

Gettysburg Address

Author(s)

President Abraham Lincoln

Date created/enacted

Spoken on November 19, 1863 at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. It lasted two minutes, and followed a two hour speech by Edward Everett of Massachusetts.

Content

(as written in the Bliss copy, the manuscript on display in the White House)

“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.”

Analysis

The Address is a brief speech with three parts.

- Introduction: Lincoln hearkens back to the creation of the United States and the founding principle.
- Mention of the Civil War: Lincoln reminds the audience that the Civil War is being fought to preserve the nation forged by the Revolution.
- Dedication: Lincoln challenges the audience to keep the founding principles of the nation alive. He calls the people to take “increased devotion to that cause [...which is] government of the people, by the people, for the people.”

Note the great irony in Lincoln's self-deprecating comment of, "The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here." He would probably be surprised to know that generations of students have memorized these words and recited them for school events and contests.

Current Location

There are five known copies of the Address. Two are in the Library of Congress, one is in the Illinois State Historical Library, one is on display in the Lincoln Room of the White House, and the last (the only privately owned copy) was donated to Cornell University and is on display there.

The version in the Lincoln Room is the one most commonly reproduced for textbooks and ceremonies. It is inscribed on the South Wall of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Teacher's Activities

The following are some activities that might be helpful in teaching the Gettysburg Address.

1. Translate some or all of the Address to more everyday, common language.
2. Imagine that Lincoln left out a paragraph in the middle of the Address. What would this paragraph say?
3. Create a similar Address based on the dedication of a cemetery or memorial to the fallen soldiers of a recent conflict, like the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan.

