

# GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

November 19, 1863

Abraham Lincoln

During the Civil War, the Battle of Gettysburg was a defeat for the Confederacy and resulted in many casualties from both sides. Following this major battle, President Abraham Lincoln was asked to speak at a ceremony dedicating a cemetery on a portion of the battlefield. Lincoln's speech was short and powerful, and has become one of the most famous speeches of modern times.

## READING FOCUS:

How did Lincoln feel the nation could best honor the soldiers, living or dead, who had fought on this battlefield?

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 battlefield 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 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 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.

From "The Gettysburg Address" by Abraham Lincoln. Reprinted in *The Annals of America: Volume 9, 1858-1865*. Copyright © 1976 by Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc.

## Analysis Questions:

1. How did Lincoln ask Americans to honor the soldiers killed and wounded in the Civil War?
2. Though a battlefield was chosen for the site of the speech, why did Lincoln say that "we cannot hallow this ground"?

# SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS

March 4, 1865

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Abraham Lincoln

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Abraham Lincoln wrote his second inaugural address while the American Civil War was drawing to an end. In this address to the nation, President Lincoln gives a somber tribute to the war which divided the nation. With powerful language that would later be included in the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., President Lincoln calls for all Americans to reconcile their differences and to begin the healing process.

## READING FOCUS:

★ How does Lincoln's speech use the devastating effects of the Civil War and common religious beliefs to promote unity and peace?

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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, urgent 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 offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses 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

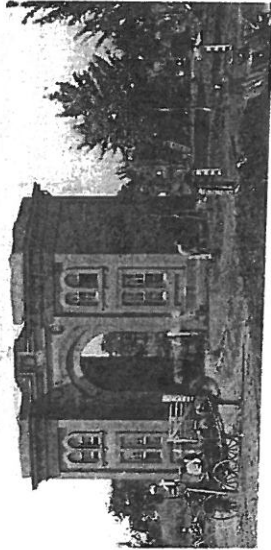
this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman'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 lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

# THE POWER OF WORDS

## The Gettysburg Address—November 19, 1863

Abraham Lincoln came to Gettysburg to speak at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery. It was just over four months since the terrible battle there, and many of those killed had been buried at Cemetery Hill. Edward Everett, a famous speaker, gave a two-hour talk, recounting the events of the battle and the fight for freedom. His speech has been completely forgotten. Lincoln's address took two minutes and has become one of the most famous speeches in American history. Even though the Civil War would continue for another year and a half, the victory at Gettysburg, and Lincoln's powerful words, provided the Union with the will to see it through.



*"I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion in two hours, as you did in two minutes."*

**Edward Everett**

*I was there too!*

*The street was crowded with people, leaving only enough room for him to pass on his horse. He would turn from side to side, looking at the people on either side when he passed with a solemn face.*

—Annie Skelly, age 7

*Another attendee at Lincoln's address remembered the "inexpressible sadness on his face"*

