I be wrong on this question of constitutional power, my error lies in believing that certain proceedings are constitutional when, in cases of rebellion or invasion, the public safety requires them, which would not be constitutional when, in absence of rebellion or invasion, the public safety does not require them: in other words, that the Constitution is not in its application in all respects the same in cases of rebellion or invasion involving the public safety, as it is in times of profound peace and public security. The Constitution itself makes the distinction, and I can no more be persuaded that the government can constitutionally take no strong measures in time of rebellion, because it can be shown that the same could not be lawfully taken in time of peace, than I can be persuaded that a particular drug is not good medicine for a sick man because it can be shown to not be good food for a well one. Nor am I able to appreciate the danger apprehended by the meeting, that the American people will by means of military arrests during the rebellion lose the right of public discussion, the liberty of speech and the press, the law of evidence, trial by jury, and habeas corpus throughout the indefinite peaceful future which I trust lies before them, any more than I am able to believe that a man could contract so strong an appetite for emetics during temporary illness as to persist in feeding upon them during the remainder of his healthful life. In giving the resolutions that earnest consideration which you request of me, I cannot overlook the fact that the meeting speak as “Democrats.” Nor can I, with full respect for their known intelligence, and the fairly presumed deliberation with which they prepared their resolutions, be permitted to suppose that this occurred by accident, or in any way other than that they preferred to designate themselves “Democrats” rather than “American citizens.” In this time of national peril I would have preferred to meet you upon a level one step higher than any party platform, because I am sure that from such more elevated position we could do better battle for the country we all love than we possibly can from those lower ones, where, from the force of habit, the prejudices of the past, and selfish hopes of the future, we are sure to expend much of our ingenuity and strength in finding fault with and aiming blows at each other. But since you have denied me this, I will yet be thankful for the country’s sake that not all Democrats have done so. He on whose discretionary judgment Mr.

Vallandigham was arrested and tried is a Democrat, having no old party affinity with me, and the judge who rejected the constitutional view expressed in these resolutions, by refusing to discharge Mr. Vallandigham on habeas corpus, is a Democrat of better days than these, having received his judicial mantle at the hands of President Jackson. And still more, of all those Democrats who are nobly exposing their lives and shedding their blood on the battle-field, I have learned that many approve the course taken with Mr. Vallandigham, while I have not heard of a single one condemning it. I cannot assert that there are none such. And the name of President Jackson recalls an instance of pertinent history. After the battle of New Orleans, and while the fact that the treaty of peace had been concluded was well known in the city, but before official knowledge of it had arrived, General Jackson still maintained martial or military law. Now that it could be said the war was over, the clamor against martial law, which had existed from the first, grew more furious. Among other things, a Mr. Louaillier published a denunciatory newspaper article. General Jackson arrested him. A lawyer by the name of Morel procured the United States Judge Hall to order a writ of habeas corpus to release Mr. Louaillier. General Jackson arrested both the lawyer and the judge. A Mr. Hollander ventured to say of some part of the matter that "it was a dirty trick." General Jackson arrested him. When the officer undertook to serve the writ of habeas corpus, General Jackson took it from him, and sent him away with a copy. Holding the judge in custody a few days, the general sent him beyond the limits of his encampment, and set him at liberty with an order to remain till the ratification of peace should be regularly announced, or until the British should have left the southern coast. A day or two more elapsed, the ratification of the treaty of peace was regularly announced, and the judge and others were fully liberated. A few days more, and the judge called General Jackson into court and fined him \$1000 for having arrested him and the others named. The general paid the fine, and then the matter rested for nearly thirty years, when Congress refunded principal and interest. The late Senator Douglas, then in the House of Representatives, took a leading part in the debates in which the constitutional question was much discussed. I am not prepared to say whom the journals would show to have voted for the measure.

It may be remarked:—first, that we had the same Constitution then as now; secondly, that we then had a case of invasion, and that now we have a case of rebellion; and, thirdly, that the permanent right of the people to public discussion, the liberty of speech and the press, the trial by jury, the law of evidence, and the habeas corpus, suffered no detriment whatever by that conduct of General Jackson, or its subsequent approval by the American Congress.

And yet, let me say that, in my own discretion, I do not know whether I would have ordered the arrest of Mr. Vallandigham. While I shift the responsibility from myself, I hold that, as a general rule, the commander in the field is the better judge of the necessity in any particular case. Of course I must practice a general directory and revisory power in the matter.

One of the resolutions expresses the opinion of the meeting that arbitrary arrests will have the effect to divide and distract those who should be united in suppressing the rebellion, and I am specifically called on to discharge Mr. Vallandigham. I regard this as,

at least, a fair appeal to me on the expediency of exercising a constitutional power which I think exists. In response to such appeal I have to say, it gave me pain when I learned that Mr. Vallandigham had been arrested (that is, I was pained that there should have seemed to be a necessity for arresting him), and that it will afford me great pleasure to discharge him so soon as I can by any means believe the public safety will not suffer by it.

I further say that, as the war progresses, it appears to me, opinion and action, which were in great confusion at first, take shape and fall into more regular channels, so that the necessity for arbitrary dealing with them gradually decreases. I have every reason to desire that it should cease altogether, and far from the least is my regard for the opinions and wishes of those who, like the meeting at Albany, declare their purpose to sustain the government in every constitutional and lawful measure to suppress the rebellion. Still, I must continue to do so much as may seem to be required by the public safety.

A. Lincoln.

Thanksgiving Day Proclamation

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln (1809–65) issued this proclamation for a day of national thanksgiving on October 3, 1863, in the midst of the Civil War, not long after the battle of Gettysburg and several other Union successes seemed to have turned the tide toward a Union victory. Like so many of his famous speeches, this modest presidential proclamation displays the extraordinary understanding, statesmanship, and generosity of soul that distinguished the 16th President of the United States.

How does Lincoln’s beginning capture the audience’s sympathy? What, exactly, are the blessings for which he believes that thanksgiving is in order, even “in the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity”? Why does he believe that, despite the human “waste” of the war, the country may be permitted to “expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom”? What is his understanding of “the Most High God,” His relation to the United States, and “our sins”? What do you think Lincoln is hoping to teach the nation here? Imagining yourself as a Confederate auditor of this proclamation; would you be inclined to accept the invitation and recommendation Lincoln offers in the long fifth paragraph to “my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States”? Is Lincoln’s case for “a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father” still persuasive today?

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added which are of so extraordinary a nature that they can not fail to penetrate and soften even the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and to provoke their aggression, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military conflict, while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

No human counsel hath devised nor hath any mortal hand worked out these great things. They are the gracious gifts of the Most High God, who, while dealing with us in anger for our sins, hath nevertheless remembered mercy.

Abraham Lincoln, Thanksgiving Day Proclamation

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged, as with one heart and one voice, by the whole American people. I do therefore invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a day of thanksgiving and praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union.

In testimony whereof I have hereunto set my hand and caused the seal of the United States to be affixed.

Done at the city of Washington, this 3d day of October, A. D. 1863, and of the Independence of the United States the eighty-eighth.

ABRAHAM LINCOLN.

Gettysburg Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

The creed of the American Republic, as enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, begins with the claim, offered as a self-evident truth, that “all men are created equal.” Yet our embrace of the principle was long embarrassed in practice by the existence of chattel slavery, present at the Founding but greatly increased through the first half of the 19th century. Critics of the Declaration openly called human equality “a self-evident lie,” and the infamous Dred Scott decision (1857) gave voice to a racist and exclusionary interpretation of the Declaration, insisting that its “all men” referred only to “all white men” who were the equals of British subjects living in Britain. No one did more to oppose this (mis)interpretation than our sixteenth president, Abraham Lincoln, who famously claimed that he had “never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence.” Lincoln’s most famous defense of equality appears in the Gettysburg Address, delivered on November 19, 1863, in the midst of a civil war whose deepest cause was the institution of slavery. Here Lincoln revisits the Declaration of Independence, summoning the nation to achieve a “new birth of freedom” through renewed dedication to the founding proposition of human equality.

How does Lincoln understand the key terms of the creed, and in particular, the relation between equality and freedom? What is the difference between “holding” equality as a “self-evident truth” and regarding it as a “proposition” to which we are dedicated? What is the difference between the “new birth of freedom,” coming from the bloody war, and the original birth of the nation, “conceived in liberty”? How, according to Lincoln, can the war lead to a more perfect Union? What do you think is the meaning of equality today, and how is it related to freedom? How fares the idea and practice of “government of the people, by the people, for the people” in the United States today? How can we tell whether the Union today is being perfected or the reverse?

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining

before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Speech to the 166th Ohio Regiment

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

On August 22, 1864, Lincoln delivered this address to the war-weary soldiers of the 166th Ohio Regiment. With the presidential election fast approaching, Lincoln saw the need to both express his gratitude to the soldiers for their personal sacrifice, and to remind them of the purpose and importance of the war. At the time, there was concern in Lincoln's camp that the soldiers would vote against him in the election, as the Democratic candidate, General George McClellan (1826–85), had pledged to end the war and send soldiers home to their families for good. The day after seeing the regiment, Lincoln wrote his "blind memorandum" stipulating that it is "exceedingly probable that this Administration will not be re-elected."

What does Lincoln say to the soldiers to impress upon them "the importance of success in this contest?" To what sentiments does he appeal? What political principle(s) does he enunciate in sentences 4 to 9? How would the statement of these principles be likely to affect his audience? What does Lincoln's rhetorical style suggest about how leaders should communicate with their subordinates? Would you be persuaded by this speech? Why or why not?

I suppose you are going home to see your families and friends. For the service you have done in this great struggle in which we are engaged I present you sincere thanks for myself and the country. I almost always feel inclined, when I happen to say anything to soldiers, to impress upon them in a few brief remarks the importance of success in this contest. It is not merely for to-day, but for all time to come that we should perpetuate for our children's children this great and free government, which we have enjoyed all our lives. I beg you to remember this, not merely for my sake, but for yours. I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and fair chance for your industry, enterprise, and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations. It is for this the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthright—not only for one, but for two or three years. The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel.

Excerpt from “The President’s Policy”

JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL

James Russell Lowell (1819–91) was a poet, editor, and diplomat, associated with the Fireside Poets, a group of New England writers who were among the first American poets to rival the popularity of British poets. An ardent abolitionist, he published anti-slavery articles and verse with his wife, Maria White (1821–53). Although at times critical of Lincoln, Lowell supported him in the 1860 presidential election, and in December 1863, wrote this essay (here excerpted) in favor of Lincoln’s reelection.

What case does Lowell make for Lincoln’s reelection? What qualities make a statesman as opposed to a mere politician? How have Lincoln’s critics misunderstood him, and why have they done so? What is Lincoln’s policy on slavery? What was the “riddle” that he understood, and his abolitionist critics did not?

There have been many painful crises since the impatient vanity of South Carolina hurried ten prosperous Commonwealths into a crime whose assured retribution was to leave them either at the mercy of the nation they had wronged, or of the anarchy they had summoned but could not control, when no thoughtful American opened his morning paper without dreading to find that he had no longer a country to love and honor. . . .

At the beginning of the war there was, indeed, occasion for the most anxious apprehension. A President known to be infected with the political heresies, and suspected of sympathy with the treason of the Southern conspirators, had just surrendered the reins, we will not say of power, but of chaos, to a successor known only as the representative of a party whose leaders, with long training in opposition, had none in the conduct of affairs; an empty treasury was called on to supply resources beyond precedent in the history of finance; the trees were yet growing and the iron unmined with which a navy was to be built and armored; officers without discipline were to make a mob into an army; and, above all, the public opinion of Europe, echoed and reinforced with every vague hint and every specious argument of despondency by a powerful faction at home, was either contemptuously skeptical or actively hostile. . . .

And even if we look only at more palpable difficulties, the problem to be solved by our civil war was so vast, both in its immediate relations and its future consequences; the conditions of its solution were so intricate and so greatly dependent on incalculable and uncontrollable contingencies; so many of the data, whether for hope or fear, were, from their novelty, incapable of arrangement under any of the categories of historical precedent,—that there were moments of crisis when the firmest believer in the strength and sufficiency of the democratic theory of government might well hold his breath in vague apprehension of disaster. . . .

Mr. Lincoln’s task was one of peculiar and exceptional difficulty. Long habit had accustomed the American people to the notion of a party in power, and of a President as

its creature and organ, while the more vital fact, that the executive for the time being represents the abstract idea of government as a permanent principle superior to all party and all private interest, had gradually become unfamiliar. They had so long seen the public policy more or less directed by views of party, and often even of personal advantage, as to be ready to suspect the motives of a chief magistrate compelled, for the first time in our history, to feel himself the head and hand of a great nation, and to act upon the fundamental maxim laid down by all publicists, that the first duty of a government is to defend and maintain its own existence. . . .

The change which three years have brought about is too remarkable to be passed over without comment, too weighty in its lesson not to be laid to heart. Never did a President enter upon office with less means at his command, outside his own strength of heart and steadiness of understanding, for inspiring confidence in the people, and so winning it for himself, than Mr. Lincoln. All that was known of him was that he was a good stump-speaker, nominated for this *availability*,—that is, because he had no history,—and chosen by a party with whose more extreme opinions he was not in sympathy. It might well be feared that a man past fifty, against whom the ingenuity of hostile partisans could rake up no accusation, must be lacking in manliness of character, in decision of principle, in strength of will,—that a man who was at best only the representative of a party, and who yet did not fairly represent even that,—would fail of political, much more of popular, support. And certainly no one ever entered upon office with so few resources of power in the past, and so many materials of weakness in the present, as Mr. Lincoln. Even in that half of the Union which acknowledged him as President, there was a large, and at that time dangerous minority, that hardly admitted his claim to the office, and even in the party that elected him, there was also a large minority that suspected him of being secretly a communicant with the Church of Laodicea. All that he did was sure to be virulently attacked as ultra by one side; all that he left undone, to be stigmatized as proof of lukewarmness and backsliding by the other. Meanwhile he was to carry on a truly colossal war by means of both; he was to disengage the country from diplomatic entanglements of unprecedented peril undisturbed by the help or the hindrance of either, and to win from the crowning dangers of his administration, in the confidence of the people, the means of his safety and their own. He has contrived to do it, and perhaps none of our Presidents since Washington has stood so firm in the confidence of the people as he does after three years of stormy administration.

Mr. Lincoln's policy was a tentative one, and rightly so. He laid down no program which must compel him to be either inconsistent or unwise, no cast-iron theorem to which circumstances must be fitted as they rose, or else be useless to his ends. He seemed to have chosen Mazarin's motto, *Le temps et moi* [*Time and me*]. The *moi*, to be sure, was not very prominent at first; but it has grown more and more so, till the world is beginning to be persuaded that it stands for a character of marked individuality and capacity for affairs. Time was his prime-minister, and, we began to think at one period, his general-in-chief also. At first he was so slow that he tired out all those who see no evidence of progress but in blowing up the engine; then he was so fast, that he took the breath away from those who think there is no getting on safely while there is a spark of fire under the boilers. God is the only being who has time enough; but a prudent man, who knows how to seize occasion,

can commonly make a shift to find as much as he needs. Mr. Lincoln, as it seems to us in reviewing his career, though we have sometimes in our impatience thought otherwise, has always waited, as a wise man should, till the right moment brought up all his reserves. *Semper nocuit differre paratis* [*Delay is always harmful to those who are prepared*], is a sound axiom, but the really efficacious man will also be sure to know when he is *not* ready, and be firm against all persuasion and reproach till he is.

One would be apt to think, from some of the criticisms made on Mr. Lincoln's course by those who mainly agree with him in principle, that the chief object of a statesman should be rather to proclaim his adhesion to certain doctrines, than to achieve their triumph by quietly accomplishing his ends. In our opinion, there is no more unsafe politician than a conscientiously rigid doctrinaire, nothing more sure to end in disaster than a theoretic scheme of policy that admits of no pliability for contingencies. True, there is a popular image of an impossible He, in whose plastic hands the submissive destinies of mankind become as wax, and to whose commanding necessity the toughest facts yield with the graceful pliancy of fiction; but in real life we commonly find that the men who control circumstances, as it is called, are those who have learned to allow for the influence of their eddies, and have the nerve to turn them to account at the happy instant. Mr. Lincoln's perilous task has been to cast a rather shakely raft through the rapids, making fast the unrulier logs as he could snatch opportunity, and the country is to be congratulated that he did not think it his duty to run straight at all hazards, but cautiously to assure himself with his setting-pole where the main current was, and keep steadily to that. He is still in wild water, but we have faith that his skill and sureness of eye will bring him out right at last. .

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Undoubtedly slavery was the most delicate and embarrassing question with which Mr. Lincoln was called on to deal, and it was one which no man in his position, whatever his opinions, could evade; for, though he might withstand the clamor of partisans, he must sooner or later yield to the persistent importunacy of circumstances, which thrust the problem upon him at every turn and in every shape. He must solve the riddle of this new Sphinx, or be devoured. . . . Mr. Lincoln dallied with his decision perhaps longer than seemed needful to those on whom its awful responsibility was not to rest, but when he made it, it was worthy of his cautious but sure-footed understanding. The moral of the Sphinx-riddle, and it is a deep one, lies in the childish simplicity of the solution. Those who fail in guessing it, fail because they are over-ingenious, and cast about for an answer that shall suit their own notion of the gravity of the occasion and of their own dignity, rather than the occasion itself.

In a matter which must be finally settled by public opinion, and in regard to which the ferment of prejudice and passion on both sides has not yet subsided to that equilibrium of compromise from which alone a sound public opinion can result, it is proper enough for the private citizen to press his own convictions with all possible force of argument and persuasion; but the popular magistrate, whose judgment must become action, and whose action involves the whole country, is bound to wait till the sentiment of the people is so far advanced toward his own point of view, that what he does shall find support in it, instead of merely confusing it with new elements of division. It was not unnatural that men

earnestly devoted to the saving of their country, and profoundly convinced that slavery was its only real enemy, should demand a decided policy round which all patriots might rally,—and this might have been the wisest course for an absolute ruler. But in the then unsettled state of the public mind, with a large party decrying even resistance to the slaveholders' rebellion as not only unwise, but even unlawful; with a majority, perhaps, even of the would-be loyal so long accustomed to regard the Constitution as a deed of gift conveying to the South their own judgment as to policy and instinct as to right, that they were in doubt at first whether their loyalty were due to the country or to slavery; and with a respectable body of honest and influential men who still believed in the possibility of conciliation,—Mr. Lincoln judged wisely, that, in laying down a policy in deference to one party, he should be giving to the other the very fulcrum for which their disloyalty had been waiting.

...

While every day was bringing the people nearer to the conclusion which all thinking men saw to be inevitable from the beginning, it was wise in Mr. Lincoln to leave the shaping of his policy to events. In this country, where the rough and ready understanding of the people is sure at last to be the controlling power, a profound common-sense is the best genius for statesmanship. Hitherto the wisdom of the President's measures have been justified by the fact that they have always resulted in more firmly uniting public opinion. .

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From *Lincoln's Yarns and Stories*

ALEXANDER MCCLURE, ED.

Lincoln is justly celebrated for the beauty and power of his eloquence, but he was also well known for his humorous stories, tall tales, and colorful jokes. As a backwoods attorney, he had often used jokes and stories to gain the good will of juries. Now as president, his story-telling and joke-making served to deflect unwanted questions, explain policies, and relieve his own spirits and those of his listeners. As Walt Whitman wrote, "Story-telling was often with President Lincoln a weapon which he employ'd with great skill. Very often he could not give a point-blank reply or comment—and these indirections, (sometimes funny, but not always so) were probably the best responses possible."

Alexander McClure (1828–1909), a politician and close confidant of Lincoln's, collected many of these tales for Lincoln's Yarns and Stories: A Complete Collection of the Funny and Witty Anecdotes That Made Abraham Lincoln Famous as America's Greatest Story Teller (1900). In reading the three yarns excerpted below, ask yourself why Lincoln chose the particular joke or story related. What purpose does the story serve? Does the story have an object or moral?

“ABE’S” HAIR NEEDED COMBING.

“By the way,” remarked President Lincoln one day to Colonel Cannon, a close personal friend, “I can tell you a good story about my hair. When I was nominated at Chicago, an enterprising fellow thought that a great many people would like to see how ‘Abe’ Lincoln looked, and, as I had not long before sat for a photograph, the fellow, having seen it, rushed over and bought the negative.

“He at once got no end of wood-cuts, and so active was their circulation they were soon selling in all parts of the country.

“Soon after they reached Springfield, I heard a boy crying them for sale on the streets. ‘Here’s your likeness of “Abe” Lincoln!’ he shouted. ‘Buy one; price only two shillings! Will look a great deal better when he gets his hair combed!’”

RIGHT FOR, ONCE, ANYHOW.

Where men bred in courts, accustomed to the world, or versed in diplomacy, would use some subterfuge, or would make a polite speech, or give a shrug of the shoulders, as the means of getting out of an embarrassing position, Lincoln raised a laugh by some bold west-country anecdote, and moved off in the cloud of merriment produced by the joke. When Attorney-General Bates was remonstrating apparently against the appointment of some indifferent lawyer to a place of judicial importance, the President interposed with: “Come now, Bates, he’s not half as bad as you think. Besides that, I must tell you, he did

me a good turn long ago. When I took to the law, I was going to court one morning, with some ten or twelve miles of bad road before me, and I had no horse.

“The judge overtook me in his carriage.

“‘Hallo, Lincoln! are you not going to the court-house? Come in and I will give you a seat!’

“Well, I got in, and the Judge went on reading his papers. Presently the carriage struck a stump on one side of the road, then it hopped off to the other. I looked out, and I saw the driver was jerking from side to side in his seat, so I says:

“‘Judge, I think your coachman has been taking a little too much this morning.’

“‘Well, I declare, Lincoln,’ said he, ‘I should not much wonder if you were right, for he has nearly upset me half a dozen times since starting.’

“So, putting his head out of the window, he shouted, ‘Why, you infernal scoundrel, you are drunk!’

“Upon which, pulling up his horses, and turning round with great gravity, the coachman said: “‘Begorra! That’s the first rightful decision that you have given for the last twelvemonth.’”

While the company were laughing, the President beat a quiet retreat from the neighborhood.

LINCOLN’S STORY TO PEACE COMMISSIONERS.

Among the reminiscences of Lincoln left by Editor Henry J. Raymond, is the following:

Among the stories told by Lincoln, which is freshest in my mind, one which he related to me shortly after its occurrence, belongs to the history of the famous interview on board the River Queen, at Hampton Roads, between himself and Secretary Seward and the rebel Peace Commissioners. It was reported at the time that the President told a “little story” on that occasion, and the inquiry went around among the newspapers, “What was it?”

The New York Herald published what purported to be a version of it, but the “point” was entirely lost, and it attracted no attention. Being in Washington a few days subsequent to the interview with the Commissioners (my previous sojourn there having terminated about the first of last August), I asked Mr. Lincoln one day if it was true that he told Stephens, Hunter and Campbell a story.

“Why, yes,” he replied, manifesting some surprise, “but has it leaked out? I was in hopes nothing would be said about it, lest some over-sensitive people should imagine there

was a degree of levity in the intercourse between us." He then went on to relate the circumstances which called it out.

