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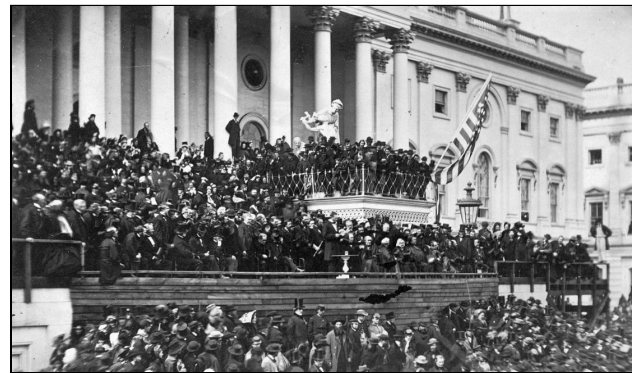
President Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

By President Abraham Lincoln
1865

On March 4, 1865, President Abraham Lincoln (1809-1865), the United States' 16th President, delivered his second inaugural speech. Weeks of wet weather turned Pennsylvania Avenue into a sea of mud; nevertheless, thousands of people came out to see the president standing tall beneath the Capitol dome, a reminder of the strength of his administration throughout the war. In little over a month, and just after the official end of the Civil War, Lincoln would be assassinated. The following speech is considered one of the most eloquent in American history. As you read, take notes on the central themes or ideas of the speech—how does Lincoln view the horrors of slavery and war, and how will the country move forward?

[1] 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 engrosses¹ 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.²



"Abraham Lincoln delivering his second inaugural address as President of the United States, Washington, D.C." by Alexander Gardner is in the public domain.

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, insurgent³ agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war – seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties deprecated⁴ 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.

1. **Engross (verb):** to hold the complete interest or attention of (someone)
 2. **Venture (verb):** to do, say, or offer something (such as a guess or an opinion) even though you are not sure about it
 3. **Insurgent (adjective):** rebellious
 4. **Deprecate (verb):** to express disapproval

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,⁵ and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend⁶ 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,⁷ 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 His⁸ aid against the other.

- [5] 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;⁹ but let us judge not that we be not judged.¹⁰ The prayers of both could not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe¹¹ unto the world because of offences! for it must needs be that offences come; but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!"¹²

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 ascribe¹³ to Him? Fondly do we hope – fervently¹⁴ do we pray – that this mighty scourge¹⁵ of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue, until all the wealth piled by the bond-man's¹⁶ two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil¹⁷ 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."¹⁸

With malice¹⁹ 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.

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5. **Perpetuate (verb):** to cause (something that should be stopped, such as a mistaken idea or a bad situation) to continue
 6. "Rend" means to tear something apart
 7. **Magnitude (noun):** the size, extent, or importance of something
 8. God's
 9. An allusion to the Fall of Man from the Book of Genesis
 10. An allusion to the words of Jesus from Mathew 7:1
 11. An expression of grief or regret
 12. A quote from Jesus that appears in Mathew 18:7
 13. **Ascribe (verb):** to attribute something to a cause or source
 14. **Fervently (adjective):** felt very strongly : having or showing very strong feelings
 15. **Scourge (noun):** a cause of wide or great pain or suffering
 16. A "bond-man" is an archaic term for "slave"
 17. In this speech, "unrequited toil" refers to the unpaid work done by black slaves since the earliest days of American history.
 18. A quote from Psalm 19.9 in the King James Bible
 19. **Malice (noun):** a desire to cause harm to another person

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which statement identifies the central idea of the speech? [RI.2]
 - A. President Lincoln believes that the Civil War was God's way of punishing the United States for its history of slavery.
 - B. President Lincoln believes that the South is to blame for the casualties of war, as it refused to give up slavery.
 - C. The nation has changed in many positive ways since President Lincoln's last inauguration.
 - D. The Civil War continued after the abolishment of slavery, proving that slavery was never the true cause of the war.

2. PART B: Which quote from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
 - A. "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." (Paragraph 2)
 - B. "One eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the Southern part of it." (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "Neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict itself should cease." (Paragraph 4)
 - D. "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," (Paragraph 6)

3. According to the text, how does the difference of four years (between inaugural speeches) alter the context of the speeches? [RI.3]
 - A. The first speech was longer, as the people needed explanation as they anxiously entered war, but the second, in light of the casualties of war, is briefer and more solemn.
 - B. The second speech is far more triumphant than the first, which was given in an uncertain time at the beginning of the war.
 - C. The second speech is more emotional and filled with more hatred towards the Confederacy, which the Union has almost defeated.
 - D. The first speech was longer as President Lincoln praised the strength of the Union, whereas in the second speech the Union is no longer so intimidating.

4. What distinction does President Lincoln make in paragraph 3 about both sides of the war? [RI.3]
- A. Lincoln argues that the Union wanted to avoid war all together, while the Confederacy wanted nothing more than to fight.
 - B. Lincoln acknowledges that the Union was the first to declare war in order to maintain the United States and that, perhaps, they should have let the Confederacy peacefully secede.
 - C. Lincoln emphasizes the fault of the Confederacy for seeking to destroy the larger union, with all states united, but does not condemn them as blood-thirsty.
 - D. Lincoln stresses the idea that neither side actively sought war; their motivations may have been different, but neither party wanted to declare war if negotiation was possible.
5. PART A: Upon whom does Lincoln cast blame for the civil war and to what effect? [RI.6]
- A. Lincoln blames the Confederate States, particularly those states that first seceded, for refusing to negotiate.
 - B. Lincoln does not actively blame anyone for the civil war, likely to avoid future hostility, but points to the institution of slavery as the cause of the war.
 - C. Lincoln does not actively blame either side; rather he blames individual supporters of slavery, thus emphasizing the evils of the institution of slavery.
 - D. Lincoln blames divine intervention for this war, for he sees the civil war as a form of senseless violence caused by an angry God.
6. PART B: Which of the following best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
- A. "On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war." (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "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. (Paragraph 4)
 - C. "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other." (Paragraph 4)
 - D. "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."" (Paragraph 6)
7. How does paragraph 6 contribute to the development of ideas in the text? [RI.5]