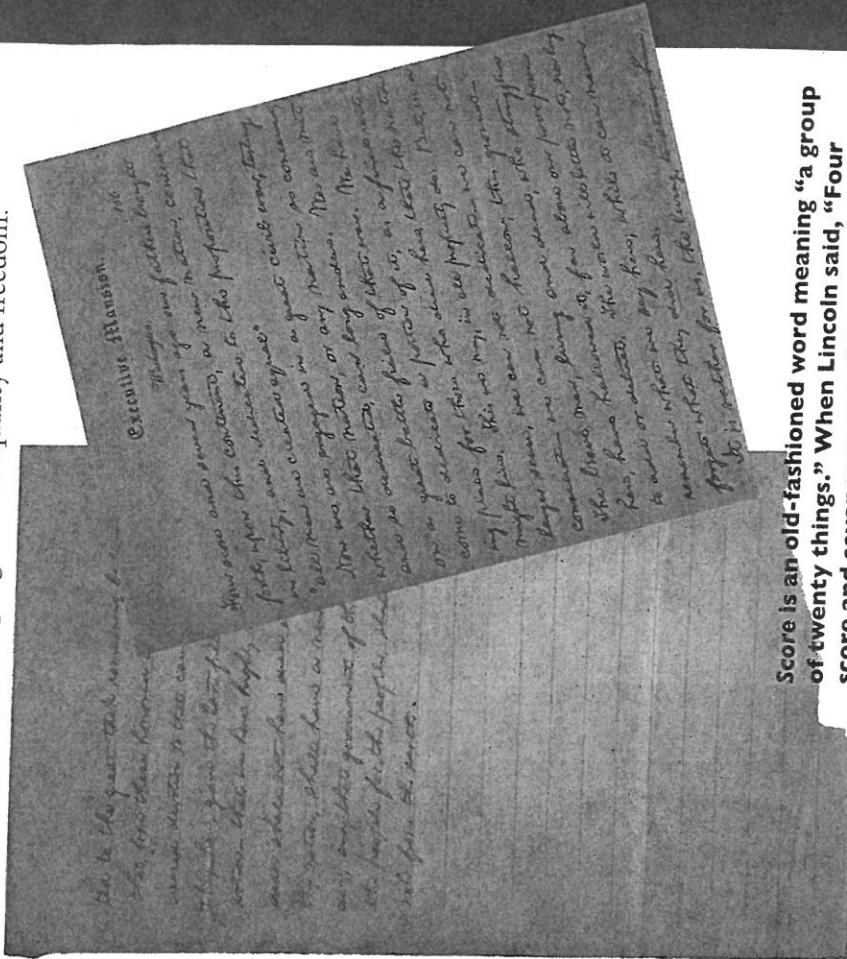
—Liberty Ann Hollinger, age 16

# WORDS

## What the Words Really Mean

In a democratic nation, *all* citizens have an equal voice. The majority rules, and the people create change by voting for lawmakers and leaders of their choice. Lincoln believed that if individual states left the Union when they didn't agree, then the "United States of America" was a meaningless idea. The nation would fall apart.

That is the message of the Gettysburg Address. The speech honors those who fought to preserve the democratic ideal of one nation governed by the will of all of its people, living together in equality and freedom.



**Score is an old-fashioned word meaning "a group of twenty things." When Lincoln said, "Four score and seven years ago," that was a fancy way of saying 87.**

# EMANCIPATION PROCLAMATION

## Push and Pull

As he looked at slavery and the Civil War, Abraham Lincoln faced difficult issues. He had to satisfy the abolitionists, who wanted to end slavery. But he also had to keep the allegiance of slave owners in the border states, which had stayed in the Union. He wanted the support of England and France, where slavery was illegal. And he had to give northerners a strong reason to support the war.

## Lincoln had other things to consider too:

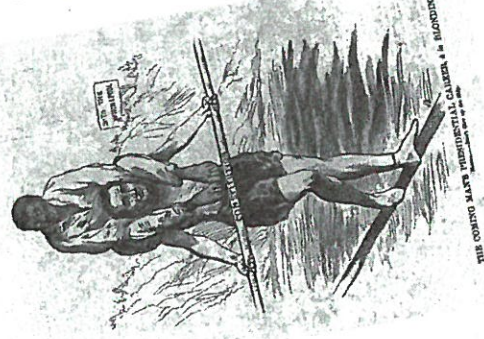
- Thousands of slaves, seeking freedom, had already fled to Union lines. Others were captured as “contrabands” by advancing Union armies. Returning them to the South was unacceptable.
- At the start of the war, many northerners supported Lincoln’s efforts to preserve the Union, but that was their only goal. They didn’t care for a war to end slavery.
- Abolitionists, however, *wanted* the war to end slavery. Frederick Douglass argued that this was a much more important cause than preserving the Union.

- Although personally against slavery, Lincoln believed that the US Constitution did not give him the power to end it.
- Fighting a war for freedom would give countries like England and France less reason to side with the Confederacy.

## Free the Slaves!

Lincoln went partway. He settled on limited emancipation. In July 1862, he shared his plan with his cabinet. Secretary of State William H. Seward

wanted to wait for a Union victory before Lincoln introduced the Emancipation Proclamation. Then, after Lee retreated from Antietam, Lincoln had his chance. On September 22, 1862, just five days after the battle, he made his announcement.



## A Proclamation of Freedom

Lincoln gave the Confederate states until January 1, 1863, to rejoin the Union. After that, all slaves living in any state that had seceded would be considered free.

## The result of the proclamation was mixed.

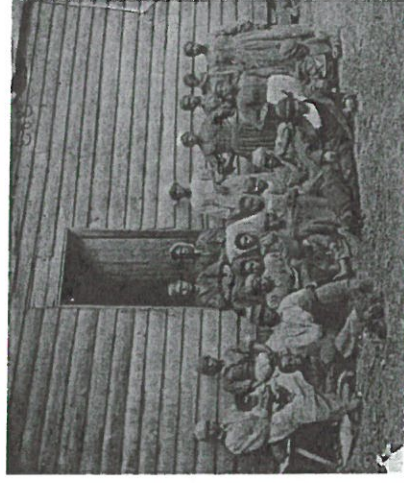
- Abolitionists were disappointed that Lincoln did not end slavery altogether.
- Confederate states were angry that Lincoln wanted to take away their slave property and encourage a slave revolt. They ignored the proclamation.
- Inspired by Lincoln’s words, many southern slaves fled to protection behind Union lines.
- The US army began enlisting black soldiers and sailors.
- Abolitionists sought to change the Constitution to outlaw slavery. In 1865, Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment. It made slavery forever illegal in the United States and its territories.