"You see," said he, "we had reached and were discussing the slavery question. Mr. Hunter said, substantially, that the slaves, always accustomed to an overseer, and to work upon compulsion, suddenly freed, as they would be if the South should consent to peace on the basis of the 'Emancipation Proclamation,' would precipitate not only themselves, but the entire Southern society, into irremediable ruin. No work would be done, nothing would be cultivated, and both blacks and whites would starve!"

Said the President: "I waited for Seward to answer that argument, but as he was silent, I at length said: 'Mr. Hunter, you ought to know a great deal better about this argument than I, for you have always lived under the slave system. I can only say, in reply to your statement of the case, that it reminds me of a man out in Illinois, by the name of Case, who undertook, a few years ago, to raise a very large herd of hogs. It was a great trouble to feed them, and how to get around this was a puzzle to him. At length he hit on the plan of planting an immense field of potatoes, and, when they were sufficiently grown, he turned the whole herd into the field, and let them have full swing, thus saving not only the labor of feeding the hogs, but also that of digging the potatoes. Charmed with his sagacity, he stood one day leaning against the fence, counting his hogs, when a neighbor came along.

"'Well, well,' said he, 'Mr. Case, this is all very fine. Your hogs are doing very well just now, but you know out here in Illinois the frost comes early, and the ground freezes for a foot deep. Then what you going to do?'

"This was a view of the matter which Mr. Case had not taken into account. Butchering time for hogs was 'way on in December or January! He scratched his head, and at length stammered: 'Well, it may come pretty hard on their snouts, but I don't see but that it will be "root, hog, or die."'"



Last Speeches



Second Inaugural Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Abraham Lincoln (1809–65), who presided over the successful prosecution of the Civil War, also gave deep thought to the war’s cause, meaning, and purpose, and also to what would be required to heal the nation after the war was over. In the Gettysburg Address (November 19, 1863), Lincoln had summoned Americans to rededicate themselves to the cause of freedom and equality. Here, in his Second Inaugural Address (March 4, 1865), invoking theological speculation and quoting Scripture, Lincoln offers an interpretation of the meaning of the war and summons all Americans to a new and more difficult public purpose.

How does Lincoln invite us to understand the Civil War? Why does he regard both North and South as guilty of the offense of American slavery? Why does Lincoln move beyond the discussion of slavery, which he calls the cause of the war, to theological reflections? What is meaning of, and what is the point of citing, the passage from the Gospel of Matthew (“Woe unto the world because of offenses! . . .”)? How do Lincoln’s theological reflections lead him to the thoughts and mood of the stirring final paragraph? In the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln had claimed that the Civil War is a test of whether our nation, or any nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to equality, can long endure. Here, with the end of the war in sight, but with wounds still wide open, he suggests that the test of our nation will henceforth be measured by its capacity for charity. What does Lincoln mean by charity? Is its capacity for charity a reasonable basis for judging this nation, or any nation?

After you have read the Second Inaugural, and pondered these questions, you may want to read the remarkable analysis of the speech (“A Very Peculiar God”) by Caitrin Nicol Keiper (b. 1985), editor of Philanthropy magazine, which appears below, as an Appendix.

Fellow Countrymen:

At this second appearing to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement, somewhat in detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil-war. All dreaded it—all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking to *destroy* it without war—

seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war; but one of them would *make* war rather than let the nation survive; and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union, even by war; while the government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war, the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces; but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Last Public Address

ABRAHAM LINCOLN

On April 11, 1865, just two days after Confederate General Robert E. Lee's (1807–70) army surrendered, Lincoln delivered his last public address from the White House balcony. In his remarks, he noted the difficulties in moving forward with Reconstruction, but also expressed hope that the majority of white southerners would support efforts to reunify the nation. Most notably, for the first time in a public setting, Lincoln stated his support for African American suffrage. This support was much too radical for some, including audience member and Confederate activist John Wilkes Booth (1838–65). Just three days after hearing Lincoln's speech, Booth assassinated Lincoln at Ford's Theater in Washington, DC.

What is the main challenge for Reconstruction, according to Lincoln? What is the relationship of the seceded states to the Union? What policies does Lincoln favor to bring the states to their "proper practical relation," particularly as it relates to Louisiana? Why do you think Lincoln chose, in his first speech after Appomattox, to mark the surrender—a great victory for the cause he championed—in this way?

We meet this evening, not in sorrow, but in gladness of heart. The evacuation of Petersburg and Richmond, and the surrender of the principal insurgent army, give hope of a righteous and speedy peace whose joyous expression can not be restrained. In the midst of this, however, He from whom all blessings flow, must not be forgotten. A call for a national thanksgiving is being prepared, and will be duly promulgated. Nor must those whose harder part gives us the cause of rejoicing, be overlooked. Their honors must not be parcelled out with others. I myself was near the front, and had the high pleasure of transmitting much of the good news to you; but no part of the honor, for plan or execution, is mine. To Gen. Grant, his skilful officers, and brave men, all belongs. The gallant Navy stood ready, but was not in reach to take active part.

By these recent successes the re-inauguration of the national authority—reconstruction—which has had a large share of thought from the first, is pressed much more closely upon our attention. It is fraught with great difficulty. Unlike the case of a war between independent nations, there is no authorized organ for us to treat with. No one man has authority to give up the rebellion for any other man. We simply must begin with, and mould from, disorganized and discordant elements. Nor is it a small additional embarrassment that we, the loyal people, differ among ourselves as to the mode, manner, and means of reconstruction.

As a general rule, I abstain from reading the reports of attacks upon myself, wishing not to be provoked by that to which I can not properly offer an answer. In spite of this precaution, however, it comes to my knowledge that I am much censured for some supposed agency in setting up, and seeking to sustain, the new State Government of Louisiana. In this I have done just so much as, and no more than, the public knows. In the Annual Message of Dec. 1863 and accompanying Proclamation, I presented a plan of re-construction (as the phrase goes) which, I promised, if adopted by any State, should be acceptable to, and sustained by, the Executive government of the nation. I distinctly stated that this was not the only plan which might possibly be acceptable; and I also distinctly protested that the Executive claimed no right to say when, or whether members

should be admitted to seats in Congress from such States. This plan was, in advance, submitted to the then Cabinet, and distinctly approved by every member of it. One of them suggested that I should then, and in that connection, apply the Emancipation Proclamation to the theretofore excepted parts of Virginia and Louisiana; that I should drop the suggestion about apprenticeship for freed-people, and that I should omit the protest against my own power, in regard to the admission of members to Congress; but even he approved every part and parcel of the plan which has since been employed or touched by the action of Louisiana. The new constitution of Louisiana, declaring emancipation for the whole State, practically applies the Proclamation to the part previously excepted. It does not adopt apprenticeship for freed-people; and it is silent, as it could not well be otherwise, about the admission of members to Congress. So that, as it applies to Louisiana, every member of the Cabinet fully approved the plan. The message went to Congress, and I received many commendations of the plan, written and verbal; and not a single objection to it, from any professed emancipationist, came to my knowledge, until after the news reached Washington that the people of Louisiana had begun to move in accordance with it. From about July 1862, I had corresponded with different persons, supposed to be interested, seeking a reconstruction of a State government for Louisiana. When the message of 1863, with the plan before mentioned, reached New-Orleans, Gen. Banks wrote me that he was confident the people, with his military co-operation, would reconstruct, substantially on that plan. I wrote him, and some of them to try it; they tried it, and the result is known. Such only has been my agency in getting up the Louisiana government. As to sustaining it, my promise is out, as before stated. But, as bad promises are better broken than kept, I shall treat this as a bad promise, and break it, whenever I shall be convinced that keeping it is adverse to the public interest. But I have not yet been so convinced.

I have been shown a letter on this subject, supposed to be an able one, in which the writer expresses regret that my mind has not seemed to be definitely fixed on the question whether the seceded States, so called, are in the Union or out of it. It would perhaps, add astonishment to his regret, were he to learn that since I have found professed Union men endeavoring to make that question, I have *purposely* forborne any public expression upon it. As appears to me that question has not been, nor yet is, a practically material one, and that any discussion of it, while it thus remains practically immaterial, could have no effect other than the mischievous one of dividing our friends. As yet, whatever it may hereafter become, that question is bad, as the basis of a controversy, and good for nothing at all—a merely pernicious abstraction.

We all agree that the seceded States, so called, are out of their proper practical relation with the Union; and that the sole object of the government, civil and military, in regard to those States is to again get them into that proper practical relation. I believe it is not only possible, but in fact, easier to do this, without deciding, or even considering, whether these states have even been out of the Union, than with it. Finding themselves safely at home, it would be utterly immaterial whether they had ever been abroad. Let us all join in doing the acts necessary to restoring the proper practical relations between these states and the Union; and each forever after, innocently indulge his own opinion whether, in doing the acts, he brought the States from without, into the Union, or only gave them proper assistance, they never having been out of it.

The amount of constituency, so to speak, on which the new Louisiana government rests, would be more satisfactory to all, if it contained fifty, thirty, or even twenty thousand, instead of only

about twelve thousand, as it does. It is also unsatisfactory to some that the elective franchise is not given to the colored man. I would myself prefer that it were now conferred on the very intelligent, and on those who serve our cause as soldiers. Still the question is not whether the Louisiana government, as it stands, is quite all that is desirable. The question is “Will it be wiser to take it as it is, and help to improve it; or to reject, and disperse it?” “Can Louisiana be brought into proper practical relation with the Union *sooner* by *sustaining*, or by *discarding* her new State Government?”

Some twelve thousand voters in the heretofore slave-state of Louisiana have sworn allegiance to the Union, assumed to be the rightful political power of the State, held elections, organized a State government, adopted a free-state constitution, giving the benefit of public schools equally to black and white, and empowering the Legislature to confer the elective franchise upon the colored man. Their Legislature has already voted to ratify the constitutional amendment recently passed by Congress, abolishing slavery throughout the nation. These twelve thousand persons are thus fully committed to the Union, and to perpetual freedom in the state—committed to the very things, and nearly all the things the nation wants—and they ask the nations recognition, and it’s assistance to make good their committal. Now, if we reject, and spurn them, we do our utmost to disorganize and disperse them. We in effect say to the white men “You are worthless, or worse—we will neither help you, nor be helped by you.” To the blacks we say “This cup of liberty which these, your old masters, hold to your lips, we will dash from you, and leave you to the chances of gathering the spilled and scattered contents in some vague and undefined when, where, and how.” If this course, discouraging and paralyzing both white and black, has any tendency to bring Louisiana into proper practical relations with the Union, I have, so far, been unable to perceive it. If, on the contrary, we recognize, and sustain the new government of Louisiana the converse of all this is made true. We encourage the hearts, and nerve the arms of the twelve thousand to adhere to their work, and argue for it, and proselyte for it, and fight for it, and feed it, and grow it, and ripen it to a complete success. The colored man too, in seeing all united for him, is inspired with vigilance, and energy, and daring, to the same end. Grant that he desires the elective franchise, will he not attain it sooner by saving the already advanced steps toward it, than by running backward over them? Concede that the new government of Louisiana is only to what it should be as the egg is to the fowl, we shall sooner have the fowl by hatching the egg than by smashing it? Again, if we reject Louisiana, we also reject one vote in favor of the proposed amendment to the national constitution. To meet this proposition, it has been argued that no more than three fourths of those States which have not attempted secession are necessary to validly ratify the amendment. I do not commit myself against this, further than to say that such a ratification would be questionable, and sure to be persistently questioned; while a ratification by three fourths of all the States would be unquestioned and unquestionable.

I repeat the question. “Can Louisiana be brought into proper practical relation with the Union *sooner* by *sustaining* or by *discarding* her new State Government?”

What has been said of Louisiana will apply generally to other States. And yet so great peculiarities pertain to each state; and such important and sudden changes occur in the same state; and, withal, so new and unprecedented is the whole case, that no exclusive, and inflexible plan can safely be prescribed as to details and colaterals [sic]. Such exclusive, and inflexible plan, would surely become a new entanglement. Important principles may, and must, be inflexible.

In the present "*situation*" as the phrase goes, it may be my duty to make some new announcement to the people of the South. I am considering, and shall not fail to act, when satisfied that action will be proper.

Appendix

A Very Peculiar God: Reading Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address

CAITRIN NICOL KEIPER

*On March 4, 1865—just a month before Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox—Abraham Lincoln delivered his Second Inaugural Address. Invoking theological speculation and quoting Scripture, he offered an interpretation of the meaning of the war, which enabled him to summon Americans to a new and more difficult public purpose. In this essay, Caitrin Nicol Keiper (b. 1985), editor of the *Philanthropy* magazine (and a former student of the editors), reveals the depths of Lincoln’s address.*

In an April 1864 letter to Albert G. Hodges, editor of the *Commonwealth* of Frankfort, Kentucky, Abraham Lincoln wrote, “I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. Now, at the end of three years struggle the nation’s condition is not what either party, or any man devised, or expected. God alone can claim it.”¹¹ President Lincoln’s reelection that fall might be attributed to the same power—a deeply unpopular president overseeing an exhausting war with no end in sight, challenged by two former generals and doubted by members of his own administration, he was not expected by anyone, including himself, to win until a handful of eleventh-hour military victories turned fate in his favor.¹²

The first words of Lincoln’s Second Inaugural Address, “At this second appearing,” quietly acknowledge the unlikely event of his reelection (following, too, on the historical accident of his election in the first place).¹³ The opening paragraph is constructed mostly in the passive tense—“public declarations have been constantly called forth,” “little that is new could be presented,” “the progress of our arms . . . is as well known to the public as to myself,” “no prediction in regard to it is ventured”—mentioning Lincoln himself but little, and after this paragraph not at all. The unslakably ambitious man from the backwoods of Illinois implausibly (still) at the apex of power has acknowledged to himself and now admits to everyone that this power has been of precious little practical significance. He is not directing history. History is being directed in some other way.

¹¹ *Abraham Lincoln to Albert G. Hodges, April 4, 1864*, The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1953), Volume VII, 282, available online at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln7/1:617.1?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

¹² Major General John C. Frémont, who had commanded the Union’s Mountain Department until June 1862, was selected as the presidential nominee of one faction of the Republican Party in 1864. Major General George B. McClellan, whose command of the Army of the Potomac was terminated by Lincoln in November 1862, was nominated as the Democratic Party’s candidate in 1864. Frémont withdrew in September 1864. Following Union General Sherman’s victorious Atlanta campaign, Lincoln defeated McClellan in the November election.

¹³ Lincoln delivered his Second Inaugural Address on the East Front of the United States Capitol in Washington, DC on March 4, 1865. The text is available at www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/second-inaugural-address-1865. All subsequent quotations from the Second Inaugural are taken from this text. All italics are in the original.

The next paragraph suggests large and shifting public forces. From the unity of the “all” who “dreaded [war]” and “sought to avert it,” two opposing sides crystallized, one supplying rogue “agents” whose agenda forced the other into a response that “both parties deprecated.” But in the last line of the paragraph, these antagonistic human forces are overtaken and subsumed by one single, inhuman actor, a conflict that is ascribed agency of its own: “And the war came.”

The cause that called this power into being, Lincoln continues, was slavery. Throughout his political career, including his first campaign for the presidency and his First Inaugural Address,¹⁴ Lincoln assiduously denied that he would challenge slavery where it already existed, insisting that his administration sought above all to preserve the Union and did not pose a threat to the South. These declared intentions had no bearing on events. Even at the beginning of the war, when the North purported to be fighting not for the sake of abolition but only to reclaim the Union, everyone somehow knew, Lincoln says now, that slavery was at the heart of it. The “bloody and heaven-daring arrangement,” as William Lloyd Garrison called it, of including the peculiar institution in the Constitution of the first nation founded on equality, an unhappy compromise to purchase the ratification of slaveholding states, finally exploded with a burning force.¹⁵

Even the institution of slavery, however, is insufficient explanation for what has happened: The war, whose magnitude and duration were wholly unanticipated by everyone involved in it, and which was set in motion by a catalyst too deeply embedded in the nation’s history to be touched by human power, had outlasted slavery. At the war’s outset, neither the government nor the insurgents, Lincoln says, “anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease.” But with the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln had formally ordered the freedom of the slaves in the Confederate states—a decision which, even though it would have no material effect until the Union won, amounted to a recognition of the subject that until then he had tried to write out of the conflict.¹⁶ Yet even so, the war went on according to its own design. No one meant to go to war to free the slaves, but the slaves were freed. No one meant for the war to go on so long. No one meant for 600,000 soldiers to die. If no one meant for it to happen, and if the initial catalyst has been burned away, who or what is actually responsible for all those casualties?

As if peeling an onion, the next causal layer that Lincoln strips back is the idea of a provincial God, even one interested in the clear cause of justice. “It may seem strange,” he says, “that any men should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men’s faces”—but is it not even stranger that a just God would *not* have come to the assistance of those who oppose them? “Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and each invokes His aid against the other. . . . The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully.”

Buried in this paragraph is the first suggestion of what Lincoln’s objective is for this address (which he had begun by announcing what it was *not*): “[L]et us judge not that we be not judged.”

¹⁴ Read Lincoln’s First Inaugural Address at www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/first-inaugural-address-1861.

¹⁵ William Lloyd Garrison, “The Great Crisis!,” *The Liberator*, December 29, 1832, 207 (leftmost column).

¹⁶ Abraham Lincoln, *Emancipation Proclamation*, January 1, 1863, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, Volume VI, 28–30.

This phrase may sound flip and noncommittal to our ears in this present age of tolerance, but in context it is an astonishing request. As Lincoln wrote in the letter to Hodges, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong."¹⁷ Now he begins a sentence by indicting slavery but concludes it by saying that we must not judge. By March 1865, the North is on the cusp of victory. With the end finally in sight, the president could be expected to deliver a sonorous, triumphant ode to the Union Army's accomplishments and the righteousness of its cause, something to suggest that the price the North had paid for victory was being justly validated.¹⁸ But why, Lincoln asked himself, if the North was being granted victory at the hand of a just God, had the war gone on so long and at such high cost to all? Looking at the question from the other side of the conflict, Confederate General Edward Porter Alexander put it thus: "It is customary to say that 'Providence did not intend that we should win,' but I do not subscribe in the least to that doctrine. Providence did not care a row of pins about it. If it did it was a very unintelligent Providence not to bring the business to a close—the close it wanted—in less than four years of most terrible & bloody war."¹⁹

The answer that Lincoln finally offers, a comprehensive but harrowing theodicy of American history stretching back before the nation's founding, undermines the comforting assurances and vindication that the North would be expecting on the eve of victory:

The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!" If we shall suppose that American Slavery is one of those offences which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South, this terrible war, as the woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "The judgments of the Lord, are true and righteous altogether."²⁰

The Union forces have been fighting to reestablish all the states as a single nation. As one nation, they have a common past, a common character, and a common destiny. There can be no such thing as sins committed solely by "the South," accountable only to "the South," for the South is only part of one great but guilty nation. No one whose life was lost in the ghastly national atonement of the Civil War was personally involved in the Atlantic slave trade (in which, before it ended in 1808, Northerners were heavily complicit), in the inclusion of slavery in the Constitution, or in the many other historical foundations for the South's slave-based economy, but it is these historical foundations, Lincoln says, as much or more than any current and particular sin

¹⁷ *Lincoln to Hodges*, 281.

¹⁸ Ronald C. White Jr., *Lincoln's Greatest Speech: The Second Inaugural* (Simon & Schuster, 2002).

¹⁹ Edward Porter Alexander, *Fighting for the Confederacy: The Personal Recollections of General Edward Porter Alexander*, ed. Gary W. Gallagher (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 58–59.

²⁰ In this passage, Lincoln quotes from Matthew 18:7 and Psalms 19:9 (both King James Version).

of slave-holding, for which everyone has now to pay. Just as liberty and self-government are the legacy of the “fathers” who “brought forth . . . a new nation” (in the words of the Gettysburg Address²¹), their guilt is everyone’s inheritance as well—the sins of the fathers visited on the children to the third and fourth generation.²² If there is anything more horrifying than the Civil War then playing out before them, it must be the two and a half centuries’ worth of slaves who went to their graves unavenged—could there be any justice in a nation that was *not* called to account for them in full measure?

But this theory of corporate guilt for the evil at the heart of the American experiment, humbling as it ought to be to a Northerner, cannot quite encompass the fatalism in this passage, in which the forces at work are still more abstract and incomprehensible than the traditional understanding of freely chosen human action: it *must needs be* that offenses come into the world, but woe is due to the unfortunates through whom they come. Is it actually the purpose of the Almighty, as Lincoln’s quoted verse from Matthew seems to say, that woes are preordained to come into the world where select men—or, in this case, a nation—are destined to pay for them? This is not a theodicy that justifies woe as the byproduct of a greater good, such as the free determination of the human conscience. This account of woe lays it directly at the feet of the Almighty, and concludes, claiming there is no other conclusion left to draw, that it, like all His other judgments, is “true and righteous altogether.” The Lincoln who three decades earlier looked to “cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason” as the bedrock of the future of America has long since disappeared.²³ The Lincoln of 1865 is prostrated by a great and tragic mystery whose scope he cannot explain, but whose source he yet refuses to attribute to malevolence. The literary critic Alfred Kazin put it wonderfully in his essay “The Almighty Has His Own Purposes”:

“Let us suppose,” [Lincoln] says in effect, that slavery is an offense that God inexplicably allowed into human history. Let us even suppose that he allowed just so much time for it. To suppose anything like this is actually to suppose a very peculiar God. But since it all happened as described, and believers hold God accountable for all things, one can only yield to the enigma of having such a God at all. It is clear that the terrible war has overwhelmed the Lincoln who identified himself as the man of reason. It has brought him to his knees, so to speak, in heartbreaking awareness of the restrictions imposed by a mystery so encompassing it can only be called “God.” Lincoln could find no other word for it.²⁴

Lincoln’s text goes further on this point than Kazin suggests—the Almighty of the Second Inaugural seems not only to have *allowed* slavery into human history for a predetermined length of time, but in fact played an active role in bringing and removing it. “Almighty” means “all powerful,” after all—where is the power for such activity to come from, if not from Him?

A sometime aficionado of Thomas Paine and Voltaire, never a conventionally religious man

²¹ Abraham Lincoln, *Gettysburg Address*, November 19, 1863, www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/gettysburg-address.

²² See, for instance, *Exodus* 20:5, *Exodus* 34:7, and *Deuteronomy* 5:9.

²³ Abraham Lincoln, *Address Before the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois*, January 27, 1838, www.whatsoproudlywehail.org/curriculum/the-meaning-of-america/the-perpetuation-of-our-political-institutions.

²⁴ Alfred Kazin, “Lincoln: The Almighty Has His Own Purposes,” *God and the American Writer* (New York: Knopf, 1997), 138.

or member of any church congregation, Lincoln the depressive agnostic had always had a streak of fatalism. But here, facing the worst evil and deepest tragedy of American history, he somehow turns from fatalism to Providence. All these offenses, he claims, came about through the *providence* of God—and who are we to say there is “therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a Living God always ascribe to Him?” “To deny it,” Lincoln wrote to Republican politician Thurlow Weed a few days after delivering the Second Inaugural, “is to deny that there is a God governing the world.”²⁵ But what are we to do when faced with such a woeful God and asked to believe that He is not malevolent?