## I was there too!

*As word of the Emancipation Proclamation spread through the South, thousands of slaves broke into secret (and not-so-secret) celebration.*

*“The Yankees told us we were all free. The Negroes [visited] each other in the cabins, and became so excited they began to shout and pray. I thought they were all crazy.”*

—Sarah Louise Augustus, slave, age 8



# Why Lincoln matters

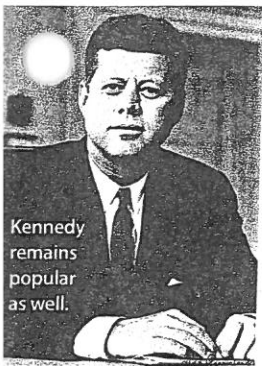


From Lincoln's death in 1865, when the American flag had only 36 stars, to today, his honesty, courage and intellect still inspire.

Two hundred years after his birth, Lincoln remains the greatest of our presidents. America's foremost historian lists the reasons why. BY MICHAEL BESCHLOSS

## 1. Scholars and the public recognize that he was the best president.

Historians and other Americans don't always agree about presidential greatness. The general public, for example, typically has a much higher opinion of John F. Kennedy than scholars do. But both groups almost consistently put Lincoln at the pinnacle. It's no accident, after all, that President Barack Obama was sworn in with the same Bible that Lincoln used at his inauguration. He understands what many of us realize: that had the president in the early 1860s been someone lesser than Lincoln, there is a good chance that the United States would have fractured into two or more countries.



Kennedy remains popular as well.

## 2. He represents the best of the American Dream.

One of the oldest American notions is that any of our children can grow up to become whatever they want. Whose life embodies this idea more than Lincoln's? This was no George Washington or Thomas Jefferson, boosted by birth among the Virginia gentry. Son of a poor, illiterate frontiersman, young Abraham lost his mother as a child and enjoyed no more than 18 months of anything remotely approaching a formal education. Nevertheless, through hard work (he read his eyes out on Euclid, military history, Shakespeare, the Bible), good character, political talent and leadership skills, Lincoln made himself into a world figure. Such a compelling story serves as a modern inspiration for presidents such as Bill Clinton, who overcame significant challenges in his early life.

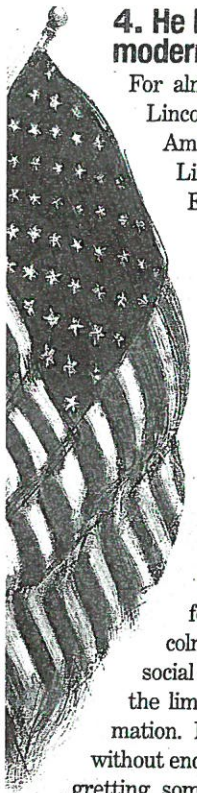
## 3. His character held strong.

Franklin Roosevelt, who guided the nation through the Great Depression and helped win World War II, was almost as great a president as Lincoln. But few Americans would urge their children to model their character on that of Roosevelt, known even to his champions for his Machiavellian deviousness. Not so "Honest Abe," as so many Americans have come to know him. He was a leader who made it to the top in American politics and waged a four-year war without lying or cheating. We know that Lincoln was almost uniformly kind even to his enemies, maintained his sense of humor amid disaster, loved his children and his volatile wife, and near the war's end, in 1865, "with malice toward none," showed not a trace of vindictiveness as he welcomed the Southern states back into the Union.



FDR led the nation through war and a depression.

Cover photograph by David Baratz for USA WEEKEND  
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#### 4. He helped pioneer modern race relations.