Lincoln’s answer is charity. It is not a reasonable answer, but it is a practical one. Reason has no more to say on this subject. And, indeed, in terms of the actual events, even the military players in this conflict will soon find their parts on the front lines of this drama coming to an end. There is no longer a question of whether the South will be won back by brute subjugation, but Lincoln, ever still the savior of the *union*, has looked through the mournful eyes of history and seen that this is not enough—“a just, and a lasting peace” will not be brought about except by humility and charity. Lincoln foresees the disastrous result of Reconstruction should it be carried out with a heavy, judgmental hand, instead of one made gentle by sorrow and mutual repentance. His final instructions, read now with our knowledge of his assassination, take on an undercurrent of eerie foreboding for the miserable Reconstruction that was actually to take place—but, in a deeper sense, they offer America a charge which it is never too late to heed:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation’s wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

The qualitative difference between fate and Providence is charity. The idea of Providence posits that charity directs our destiny even if it is in a way that we cannot comprehend. When we come to the edges of our understanding of it, we can only take it up and keep going—or not. Even if there is ultimately no such thing as Providence—it would be a fair assumption, in fact, to think that this was a strong possibility in Lincoln’s private mind—we can still act with charity; and for a nation that has just killed 600,000 of her own, there is no other way forward. Lincoln proposes a practical and transformative response to horror, a kind of active love that reaches past the limits of reason. We do not know the ways of the Almighty. We do not know the future, and we may not understand the past. But we know our obligations to each other, drawn from the character of the Christian Providence, whatever that ultimately means. *This* is the final objective of the president who was almost mysteriously appointed to lead America through her Civil War, a national apocalypse with the opportunity to be reborn on the other side.

Lincoln was shot just five weeks later—on Good Friday, of all days—and instantly became a sainted martyr, the holy savior of a nation venerated as such even to this day. The “truth which [he] thought needed to be told” thus became his final testament—but “whatever of humiliation there is in it,” he concluded his letter to Weed, “falls most directly on myself.” If there *is* a just

²⁵ *Abraham Lincoln to Thurlow Weed, March 15, 1865*, The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume VIII, 356, available online at <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/l/lincoln/lincoln8/1:764.1?rgn=div2;view=fulltext>.

God governing the world, perhaps Lincoln was sacrificed not because he was innocent, but, as he suggests, because he was guilty. A very peculiar God it is that would call us in such a way to the work of charity.



Assassination



O Captain! My Captain!

WALT WHITMAN

In the days after Lincoln's assassination, the nation, already war-torn and weary, grieved for its fallen hero. The poet Walt Whitman (1819–92) had lived in Washington, DC during the Civil War, and was a great admirer of Lincoln. He had been present at Lincoln's second inauguration just weeks before the assassination, after which he noted that the president "look'd very much worn and tired," but still showed "all the old goodness, tenderness, sadness, and canny shrewdness, underneath the furrows." Devastated by Lincoln's death, Whitman wrote one of his most famous poems—and the only one with rhyming meter. "O Captain! My Captain!" was first published in New York's Saturday Press in November of 1865.

Why does Whitman address Lincoln as "my Captain"? What is the "ship," and what "prize" has it won? How does Whitman render the loss of Lincoln as a loss personal to the speaker of the poem? How does he render the loss of Lincoln as a national loss? Can one, at the same time, feel joy for great victory and sadness at great loss? How does the poet navigate this emotional terrain? Does the rhyming meter add to (or detract from) the poem's meaning and impact?

O Captain! my Captain! our fearful trip is done,
The ship has weathered every rack, the prize we sought is won,
The port is near, the bells I hear, the people all exulting,
While follow eyes the steady keel, the vessel grim and daring;
But O heart! heart! heart!
O the bleeding drops of red,
Where on the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

O Captain! my Captain! rise up and hear the bells;
Rise up—for you the flag is flung—for you the bugle trills,
For you bouquets and ribboned wreaths—for you the shores a-crowding,
For you they call, the swaying mass, their eager faces turning;
Here Captain! dear father!
This arm beneath your head!
It is some dream that on the deck,
You've fallen cold and dead.

My Captain does not answer, his lips are pale and still;
My father does not feel my arm, he has no pulse nor will;
The ship is anchored safe and sound, its voyage closed and done;
From fearful trip the victor ship comes in with object won;
Exult O shores, and ring O bells!
But I, with mournful tread,
Walk the deck my Captain lies,
Fallen cold and dead.

When Lilacs Last in the Door-Yard Bloom'd

WALT WHITMAN

Although "O Captain! My Captain!" is the more famous of Walt Whitman's eulogies of Lincoln, the poet (1819–92) himself preferred this elegy to the fallen president. Composed in the summer of 1865, the poem was inspired by the lilacs Whitman saw on his mother's doorstep in Brooklyn after hearing the news of Lincoln's assassination. In Specimen Days, he later wrote, "By one of those caprices that enter and give tinge to events without being at all a part of them, I find myself always reminded of great tragedy of that day by the sight and odor of these blossoms. It never fails."

Note the poem's three major motifs—the lilacs, a western star (Venus), and the hermit thrush. Why do you think the poet chose them? What is the connection between Lincoln, the poet, and these three symbols? What is the "swamp" that the poet seeks (section 15), and what is the "harsh surrounding cloud" that holds him back (section 2)? What is the meaning of the bird's song (see, especially, section 4, where the poet calls it "Death's outlet song of life")? How does it inspire the poet's vision (section 18)? What consolation does it offer the poet and the reader? Why do you think the poet chose a lilac to put on Lincoln's coffin (section 6)?

1

When lilacs last in the door-yard bloom'd,
And the great star early droop'd in the western sky in the night,
I mourn'd—and yet shall mourn with ever-returning spring.

O ever-returning spring! trinity sure to me you bring;
Lilac blooming perennial, and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love.

2

O powerful, western, fallen star!
O shades of night! O moody, tearful night!
O great star disappear'd! O the black murk that hides the star!
O cruel hands that hold me powerless! O helpless soul of me!
O harsh surrounding cloud, that will not free my soul!

3

In the door-yard fronting an old farm-house, near the white-wash'd palings,
Stands the lilac bush, tall-growing, with heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
With many a pointed blossom, rising, delicate, with the perfume strong I love,
With every leaf a miracle . . . and from this bush in the door-yard,
With delicate-color'd blossoms, and heart-shaped leaves of rich green,
A sprig, with its flower, I break.

4

In the swamp, in secluded recesses,

A shy and hidden bird is warbling a song.

Solitary, the thrush,
The hermit, withdrawn to himself, avoiding the settlements,
Sings by himself a song.

Song of the bleeding throat!
Death's outlet song of life—(for well, dear brother, I know
If thou wast not gifted to sing, thou would'st surely die.)

5

Over the breast of the spring, the land, amid cities,
Amid lanes, and through old woods, (where lately the violets peep'd from the ground, spotting
the gray debris;)
Amid the grass in the fields each side of the lanes—passing the endless grass;
Passing the yellow-spear'd wheat, every grain from its shroud in the dark-brown fields uprising;
Passing the apple-tree blows of white and pink in the orchards;
Carrying a corpse to where it shall rest in the grave,
Night and day journeys a coffin.

6

Coffin that passes through lanes and streets,
Through day and night, with the great cloud darkening the land,
With the pomp of the inloop'd flags, with the cities draped in black,
With the show of the States themselves, as of crape-veil'd women, standing,
With processions long and winding, and the flambeaus of the night,
With the countless torches lit—with the silent sea of faces, and the unbared heads,
With the waiting depot, the arriving coffin, and the sombre faces,
With dirges through the night, with the thousand voices rising strong and solemn;
With all the mournful voices of the dirges, pour'd around the coffin,
The dim-lit churches and the shuddering organs—Where amid these you journey,
With the tolling, tolling bells' perpetual clang;
Here! coffin that slowly passes,
I give you my sprig of lilac.

7

(Nor for you, for one, alone;
Blossoms and branches green to coffins all I bring:
For fresh as the morning—thus would I carol a song for you, O sane and sacred death.

All over bouquets of roses,
O death! I cover you over with roses and early lilies;
But mostly and now the lilac that blooms the first,
Copious, I break, I break the sprigs from the bushes;
With loaded arms I come, pouring for you,
For you, and the coffins all of you, O death.)

8

O western orb, sailing the heaven!

Now I know what you must have meant, as a month since we walk'd,

As we walk'd up and down in the dark blue so mystic,

As we walk'd in silence the transparent shadowy night,

As I saw you had something to tell, as you bent to me night after night,

As you droop'd from the sky low down, as if to my side, (while the other stars all look'd on;)

As we wander'd together the solemn night, (for something, I know not what, kept me from sleep;)

As the night advanced, and I saw on the rim of the west, ere you went, how full you were of woe;

As I stood on the rising ground in the breeze, in the cold transparent night,

As I watch'd where you pass'd and was lost in the netherward black of the night,

As my soul, in its trouble, dissatisfied, sank, as where you, sad orb,

Concluded, dropt in the night, and was gone.

9

Sing on, there in the swamp!

O singer bashful and tender! I hear your notes—I hear your call;

I hear—I come presently—I understand you;

But a moment I linger—for the lustrous star has detain'd me;

The star, my departing comrade, holds and detains me.

10

O how shall I warble myself for the dead one there I loved?

And how shall I deck my song for the large sweet soul that has gone?

And what shall my perfume be, for the grave of him I love?

Sea-winds, blown from east and west,

Blown from the eastern sea, and blown from the western sea, till there on the prairies meeting:

These, and with these, and the breath of my chant,

I perfume the grave of him I love.

11

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?

And what shall the pictures be that I hang on the walls,

To adorn the burial-house of him I love?

Pictures of growing spring, and farms, and homes,

With the Fourth-month eve at sundown, and the gray smoke lucid and bright,

With floods of the yellow gold of the gorgeous, indolent, sinking sun, burning, expanding the air;

With the fresh sweet herbage under foot, and the pale green leaves of the trees prolific;

In the distance the flowing glaze, the breast of the river, with a wind-dapple here and there;

With ranging hills on the banks, with many a line against the sky, and shadows;

And the city at hand, with dwellings so dense, and stacks of chimneys,

And all the scenes of life, and the workshops, and the workmen homeward returning.

12

Lo! body and soul! this land!
Mighty Manhattan, with spires, and the sparkling and hurrying tides, and the ships;
The varied and ample land—the South and the North in the light—Ohio's shores, and flashing
Missouri,
And ever the far-spreading prairies, cover'd with grass and corn.

Lo! the most excellent sun, so calm and haughty;
The violet and purple morn, with just-felt breezes;
The gentle, soft-born, measureless light;
The miracle, spreading, bathing all—the fulfill'd noon;
The coming eve, delicious—the welcome night, and the stars,
Over my cities shining all, enveloping man and land.

13

Sing on! sing on, you gray-brown bird!
Sing from the swamps, the recesses—pour your chant from the bushes;
Limitless out of the dusk, out of the cedars and pines.

Sing on, dearest brother—warble your reedy song;
Loud human song, with voice of uttermost woe.

O liquid, and free, and tender!
O wild and loose to my soul! O wondrous singer!
You only I hear . . . yet the star holds me, (but will soon depart;)
Yet the lilac, with mastering odor, holds me.

14

Now while I sat in the day, and look'd forth,
In the close of the day, with its light, and the fields of spring, and the farmer preparing his crops,
In the large unconscious scenery of my land, with its lakes and forests,
In the heavenly aerial beauty, (after the perturb'd winds, and the storms;)
Under the arching heavens of the afternoon swift passing, and the voices of children and women,
The many-moving sea-tides,—and I saw the ships how they sail'd,
And the summer approaching with richness, and the fields all busy with labor,
And the infinite separate houses, how they all went on, each with its meals and minutia of daily
usages;
And the streets, how their throbbings throb'd, and the cities pent—lo! then and there,
Falling upon them all, and among them all, enveloping me with the rest,
Appear'd the cloud, appear'd the long black trail;
And I knew Death, its thought, and the sacred knowledge of death.

15

Then with the knowledge of death as walking one side of me,
And the thought of death close-walking the other side of me,
And I in the middle, as with companions, and as holding the hands of companions,

I fled forth to the hiding receiving night, that talks not,
Down to the shores of the water, the path by the swamp in the dimness,
To the solemn shadowy cedars, and ghostly pines so still.

And the singer so shy to the rest receiv'd me;
The gray-brown bird I know, receiv'd us comrades three;
And he sang what seem'd the carol of death, and a verse for him I love.

From deep secluded recesses,
From the fragrant cedars, and the ghostly pines so still,
Came the carol of the bird.

And the charm of the carol rapt me,
As I held, as if by their hands, my comrades in the night;
And the voice of my spirit tallied the song of the bird.

DEATH CAROL.

16
Come, lovely and soothing Death,
Undulate round the world, serenely arriving, arriving,
In the day, in the night, to all, to each,
Sooner or later, delicate Death.

Prais'd be the fathomless universe,
For life and joy, and for objects and knowledge curious;
And for love, sweet love—But praise! praise! praise!
For the sure-enwinding arms of cool-enfolding Death.

Dark Mother, always gliding near, with soft feet,
Have none chanted for thee a chant of fullest welcome?

Then I chant it for thee—I glorify thee above all;
I bring thee a song that when thou must indeed come, come unfalteringly.

Approach, strong Deliveress!
When it is so—when thou hast taken them, I joyously sing the dead,
Lost in the loving, floating ocean of thee,
Laved in the flood of thy bliss, O Death.

From me to thee glad serenades,
Dances for thee I propose, saluting thee—adornments and feastings for thee;
And the sights of the open landscape, and the high-spread sky, are fitting,
And life and the fields, and the huge and thoughtful night.

The night, in silence, under many a star;

The ocean shore, and the husky whispering wave, whose voice I know;
And the soul turning to thee, O vast and well-veil'd Death,
And the body gratefully nestling close to thee.

Over the tree-tops I float thee a song!
Over the rising and sinking waves—over the myriad fields, and the prairies wide;
Over the dense-pack'd cities all, and the teeming wharves and ways,
I float this carol with joy, with joy to thee, O Death!

17
To the tally of my soul,
Loud and strong kept up the gray-brown bird,
With pure, deliberate notes, spreading, filling the night.

Loud in the pines and cedars dim,
Clear in the freshness moist, and the swamp-perfume;
And I with my comrades there in the night.

While my sight that was bound in my eyes unclosed,
As to long panoramas of visions.

18
I saw askant the armies;
And I saw, as in noiseless dreams, hundreds of battle-flags;
Borne through the smoke of the battles, and pierc'd with missiles, I saw them,
And carried hither and yon through the smoke, and torn and bloody;
And at last but a few shreds left on the staffs, (and all in silence,)
And the staffs all splinter'd and broken.

I saw battle-corpses, myriads of them,
And the white skeletons of young men—I saw them;
I saw the debris and debris of all the dead soldiers of the war;
But I saw they were not as was thought;
They themselves were fully at rest—they suffer'd not;
The living remain'd and suffer'd—the mother suffer'd,
And the wife and the child, and the musing comrade suffer'd,
And the armies that remain'd suffer'd.

19
Passing the visions, passing the night;
Passing, unloosing the hold of my comrades' hands;
Passing the song of the hermit bird, and the tallying song of my soul,
(Victorious song, death's outlet song, yet varying, ever-altering song,
As low and wailing, yet clear the notes, rising and falling, flooding the night,
Sadly sinking and fainting, as warning and warning, and yet again bursting with joy,
Covering the earth, and filling the spread of the heaven,

As that powerful psalm in the night I heard from recesses,)
Passing, I leave thee, lilac with heart-shaped leaves;
I leave thee there in the door-yard, blooming, returning with spring,
I cease from my song for thee;
From my gaze on thee in the west, fronting the west, communing with thee,
O comrade lustrous, with silver face in the night.

20

Yet each I keep, and all, retrievments out of the night;
The song, the wondrous chant of the gray-brown bird,
And the tallying chant, the echo arous'd in my soul,
With the lustrous and drooping star, with the countenance full of woe,
With the lilac tall, and its blossoms of mastering odor;
With the holders holding my hand, nearing the call of the bird,
Comrades mine, and I in the midst, and their memory ever I keep—for the dead I loved so well;
For the sweetest, wisest soul of all my days and lands . . . and this for his dear sake;
Lilac and star and bird, twined with the chant of my soul,
There in the fragrant pines, and the cedars dusk and dim.

Crown His Blood-Stained Pillow

JULIA WARD HOWE

Noted abolitionist and social activist Julia Ward Howe (1819–1910) met Abraham Lincoln in Washington, DC in November 1861. The meeting inspired her to write one of the most popular Union songs of the Civil War, “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” After Lincoln’s assassination, Howe turned to the sorrowful task of mourning the dead president with this somber poem, first published in 1865.

Looking at the first three stanzas, what was Lincoln’s legacy, and what is his reward? Moving to stanzas 4 through 6, how does the poet instruct us to honor him? Who is the “First Hero” of the final verse, and how does his heroic action compare to that of Lincoln?

Crown his blood-stained pillow
With a victor’s palm;
Life’s receding billow
Leaves eternal calm.

At the feet Almighty
Lay this gift sincere;
Of a purpose weighty,
And a record clear.

With deliverance freighted
Was this passive hand,
And this heart, high-fated,
Would with love command.

Let him rest serenely
In a Nation’s care,
Where her waters queenly
Make the West most fair.

In the greenest meadow
That the prairies show,
Let his marble’s shadow
Give all men to know:

“Our First Hero, living,
Made his country free;
Heed the Second’s giving,
Death for Liberty.”

Martyr

HERMAN MELVILLE

Novelist and poet Herman Melville (1819–91) published this poem a year after Lincoln’s assassination. Melville included the poem in a collection on the Civil War, Battle-Pieces and Aspects of the War, and introduced it as “indicative of the Passion of the People on the 15th of April, 1865.”

How does this poem differ from the other poetic tributes to Lincoln? Who is the “they” that “killed him in his pity,” and what “Passion of the People” do they unleash? Throughout the poem, Lincoln is identified with Christ, but does his martyrdom bring salvation? Who is the “Avenger”? How does Melville predict the Avenger will respond to Lincoln’s assassination?

Good Friday was the day
Of the prodigy and crime,
When they killed him in his pity,
When they killed him in his prime
Of clemency and calm—
When with yearning he was filled
To redeem the evil-willed,
And, though conqueror, be kind;
But they killed him in his kindness,
In their madness, in their blindness,
And they killed him from behind.

There is sobbing of the strong,
And a pall upon the land;
But the People in their weeping
Bare the iron hand:
Beware the People weeping
When they bare the iron hand.

He lieth in his blood—
The father in his face;
They have killed him, the Forgiver—
The Avenger takes his place,
The Avenger wisely stern,
Who in righteousness shall do
What the heavens call him to,
And the parricides remand;
For they killed him in his kindness
In their madness and their blindness,
And his blood is on their hand.

There is sobbing of the strong,
And a pall upon the land;
But the People in their weeping
Bare the iron hand:
Beware the People weeping
When they bare the iron hand.

3



Lincoln Assessed
and Remembered



Great Emancipator



Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln

FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Frederick Douglass (c.1818–95), a prominent African-American abolitionist, social reformer, and statesman, delivered his “Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln” at the unveiling of The Freedmen’s Monument in Lincoln Park, Washington, DC on April 14, 1876. Douglass himself did not care for the statue, sculpted by Thomas Ball and showing a kneeling slave at Lincoln’s feet. During the unveiling, he was overheard complaining that it “showed the Negro on his knees when a more manly attitude would have been indicative of freedom.”

In his speech, Douglass describes Lincoln as “preeminently the white man’s President.” What does Douglass mean by this, and is it intended solely as a criticism of Lincoln? What is Douglass’ final verdict on Lincoln’s priority of Union over emancipation? What is the “good work for our race” that is being performed at the unveiling, and to whom does it pay “highest honors”?

Friends and Fellow-citizens:

I warmly congratulate you upon the highly interesting object which has caused you to assemble in such numbers and spirit as you have today. This occasion is in some respects remarkable. Wise and thoughtful men of our race, who shall come after us, and study the lesson of our history in the United States; who shall survey the long and dreary spaces over which we have traveled; who shall count the links in the great chain of events by which we have reached our present position, will make a note of this occasion; they will think of it and speak of it with a sense of manly pride and complacency.

I congratulate you, also, upon the very favorable circumstances in which we meet today. They are high, inspiring, and uncommon. They lend grace, glory, and significance to the object for which we have met. Nowhere else in this great country, with its uncounted towns and cities, unlimited wealth, and immeasurable territory extending from sea to sea, could conditions be found more favorable to the success of this occasion than here.

We stand today at the national center to perform something like a national act—an act which is to go into history; and we are here where every pulsation of the national heart can be heard, felt, and reciprocated. A thousand wires, fed with thought and winged with lightning, put us in instantaneous communication with the loyal and true men all over the country.

Few facts could better illustrate the vast and wonderful change which has taken place in our condition as a people than the fact of our assembling here for the purpose we have today. Harmless, beautiful, proper, and praiseworthy as this demonstration is, I cannot forget that no such demonstration would have been tolerated here twenty years ago. The spirit of slavery and barbarism, which still lingers to blight and destroy in some dark and distant parts of our country, would have made our assembling here the signal and excuse for opening upon us all the flood-gates of wrath and violence. That we are here in peace today is a compliment and a credit to American civilization, and a prophecy of still greater national enlightenment and progress in the future. I refer to the past not in malice, for this is no day for malice; but simply to place more

distinctly in front the gratifying and glorious change which has come both to our white fellow-citizens and ourselves, and to congratulate all upon the contrast between now and then; the new dispensation of freedom with its thousand blessings to both races, and the old dispensation of slavery with its ten thousand evils to both races—white and black. In view, then, of the past, the present, and the future, with the long and dark history of our bondage behind us, and with liberty, progress, and enlightenment before us, I again congratulate you upon this auspicious day and hour.

Friends and fellow-citizens, the story of our presence here is soon and easily told. We are here in the District of Columbia, here in the city of Washington, the most luminous point of American territory; a city recently transformed and made beautiful in its body and in its spirit; we are here in the place where the ablest and best men of the country are sent to devise the policy, enact the laws, and shape the destiny of the Republic; we are here, with the stately pillars and majestic dome of the Capitol of the nation looking down upon us; we are here, with the broad earth freshly adorned with the foliage and flowers of spring for our church, and all races, colors, and conditions of men for our congregation—in a word, we are here to express, as best we may, by appropriate forms and ceremonies, our grateful sense of the vast, high, and preeminent services rendered to ourselves, to our race, to our country, and to the whole world by Abraham Lincoln.

The sentiment that brings us here to-day is one of the noblest that can stir and thrill the human heart. It has crowned and made glorious the high places of all civilized nations with the grandest and most enduring works of art, designed to illustrate the characters and perpetuate the memories of great public men. It is the sentiment which from year to year adorns with fragrant and beautiful flowers the graves of our loyal, brave, and patriotic soldiers who fell in defense of the Union and liberty. It is the sentiment of gratitude and appreciation, which often, in the presence of many who hear me, has filled yonder heights of Arlington with the eloquence of eulogy and the sublime enthusiasm of poetry and song; a sentiment which can never die while the Republic lives.

For the first time in the history of our people, and in the history of the whole American people, we join in this high worship, and march conspicuously in the line of this time-honored custom. First things are always interesting, and this is one of our first things. It is the first time that, in this form and manner, we have sought to do honor to an American great man, however deserving and illustrious. I commend the fact to notice; let it be told in every part of the Republic; let men of all parties and opinions hear it; let those who despise us, not less than those who respect us, know that now and here, in the spirit of liberty, loyalty, and gratitude, let it be known everywhere, and by everybody who takes an interest in human progress and in the amelioration of the condition of mankind, that, in the presence and with the approval of the members of the American House of Representatives, reflecting the general sentiment of the country; that in the presence of that august body, the American Senate, representing the highest intelligence and the calmest judgment of the country; in the presence of the Supreme Court and Chief-Justice of the United States, to whose decisions we all patriotically bow; in the presence and under the steady eye of the honored and trusted President of the United States, with the members of his wise and patriotic Cabinet, we, the colored people, newly emancipated and rejoicing in our blood-bought freedom, near the close of the first century in the life of this Republic, have now and here unveiled, set apart, and dedicated a monument of enduring granite and bronze, in every line, feature, and figure of which the men of this generation may read, and those of aftercoming generations may read, something of the exalted character and great works of Abraham Lincoln, the first martyr President of the United States.

Fellow-citizens, in what we have said and done today, and in what we may say and do hereafter, we disclaim everything like arrogance and assumption. We claim for ourselves no superior devotion to the character, history, and memory of the illustrious name whose monument we have here dedicated today. We fully comprehend the relation of Abraham Lincoln both to ourselves and to the white people of the United States. Truth is proper and beautiful at all times and in all places, and it is never more proper and beautiful in any case than when speaking of a great public man whose example is likely to be commended for honor and imitation long after his departure to the solemn shades, the silent continents of eternity. It must be admitted, truth compels me to admit, even here in the presence of the monument we have erected to his memory, Abraham Lincoln was not, in the fullest sense of the word, either our man or our model. In his interests, in his associations, in his habits of thought, and in his prejudices, he was a white man.

He was preeminently the white man's President, entirely devoted to the welfare of white men. He was ready and willing at any time during the first years of his administration to deny, postpone, and sacrifice the rights of humanity in the colored people to promote the welfare of the white people of this country. In all his education and feeling he was an American of the Americans. He came into the Presidential chair upon one principle alone, namely, opposition to the extension of slavery. His arguments in furtherance of this policy had their motive and mainspring in his patriotic devotion to the interests of his own race. To protect, defend, and perpetuate slavery in the states where it existed Abraham Lincoln was not less ready than any other President to draw the sword of the nation. He was ready to execute all the supposed guarantees of the United States Constitution in favor of the slave system anywhere inside the slave states. He was willing to pursue, recapture, and send back the fugitive slave to his master, and to suppress a slave rising for liberty, though his guilty master were already in arms against the Government. The race to which we belong were not the special objects of his consideration. Knowing this, I concede to you, my white fellow-citizens, a pre-eminence in this worship at once full and supreme. First, midst, and last, you and yours were the objects of his deepest affection and his most earnest solicitude. You are the children of Abraham Lincoln. We are at best only his step-children; children by adoption, children by forces of circumstances and necessity. To you it especially belongs to sound his praises, to preserve and perpetuate his memory, to multiply his statues, to hang his pictures high upon your walls, and commend his example, for to you he was a great and glorious friend and benefactor. Instead of supplanting you at his altar, we would exhort you to build high his monuments; let them be of the most costly material, of the most cunning workmanship; let their forms be symmetrical, beautiful, and perfect, let their bases be upon solid rocks, and their summits lean against the unchanging blue, overhanging sky, and let them endure forever! But while in the abundance of your wealth, and in the fullness of your just and patriotic devotion, you do all this, we entreat you to despise not the humble offering we this day unveil to view; for while Abraham Lincoln saved for you a country, he delivered us from a bondage, according to Jefferson, one hour of which was worse than ages of the oppression your fathers rose in rebellion to oppose.

Fellow-citizens, ours is no new-born zeal and devotion—merely a thing of this moment. The name of Abraham Lincoln was near and dear to our hearts in the darkest and most perilous hours of the Republic. We were no more ashamed of him when shrouded in clouds of darkness, of doubt, and defeat than when we saw him crowned with victory, honor, and glory. Our faith in him was often taxed and strained to the uttermost, but it never failed. When he tarried long in the mountain; when he strangely told us that we were the cause of the war; when he still more strangely told us

that we were to leave the land in which we were born; when he refused to employ our arms in defense of the Union; when, after accepting our services as colored soldiers, he refused to retaliate our murder and torture as colored prisoners; when he told us he would save the Union if he could with slavery; when he revoked the Proclamation of Emancipation of General Fremont; when he refused to remove the popular commander of the Army of the Potomac, in the days of its inaction and defeat, who was more zealous in his efforts to protect slavery than to suppress rebellion; when we saw all this, and more, we were at times grieved, stunned, and greatly bewildered; but our hearts believed while they ached and bled. Nor was this, even at that time, a blind and unreasoning superstition. Despite the mist and haze that surrounded him; despite the tumult, the hurry, and confusion of the hour, we were able to take a comprehensive view of Abraham Lincoln, and to make reasonable allowance for the circumstances of his position. We saw him, measured him, and estimated him; not by stray utterances to injudicious and tedious delegations, who often tried his patience; not by isolated facts torn from their connection; not by any partial and imperfect glimpses, caught at inopportune moments; but by a broad survey, in the light of the stern logic of great events, and in view of that divinity which shapes our ends, rough hew them how we will, we came to the conclusion that the hour and the man of our redemption had somehow met in the person of Abraham Lincoln. It mattered little to us what language he might employ on special occasions; it mattered little to us, when we fully knew him, whether he was swift or slow in his movements; it was enough for us that Abraham Lincoln was at the head of a great movement, and was in living and earnest sympathy with that movement, which, in the nature of things, must go on until slavery should be utterly and forever abolished in the United States.

When, therefore, it shall be asked what we have to do with the memory of Abraham Lincoln, or what Abraham Lincoln had to do with us, the answer is ready, full, and complete. Though he loved Caesar less than Rome, though the Union was more to him than our freedom or our future, under his wise and beneficent rule we saw ourselves gradually lifted from the depths of slavery to the heights of liberty and manhood; under his wise and beneficent rule, and by measures approved and vigorously pressed by him, we saw that the handwriting of ages, in the form of prejudice and proscription, was rapidly fading away from the face of our whole country; under his rule, and in due time, about as soon after all as the country could tolerate the strange spectacle, we saw our brave sons and brothers laying off the rags of bondage, and being clothed all over in the blue uniforms of the soldiers of the United States; under his rule we saw two hundred thousand of our dark and dusky people responding to the call of Abraham Lincoln, and with muskets on their shoulders, and eagles on their buttons, timing their high footsteps to liberty and union under the national flag; under his rule we saw the independence of the black republic of Haiti, the special object of slave-holding aversion and horror, fully recognized, and her minister, a colored gentleman, duly received here in the city of Washington; under his rule we saw the internal slave-trade, which so long disgraced the nation, abolished, and slavery abolished in the District of Columbia; under his rule we saw for the first time the law enforced against the foreign slave trade, and the first slave-trader hanged like any other pirate or murderer; under his rule, assisted by the greatest captain of our age, and his inspiration, we saw the Confederate States, based upon the idea that our race must be slaves, and slaves forever, battered to pieces and scattered to the four winds; under his rule, and in the fullness of time, we saw Abraham Lincoln, after giving the slave-holders three months' grace in which to save their hateful slave system, penning the immortal paper, which, though special in its language, was general in its principles and effect, making slavery forever impossible in the United States. Though we waited long, we saw all this and more.

Can any colored man, or any white man friendly to the freedom of all men, ever forget the night which followed the first day of January, 1863, when the world was to see if Abraham Lincoln would prove to be as good as his word? I shall never forget that memorable night, when in a distant city I waited and watched at a public meeting, with three thousand others not less anxious than myself, for the word of deliverance which we have heard read today. Nor shall I ever forget the outburst of joy and thanksgiving that rent the air when the lightning brought to us the emancipation proclamation. In that happy hour we forgot all delay, and forgot all tardiness, forgot that the President had bribed the rebels to lay down their arms by a promise to withhold the bolt which would smite the slave-system with destruction; and we were thenceforward willing to allow the President all the latitude of time, phraseology, and every honorable device that statesmanship might require for the achievement of a great and beneficent measure of liberty and progress.

Fellow-citizens, there is little necessity on this occasion to speak at length and critically of this great and good man, and of his high mission in the world. That ground has been fully occupied and completely covered both here and elsewhere. The whole field of fact and fancy has been gleaned and garnered. Any man can say things that are true of Abraham Lincoln, but no man can say anything that is new of Abraham Lincoln. His personal traits and public acts are better known to the American people than are those of any other man of his age. He was a mystery to no man who saw him and heard him. Though high in position, the humblest could approach him and feel at home in his presence. Though deep, he was transparent; though strong, he was gentle; though decided and pronounced in his convictions, he was tolerant towards those who differed from him, and patient under reproaches. Even those who only knew him through his public utterance obtained a tolerably clear idea of his character and personality. The image of the man went out with his words, and those who read them knew him.

I have said that President Lincoln was a white man, and shared the prejudices common to his countrymen towards the colored race. Looking back to his times and to the condition of his country, we are compelled to admit that this unfriendly feeling on his part may be safely set down as one element of his wonderful success in organizing the loyal American people for the tremendous conflict before them, and bringing them safely through that conflict. His great mission was to accomplish two things: first, to save his country from dismemberment and ruin; and, second, to free his country from the great crime of slavery. To do one or the other, or both, he must have the earnest sympathy and the powerful cooperation of his loyal fellow-countrymen. Without this primary and essential condition to success his efforts must have been vain and utterly fruitless. Had he put the abolition of slavery before the salvation of the Union, he would have inevitably driven from him a powerful class of the American people and rendered resistance to rebellion impossible. Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent; but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined.

Though Mr. Lincoln shared the prejudices of his white fellow-countrymen against the Negro, it is hardly necessary to say that in his heart of hearts he loathed and hated slavery. The man who could say, "Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war shall soon pass away, yet if God wills it continue till all the wealth piled by two hundred years of bondage shall have been wasted, and each drop of blood drawn by the lash shall have been paid for by one drawn by the sword, the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether," gives all needed

proof of his feeling on the subject of slavery. He was willing, while the South was loyal, that it should have its pound of flesh, because he thought that it was so nominated in the bond; but farther than this no earthly power could make him go.

Fellow-citizens, whatever else in this world may be partial, unjust, and uncertain, time, time! is impartial, just, and certain in its action. In the realm of mind, as well as in the realm of matter, it is a great worker, and often works wonders. The honest and comprehensive statesman, clearly discerning the needs of his country, and earnestly endeavoring to do his whole duty, though covered and blistered with reproaches, may safely leave his course to the silent judgment of time. Few great public men have ever been the victims of fiercer denunciation than Abraham Lincoln was during his administration. He was often wounded in the house of his friends. Reproaches came thick and fast upon him from within and from without, and from opposite quarters. He was assailed by Abolitionists; he was assailed by slave-holders; he was assailed by the men who were for peace at any price; he was assailed by those who were for a more vigorous prosecution of the war; he was assailed for not making the war an abolition war; and he was bitterly assailed for making the war an abolition war.

But now behold the change: the judgment of the present hour is, that taking him for all in all, measuring the tremendous magnitude of the work before him, considering the necessary means to ends, and surveying the end from the beginning, infinite wisdom has seldom sent any man into the world better fitted for his mission than Abraham Lincoln. His birth, his training, and his natural endowments, both mental and physical, were strongly in his favor. Born and reared among the lowly, a stranger to wealth and luxury, compelled to grapple single-handed with the flintiest hardships of life, from tender youth to sturdy manhood, he grew strong in the manly and heroic qualities demanded by the great mission to which he was called by the votes of his countrymen. The hard condition of his early life, which would have depressed and broken down weaker men, only gave greater life, vigor, and buoyancy to the heroic spirit of Abraham Lincoln. He was ready for any kind and any quality of work. What other young men dreaded in the shape of toil, he took hold of with the utmost cheerfulness.

“A spade, a rake, a hoe,
A pick-axe, or a bill;
A hook to reap, a scythe to mow,
A flail, or what you will.”

All day long he could split heavy rails in the woods, and half the night long he could study his English Grammar by the uncertain flare and glare of the light made by a pine-knot. He was at home in the land with his axe, with his maul, with his gluts, and his wedges; and he was equally at home on water, with his oars, with his poles, with his planks, and with his boat-hooks. And whether in his flat-boat on the Mississippi River, or at the fireside of his frontier cabin, he was a man of work. A son of toil himself, he was linked in brotherly sympathy with the sons of toil in every loyal part of the Republic. This very fact gave him tremendous power with the American people, and materially contributed not only to selecting him to the Presidency, but in sustaining his administration of the Government.

Upon his inauguration as President of the United States, an office, even when assumed under the most favorable condition, fitted to tax and strain the largest abilities, Abraham Lincoln was met by a tremendous crisis. He was called upon not merely to administer the Government, but to decide, in the face of terrible odds, the fate of the Republic.

A formidable rebellion rose in his path before him; the Union was already practically dissolved; his country was torn and rent asunder at the center. Hostile armies were already organized against the Republic, armed with the munitions of war which the Republic had provided for its own defense. The tremendous question for him to decide was whether his country should survive the crisis and flourish, or be dismembered and perish. His predecessor in office had already decided the question in favor of national dismemberment, by denying to it the right of self-defense and self-preservation—a right which belongs to the meanest insect.

Happily for the country, happily for you and for me, the judgment of James Buchanan, the patrician, was not the judgment of Abraham Lincoln, the plebeian. He brought his strong common sense, sharpened in the school of adversity, to bear upon the question. He did not hesitate, he did not doubt, he did not falter; but at once resolved that at whatever peril, at whatever cost, the union of the States should be preserved. A patriot himself, his faith was strong and unwavering in the patriotism of his countrymen. Timid men said before Mr. Lincoln's inauguration, that we have seen the last President of the United States. A voice in influential quarters said, "Let the Union slide." Some said that a Union maintained by the sword was worthless. Others said a rebellion of 8,000,000 cannot be suppressed; but in the midst of all this tumult and timidity, and against all this, Abraham Lincoln was clear in his duty, and had an oath in heaven. He calmly and bravely heard the voice of doubt and fear all around him; but he had an oath in heaven, and there was not power enough on earth to make this honest boatman, backwoodsman, and broad-handed splitter of rails evade or violate that sacred oath. He had not been schooled in the ethics of slavery; his plain life had favored his love of truth. He had not been taught that treason and perjury were the proof of honor and honesty. His moral training was against his saying one thing when he meant another. The trust that Abraham Lincoln had in himself and in the people was surprising and grand, but it was also enlightened and well founded. He knew the American people better than they knew themselves, and his truth was based upon this knowledge.

Fellow-citizens, the fourteenth day of April, 1865, of which this is the eleventh anniversary, is now and will ever remain a memorable day in the annals of this Republic. It was on the evening of this day, while a fierce and sanguinary rebellion was in the last stages of its desolating power; while its armies were broken and scattered before the invincible armies of Grant and Sherman; while a great nation, torn and rent by war, was already beginning to raise to the skies loud anthems of joy at the dawn of peace, it was startled, amazed, and overwhelmed by the crowning crime of slavery—the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. It was a new crime, a pure act of malice. No purpose of the rebellion was to be served by it. It was the simple gratification of a hell-black spirit of revenge. But it has done good after all. It has filled the country with a deeper abhorrence of slavery and a deeper love for the great liberator.

Had Abraham Lincoln died from any of the numerous ills to which flesh is heir; had he reached that good old age of which his vigorous constitution and his temperate habits gave promise; had he been permitted to see the end of his great work; had the solemn curtain of death come down but

gradually—we should still have been smitten with a heavy grief, and treasured his name lovingly. But dying as he did die, by the red hand of violence, killed, assassinated, taken off without warning, not because of personal hate—for no man who knew Abraham Lincoln could hate him—but because of his fidelity to union and liberty, he is doubly dear to us, and his memory will be precious forever.

Fellow-citizens, I end, as I began, with congratulations. We have done a good work for our race today. In doing honor to the memory of our friend and liberator, we have been doing highest honors to ourselves and those who come after us; we have been fastening ourselves to a name and fame imperishable and immortal; we have also been defending ourselves from a blighting scandal. When now it shall be said that the colored man is soulless, that he has no appreciation of benefits or benefactors; when the foul reproach of ingratitude is hurled at us, and it is attempted to scourge us beyond the range of human brotherhood, we may calmly point to the monument we have this day erected to the memory of Abraham Lincoln.

The Emancipation Group

JOHN GREENLEAF WHITTIER

John Greenleaf Whittier (1807–92) was a prominent poet and advocate for the abolitionist cause. His poems first appeared in the Newburyport Free Press, edited by the prominent abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison (1805–79). Whittier wrote this poem for the December 9, 1879 unveiling of a duplicate of the Emancipation Group Memorial (also commonly known as the Emancipation Memorial or the Freedman’s Memorial/Monument) in Park Square, Boston. The Memorial, originally designed and sculpted by Thomas Ball, depicts a freed slave, his shackles newly broken, kneeling under Abraham Lincoln’s protective hand.

In the first stanza, how can a hand “unchain[] a race?” What images does the poet use to describe Lincoln? What, according to Whittier, moved Lincoln to emancipate the slaves (stanzas 3 and 4)? Who or what inspired him to say “Let man be free!” What is Lincoln’s sacrifice, and why is it necessary, according to the poet (stanzas 5 and 6)? What is the statue’s message, and how is Lincoln’s sacrifice related (stanza 7)? Do you agree with the poet’s assertion “That truth is stronger than a lie, / And righteousness than wrong”?

Amidst thy sacred effigies
Of old renown give place,
O city, Freedom-loved! to his
Whose hand unchained a race.

Take the worn frame, that rested not
Save in a martyr’s grave;
The care-lined face, that none forgot,
Bent to the kneeling slave.

Let man be free! The mighty word
He spake was not his own;
An impulse from the Highest stirred
These chiselled lips alone.

The cloudy sign, the fiery guide,
Along his pathway ran,

And Nature, through his voice, denied
The ownership of man.

We rest in peace where these sad eyes
Saw peril, strife, and pain;
His was the nation’s sacrifice,
And ours the priceless gain.

O symbol of God’s will on earth
As it is done above!
Bear witness to the cost and worth
Of justice and of love.

Stand in thy place and testify
To coming ages long,
That truth is stronger than a lie,
And righteousness than wrong.

Lincoln

PAUL LAURENCE DUNBAR

One of the first African American writers to come to prominence, poet Paul Laurence Dunbar (1872–1906) was the son of two escaped slaves from Kentucky. His father escaped from bondage and served in the 55th Massachusetts Infantry Regiment and the 5th Massachusetts Colored Cavalry Regiment during the Civil War. In 1913, Dunbar first published this tribute to Abraham Lincoln.

What is the “mighty wound” suffered by the nation (lines 1 through 4)? What event compels Lincoln to come forward (lines 5 to 9)? Why does Dunbar compare Lincoln to a poet, a “Mighty Homer of the lyre of war?” For what qualities and deeds does Dunbar celebrate Lincoln?

Hurt was the nation with a mighty wound,
And all her ways were filled with clam'rous sound.
Wailed loud the South with unremitting grief,
And wept the North that could not find relief.
Then madness joined its harshest tone to strife:
A minor note swelled in the song of life.
'Till, stirring with the love that filled his breast,
But still, unflinching at the right's behest,
Grave Lincoln came, strong handed, from afar,
The mighty Homer of the lyre of war.
'Twas he who bade the raging tempest cease,
Wrenched from his harp the harmony of peace,
Muted the strings, that made the discord,—Wrong,
And gave his spirit up in thund'rous song.
Oh mighty Master of the mighty lyre,
Earth heard and trembled at thy strains of fire:
Earth learned of thee what Heav'n already knew,
And wrote thee down among her treasured few.

Lincoln Monument: Washington

LANGSTON HUGHES

Langston Hughes (1902–67), widely known as a leader of the 1920s Harlem Renaissance, brought the African American struggle for civil rights into the public sphere with his novels, plays, and poems. This poem, published in 1926, pays tribute to Lincoln at a time when Washington, DC was still a segregated city.

Why does the poet call Lincoln “Old Abe,” and why is he described as “quiet”? What is the “voice” the poet hears “Against the / Timeless walls / Of time,” and what do you think this voice says? What is the role of time in this poem? Why does Hughes (over-)emphasize the years during which the Memorial has been standing? How is the voice heard against the wall of the Memorial “timeless”?

Let’s go see Old Abe
Sitting in the marble and the moonlight,
Sitting lonely in the marble and the moonlight,
Quiet for ten thousand centuries, old Abe.
Quiet for a million, million years.

Quiet—

And yet a voice forever
Against the
Timeless walls
Of time—
Old Abe.

Emancipation Proclamation Centennial Address

MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929–68) was a pastor, activist, and leader of the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. On September 12, 1962, King gave the following remarks—an early forerunner of his famous “I Have a Dream” speech—as part of the New York Civil War Centennial Commission’s Emancipation Proclamation Observance in New York City.

What is the meaning of the Declaration of Independence, according to King? What is the relationship of the Emancipation Proclamation to the Declaration? What did it achieve? What were Lincoln’s motivations in issuing the Proclamation, according to King? Why does King think that Americans should commemorate the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation in spite of the ongoing injustice against African Americans? How does King think we should we commemorate it? Is his recommendation still timely?

Listen to Dr. King deliver the speech at www.youtube.com/watch?v=k7t35qDYHgc.

If our nation had done nothing more in its whole history than to create just two documents, its contribution to civilization would be imperishable. The first of these documents is the Declaration of Independence and the other is that which we are here to honor tonight, the Emancipation Proclamation. All tyrants, past, present and future, are powerless to bury the truths in these declarations, no matter how extensive their legions, how vast their power and how malignant their evil.

The Declaration of Independence proclaimed to a world, organized politically and spiritually around the concept of the inequality of man, that the dignity of human personality was inherent in man as a living being. The Emancipation Proclamation was the offspring of the Declaration of Independence. It was a constructive use of the force of law to uproot a social order which sought to separate liberty from a segment of humanity.

Our pride and progress could be unqualified if the story might end here. But history reveals that America has been a schizophrenic personality where these two documents are concerned. On the one hand she has proudly professed the basic principles inherent in both documents. On the other hand she has sadly practiced the antithesis of these principles.

If we look at our history with honesty and clarity we will be forced to admit that our Federal form of government has been, from the day of its birth, weakened in its integrity, confused and confounded in its direction, by the unresolved race question. We seldom take note or give adequate significance to the fact that Thomas Jefferson’s text of the Declaration of Independence was revised by the Continental Congress to eliminate a justifiable attack on King George for encouraging slave trade. Jefferson knew that such compromises with principle struck at the heart of the nation’s security and integrity. In 1820, six years before his death, he wrote these melancholy words:

“But this momentous question (slavery), like a fire bell in the night awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. I regret that I am now to die in the belief that the useless sacrifice of themselves by the generation of 1776 to acquire self-government and happiness to their country is to be thrown away, and my only consolation is to be that I live not to weep over it.”