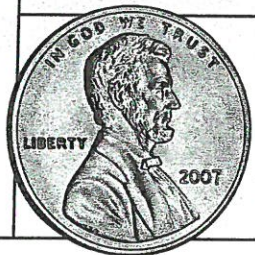
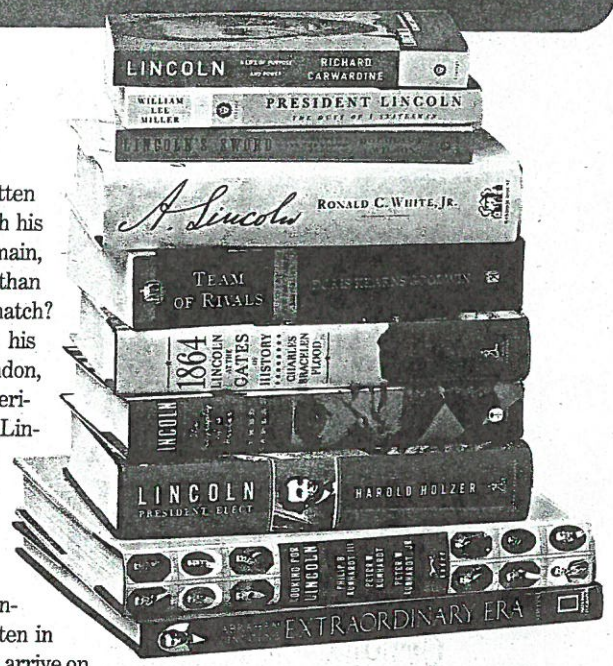
For almost a century after Lincoln's death, African-Americans celebrated Lincoln as "the Great Emancipator." As the 1960s civil rights revolution gained strength, however, the romance between Lincoln and American blacks began to cool. People paid more attention to black Civil War-era firebrands such as Frederick Douglass, who had pressed President Lincoln to understand that the struggle must not be just to reunite the Union but also to abolish slavery. And many scholars began to focus on what seemed by then to be Lincoln's shockingly retrograde views on black social equality and intermarriage, as well as the limitations of his Emancipation Proclamation. But history is always an argument without end. With the passage of time, while regretting some of Lincoln's words and actions, many scholars emphasize his growth and his political dexterity in galvanizing public opinion to give African-Americans legal equality.



Douglass urged Lincoln to understand the struggle.

#### 6. His life story still contains many intriguing mysteries.

Countless books have been written on Lincoln. Yet, as we approach his bicentennial, the mysteries remain, making him more compelling than ever. Was his marriage a love match? Or was it a hell on Earth, as his final law partner, William Herndon, portrayed it? How would American history have changed had Lincoln survived that fatal night at Ford's Theatre? Lincoln's most lyrical biographer, Carl Sandburg, captured the lingering paradoxes when he spoke before Congress in 1959, on Lincoln's sesquicentennial: "Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on Earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as rock and soft as drifting fog, who holds in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and peace unspeakable and perfect."

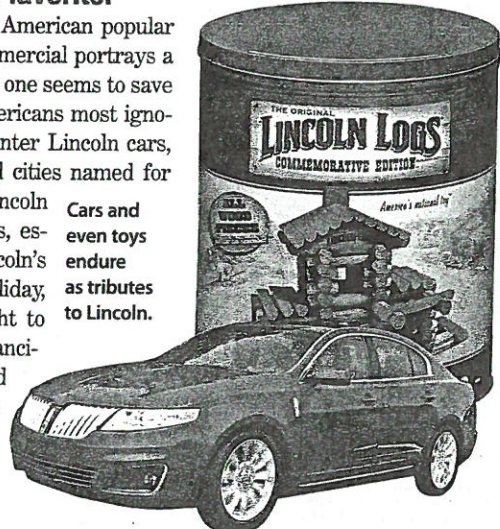


One of the most important ways leaders live on is through their words. The public language uttered by this self-taught man was poetry.

#### 5. He remains a pop culture favorite.

Lincoln has lived on at the center of American popular culture. On TV right now, a bank commercial portrays a President Lincoln complaining that no one seems to save his pennies anymore. Even those Americans most ignorant of presidential history will encounter Lincoln cars, Lincoln Logs, companies, schools and cities named for Lincoln. A formidable engine of the Lincoln legend is the fact that in many states, especially Illinois ("Land of Lincoln"), Lincoln's birthday has been celebrated as a holiday, and schoolchildren are annually taught to understand and respect the Great Emancipator. Sadly, that holiday was supplanted in 1971 by the amorphous "President's Day," which places Lincoln on equal footing with leaders such as the pedestrian Millard Fillmore.

Cars and even toys endure as tributes to Lincoln.



#### 7. He understood the power of words.

It's amazing how often the public language uttered by this self-taught man was poetry — the call for a "new birth of freedom" on the Gettysburg, Pa., battlefield and to "bind up the nation's wounds" at the bloody conflict's end. His Gettysburg Address remains among the greatest speeches that any president has ever given. And in his first debate against Richard Nixon, Kennedy borrowed Lincoln's words to describe the nation's challenge in the Cold War: "In the election of 1860, Abraham Lincoln said the question was whether this nation could exist half-slave or half-free. In the election of 1960, and with the world around us, the question is whether the world will exist half-slave or half-free." **W**



Presidential historian MICHAEL BESCHLOSS is author, most recently, of *Presidential Courage* and serves on the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, a federally appointed commission in charge of recognizing Lincoln's 200th birthday on Feb. 12.

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