The somber picture (of the condition of the American Negro today) may induce the sober thought that there is nothing to commemorate about the centennial of the Emancipation Proclamation. But tragic disappointments and undeserved defeats do not put an end to life, nor do they wipe out the positive, however submerged it may have become beneath floods of negative experience.

The Emancipation Proclamation had four enduring results. First, it gave force to the executive power to change conditions in the national interest on a broad and far-reaching scale. Second, it dealt a devastating blow to the system of slaveholding and an economy built upon it, which had been muscular enough to engage in warfare on the Federal government. Third, it enabled the Negro to play a significant role in his own liberation with the ability to organize and to struggle, with less of the bestial retaliation his slave status had permitted to his masters. Fourth, it resurrected and restated the principle of equality upon which the founding of the nation rested.

When Abraham Lincoln signed the Emancipation Proclamation it was not the act of an opportunistic politician issuing a hollow pronouncement to placate a pressure group.

Our truly great presidents were tortured deep in their hearts by the race question. Jefferson with keen perception saw that the festering sore of slavery debilitated white masters as well as the Negro. He feared for the future of white children who were taught a false supremacy. His concern can be summed up in one quotation, “I tremble for my country when I reflect that God is just.”

Lincoln’s torments are well known, his vacillations were facts. In the seething cauldron of ’62 and ’63 Lincoln was called the “Baboon President” in the North, and “coward”, “assassin” and “savage” in the South. Yet he searched his way to the conclusions embodied in these words, “In giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free, honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve.” On this moral foundation he personally prepared the first draft of the Emancipation Proclamation, and to emphasize the decisiveness of his course he called his cabinet together and declared he was not seeking their advice as to its wisdom but only suggestions on subject matter. Lincoln achieved immortality because he issued the Emancipation Proclamation. His hesitation had not stayed his hand when historic necessity charted but one course. No President can be great, or even fit for office, if he attempts to accommodate to injustice to maintain his political balance.

The Emancipation Proclamation shattered in one blow the slave system, undermining the foundations of the economy of the rebellious South; and guaranteed that no slave-holding class, if permitted to exist in defeat, could prepare a new and deadlier war after resuscitation.

The Proclamation opened the door to self-liberation by the Negro upon which he immediately acted by deserting the plantations in the South and joining the Union armies in the North. Henry

Wadsworth Longfellow, seeing a regiment of Negroes march through Beacon Street in Boston, wrote in his diary, "An imposing sight, with something wild and strange about it, like a dream. At last the North consents to let the Negro fight for freedom." Beyond the war years the grim and tortured struggle of Negroes to win their own freedom is an epic of battle against frightful odds. If we have failed to do enough, it was not the will for freedom that was weak, but the forces against us which were too strong.

We have spelled out a balance sheet of the Emancipation Proclamation, its contributions and its deficiencies which our lack of zeal permitted to find expression. There is but one way to commemorate the Emancipation Proclamation. That is to make its declarations of freedom real; to reach back to the origins of our nation when our message of equality electrified an unfree world, and reaffirm democracy by deeds as bold and daring as the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation.



Man of the People



A Lincoln Memorial

MARK TWAIN

On January 13, 1907, American novelist Mark Twain (1835–1910) delivered these short remarks at a fundraiser for the Lincoln Birthplace Farm in Kentucky. In building a national memorial to Lincoln, the Lincoln Farm Association did not want to rely on a few wealthy donors to raise money for the park. Instead, it called upon any willing American to help fund the park, so long as each individual did not give less than twenty-five cents or more than twenty-five dollars.

Why is it important that Lincoln was born in a border state? What knowledge or insights did it afford him so that he could save the Union? Why couldn't a "New England Brahmin" or "cotton planter" have done the same thing? What significance does Lincoln's birthplace have for Americans, according to Twain? Why is it "worth saving"?

There is a natural human instinct that is gratified by the sight of anything hallowed by association with a great man or with great deeds. So people make pilgrimages to the town whose streets were once trodden by Shakespeare, and Hartford guarded her Charter Oak for centuries because it had once had a hole in it that helped to save the liberties of a Colony.

But it was no accident that planted Lincoln on a Kentucky farm, half way between the lakes and the Gulf. The association there had substance in it. Lincoln belonged just where he was put. If the Union was to be saved, it had to be a man of such an origin that should save it. No wintry New England Brahmin could have done it, or any torrid cotton planter, regarding the distant Yankee as a species of obnoxious foreigner.

It needed a man of the border, where civil war meant the grapple of brother and brother and disunion a raw and gaping wound. It needed one who knew slavery not from books only, but as a living thing, knew the good that was mixed with its evil, and knew the evil not merely as it affected the negroes, but in its hardly less baneful influence upon the poor whites. It needed one who knew how human all the parties to the quarrel were, how much alike they were at bottom, who saw them all reflected in himself, and felt their dissensions like the tearing apart of his own soul. When the war came Georgia sent an army in gray and Massachusetts an army in blue, but Kentucky raised armies for both sides. And this man, sprung from Southern poor whites, born on a Kentucky farm and transplanted to an Illinois village, this man, in whose heart knowledge and charity had left no room for malice, was marked by Providence as the one to "bind up the Nation's wounds." His birthplace is worth saving.

Lincoln, the Man of the People

EDWIN MARKHAM

This poem was selected from 250 submissions to be read at the dedication ceremony of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC on Memorial Day, 1922. Its author, Oregon poet Edwin Markham (1852–1940), was already internationally famous as the “Laureate of Labor” for his advocacy of the working class. His selection may have owed something to the controversy over the Memorial’s design, which critics protested as undemocratic for placing Lincoln in a Greek temple and thus raising the man of the people above the people.

How does the poet describe Lincoln—his origins, his nature, his deeds? Do you see in Markham’s poem a similar tension between Lincoln as common man and Lincoln as great man? How does Markham handle this tension? What does this tension imply for leadership in America?

When the Norn Mother saw the Whirlwind Hour
Greatening and darkening as it hurried on,
She left the Heaven of Heroes and came down
To make a man to meet the mortal need.
She took the tried clay of the common road—
Clay warm yet with the genial heat of Earth,
Dashed through it all a strain of prophecy;
Tempered the heap with thrill of human tears;
Then mixed a laughter with the serious stuff.
Into the shape she breathed a flame to light
That tender, tragic, ever-changing face.
Here was a man to hold against the world,
A man to match the mountains and the sea.

The color of the ground was in him, the red earth;
The smack and tang of elemental things;
The rectitude and patience of the cliff;
The good-will of the rain that loves all leaves;
The friendly welcome of the wayside well;
The courage of the bird that dares the sea;
The gladness of the wind that shakes the corn;
The pity of the snow that hides all scars;
The secrecy of streams that make their way
Beneath the mountain to the rifted rock;
The tolerance and equity of light
That gives as freely to the shrinking flower
As to the great oak flaring to the wind—
To the grave’s low hill as to the Matterhorn
That shoulders out the sky. Sprung from the West,
He drank the valorous youth of a new world.
The strength of virgin forests braced his mind,

The hush of spacious prairies stilled his soul.
His words were oaks in acorns; and his thoughts
Were roots that firmly gripped the granite truth.

Up from log cabin to the Capitol,
One fire was on his spirit, one resolve—
To send the keen ax to the root of wrong,
Clearing a free way for the feet of God,
The eyes of conscience testing every stroke,
To make his deed the measure of a man.
He built the rail-pile as he built the State,
Pouring his splendid strength through every blow:
The grip that swung the ax in Illinois
Was on the pen that set a people free.

So came the Captain with the mighty heart;
And when the judgment thunders split the house,
Wrenching the rafters from their ancient rest,
He held the ridgepole up, and spiked again
The rafters of the Home. He held his place—
Held the long purpose like a growing tree—
Held on through blame and faltered not at praise.
And when he fell in whirlwind, he went down
As when a lordly cedar, green with boughs,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills,
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky.

from *The People, Yes*

CARL SANDBURG

*The Great Depression of the 1930s and 1940s crippled the global economy, and made for one of the most harrowing periods in American history. Carl Sandburg (1878–1967), America’s beloved Midwestern poet, was inspired to write a book-length poem titled *The People, Yes* (1936) as an ode to those hardest hit by unemployment and poverty. In this excerpt from Sandburg’s work, he calls upon the memory of Lincoln, about whom he had earlier written a four-volume Pulitzer Prize-winning biography. This work, he later said, was “my footnote to the last words of the Gettysburg Address.”*

How is Lincoln a “mystery”? Look carefully at the list of the things to which Lincoln says “yes”—what are they, and do they fit together? What about the things to which he says, “no”—what are they, and do they fit together? How is Lincoln like a poet? What does it mean to say “yes” (or “no”)? What is the relation between the last two lines of Sandburg’s poem and the rest of it?

Lincoln?

He was a mystery in smoke and flags
Saying yes to the smoke, yes to the flags,
Yes to the paradoxes of democracy,
Yes to the hopes of government
Of the people by the people for the people,
No to debauchery of the public mind,
No to personal malice nursed and fed,
Yes to the Constitution when a help,
No to the Constitution when a hindrance
Yes to man as a struggler amid illusions,
Each man fated to answer for himself:
Which of the faiths and illusions of mankind
Must I choose for my own sustaining light
To bring me beyond the present wilderness?

Lincoln? Was he a poet?

And did he write verses?

“I have not willingly planted a thorn
in any man’s bosom.”

I shall do nothing through malice: what
I deal with is too vast for malice.”

Death was in the air.
So was birth.

Sonnet

ANONYMOUS

This sonnet was published anonymously in The New York Herald in 1937 during the dark days of the Great Depression. It opens in imitation of William Wordsworth's poem, "London 1802," which begins, "Milton! Thou shouldst be living at this hour: England hath need of thee." Why does the poet call upon Lincoln? Why is he—and not some other American hero like Washington—needed at this particular hour? What is the "Spirit of Lincoln," and how can the poem's readers invoke that spirit? Is that same spirit needed today?

Lincoln, thou shouldst be living at this hour:
Son of the soil, brother of poverty
Those hard sharers of great destiny;
Exemplar of humility and power,
Walking alone to meet thy waiting fate
Whose shadow was reflected on thy brow,
Lincoln, thy people invoke thy spirit now—
Preserve, protect, defend our sovereign state!
Lover of justice and the common good,
Despiser of lies, from thy yonder solitude
Consider the land of thine and freedom's birth—
Cry out: It shall not perish from the earth!
Engrave upon our hearts that holy vow.
Spirit of Lincoln, thy country needs thee now.

The Master

EDWIN ARLINGTON ROBINSON

Edwin Arlington Robinson's (1869–1935) 1909 tribute to Abraham Lincoln, "The Master," takes up the theme of national memory. In the poem, Robinson, a lover of irony, recalls the ridicule Lincoln once endured, in light of Americans' newfound appreciation for their sixteenth president after his successful prosecution of the Civil War and tragic assassination.

Who is speaking in the poem? How does the speaker(s) describe Lincoln? What kind of leader was he? In what sense is Lincoln "The Master"? Why did "we" initially "sneer" at and "revile" him? What did "we" learn about Lincoln that caused us to change our opinion of him? Might Lincoln's own qualities have contributed to our misunderstanding of him? If yes, how so? Do "we" have a clearer understanding of Lincoln than before? With the poem's help, do you?

A flying word from here and there
Had sown the name at which we sneered,
But soon the name was everywhere,
To be reviled and then revered:
A presence to be loved and feared,
We cannot hide it, or deny
That we, the gentlemen who jeered,
May be forgotten by and by.

He came when days were perilous
And hearts of men were sore beguiled;
And having made his note of us,
He pondered and was reconciled.
Was ever master yet so mild
As he, and so untamable?
We doubted, even when he smiled,
Not knowing what he knew so well.

He knew that undeceiving fate
Would shame us whom he served unsought;
He knew that he must wince and wait—
The jest of those for whom he fought;
He knew devoutly what he thought
Of us and of our ridicule;
He knew that we must all be taught
Like little children in a school.

We gave a glamour to the task
That he encountered and saw through,
But little of us did he ask,

And little did we ever do.
And what appears if we review
The season when we railed and chaffed?
It is the face of one who knew
That we were learning while we laughed.

The face that in our vision feels
Again the venom that we flung,
Transfigured to the world reveals
The vigilance to which we clung.
Shrewd, hallowed, harassed, and among
The mysteries that are untold,
The face we see was never young
Nor could it wholly have been old.

For he, to whom we had applied
Our shopman's test of age and worth,
Was elemental when he died,
As he was ancient at his birth:
The saddest among kings of earth,
Bowed with a galling crown, this man
Met rancor with a cryptic mirth,
Laconic—and Olympian.

The love, the grandeur, and the fame
Are bounded by the world alone;
The calm, the smouldering, and the flame
Of awful patience were his own:
With him they are forever flown
Past all our fond self-shadowings,
Wherewith we cumber the Unknown
As with inept, Icarian wings.

For we were not as other men:
'Twas ours to soar and his to see;
But we are coming down again,
And we shall come down pleasantly;
Nor shall we longer disagree
On what it is to be sublime,
But flourish in our perigee
And have one Titan at a time.



Savior of the Union



The Answer

ZACHARY GOLD

Zachary Gold (1918–53) was an American screenwriter and short story writer. Born in Brooklyn and educated at the University of Wisconsin, he wrote a considerable number of notable short stories, variously published in the Saturday Evening Post, Collier’s, and Reader’s Digest.

This story, originally published by Collier’s in 1945, imagines the events leading to Abraham Lincoln’s delivery of the Gettysburg Address on November 19, 1863 through the viewpoint of a (fictional) black servant to David Wills (1831–94), Lincoln’s host in Gettysburg. What is the meaning of the title? What question(s) are asked in the story, whether explicitly or implicitly, and how are they answered? How good a response is Lincoln’s speech to the loss of Marcus’ son, Jeff, in battle—and by extension, to the terrible carnage of the Civil War? What is the significance of the math problem Marcus discovers?

The old Negro meant to come up when the room was empty. He thought they must be gone by now but coming up the stairs he heard voices and he knew that they were still there. It was too late then. Mr. Wills was standing in the doorway of the room and he saw him.

“You can come in now, Marcus,” he said. “We’ll be leaving in a minute.”

The tall man, the tallest man Marcus had ever seen, was sitting at the desk writing, and he looked up when Marcus came in and smiled.

It didn’t seem right somehow to smile back, so Marcus did nothing, moving to a corner of the room, holding his broom and dustpan, waiting, standing quietly as a shadow. Once he wondered if he dared to say anything about Jeff, but he heard the pen scratch steadily on without a break. Still, someday he’d tell Jeff that he had thought about it.

He had Jeff’s letter in the inside pocket of his jacket and he felt for it. There was something even in the feel of the paper that brought the boy back real and shining and alive to his senses. Jeff never wrote much and it hardly mattered to Marcus that he couldn’t read the words; it was the letter itself in the stiff envelope that counted. It was getting it and knowing that Jeff was alive and well in war. That was the main thing.

He heard Mr. Wills say: “All right, Marcus.”

He watched them go but he waited until the tall man descended the steps before he moved. There wasn’t much to clean. He swept the room, straightened the scarves on the furniture and emptied a small litter of scraps from the wastebasket. Through the windows of the room he could see movement on the roads that snaked out of town to the hills.

Marcus remembered then that he had to hurry.

Mr. Wills had told him that he might take the time off if he wanted to come. The whole town would be there and people had come in from miles away—from Philadelphia, some said—and it wasn't something a man should miss. It was a big day and Marcus meant to be there.

Standing in the empty room, he took one final look around. Had he forgotten anything?

Sure enough, he had forgotten to clear off the desk. There was a half sheet of paper lying on the face of the desk. There were some numbers scribbled on it in a column. He could read numbers and he glanced down idly at the sheet:

1863 - 1776 = 87

And then because he was eager to be gone, he swept it from the desk and stuffed it in his pocket as he hurried out.

There was a hint of winter outdoors, although there was no snow yet. Hurrying through the streets of the town, Marcus wondered whether he had time to stop off to get Jeff's letter read. Old Glidden, the Negro schoolteacher, was always glad to read Jeff's letters to him, and it wouldn't take long. Besides, it was a long way out, and a stop would be a warm break in the cold walk.

Old Glidden was brewing coffee when he came in. He was old—older than Marcus—older than most men get to be, but he was sharp and quick and he looked up as Marcus came in.

“Got a letter from Jeff?” he said.

“Yes,” Marcus said.

“How is he?”

“The letter feels good,” Marcus said. “The letter feels like Jeff is all right.”

Old Glidden poured two cups of coffee, and then Marcus took the letter out of his pocket. He passed it to Old Glidden, and while he was opening the letter, Marcus bent eagerly to the coffee and sipped it in, feeling the welcome heat go through him.

“Marcus.” Old Glidden said.

Marcus looked up.

“This letter isn't from Jeff.”

“Not from Jeff. Who'd be writing to me?”

For a moment Old Glidden didn't answer and then he said quickly and baldly, “The letter says Jeff is dead.”

Marcus felt the cup shake in his hand and he sat there looking at Old Glidden, suddenly smelling the warm, pungent vapor of the coffee all around him, sharp as the odor of early clover.

"This is from the captain," Old Glidden was saying, softly now. "He says he wanted to write to tell you how Jeff died. He says Jeff was one of the best men he ever knew and he was a good and brave soldier. He says—"

"Jeff?" Marcus said.

He was reaching for the letter, and Old Glidden gave it to him, saying nothing.

He held it in his hands for a while and then, as he always did after Old Glidden finished with one of the letters, he put it carefully back into his pocket.

He got up.

Old Glidden said anxiously: "Where are you going, Marcus?"

"I told Mr. Wills I'd come," he said. "I told him I'd be there."

"Put on your coat," Old Glidden said.

Marcus came back for his coat. Old Glidden twisted the red wool scarf around his neck. He went to the door with Marcus.

"You all right, Marcus?"

And then at the door, looking out at the bare hills sharp as iron humps against the November sky, Marcus said, "Why Jeff?"

It was because he heard the sound of a crowd that he knew he was there. He was suddenly aware of the people around him and he looked up. There were more than he had expected and he knew that he would never find Mr. Wills in a crowd like this. Well, it didn't matter. Jeff was dead: the son who was like the morning, full of hope and strength and the promise of laughter.

Marcus reached once more for the letter and drew it out. There was a sheet of paper caught under the flap of the envelope. He stared at it and then remembered that it was the sheet of paper he had swept off the desk earlier that morning.

He opened it now, holding it against the envelope, puzzling over the sum:

1863 - 1776 = 87

Eighty-seven? he thought dully; eighty-seven?

He repeated the number to himself but the meaning, whatever it was, escaped him. He needed Jeff. Jeff was always the one to tell him things, but Jeff was gone now, and who was there to answer the questions that beat in waves of bitter grief and pain against the breached fortress of his heart?

Why was he dead? Why Jeff? What was there worth his young body and the curiosity of his mind and the strong sound of his voice?

He remembered the man who had written the sum and he looked toward the platform at one end of the field where the tall man, the tallest man Marcus had ever seen, was rising now, bareheaded in the chill November air.

Marcus leaned forward then, filled with a sudden sense of urgency, listening angrily, wanting an answer, listening for Jeff, and for all the young everywhere who give their bodies and their hopes and their lives upon bare and death-strangled fields.

And there in the low hills outside Gettysburg town that lay quiet now under the cold autumn sun, the tall man who had scribbled the odd sum on a scrap of paper rose to speak:

“Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.”

The Perfect Tribute

MARY RAYMOND SHIPMAN

Alabama-born writer Mary Raymond Shipman Andrews (1860–1936) is best known for this short story, which appeared in Collier’s in July 1906. It was adapted for film twice and sold 600,000 copies as a standalone volume. Although less well known today, Shipman’s fiction is largely responsible for the myth that Lincoln hastily dashed off the Gettysburg Address on the train on the way to Pennsylvania.

How does Shipman contrast Lincoln to Edward Everett (1794–1865), the noted orator and former Senator who delivered the principal speech at Gettysburg, just before Lincoln’s? Why, according to Shipman, does Lincoln initially believe his speech to be a “failure”? What is the reaction of the audience to Everett’s speech? How does it differ from the response to Lincoln’s address? What is “the perfect tribute” of the title? Why might silence be a fitting response to Lincoln’s speech? What do you make of the anecdote about the dying Confederate soldier at the end of the story? In particular, what is the significance of his praise of the address and of the handshake at the end of the story? How are you moved by this story, and why?

On the morning of November 18, 1863, a special train drew out from Washington, carrying a distinguished company. The presence with them of the Marine Band from the Navy Yard spoke a public occasion to come, and among the travellers there were those who might be gathered only for an occasion of importance. There were judges of the Supreme Court of the United States; there were heads of departments; the general-in-chief of the army and his staff; members of the cabinet. In their midst, as they stood about the car before settling for the journey, towered a man sad, preoccupied, unassuming; a man awkward and ill-dressed; a man, as he leaned slouchingly against the wall, of no grace of look or manner, in whose haggard face seemed to be the suffering of the sins of the world. Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, journeyed with his party to assist at the consecration, the next day, of the national cemetery at Gettysburg. The quiet November landscape slipped past the rattling train, and the President’s deep-set eyes stared out at it gravely, a bit listlessly. From time to time he talked with those who were about him; from time to time there were flashes of that quaint wit which is linked, as his greatness, with his name, but his mind was to-day dispirited, unhopeful. The weight on his shoulders seemed pressing more heavily than he had courage to press back against it, the responsibility of one almost a dictator in a wide, war-torn country came near to crushing, at times, the mere human soul and body. There was, moreover, a speech to be made to-morrow to thousands who would expect their President to say something to them worth the listening of a people who were making history; something brilliant, eloquent, strong. The melancholy gaze glittered with a grim smile. He—Abraham Lincoln—the lad bred in a cabin, tutored in rough schools here and there, fighting for, snatching at crumbs of learning that fell from rich tables, struggling to a hard knowledge which well knew its own limitations—it was he of whom this was expected. He glanced across the car. Edward Everett sat there, the orator of the following day, the finished gentleman, the careful student, the heir of traditions of learning and breeding, of scholarly instincts and resources. The self-made President gazed at him wistfully. From him the people might expect and would get a balanced and polished oration. For that end he had been born, and inheritance and opportunity and inclination had worked together for that end’s

perfection. While Lincoln had wrested from a scanty schooling a command of English clear and forcible always, but, he feared, rough-hewn, lacking, he feared, in finish and in breadth—of what use was it for such a one to try to fashion a speech fit to take a place by the side of Everett’s silver sentences? He sighed. Yet the people had a right to the best he could give, and he would give them his best; at least he could see to it that the words were real and were short; at least he would not, so, exhaust their patience. And the work might as well be done now in the leisure of the journey. He put a hand, big, powerful, labor-knotted, into first one sagging pocket and then another, in search of a pencil, and drew out one broken across the end. He glanced about inquiringly—there was nothing to write upon. Across the car the Secretary of State had just opened a package of books and their wrapping of brown paper lay on the floor, torn carelessly in a zigzag. The President stretched a long arm.

“Mr. Seward, may I have this to do a little writing?” he asked, and the Secretary protested, insisting on finding better material.

But Lincoln, with few words, had his way, and soon the untidy stump of a pencil was at work and the great head, the deep-lined face, bent over Seward’s bit of brown paper, the whole man absorbed in his task.

Earnestly, with that “capacity for taking infinite pains” which has been defined as genius, he labored as the hours flew, building together close-fitted word on word, sentence on sentence. As the sculptor must dream the statue prisoned in the marble, as the artist must dream the picture to come from the brilliant unmeaning of his palette, as the musician dreams a song, so he who writes must have a vision of his finished work before he touches, to begin it, a medium more elastic, more vivid, more powerful than any other—words—prismatic bits of humanity, old as the Pharaohs, new as the Arabs of the street, broken, sparkling, alive, from the age-long life of the race. Abraham Lincoln, with the clear thought in his mind of what he would say, found the sentences that came to him colorless, wooden. A wonder flashed over him once or twice of Everett’s skill with these symbols which, it seemed to him, were to the Bostonian a key-board facile to make music, to Lincoln tools to do his labor. He put the idea aside, for it hindered him. As he found the sword fitted to his hand he must fight with it; it might be that he, as well as Everett, could say that which should go straight from him to his people, to the nation who struggled at his back towards a goal. At least each syllable he said should be chiseled from the rock of his sincerity. So he cut here and there an adjective, here and there a phrase, baring the heart of his thought, leaving no ribbon or flower of rhetoric to flutter in the eyes of those with whom he would be utterly honest. And when he had done he read the speech and dropped it from his hand to the floor and stared again from the window. It was the best he could do, and it was a failure. So, with the pang of the workman who believes his work done wrong, he lifted and folded the torn bit of paper and put it in his pocket, and put aside the thought of it, as of a bad thing which he might not better, and turned and talked cheerfully with his friends.

At eleven o’clock on the morning of the day following, on November 19, 1863, a vast, silent multitude billowed, like waves of the sea, over what had been not long before the battle-field of Gettysburg. There were wounded soldiers there who had beaten their way four months before through a singing fire across these quiet fields, who had seen the men die who were buried here; there were troops, grave and responsible, who must soon go again into battle; there were the rank

and file of an everyday American gathering in surging thousands; and above them all, on the open-air platform, there were the leaders of the land, the pilots who to-day lifted a hand from the wheel of the ship of state to salute the memory of those gone down in the storm. Most of the men in that group of honor are now passed over to the majority, but their names are not dead in American history—great ghosts who walk still in the annals of their country, their flesh-and-blood faces were turned attentively that bright, still November afternoon towards the orator of the day, whose voice held the audience.

For two hours Everett spoke and the throng listened untired, fascinated by the dignity of his high-bred look and manner almost as much, perhaps, as by the speech which has taken a place in literature. As he had been expected to speak he spoke, of the great battle, of the causes of the war, of the results to come after. It was an oration which missed no shade of expression, no reach of grasp. Yet there were those in the multitude, sympathetic to a unit as it was with the Northern cause, who grew restless when this man who had been crowned with so thick a laurel wreath by Americans spoke of Americans as rebels, of a cause for which honest Americans were giving their lives as a crime. The days were war days, and men's passions were inflamed, yet there were men who listened to Edward Everett who believed that his great speech would have been greater unenforced with bitterness.

As the clear, cultivated voice fell into silence, the mass of people burst into a long storm of applause, for they knew that they had heard an oration which was an event. They clapped and cheered him again and again and again, as good citizens acclaim a man worthy of honor whom they have delighted to honor. At last, as the ex-Governor of Massachusetts, the ex-ambassador to England, the ex-Secretary of State, the ex-Senator of the United States—handsome, distinguished, graceful, sure of voice and of movement—took his seat, a tall, gaunt figure detached itself from the group on the platform and slouched slowly across the open space and stood facing the audience. A stir and a whisper brushed over the field of humanity, as if a breeze had rippled a monstrous bed of poppies. This was the President. A quivering silence settled down and every eye was wide to watch this strange, disappointing appearance, every ear alert to catch the first sound of his voice. Suddenly the voice came, in a queer, squeaking falsetto. The effect on the audience was irrepressible, ghastly. After Everett's deep tones, after the strain of expectancy, this extraordinary, gaunt apparition, this high, thin sound from the huge body, were too much for the American crowd's sense of humor, always stronger than its sense of reverence. A suppressed yet unmistakable titter caught the throng, ran through it, and was gone. Yet no one who knew the President's face could doubt that he had heard it and had understood. Calmly enough, after a pause almost too slight to be recognized, he went on, and in a dozen words his tones had gathered volume, he had come to his power and dignity. There was no smile now on any face of those who listened. People stopped breathing rather, as if they feared to miss an inflection. A loose-hung figure, six feet four inches high, he towered above them, conscious of and quietly ignoring the bad first impression, unconscious of a charm of personality which reversed that impression within a sentence. That these were his people was his only thought. He had something to say to them; what did it matter about him or his voice?

"Fourscore and seven years ago," spoke the President, "our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation,

so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of it as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

“But in a larger sense we cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hallow, this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it far above our poor power to add or to detract. The world will little note nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us, the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they here gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

There was no sound from the silent, vast assembly. The President’s large figure stood before them, at first inspired, glorified with the thrill and swing of his words, lapsing slowly in the stillness into lax, ungraceful lines. He stared at them a moment with sad eyes full of gentleness, of resignation, and in the deep quiet they stared at him. Not a hand was lifted in applause. Slowly the big, awkward man slouched back across the platform and sank into his seat, and yet there was no sound of approval, of recognition from the audience; only a long sigh ran like a ripple on an ocean through rank after rank. In Lincoln’s heart a throb of pain answered it. His speech had been, as he feared it would be, a failure. As he gazed steadily at these his countrymen who would not give him even a little perfunctory applause for his best effort, he knew that the disappointment of it cut into his soul. And then he was aware that there was music, the choir was singing a dirge; his part was done, and his part had failed.

When the ceremonies were over Everett at once found the President. “Mr. President,” he began, “your speech—” but Lincoln had interrupted, flashing a kindly smile down at him, laying a hand on his shoulder.

“We’ll manage not to talk about my speech, Mr. Everett,” he said. “This isn’t the first time I’ve felt that my dignity ought not to permit me to be a public speaker.”

He went on in a few cordial sentences to pay tribute to the orator of the occasion. Everett listened thoughtfully and when the chief had done, “Mr. President,” he said simply, “I should be glad if I could flatter myself that I came as near the central idea of the occasion in two hours as you did in two minutes.”

But Lincoln shook his head and laughed and turned to speak to a newcomer with no change of opinion—he was apt to trust his own judgments.

The special train which left Gettysburg immediately after the solemnities on the battle-field cemetery brought the President’s party into Washington during the night. There was no rest for the man at the wheel of the nation next day, but rather added work until, at about four in the afternoon, he felt sorely the need of air and went out from the White House alone, for a walk. His mind still

ran on the events of the day before—the impressive, quiet multitude, the serene sky of November arched, in the hushed interregnum of the year, between the joy of summer and the war of winter, over those who had gone from earthly war to heavenly joy. The picture was deeply engraved in his memory; it haunted him. And with it came a soreness, a discomfort of mind which had haunted him as well in the hours between—the chagrin of the failure of his speech. During the day he had gently but decisively put aside all reference to it from those about him; he had glanced at the headlines in the newspapers with a sarcastic smile; the Chief Executive must he flattered, of course; newspaper notices meant nothing. He knew well that he had made many successful speeches; no man of his shrewdness could be ignorant that again and again he had carried an audience by storm; yet he had no high idea of his own speech-making, and yesterday's affair had shaken his confidence more. He remembered sadly that, even for the President, no hand, no voice had been lifted in applause.

"It must have been pretty poor stuff," he said half aloud; "yet I thought it was a fair little composition. I meant to do well by them."

His long strides had carried him into the outskirts of the city, and suddenly, at a corner, from behind a hedge, a young boy of fifteen years or so came rushing toward him and tripped and stumbled against him, and Lincoln kept him from falling with a quick, vigorous arm. The lad righted himself and tossed back his thick, light hair and stared haughtily, and the President, regarding him, saw that his blue eyes were blind with tears.

"Do you want all of the public highway? Can't a gentleman from the South even walk in the streets without—without—" and the broken sentence ended in a sob.

The anger and the insolence of the lad were nothing to the man who towered above him—to that broad mind this was but a child in trouble. "My boy, the fellow that's interfering with your walking is down inside of you," he said gently, and with that the astonished youngster opened his wet eyes wide and laughed—a choking, childish laugh that pulled at the older man's heart-strings. "That's better, sonny," he said, and patted the slim shoulder. "Now tell me what's wrong with the world. Maybe I might help straighten it."

"Wrong, wrong!" the child raved; "everything's wrong," and launched into a mad tirade against the government from the President down.

Lincoln listened patiently, and when the lad paused for breath, "Go ahead," he said good-naturedly. "Every little helps."

With that the youngster was silent and drew himself up with stiff dignity, offended yet fascinated; unable to tear himself away from this strange giant who was so insultingly kind under his abuse, who yet inspired him with such a sense of trust and of hope.

"I want a lawyer," he said impulsively, looking up anxiously into the deep-lined face inches above him. "I don't know where to find a lawyer in this horrible city, and I must have one—I can't wait—it may be too late—I want a lawyer *now*" and once more he was in a fever of excitement.

“What do you want with a lawyer?” Again the calm, friendly tone quieted him.

“I want him to draw a will. My brother is—” he caught his breath with a gasp in a desperate effort for self-control. “They say he’s—dying.” He finished the sentence with a quiver in his voice, and the brave front and the trembling, childish tone went to the man’s heart. “I don’t believe it—he can’t be dying,” the boy talked on, gathering courage. “But anyway, he wants to make a will, and—and I reckon—it may be that he—he must.”

“I see,” the other answered gravely, and the young, torn soul felt an unreasoning confidence that he had found a friend. “Where is your brother?”

“He’s in the prison hospital there—in that big building,” he pointed down the street. “He’s captain in our army—in the Confederate army. He was wounded at Gettysburg.”

“Oh!” The deep-set eyes gazed down at the fresh face, its muscles straining under grief and responsibility, with the gentlest, most fatherly pity. “I think I can manage your job, my boy,” he said. “I used to practice law in a small way myself, and I’ll be glad to draw the will for you.”

The young fellow had whirled him around before he had finished the sentence. “Come,” he said. “Don’t waste time talking—why didn’t you tell me before?” and then he glanced up. He saw the ill-fitting clothes, the crag-like, rough-modelled head, the awkward carriage of the man; he was too young to know that what he felt beyond these was greatness. There was a tone of patronage in his voice and in the cock of his aristocratic young head as he spoke. “We can pay you, you know—we’re not paupers.” He fixed his eyes on Lincoln’s face to watch the impression as he added, “My brother is Carter Hampton Blair, of Georgia. I’m Warrington Blair. The Hampton Court Blairs, you know.”

“Oh!” said the President.

The lad went on:

“It would have been all right if Nellie hadn’t left Washington to-day—my sister, Miss Eleanor Hampton Blair. Carter was better this morning, and so she went with the Senator. She’s secretary to Senator Warrington, you know. He’s on the Yankee side”—the tone was full of contempt—“but yet he’s our cousin, and when he offered Nellie the position she would take it in spite of Carter and me. We were so poor”—the lad’s pride was off its guard for the moment, melted in the soothing trust with which this stranger thrilled his soul. It was a relief to him to talk, and the large hand which rested on his shoulder as they walked seemed an assurance that his words were accorded respect and understanding. “Of course, if Nellie had been here she would have known how to get a lawyer, but Carter had a bad turn half an hour ago, and the doctor said he might get better or he might die any minute, and Carter remembered about the money, and got so excited that they said it was hurting him, so I said I’d get a lawyer, and I rushed out, and the first thing I ran against you. I’m afraid I wasn’t very polite.” The smile on the gaunt face above him was all the answer he needed. “I’m sorry. I apologize. It certainly was good of you to come right back with me.” The child’s manner was full of the assured graciousness of a high-born gentleman; there was a lovable quality in his very patronage, and the suffering and the sweetness and the pride

combined held Lincoln by his sense of humor as well as by his soft heart. "You sha'n't lose anything by it," the youngster went on. "We may be poor, but we have more than plenty to pay you, I'm sure. Nellie has some jewels, you see—oh, I think several things yet. Is it very expensive to draw a will?" he asked wistfully.

"No, sonny; it's one of the cheapest things a man can do," was the hurried answer, and the child's tone showed a lighter heart.

"I'm glad of that, for, of course, Carter wants to leave—to leave as much as he can. You see, that's what the will is about—Carter is engaged to marry Miss Sally Maxfield, and they would have been married now if he hadn't been wounded and taken prisoner. So, of course, like any gentleman that's engaged, he wants to give her everything that he has. Hampton Court has to come to me after Carter, but there's some money—quite a lot—only we can't get it now. And that ought to go to Carter's wife, which is what she is—just about—and if he doesn't make a will it won't. It will come to Nellie and me if—if anything should happen to Carter."

"So you're worrying for fear you'll inherit some money?" Lincoln asked meditatively.

"Of course," the boy threw back impatiently. "Of course, it would be a shame if it came to Nellie and me, for we couldn't ever make her take it. We don't need it—I can look after Nellie and myself," he said proudly, with a quick, tossing motion of his fair head that was like the motion of a spirited, thoroughbred horse. They had arrived at the prison. "I can get you through all right. They all know me here," he spoke over his shoulder reassuringly to the President with a friendly glance. Dashing down the corridors in front, he did not see the guards salute the tall figure which followed him; too preoccupied to wonder at the ease of their entrance, he flew along through the big building, and behind him in large strides came his friend.

A young man—almost a boy, too—of twenty-three or twenty-four, his handsome face a white shadow, lay propped against the pillows, watching the door eagerly as they entered.

"Good boy, Warry," he greeted the little fellow; "you've got me a lawyer," and the pale features lighted with a smile of such radiance as seemed incongruous in this gruesome place. He held out his hand to the man who swung toward him, looming mountainous behind his brother's slight figure. "Thank you for coming," he said cordially, and in his tone was the same air of a *grand seigneur* as in the lad's. Suddenly a spasm of pain caught him, his head fell into the pillows, his muscles twisted, his arm about the neck of the kneeling boy tightened convulsively. Yet while the agony still held him he was smiling again with gay courage. "It nearly blew me away," he whispered, his voice shaking, but his eyes bright with amusement. "We'd better get to work before one of those little breezes carries me too far. There's pen and ink on the table, Mr.—my brother did not tell me your name."

"Your brother and I met informally," the other answered, setting the materials in order for writing. "He charged into me like a young steer," and the boy, out of his deep trouble, laughed delightedly. "My name is Lincoln."

The young officer regarded him. "That's a good name from your standpoint—you are, I take it, a Northerner?"

The deep eyes smiled whimsically. "I'm on that side of the fence. You may call me a Yankee if you'd like."

"There's something about you, Mr. Lincoln," the young Georgian answered gravely, with a kindly and unconscious condescension, "which makes me wish to call you, if I may, a friend."

He had that happy instinct which shapes a sentence to fall on its smoothest surface, and the President, in whom the same instinct was strong, felt a quick comradeship with this enemy who, about to die, saluted him. He put out his great fist swiftly. "Shake hands," he said. "Friends it is."

"Till death us do part," said the officer slowly, and smiled, and then threw back his head with a gesture like the boy's. "We must do the will," he said peremptorily.

"Yes, now we'll fix this will business, Captain Blair," the big man answered cheerfully. "When your mind's relieved about your plunder you can rest easier and get well faster."

The sweet, brilliant smile of the Southerner shone out, his arm drew the boy's shoulder closer, and the President, with a pang, knew that his friend knew that he must die.

With direct, condensed question and clear answer the simple will was shortly drawn and the impromptu lawyer rose to take his leave. But the wounded man put out his hand.

"Don't go yet," he pleaded, with the imperious, winning accent which was characteristic of both brothers. The sudden, radiant smile broke again over the face, young, drawn with suffering, prophetic of close death. "I like you," he brought out frankly. "I've never liked a stranger as much in such short order before."

His head, fair as the boy's, lay back on the pillows, locks of hair damp against the whiteness, the blue eyes shone like jewels from the colorless face, a weak arm stretched protectingly about the young brother who pressed against him. There was so much courage, so much helplessness, so much pathos in the picture that the President's great heart throbbed with a desire to comfort them.

"I want to talk to you about that man Lincoln, your namesake," the prisoner's deep, uncertain voice went on, trying pathetically to make conversation which might interest, might hold his guest. The man who stood hesitating controlled a startled movement. "I'm Southern to the core of me, and I believe with my soul in the cause I've fought for, the cause I'm—" he stopped, and his hand caressed the boy's shoulder. "But that President of yours is a remarkable man. He's regarded as a red devil by most of us down home, you know," and he laughed, "but I've admired him all along. He's inspired by principle, not by animosity, in this fight; he's real and he's powerful and"—he lifted his head impetuously and his eyes flashed—"and, by Jove, have you read his speech of yesterday in the papers?"

Lincoln gave him an odd look. "No," he said, "I haven't."

"Sit down," Blair commanded. "Don't grudge a few minutes to a man in hard luck. I want to tell you about that speech. You're not so busy but that you ought to know."

"Well, yes," said Lincoln, "perhaps I ought." He took out his watch and made a quick mental calculation. "It's only a question of going without my dinner, and the boy is dying," he thought. "If I can give him a little pleasure the dinner is a small matter." He spoke again. "It's the soldiers who are the busy men, not the lawyers, nowadays," he said. "I'll be delighted to spend a half hour with you, Captain Blair, if I won't tire you."

"That's good of you," the young officer said, and a king on his throne could not have been gracious in a more lordly yet unconscious way.

"By the way, this great man isn't any relation of yours, is he, Mr. Lincoln?"

"He's a kind of connection—through my grandfather," Lincoln acknowledged. "But I know just the sort of fellow he is—you can say what you want."

"What I want to say first is this: that he yesterday made one of the great speeches of history."

"What?" demanded Lincoln, staring.

"I know what I'm talking about." The young fellow brought his thin fist down on the bedclothes. "My father was a speaker—all my uncles and my grandfather were speakers. I've been brought up on oratory. I've studied and read the best models since I was a lad in knee-breeches. And I know a great speech when I see it. And when Nellie—my sister—brought in the paper this morning and read that to me I told her at once that not six times since history began has a speech been made which was its equal. That was before she told me what the Senator said."

"What did the Senator say?" asked the quiet man who listened.

"It was Senator Warrington, to whom my sister is—is acting as secretary." The explanation was distasteful, but he went on, carried past the jog by the interest of his story. "He was at Gettysburg yesterday, with the President's party. He told my sister that the speech so went home to the hearts of all those thousands of people that when it was ended it was as if the whole audience held its breath—there was not a hand lifted to applaud. One might as well applaud the Lord's Prayer—it would have been sacrilege. And they all felt it—down to the lowest. There was a long minute of reverent silence, no sound from all that great throng—it seems to me, an enemy, that it was the most perfect tribute that has ever been paid by any people to any orator."

The boy, lifting his hand from his brother's shoulder to mark the effect of his brother's words, saw with surprise that in the strange lawyer's eyes were tears. But the wounded man did not notice.

"It will live, that speech. Fifty years from now American schoolboys will be learning it as part of their education. It is not merely my opinion," he went on. "Warrington says the whole country

is ringing with it. And you haven't read it? And your name's Lincoln? Worry, boy, where's the paper Nellie left? I'll read the speech to Mr. Lincoln myself."

The boy had sprung to his feet and across the room, and had lifted a folded newspaper from the table. "Let me read it, Carter—it might tire you."

The giant figure which had crouched, elbows on knees, in the shadows by the narrow hospital cot, heaved itself slowly upward till it loomed at its full height in air. Lincoln turned his face toward the boy standing under the flickering gas-jet and reading with soft, sliding inflections the words which had for twenty-four hours been gall and wormwood to his memory. And as the sentences slipped from the lad's mouth, behold, a miracle happened, for the man who had written them knew that they were great. He knew then, as many a lesser one has known, that out of a little loving-kindness had come great joy; that he had wrested with gentleness a blessing from his enemy.

"'Fourscore and seven years ago,'" the fresh voice began, and the face of the dying man stood out white in the white pillows, sharp with eagerness, and the face of the President shone as he listened as if to new words. The field of yesterday, the speech, the deep silence which followed it, all were illuminated, as his mind went back, with new meaning. With the realization that the stillness had meant, not indifference, but perhaps, as this generous enemy had said, "The most perfect tribute ever paid by any people to any orator," there came to him a rush of glad strength to bear the burdens of the nation. The boy's tones ended clearly, deliberately:

"'We here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain, that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom, and that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.'"

There was deep stillness in the hospital ward as there had been stillness on the field of Gettysburg. The soldier's voice broke it. "It's a wonderful speech," he said. "There's nothing finer. Other men have spoken stirring words, for the North and for the South, but never before, I think, with the love of both breathing through them. It is only the greatest who can be a partisan without bitterness, and only such to-day may call himself not Northern or Southern, but American. To feel that your enemy can fight you to death without malice, with charity—it lifts country, it lifts humanity to something worth dying for. They are beautiful, broad words and the sting of war would be drawn if the soul of Lincoln could be breathed into the armies. Do you agree with me?" he demanded abruptly, and Lincoln answered slowly, from a happy heart.

"I believe it is a good speech," he said.

The impetuous Southerner went on: "Of course, it's all wrong from my point of view," and the gentleness of his look made the words charming. "The thought which underlies it is warped, inverted, as I look at it, yet that doesn't alter my admiration of the man and of his words. I'd like to put my hand in his before I die," he said, and the sudden, brilliant, sweet smile lit the transparency of his face like a lamp; "and I'd like to tell him that I know that what we're all fighting for, the best of us, is the right of our country as it is given us to see it." He was laboring a bit with the words now as if he were tired, but he hushed the boy imperiously. "When a man gets so close to death's door that he feels the wind through it from a larger atmosphere, then the small things

are blown away. The bitterness of the fight has faded for me. I only feel the love of country, the satisfaction of giving my life for it. The speech—that speech—has made it look higher and simpler—your side as well as ours. I would like to put my hand in Abraham Lincoln's—"

The clear, deep voice, with its hesitations, its catch of weakness, stopped short. Convulsively the hand shot out and caught at the great fingers that hung near him, pulling the President, with the strength of agony, to his knees by the cot. The prisoner was writhing in an attack of mortal pain, while he held, unknowing that he held it, the hand of his new friend in a torturing grip. The door of death had opened wide and a stormy wind was carrying the bright, conquered spirit into that larger atmosphere of which he had spoken. Suddenly the struggle ceased, the unconscious head rested in the boy's arms, and the hand of the Southern soldier lay quiet, where he had wished to place it, in the hand of Abraham Lincoln.

Centennial of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

DWIGHT EISENHOWER

To commemorate the centennial of the Gettysburg Address, President John F. Kennedy (1917–63) was asked to speak during a special event at the Gettysburg National Cemetery. Already scheduled on a trip to Texas, Kennedy declined the invitation, and former President Dwight D. Eisenhower (1890–1969) stepped in to honor Lincoln's memory. Eisenhower's speech exalting America's great fallen hero would be soon overshadowed by another event that occurred just days later: the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963.

What was Lincoln's "faith"? Why can we not finish the work called for in the Gettysburg Address? If that work is still—and will remain—unfinished, how could Lincoln's faith be "justified"? How, according to Eisenhower, can we properly pay tribute to Lincoln? Does this suggestion make sense to you? Is it sufficient?

We mark today the centennial of an immortal address. We stand where Abraham Lincoln stood as, a century ago, he gave to the world words as moving in their solemn cadence as they are timeless in their meaning. Little wonder it is that, as here we sense his deep dedication to freedom, our own dedication takes added strength.

Lincoln had faith that the ancient drums of Gettysburg, throbbing mutual defiance from the battle lines of the blue and the gray, would one day beat in unison, to summon a people, happily united in peace, to fulfill, generation by generation, a noble destiny. His faith has been justified—but the unfinished work of which he spoke in 1863 is still unfinished; because of human frailty, it always will be. Where we see the serenity with which time has invested this hallowed ground, Lincoln saw the scarred earth and felt the press of personal grief. Yet he lifted his eyes to the future, the future that is our present. He foresaw a new birth of freedom, a freedom and equality for all which, under God, would restore the purpose and meaning of America, defining a goal that challenges each of us to attain his full stature of citizenship.

We read Lincoln's sentiments, we ponder his words—the beauty of the sentiments he expressed enralls us; the majesty of his words holds us spellbound—but we have not paid to his message its just tribute until we—ourselves—live it. For well he knew that to live for country is a duty, as demanding as is the readiness to die for it. So long as this truth remains our guiding light, self-government in this nation will never die. True to democracy's basic principle that all are created equal and endowed by the Creator with priceless human rights, the good citizen now, as always before, is called upon to defend the rights of others as he does his own; to subordinate self to the country's good; to refuse to take the easy way today that may invite national disaster tomorrow; to accept the truth that the work still to be done awaits his doing.

On this day of commemoration, Lincoln still asks of each of us, as clearly as he did of those who heard his words a century ago, to give that increased devotion to the cause for which soldiers in all our wars have given the last full measure of devotion. Our answer, the only worthy one we can render to the memory of the great emancipator, is ever to defend, protect and pass on unblemished, to coming generations the heritage—the trust—that Abraham Lincoln, and all the

ghostly legions of patriots of the past, with unflinching faith in their God, have bequeathed to us—
a nation free, with liberty, dignity, and justice for all.

Abraham Lincoln's Re-founding of the Nation

LEON R. KASS

This essay interpreting the Gettysburg Address is based on a talk given in June 2007 at the AEI World Forum in Beaver Creek, Colorado, by humanist educator and AEI scholar Leon R. Kass (b. 1939). What was Lincoln's purpose for the Gettysburg Address, according to Kass? How does the structure and imagery of the Address serve this purpose? How, and why, does Lincoln change the Declaration of Independence? How does he reinterpret the American Founding? How is the nation's "new birth of freedom" related to its "first" birth? How are the principles of freedom and equality to be joined under this "new founding"? Who is responsible for the nation's rebirth and re-founding? Why is the Gettysburg Address still meaningful to us today?

From the time I was old enough to have a hero, Abraham Lincoln has been mine. At first, it was largely an accident of birth. Born in Chicago on Lincoln's birthday (1939), to immigrant parents who admired Lincoln as the Great Emancipator, I was educated in a public school whose classrooms displayed portraits of Lincoln (and George Washington) and which closed annually (on the exact date, February 12th) in honor of Lincoln's birthday, still in Illinois a civic holiday. One of my prize possessions (a birthday present, I believe) was a large loose-leaf scrapbook bearing a large portrait of President Lincoln as its leather-bound cover. I loved Lincoln well before I really knew why he deserved my—and our—veneration.

Time and study—not to mention living in the United States under thirteen presidents—have steadily increased my love and admiration of Lincoln. He wins my heart because of his exemplary character, his deep understanding of human affairs, his principled and prudent leadership during the Civil, his courageous deeds, and, not least, his way with words and his inspiring speeches. Justly celebrated as the best among those speeches is the address Lincoln gave at Gettysburg on November 19, 1863.

The Gettysburg Address has been memorized, recited, and admired. Countless scholars have discussed its rhetorical devices, literary merit, and political reception. But few have attended to the *thought* of Lincoln's speech and its deeper purposes, purposes that it continues to serve. Many people recognize that this funeral oration, honoring the Union dead in the battle that marked a turning point in the war against Southern rebellion, was clearly even more a summons to the living to prosecute to victorious conclusion a war that, despite the victory at Gettysburg, was not going well enough: what Lincoln calls "the great task remaining before us" is, first and foremost, the winning of the war. But few people see that the speech offers Lincoln's reinterpretation of the American Founding, his construal of the war as a *test* of that founding, and his own radical call for a second birth of our nation, a nation to be reborn through passing that bloody test. Central to Lincoln's declaration of America reborn is his revisionist reading of our original birth announcement, the Declaration of Independence and, with it, his own as-it-were baptismal teaching on the relation between liberty and equality, crucial to our new birth of freedom.

The express rhetorical purpose of the speech is clearly evident on the surface. The occasion is the dedication of a Union cemetery at Gettysburg for the burial of the nearly 5,300 Union fallen

(killed in 3 days; another 17,000 Union soldiers were wounded; 27,000 Confederate soldiers were killed or wounded). Lincoln acknowledges that, "it is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this." But he is much less interested in dedicating a patch of earth to honor the dead than he is in inspiring his listeners, "us the living," who are—despite dispiriting loss and grief—"to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced," dedicated to "the great task remaining before us," namely, victory in the war and the restoration of the Union, now on a more solid foundation. But it is the outer frame of the speech, and especially its beginning and its end, that bespeaks Lincoln's larger purpose: to create for future generations an *interpretation* of the war, and especially the war's relation to both the once "*new nation*," brought forth by "our fathers" and "conceived in liberty," and "*this nation*," which, through the sacrifice of war and our dedication and resolve, "shall have a new birth of freedom." Before turning to those passages at the beginning and the end, we need to see the relation of this speech to a concern that had preoccupied Lincoln for at least 25 years.

In January 1838, in a remarkable speech to the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield, Illinois, Lincoln (age 28) worried about the perpetuation of our institutions, now that the Founding generation had gone to rest and those who had known them were also dying out. It is an astonishing speech, informed by profound reflections on law and lawlessness, soaring political ambition (including his own), and the vulnerability of free institutions in democratic times to both mob rule and tyranny. It is in this speech that Lincoln asserts that perpetuating our political institutions requires the development of a "political religion," comprising reverence for the laws and, more generally, sober sentiments "hewn from the solid quarry of sober reason"—among them, the founding principles. As Lincoln put it:

. . . Passion has helped us; but can do so no more. It will in future be our enemy. Reason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason, must furnish all the materials for our future support and defense.—Let those materials be moulded into *general intelligence; sound morality;* and, in particular, *a reverence for the constitution and laws.*

Lincoln remained, throughout his life, obsessed with the problem of attaching his fellow citizens to the American republic. And one might well say that his speeches taken as a whole—unsurpassed in the annals of American political utterance—follow his advice in the Lyceum address: they articulate the clear rational principles of the American Republic, they are molded into persuasive and sound moral arguments, and they are always in the service of enhancing reverence for the constitution and its laws. But his *greatest* public utterances were prophetic speeches, speeches that soar and move the soul because they display powers higher than cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason. These supremely inspiring speeches, I submit, were crafted by Lincoln with a view to their becoming canonical texts of the much-needed political religion.

The Gettysburg Address is, in both form and substance, the perfect text for the "bible" of American political religion. It is short enough to be memorized: 3 paragraphs of progressively increasing length, 10 sentences, 272 words (only 130 different words), 74% of which are monosyllables. The polysyllabic words stand out against the little words, and only a few pregnant longer words appear more than once: among the disyllabic words, only *conceived*, *living*, *rather*, *people* (three times in the last clause), and especially *nation* (5 times: "*new nation*" in paragraph 1; "that nation," "any nation," and "that nation" in paragraph 2; but "*this nation*" in the last

sentence of paragraph 3, this nation that shall be reborn into freedom). Among still longer words, Lincoln uses more than once only *devotion* (twice), *consecrate* or *consecrated* (twice), and—the most important word in the speech—*dedicate* or *dedicated* (6 times). Noteworthy also is the echoing use of the word “here”—heard 8 times—the importance of which will be clear by the end.

The three paragraphs of progressively increasing length refer to time periods and actors of progressively increasing rhetorical importance: (paragraph 1) the *past* (“Four-score and seven years ago”; “our fathers”; 30 words); (paragraph 2) the *very immediate present* (“Now”; *we* who are engaged in a great civil war, but mainly a much smaller *we* who are, right *here* and right *now*, met on a great battlefield of that war and who, fittingly and properly, have come to dedicate a portion of that field; 73 words); and (paragraph 3) our *future* in relation to our present and our past (contrasting “the brave men” who fought and died, with “us the living”); and moving from (a) our inability through speech to dedicate ground better consecrated by the deeds of the brave men, to (b) “us the living” dedicating *ourselves* to the great task remaining before us, (c) to “*we* here highly *resolv[ing]*” to win the war, so that (d) certain great things will follow, both for this nation (“a new birth”) and also for people everywhere (169 words, nearly half of them in the last sentence about our dedication). The speech, in its spatial references, has an hour-glass structure, widest below: it opens “on this continent,” narrows in its center to “a great battle-field” and, even narrower, to “a portion of that field,” but finishes by suggesting that our dedication “here” can ensure that popular government will never perish from the *whole earth*.

But these are but smaller formal details, important to be sure for the rhetorical effect, but hardly by themselves enough to give the speech canonical standing. That comes from both its content and its elevated tone and expression, and especially from its famous beginning and end. Let us examine them.

Four score and seven years ago, our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in Liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Four score and seven years ago. Why does Lincoln begin with this expression? Scholars note that the language is Biblical, and that it echoes the 90th Psalm:

The days of our years are three score and ten,
Or even by reason of strength four score years.

But few notice that, by this pious biblical reference, Lincoln is also making a crucial substantive point: the deed he is about to recount, he intimates, happened not in living memory; four score *and seven* years ago none alive today (in 1863) had yet been born. Lincoln’s beginning reflects and highlights his long-standing concern about perpetuation in a fully post-revolutionary age. He starts by reminding us of things we could not possibly remember.

The theme and imagery of the first paragraph, and indeed of the frame of the speech as a whole, is *birth*: the birth and, at the end, the *re-birth*, of the nation. Four score and seven, or 87, years identifies the birth year as 1776, the year of the Declaration of Independence, not 1775, the year of Lexington and Concord, not 1787, the year of the Constitution. Lincoln gives no hint of the bloody war of American separation and secession that secured in deed the Declaration’s verbal

assertion of our independence from Great Britain. Instead, Lincoln gives us an image of quiet generative congress. According to Lincoln, *our fathers*—after pointing out that we could not have known them, Lincoln calls the founders *our fathers*, rather than our *grandfathers* or *forefathers*, bringing us close to them in spirit and inviting pious gratitude for our patrimony—brought forth or sired upon this continent (as mother) a *new* nation. It is new not only in historical fact. It is new also in principle: it was, Lincoln tells us, "conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." Several points deserve emphasis, especially when we compare Lincoln's description of the founding birth with the birth certificate language of the Declaration of Independence itself.

In the Declaration the signers declare: "We *hold* these *truths* to be *self-evident*: that all men are created equal." In Lincoln's version, three important changes are made. First, Lincoln changes a "self-evident truth" to a "proposition." Both notions come from geometry (Lincoln had studied Euclid): a self-evident truth is an *axiom* (for example, "The whole is greater than the part" or "Things equal to the same thing are also equal to one another"), which neither admits of proof nor requires proof, for it contains its evidence in itself. If you *understand* the statement, you are compelled also to *affirm* it as *true*. According to the Declaration, human equality is held to be an axiom, evident in itself: if one understands the meaning of "men," one must immediately see that *all* men (both male and female²⁶) are *equally human*; and, further, one must see that they *equally* possess, by *virtue* of their *equal* humanity, inalienable *rights*, among them, the right to defend their life (when threatened), safeguard their liberty (against enslavement or despotism), and pursue their own happiness as they see fit. A proposition, on the other hand, is like a geometric *theorem*: it is something now put before us—a "pro-posit-ing"—whose truth *must* be proved; yet it may turn out to be either unprovable or even false. According to Lincoln, human equality was less a self-evident *premise*²⁷ of the American founding, more a proposition in need of *future* demonstration.

The significance of shifting "all men are created equal" from axiom to proposition is revealed by Lincoln's second big change: according to Lincoln "our fathers" treated "all men are created equal" not, as the Declaration states, as a *truth* that "we *hold*," but as a proposal to which they were *dedicated*. Lincoln shifts the picture from theory to practice: the proposition is more than an intellectual matter that one holds as a belief and proves in speech; it is a practical and moral goal to which one must devote oneself in action. The effective truth of the proposition of human equality cannot be shown by Euclidean reasoning; it must be demonstrated through deed and devotion.

²⁶ The term "men" in the Declaration of Independence clearly means "human beings," and refers equally to male and female human beings. The same is true of both of the putative sources for the Declaration's teaching of human equality: the natural rights teaching of John Locke and the "created-in-the-image-of-God" teaching of the Bible ("God created man in his own image; male and female created He them").

²⁷ It should also be noted that, in the Declaration, "all men are created equal" is but the first of several such self-evident truths. It is closely followed by assertions about (a) (equal) inalienable rights, (b) rights secured by governments, justly instituted (only) by consent of the governed, and (in the event that instituted governments become destructive of those ends) (c) the right of revolution and of instituting new government, according to principles and forms deemed likely to effect the people's safety and happiness. Thus, in contrast to Lincoln's formulation in the Gettysburg Address, in the context of the declaring independence, the claim of human equality, although it is stated first, functions less as a national credo, and more as the beginning of a logical argument for legitimating the American Revolution.

To avoid possible misunderstanding, we need to clarify what sort of human equality needs proof through deed and devotion. The propositional “created equal” clearly does not mean, “created the same.” Neither does it mean equal in every respect. We human beings naturally differ in body and mind, talents and character, desire and determination. Some of us are sturdy, swift, or striving; others are sickly, slow, or slothful. Some find success and happiness, others failure and misery. Some are rich, powerful, and in positions of authority; most people are not. But these natural, social, or economic inequalities in no way contradict the equal *humanity* of otherwise differing human beings. Neither do they refute the derivative—and politically relevant—idea of natural or God-given equal *rights*, including the rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It is the Declaration’s (pre-political) equality of intrinsic rights, not social or political equality, to which, according to Lincoln, our nation was dedicated and which, as a proposition, requires proof through deed and dedication.²⁸

Third, and most subtly, Lincoln does not ask us to think of the proposition only as a universal truth that we too can try to prove in practice; he wraps that truth in the pious drapery of the dedication of *our fathers*. We should take an interest in this proposition, he implies, not only because it might be true, but as a matter of honoring the memory of our remarkable fathers. In short, Lincoln has transformed a merely intellectual truth, held as self-evident and accessible to universal human reason (the Declaration’s formulation), into a truth requiring *practical* demonstration by *particular* people—our fathers—who dedicated themselves to doing so. In this way, Lincoln summons our ancestral piety and attaches it to the principles of an emerging political religion, whose creed he is here redefining. Yet, as we shall see, ancestral piety alone cannot sustain us, and a new birth is necessary, in large part because our fathers did not get it exactly right—not so much in idea as in practice.

Why does Lincoln change the Declaration? In order to address and correct a deep difficulty in our founding regarding the relation between equality and liberty. A clue is provided in the other big idea in the first sentence, “conceived in liberty.” We know the fathers, we know the mother continent, and we know the child nation and to what it is dedicated. But what is meant by “conceived *in* liberty,” and how does this figure in Lincoln’s revision of the story of America’s birth?

Attending closely to the image of generation, we note that, because conception precedes birth, our fathers who brought forth the new nation, according to Lincoln, already enjoyed liberty when they conceived her. But the oddity of the “in” in the phrase, “conceived in Liberty,” has confused me for some time. One astute reader suggested that, just as a natural child is “conceived in love,” so the American national child was “conceived in love of Liberty.” I myself have instead toyed with “conceived *freely*, conceived by *choice*,” not by necessity or nature or in a fit of passion, or, alternatively, “conceived in an act of independence and liberation, from the rule of Britain.” But an illuminating interpretation was given me by my friend, Harvey Flaumenhaft, of St. John’s College, Annapolis. “In Liberty,” he suggests, refers to the political matrix that characterizes both “the before” and “the after” of the “bringing forth” of the new nation, and that matrix is British

²⁸ *It is commonly overlooked that, because of the great diversity of talents, ambitions, and efforts of human beings, securing these equal individual rights, especially the right to pursue happiness, virtually guarantees enormous inequalities of outcomes and achievements—economic, social, cultural, political. Neither Lincoln nor the signers of the Declaration of Independence were simple egalitarians.*

liberty, the context also of the American colonies. Britain, like her colonies and the new republic, was a liberal polity, but British liberty was mixed with a hereditary principle—not only the monarchy, but especially a hereditary nobility of dukes and barons who lorded it over the commons. The true American innovation is the freely chosen replacement of the hereditary principle with the principle of equality and equal rights: governments, the Founders declared, exist to secure the rights not only of the highborn of hereditary privilege but of *all* men, who are *equally* endowed with unalienable rights. Or, in Lincoln's formulation, our fathers exercised their liberty to dedicate a new nation to the principle of human equality.

We today take for granted the compatibility of political liberty and political equality. But this novel addition of the principle of equality to the principle of liberty was then an unprecedented experiment. Not unreasonably, it gave rise to two big questions: Can a nation "so conceived and so dedicated long endure"? Can political equality be obtained without the *surrender* of liberty? Taking the second question first, Lincoln had been personally attacked as a tyrant who was destroying liberty in his pursuit of equality: "Maryland, My Maryland," the state song written in 1861, begins "The despot's heel is on thy shore, Maryland! His torch is at thy temple door, Maryland!" and the alleged despot is none other than Lincoln! His later suspension of the writ of habeas corpus would eventually be ruled unconstitutional. Yet Lincoln teaches in this speech that commitment to the proposition of human equality is not only compatible with liberty, but is in fact freedom's only true foundation.

Regarding the first point, the war, Lincoln says, is a test: a test of the durability of a nation committed to equality as well as to liberty.²⁹ And although he does not say so here, as he does in the Second Inaugural, the war is a test that is now upon the nation because of an offensive defect in the founding. The defect is not mentioned by name in the Gettysburg Address, but its name is slavery. (Lincoln, by the way, also does not mention either the North or the South—or the Union—nor does he here assign blame for the war; in the Second Inaugural he will explicitly suggest that the offense of slavery lies with the nation as a whole.)

The Declaration of Independence was a liberal document, not a republican (or democratic) one. It did not by itself specify any particular form of government: *any* government (including monarchy or aristocracy) is legitimate so long as it secures the rights of all who live under its rule and rules by consent of the governed. Yet despite adding the egalitarian principle to the British liberal principle, and despite the fact that, in Lincoln's reformulation of the nation's birth, equality as the *goal* was to come out of liberty by way of dedication, the new nation was flawed and stained from the start by the institution of slavery.

Contrary to current opinion, many of the Founders understood that America's practice fell short of its founding principles, and they devised instrumentalities that they hoped would place slavery in the course of its ultimate extinction. But by Lincoln's time the situation had deteriorated.

²⁹ *Lincoln insisted that the civil war was a test also for durability of any nation so conceived and so dedicated. Why might our civil war have such universal significance? In part, perhaps, because of the unprecedented character and great good fortune of America's founding: what other nation heretofore in the name of certain abstract moral and political principles? But also, as we shall see, because the war was fought precisely to defend those principles against rebellious forces that denied those principles and sought to destroy the nation that rested on them. Victory against a rebellion based on denial of fundamental principles is surely evidence of durability.*

Not only was the regime in contradiction with itself, falling short of its stated ideals; worse, the South in rebelling had given effect to the view that the principle of equality was not merely too lofty but, in fact, as a proposition simply false. Lincoln knew that this denial of human equality was the true cause of the war; and Lincoln understood that the bloody struggle over slavery was the true test of the nation. Now that the self-evident truth of equality had been turned into a proposition needing proof, and now that the rebels had repudiated the proposition calling it a self-evident lie, passing the test meant winning the war, in part because winning the war meant a repudiation of the repudiation, a vindication of the proposition of equality. And, in practical terms, only by winning the war and by restoring the Union could slavery be abolished and the equal humanity of all citizens given enduring political legitimacy.

This is made clear in the end of the speech, where Lincoln moves from the deeds of the noble dead to “us the living,” and, finally, from the religious language of dedication and devotion to the more political language of resolution.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Why must “we *here* highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain”? The goal for which victory is indispensable, stated in Lincoln’s conclusion, is two-fold, both aspects transcending the mere restoration of the now dissolved Union: first, “that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom”; and second, “that government of the people, by the people, for the people shall not perish from the earth.”

The new birth of freedom—for which Lincoln is here offering the baptismal blessing and explanation—is a birth made possible only through bloodshed, not through generative congress of ancestral patriarchs and mother continent. More important, this new freedom will differ from the British liberty in which the nation was first conceived. Here equality will not come out of liberty. Rather, if we adhere to our resolve, *freedom will be newly born out of equality*, because the inegalitarian principle and the practice of slavery will be repudiated and defeated as the necessary condition of rebirth. Masters as well as slaves will share in this new birth of freedom, having shed the mutual degradation that enslavement brings to them both. Liberty, says Lincoln, has not only not been destroyed, as the rebels claimed; it will for the first time be put on a truly secure foundation: the radical equality of all human beings, now thrice called “the people,” who will govern and be governed for their own well-being. We the people, we the living rededicating ourselves here on the graves of the fallen and resolving to act hereafter in service to the cause, become, under God, the nation’s new patriarchs and founders.

But it is Lincoln’s final words, those enunciating the second goal of the war, that show why the new birth of freedom goes beyond the mere abolition of slavery, and why the vindication of the principle of equality goes beyond securing the intrinsic human rights of the Declaration of Independence. “Government of the people, by the people, for the people” is, in fact, Lincoln’s final alteration and improvement of the Declaration, going beyond its neutrality regarding the form of

government. To the Declaration's legitimating philosophical principle of consent of the governed Lincoln adds the operative practical (and Constitutional) principle of *popular self-government*. Not only are the people to be governed ("of the people"), but *they* are to do the governing ("by the people"). Also, the clear purpose of government is not the prosperity of the few, but the well-being of all ("*for* the people"). The new synthesis of freedom and equality takes the form of democratic self-rule—not just rule of the majority, but that special sort of democratic self-rule that is informed by the proposition of radical human equality and equal human rights.

The nation conceived in liberty got a new birth, a birth of freedom and popular self-government, thanks to the self-sacrificing deeds of "the brave men . . . who struggled here" and thanks to the dedication of the living, under Lincoln's leadership, to "the cause for which they gave their last full measure of devotion." But taking the long view, the nation became better able to attach the hearts and minds of its citizens thanks to the words fitly spoken at Gettysburg by Father Abraham, who presided over its re-founding in speech no less than in deed and whose words have inspired all who came afterwards to dedicate themselves to preserve, protect, and perfect our political freedom and equality. Today and tomorrow, our attachment to the republic is greatly enhanced whenever we reanimate Lincoln's words and, under their still living instruction, remain dedicated to his vision of our national purpose.

Lincoln at Two Hundred

WALTER BERNS

On the two hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth, scholar and author Walter Berns (1919–2015) gave these remarks in Washington, DC as part of the Bradley Lecture Series hosted by the American Enterprise Institute. This speech was the culmination of decades of scholarship on Lincoln by Berns, a fellow Illinoisan who in his youth had watched Civil War veterans parade down Chicago's streets.

How was Lincoln extraordinary, according to Berns? What situation did he confront as president? Why did he decide to go to war, and why did he continue the war? How did Lincoln "correct" the Declaration of Independence in the Gettysburg Address? How does he reattach the hearts and minds of his listeners (and readers) to this "statement of fundamental principles"? Why, according to Berns, is Lincoln's way with words so important?

Watch Leon Kass and Walter Berns discuss Lincoln here:

www.youtube.com/watch?v=xiOW7QKbNIQ.

More has been written about Abraham Lincoln than of any other president or, for that matter, any other American; the amount is prodigious: no fewer than 16,000 books and goodness knows how many journal articles. I cannot claim to have read more than a portion of this vast literature, and I very much doubt that I can say anything about Lincoln that has not already been said by someone, somewhere, sometime. Yet I am obliged to say something.

What accounts for the extraordinary interest in him? Well, he was an extraordinary man; he did things ordinary men don't do. For example, his law partner reports how, while on circuit the other lawyers, and sometimes even the circuit judge, were asleep in the room, Lincoln would lie on the floor, with a lamp, studying Euclid's *Elements*, the geometry book which begins with definitions (e.g., a point is that which has no parts); followed by postulates and axioms (e.g., things which are equal to the same thing are equal to each other); leading to the propositions, two sorts of propositions, problems and theorems (e.g., describe an equilateral triangle on a given finite straight line, and in any right-angled triangle, the square which is described on the side subtending the right angle is equal to the squares described on the sides which contain the right angle). These propositions have then to be demonstrated, which is done diagrammatically, showing, in the one case, that the problem is solved, and, in the second, that the theorem is true.

All very interesting, and in some respects, or for some purposes, very important. The *Elements* is one of the books in the Great Books curriculum; indeed, for almost two thousand years (until Descartes) Euclid was geometry—but what has it to do with the practice of law in the Illinois of the 1840s?

My point is, only an unusual intellectual curiosity could have led a backwoods lawyer to pick it up and proceed to master it. Lincoln was different, and he had to know it.

Imagine, if you will, what it was like for this man to live in a place like New Salem, Illinois, in the 1830s, a town without books, without civilization, without anyone like himself with whom he might want to talk. The Springfield he moved to in 1837 was not much better. Yet, in both places, something drove him to get his hands on books, not only Euclid's geometry but history books, grammar books, Shakespeare's books, and books of poetry.

He was an avid reader of poetry, beginning with the poems of Scotland's Robert Burns and continuing with those of England's George Gordon, Lord Byron. He started this reading in New Salem and Springfield, and continued it in the White House, where he could get books from the Library of Congress. But what has "My Heart's In the Highlands" to do with the relief or provisioning of Fort Sumter? And what has Byron's "Don Juan," pronounced here (for scanning purposes) "Don Ju-an," what has it to do with emancipating slaves? Especially what is perhaps its best known passage: "A little still she strove, and much repented, and whispering 'I will never consent,' consented. . . ." What has this to do with any of the problems that crossed his White House desk? Nothing at all, of course. I mention it only because it tells us something about the sort of man he was. He also read the Bible, and seems to have been familiar with it. Burns, Byron, Bible; no one going to school with them is likely to have a tin ear. This was surely true of Lincoln. Their influence on him is evident, not in what he said, but in how he said it, in the rhythm or music of his speech. I'll have more to say about this in due course.

He was, of course, president in an extraordinary time; but so were Woodrow Wilson and Franklin D. Roosevelt. He was assassinated while in office; but so were James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy. Admittedly, there is something unusual or special about his assassination; there was something profoundly political about it, and he may have foreseen it; he surely had forebodings of it. For example, he had the habit of quoting these words of Shakespeare's *Richard II*: "For God's sake, let us sit upon the ground and tell sad stories of the death of kings . . . all murdered." (From act III, scene 2.) What does one make of this?

Senator Charles Sumner reports—and so does the French diplomat, the Marquis de Chambrun—that, on returning from Richmond and a visit with General Grant the day before Lee's surrender at Appomattox, knowing that the war was effectively over, Lincoln had twice recited the following lines from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*:

Duncan is in his grave;
After life's fitful fever, he sleeps well;
Treason has done his worst; nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing
Can touch him further. (Act III, scene 2.)

Apparently, he saw himself as Duncan. Sumner thought so. If not, why does he quote the passage, not once but twice, and at this time? (*Macbeth* was his favorite play. As he said to a well-known Shakespearean actor, "nothing equals *Macbeth*, it is wonderful.")

Of course, Lincoln did great things; greater than anything done by Wilson or Roosevelt, or Garfield, McKinley, and Kennedy; he freed the slaves and saved the Union, and because he saved the Union he was able free the slaves. Beyond this, however, it seems to me that our extraordinary

interest in him, and esteem for him, has to do with what he said, and how he said it. And much of this had to do with the Union: what it was and why it was worth the saving.

He saved it by fighting and winning the war, of course; but his initial step in this was the decision to go to war in the first place. Not a popular decision, and certainly not an easy one. His predecessor, the incompetent fool James Buchanan, believed that the states had no right to secede from the Union, but that there was nothing he could do about it if they did. Or as Senator William Seward put it, “he was commenting on Buchanan’s last Message to Congress, of December 3, 1860, ‘the states had no right to secede, unless they wanted to, and the president had the duty to enforce the law, unless someone opposed him.’” Thus, by the time Lincoln took office, seven southern states had seceded, and nothing had been done about it, specifically, nothing about their seizure of federal property, the forts, arsenals, and naval facilities. Six of those states had formed a new government, with a constitution, a congress and president; it was, as we say, “in business.” Led by South Carolina, they claimed to be doing only what they and the other colonies had done in 1776, and, on the whole, Buchanan agreed with them. Besides, to oppose them might bring on the war, and Buchanan had no stomach for this. Yet he was the president, and had sworn an oath to “preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution of the United States,” and to this end he was given the powers of commander in chief. But he was the last man to use them.

It was otherwise with Lincoln. He knew very well that the time had come when the only way to save the Union was to go to war. But he hesitated publicly to say so. Could he say it and retain the support of the people who had voted for him? The abolitionists, for example. For them, slavery was a sin, and the slave-holders sinners. But their leading spokesman, William Lloyd Garrison, was no friend of the Union. He said the Constitution was “a covenant with death and an agreement with hell,” and once set fire to a copy of it, uttering the evangelist battle-cry, “And let the people say, amen.” He and his friends were of no help to Lincoln. He said—this was during the Fort Sumter crisis—“all Union saving efforts are simply idiotic.”

Nor could Lincoln expect any help from his home-state newspaper, the *Chicago Tribune*. If South Carolina wanted to secede, the *Tribune* said in an editorial, “let her go.” The country’s leading antislavery editor, Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*, said much the same thing. As he put it, “if the Cotton States shall become satisfied they can do better out of the Union than in it, we insist on letting them go.” But suppose we had let them go. With them would have gone almost all the slaves, gone to what claimed to be another country, a foreign country. How, then, would he free them, except by going to war with that country? The self-righteous journalist did not say—perhaps he would have had us enter into “real” negotiations with the Confederates—but it was his desire to avoid war that led him to say what he said.

Another problem facing Lincoln was this: The people of the North, especially the Republicans, were almost all of them antislavery, but they were also, almost all of them, anti-Negro. This prejudice was reflected in the laws adopted by some of the northern states, among them Illinois, Indiana, and Iowa, laws forbidding Negroes—free Negroes to enter or remain in the state. These Yankees, as they were soon to be known, obviously did not want Negroes in their neighborhoods, something their politicians could not afford to ignore.

Then,—I'm speaking here of the situation Lincoln faced before taking office—then there was the question of those slave states that had not, or not yet, seceded, specifically the border states Virginia, Maryland, Missouri, Kentucky. What would they do if he used force against the others? Later on, he was to say that he hoped God was on the side of the Union, but that he had to have Kentucky. Without it, there would be no chance of winning the civil war. (Look at a map.)

And, finally, there was the effort, a desperate or last-chance effort, to avoid the war by way of compromise. This deserves to be treated in detail. On January 16, 1861, a mere six weeks before Lincoln's inauguration, the Kentuckian John Crittenden, on behalf of a Senate committee that included the Democrats Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois and Jefferson Davis of Mississippi, as well as Republicans Benjamin Wade of Ohio and William Seward of New York, proposed a set of six constitutional amendments, that—I mention only the major provisions—(1) guaranteed slavery in the states where it existed against future interference by the federal government, (2) denied Congress any power to interfere with the interstate slave trade, and (3)—and here is what proved to be the sticking point—prohibited slavery in the territories north of the Missouri Compromise line, but protected it south of the line “in all territories now held, or hereafter acquired.”

Obviously, this was not much of a compromise; by giving them so much, the southern Democrats could be expected eagerly to support them. For some reason—probably to avoid the war—the amendments also had the support of some important Republicans, not only Senators Wade and Seward, but certain businessmen and Wall Street bankers. But Lincoln said no. “Let there be no compromise on the question of extending slavery,” he wrote his Republican friends in Congress. “The instant you do, they have us under again; all our labor is lost. . . . Douglas is sure to be again trying to bring in his ‘Pop. Sov.’ Have none of it. The tug has to come & better now than later.” That tug came, and with it came the war.

Question: Would he have taken so hard a line, or refused all compromise, had he anticipated the war would take the lives of—the number is appalling—some 620,000 Americans? Probably not. (Nor, I suspect, would the southern states have seceded had they anticipated the price they would pay.) Intransigent, Lincoln surely was, but before blaming him for this, consider the alternative to war, or going to war? What was at stake?

Lincoln stated the essential point time and again, and best, because succinctly, in his speech at the Cooper Institute in New York in February 1860. We Republicans, he said, think slavery wrong, and ought to be restricted, and they, the southerners, think it right, and ought to be extended. “Their thinking it right,” he said, “and our thinking it wrong, is the precise fact upon which depends the whole controversy.”

And by this time, it was possible to know and state with sufficient precision what the extension of slavery would involve. First, according to the Crittenden proposal, slavery was to be protected south of the Missouri line “in all territories now held, or hereafter acquired, and by this they meant territories not then, or not yet, part of the United States. And what were they? Well, Cuba, for instance—the Democrats had long had their eyes on it; in 1854 they tried to buy it (Ostend proposal); and in 1860 their party platforms, the Northern or Douglas Democrats and the Southern or Breckinridge Democrats, both called for its acquisition. And not only Cuba, but Mexico, or that

part which we had not already “acquired,” and other places in Central America. But even this is not all they had in mind.

There was a time when the southerners were satisfied with some—the southern part—of the Louisiana Purchase territory; this was in 1820, when the Missouri compromise was adopted. And later, after the passage of the Kansas-Nebraska Act with its popular sovereignty provision, they were satisfied merely with the possibility of slavery in all the territories (How much, if any, would depend on the vote of the people living in them); this was in 1854.

But in 1857, the Supreme Court of the United States handed down the decision in the *Dred Scott* case, holding that Congress, under the Constitution, could not prohibit slavery in any of the territories, thereby opening them all to slavery, and putting an end to popular sovereignty.

But Chief Justice Roger Taney did more than that in his *Dred Scott* opinion, he opened a far fairer prospect for the southern Democrats: slavery everywhere, not only in all the territories, but in all the states, north as well as south, new as well as old, Illinois as well as Kentucky, Massachusetts as well as Mississippi. How real a prospect was this? All it needed was another Supreme Court decision, and *Dred Scott* paved the way for that. As Lincoln put it, if *Dred Scott*, why not its sequel? Or, if the chief justice could dare the one, why could he not dare the other?

As stated in *Dred Scott*, what Taney said about this, the nationalization of slavery was only dicta—words spoken in passing—not part of the holding in the case, but they were not nothing there; he must have had some reason for making the statement; there is no reason to believe it was inadvertent; it is too deliberate for that. This is what he said about this: “the right of property in a slave is distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution.” (Everyone, wherever he lives, has a constitutional right to hold slaves.)

Taney was the chief justice of the United States, and, therefore, his word carried (or ought to carry) some weight. Still, his saying it didn’t make it so, not yet, and it certainly was not then so. The Constitution certainly did not say, or even imply, what he said it said. The late professor Herbert Storing put this very well: “If one had to think of two adverbs that do not describe the way the Constitution acknowledged slavery, he could not do better than “distinctly and expressly.”

Whatever else, Taney’s statement proved to be grist for Lincoln’s mill. He seized on it during the debates with Douglas in 1858, and rang the changes on it. He began with the supremacy clause of the Constitution (Article VI, clause 2), which provides (in part) that the Constitution is the supreme law of the land, and that “the judges of every state shall be bound thereby anything in the constitution or laws of any state to the contrary notwithstanding.” He then constructed the following syllogism:

Nothing in the constitution or laws of any state can destroy a right distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution of the United States.

The right of property in a slave is distinctly and expressly affirmed in the Constitution of the United States.

Therefore, nothing in the constitution or laws of any state can destroy the right of property in a slave.

Q.E.D., *quod erat demonstrandum*. And what was it that was demonstrated? Assuming Taney spoke for them, the southerners wanted slavery nationalized, i.e., protected by the Constitution in all the states of the United States. And beyond that, assuming Senators Crittenden and Davis also spoke for them, they wanted slavery to be extended throughout the length and breadth of the Americas; the only limits being the slaveholders' appetite (or they would say, their need) and the military power of the United States.

This, I suggest, is why Lincoln said, no to the Crittenden compromise, or so-called compromise. And who—or who now—can blame him?

As to that, I wonder if we—we today—are not inclined to ignore or discount the very real possibility of slavery becoming lawful in all the states. Suppose the Republican Party had heeded the advice of Horace Greeley and other eastern Republicans and had supported Senator Douglas in his reelection campaign in 1858. Douglas had won their favor by his opposition to the fraudulent proslavery constitution proposed for Kansas, the so-called Lecompton constitution. Had they done so, that is, had the Republicans supported Douglas for senator in 1858, there would have been no Lincoln-Douglas debates, and, therefore, no "Freeport question" from Lincoln: "May the people of a Territory, in any lawful way, against the wish of a citizen of the United States, exclude slavery from its limits prior to the formation of a State constitution." That was the question Lincoln asked at Freeport, and by answering it, by saying that despite the Supreme Court's decision in the *Dred Scott* case, the people might exclude slavery from the territory, Douglas lost the support of the southern Democrats, which, in turn, caused the split in the party in 1860 and led to the election of Lincoln. Suppose, therefore, a Democratic administration in Washington led by a man (Douglas) who did not care whether slavery was voted up or down, and supported by a party most of whose members wanted very much that it be voted up. What would have been the consequences of that?

And, once again employing faint-hearted Horace Greeley as a foil, suppose Lincoln had heeded his advice and had entered into peace negotiations with the Confederates in the spring or summer of 1864, without insisting, as Lincoln always did, that the Confederate states agree to abolish slavery. The Confederates would surely have jumped at the chance, and the northern people, who had grown more and more weary of the war—they had taken to singing, "When This Cruel War Is Over"; a million copies of it had been sold—and were obviously yearning for peace. They obviously had reason to think it a cruel war. In six weeks, beginning May 3, 1864—this was after Antietam, after Gettysburg, after Fredericksburg—at the Wilderness, and continuing at Spotsylvania (May 10-14), and Cold Harbor (June 1), Grant's Army of the Potomac had lost some 65,000 men, killed, wounded, or missing in action, and 7,000 in an afternoon, at Cold Harbor. As Greeley wrote to Lincoln, "Our bleeding, bankrupt, almost dying country, yearns for peace—shudders at the prospect of fresh conscriptions, of further wholesale devastations, and of new rivers of human blood. . . . I entreat you," he said, "entreat you to submit overtures for peace to the Southern insurgents." But Lincoln refused to do so. By making abolition a condition for peace, Greeley said, Lincoln gave "new strength to the Democrats." So he did. As one of them wrote, "Tens of thousands of white men must yet bite the dust to allay the Negro mania of the President." And the Democratic party, meeting in Chicago in August '64, adopted a peace platform in which

they pledged to “preserve the rights of the States unimpaired” (meaning their right to hold slaves). The situation was such that Lincoln expected to be beaten (and, he said, “unless some great change takes place, badly beaten”). Even the abolitionists were against him. Wendell Phillips declared that he would “cut off both hands before doing anything to aid Lincoln’s reelection.”

Who—besides Lincoln—was then for continuing the war, at so terrible a price? Surely not the troops, who were deserting in droves, and not many of the officers. As one general said—this was after Cold Harbor—“For thirty days it has been one funeral procession past me, and it has been too much.” But Lincoln, almost alone, was intransigent, just as he had been in 1861.

But suppose he had agreed to sue for peace, a peace without conditions, a peace whereby the Union would have been as it was before the war, but with slavery more than ever safely secured in those states that wanted it, and its champions agitating for its extension. What would have been the consequences of that? We might discuss this later.

I earlier attributed our extraordinary interest in Lincoln, and especially our esteem for him, partly to what he said and how he said it. He was surely a great writer and speaker of words; in my judgment, the greatest. As I said on another occasion, he was (and is) our national poet. In saying this, I referred initially—because of their emotional appeal—to some of his private letters, the one to Mrs. Bixby, for instance, or my favorite, the letter of condolence to the teen-aged Fanny McCullough, whose father, a Lincoln friend from Illinois, had been killed in battle. But I know no better way to demonstrate his poetic gifts, or the awesome beauty of his words, than by quoting the closing paragraph of his First Inaugural Address, March 4, 1861.

The Address was written, we know, in Springfield, before he departed for Washington. We have also been told, and have reason to believe, that every speech that carries his name was, in fact, written by him; he employed no speech writer. And we know from his law partner William Herndon that Lincoln was “inflexibly” opposed to changes in what he had written, especially on this occasion, because he was anxious to avoid any words that might “fan the flames of secession.”

The closing paragraph in the Address might be an exception, an exception that can be said to prove the rule. The idea for it, or its central metaphor, was written and given to Lincoln by Senator—and soon to be Secretary of State—Seward. This is what Seward suggested that he say:

I close. We are not, we must not be aliens or enemies but fellow countrymen and brethren. Although passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly they must not, I am sure they will not be broken. The mystic chords of memory which proceeding from so many battlefields and so many patriot graves pass through all the hearts and all the hearths in this broad continent of ours will yet again harmonize in their ancient music when breathed upon by the guardian angels of the nation.

And this is what Lincoln said:

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battle-field and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all

over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

It is not by chance that his best and most celebrated speech was delivered on a battlefield, on the occasion of dedicating a cemetery filled with the graves of patriots. I speak, of course, of the Gettysburg Address.

A prefatory statement before turning to the Address: the principles of the Constitution are set down in the Declaration of Independence, a document that appeals to the “laws of Nature and of Nature’s God, a god—arguably, at least—that reveals himself not in the Bible but in the “book of nature,” the book readable in our day by astrophysicists and in those days by the Enlightenment philosophers and their students, such as Thomas Jefferson. What Lincoln did at Gettysburg was to make something else of the Declaration: a statement of fundamental principles—“our ancient faith,” as he put it—to which we were attached not only with our minds, but with our hearts.

It is brief, a mere 272 words, and could not have taken much more than five minutes to deliver. In its central passage, Lincoln says, “The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.” Well, what little do we remember?

We remember he said that this nation was founded in 1776 with the Declaration of Independence and its principles. We remember this because of the unusual way he said it. Not eighty-seven years ago, but “four score and seven.” His Bible-reading audience assembled there (and afterwards) would surely have remembered what he said because, in what he said, they would have heard echoes of the Ninetieth Psalm, where the psalmist says, “three score and ten,” our years on this earth, and “four score” if we’re healthy. They would not have known that the principles we declared in 1776 had their wellspring not in the Bible, but in the second of John Locke’s *Two Treatises of Government*, and that Locke’s connection with us is confirmed by the fact that his words are—although without attribution—three times quoted in our Declaration; they would not be told this because our association-one-with-another is supposed to be something more exalted than a Lockean contract entered into by antisocial individuals seeking only to secure their private rights. (Did Lincoln not speak of us as friends?) They might instead, because of the implied association with the Bible, as well as Lincoln’s designation of the Founders as “our Fathers”—who art in heaven?—they might also have thought—as they probably were expected to think—that our founding, if not sacred, was surely not profane.

They (his Bible-reading audience) might also have thought this because—and this, too, we remember—Lincoln goes on to say, after suggesting that the nation so founded might not long endure, that the brave men, living and dead, who struggled on this ground, this battlefield, had “consecrated” it better than he or anyone else could. Consecrated? Had made it sacred, a battlefield? As if they—presumably the Union soldiers—were fighting for the Lord? No, but their cause was great and noble.

We also remember Lincoln saying that their work was “unfinished,” and that we, the living, should highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain and that this nation, “under God, shall have a new birth of freedom,” and that government of, by, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.

What little do we remember? In a word, and despite what he said, we remember everything he said, and we remember it because he took great pains to say it beautifully, to the end that we remember it.

We also remember his Second Inaugural Address, especially the concluding paragraph—the poignant beauty of it:

With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to do all which may achieve and cherish a just, and a lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

Six weeks later he was murdered.

We say that a man can be known by the company he keeps. So I say that a nation, a people, can be known and be judged by its heroes, by whom it honors above all others.

We pay ourselves the greatest compliment when we say that Abraham Lincoln is that man for us.

About the Cover



This portrait of Abraham Lincoln was painted by George Henry Story (1835–1922) in 1915. Story was born in New Haven, Connecticut and initially worked as a wood-carver. In the mid-1830s, he traveled to Europe to study painting, and on his return in 1858, opened a studio in Portland, Maine. By 1860, he had moved to Washington, DC, where he was asked to help pose President Lincoln for his first official presidential photograph. Story took the opportunity to make sketches of the President, which he later used to create several portraits. Of his time in the Oval Office, he wrote, “On three successive days I quietly entered the president’s office and made pencil notes of my subject and mental observations of the changes in his countenance while he was . . . under the influence of state affairs in the different interviews with his visitors. After each sitting I

returned to my room and worked upon my picture with my sitter as vividly in mind almost as though he were in my actual presence.”

Story recalled that he made additional renderings in 1915 because he couldn’t find a portrait of Lincoln in any of Washington’s public galleries or departmental buildings. Copies now hang in the White House, the Smithsonian Institution, the Metropolitan Museum, and several other institutions.

What do each of these elements contribute to the overall impression: the framing, the pose, the light, the color, the dress, the profile, the gaze, the brow, the nose, the chin, and the expression? How well does this portrait capture the man you think you know and have read about in this book?

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