

LINCOLN'S SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS

The windows of the house rattled with the March wind, causing its principal occupant to look out at the steel-gray dawn. Soon, he thought, it would be time to leave, so he tapped the outside of his coat pocket for the reassuring crinkle of paper; yes, his inaugural address was there, tucked away for the ride to the Capitol. He did not really need a copy, of course, since he had brooded about these matters for years. Yet, his words would be something unexpected for such an occasion, and besides, they were meant for a vast audience, so he wanted to get them just right.

Peering intently into the distance, he could just make out the dark outline of Virginia, and through a curtain of early mist, Alexandria. He recalled how nearly four years ago a strange, menacing flag flew over that city.

Now, that alarming presence was gone from the banks of the Potomac, having ebbed to a spot 100 miles away – the perimeter of General Robert E. Lee's breastworks outside Richmond and Petersburg. And although the Army of the Northern Virginia was still there and dangerous, it was hemorrhaging. At times, 100 or more men a day crawled out from the cold, wet, vermin-filled trenches into the night, perhaps into Union lines, but, just as likely, home.

The view caused him to study the weather more closely. Though it was early morning, it was easy to see that today would be plagued by cold and rain. The observation was ominous; this weather was even worse than at his first inaugural, an occasion which was followed by the fall of Fort Sumter and a cascade of searing events.

Then, the capitol city of the United States was virtually surrounded, so messages could reliably get out only by courier. Troops on their way to help had to fight through mobs in

Baltimore. Daily reports told of federal arsenals, storehouses, and shipyards falling into Confederate hands (Miller 97). Observers could see the steady exodus of government officials, military officers, and even Supreme Court Justices (Miller 105). And just in case it might be necessary, the Treasury Building next door was turned into a sandbagged citadel, a potential Alamo (Guelzo 273; Miller 107). The situation was so dire that the new Confederate secretary of war suggested that Washington would likely fall into their hands in weeks, if not days (Miller 107). Defeat, the rending of the Union, perhaps the destruction of the country, had been a very near thing.

Now, less than four years later, as the country marked the start of a new presidential term, only one thing seemed clear – that curiously, the war had accomplished something no one had really set out to do (Catton 583). Having started with no declared intention of freeing the slaves, the war was ending with over 186,000 black men wearing Union blue (Miller 301). In fact, today's inaugural parade would put an exclamation point on the change; amidst the usual dignitaries was a military escort of four companies of "colored troops" (Miller 396).

He had always denounced slavery and intended to put it on a "course of ultimate extinction" (Guelzo 216), but the war and God's unseen hand was finally destroying it. At this portentous hour he would tell his fellow countrymen his understanding of God's purpose and its meaning for the future, and that whatever God's will may be, they must now work to achieve a just and lasting peace for North and South, black and white, everyone together. All this and more was on that paper in his pocket.

As we peer back through six generations, Abraham Lincoln's re-election and second inaugural seem quite natural, practically foreordained. But the reality was something altogether

different. In the summer of 1864, the smart money was on former General George McClellan, the presumptive Democratic candidate. The reasons were obvious and daunting.

The bright hopes for the military campaign of spring 1864 soon darkened with the summer's savage fighting, resulting in 60,000 Union casualties in May alone. Frustration grew; the armies of both Sherman outside Atlanta and Grant at Petersburg seemed like pathetic, big bugs stuck on flypaper, mighty in appearance but unable to move.

Through the summer of 1864, leading Republicans spoke to the President in despair at his prospects; Thurlow Weed, the political boss of New York, confided that his re-election "was an impossibility" (Goodwin 647). A gloomy Republican party was hearing open talk of nominating someone else; in fact, a splinter group of Republican Radicals and other malcontents hoping to split the party did just that, nominating as their candidate, John C. Fremont (Goodwin 624).

Lincoln could do little about the military stalemate, but that was only part of the problem; there was also the clear impression that he was now fighting a war of abolition and would never agree to peace unless the South abandoned slavery (Miller 375). In contrast, McClellan suggested that he could restore the Union and would consider leaving slavery in place if that were the price.

Although Lincoln wanted to be re-elected, and to "finish [the] job," he would not abandon emancipation, as it was the only available "lever" by which the rebellion could be subdued and the Union restored (Goodwin 648). Moreover, he would not betray the thousands of emancipated former slaves now fighting for the Union (Goodwin 648). In August, when his re-election campaign had reached its lowest point, he penned a confidential memo to his cabinet, recounting the likelihood of political defeat and asking each cabinet member to pledge that in the

months before the next administration they would do everything they could to bring the war to a successful end (Goodwin 648). In the meantime, the President hatched a scheme to bring thousands of southern slaves within Union lines before the change of administration (Goodwin 649).

About the time the Democrats met in their nominating convention, however, stunning news arrived that Atlanta had fallen (Goodwin 654). The victory gave an immediate boost to Lincoln's re-election prospects, and two months later his substantial election victory (where he carried every state except New Jersey, Kentucky, and Delaware) confirmed that the country was prepared to see the war through to its end (Goodwin 656, 665-66).

The months that followed proved promising. What remained of the Confederate army in the west was routed at Nashville, effectively ending the war there, a triumph closely followed by Sherman's capture of Savannah on Christmas Day (Goodwin 684-85). Southern odds became even longer in January when Fort Fisher fell outside Wilmington, North Carolina, slamming shut the Confederacy's last remaining door to the world (Goodwin 685). Union forces now had the Confederacy by the throat, and each day it became harder for the South to breathe, eat, and live.

Military success brought political opportunity. The previous spring Lincoln had pushed for passage of the Thirteenth Amendment and the formal abolishment of slavery; while it passed in the Senate, it had failed in the House (Goodwin 686). In the summer that followed, he had insisted that the provision be made a plank of his party's platform. Now, with a stronger political hand, Lincoln urged another vote, and since Republicans already supported the measure, he lobbied fence-straddling Democrats (Goodwin 687). Ultimately, through personal persuasion and political favors, the necessary votes were procured, and the "King's cure for all

evils,” as Lincoln put it, passed (Goodwin 687-89; White, The Eloquent President 298).

But it was now increasingly clear that, in the words of General Lee, the Confederacy would “fight to the last” (Winik 38). Yet, there was the overriding fear that the wily Lee might still be able to elude Grant in the spring and get into the mountains after Virginia’s mud-soaked roads improved. The prospect meant the possibility of a guerilla war – a conflict of revenge and retribution, the type of war that could either delay restoration of the Union or imperil it altogether (Winik 39).

On top of all this, the events of this day would spark questions concerning his new Vice-President, Andrew Johnson. Johnson, a pro-Union Democrat and the military governor of Tennessee, had wanted to avoid the inaugural and had asked to stay a little longer so that he could preside over the newly-elected Tennessee state legislature (Donald 565). Lincoln thought his attendance in Washington was more important, however, and so Johnson arrived exhausted and ill from the lingering effects of typhoid fever (Donald 565). Using whiskey to clear his mind, the “cure” seemed to have the opposite effect (Donald 565). His speech in the Senate chamber was a long, rambling affair that suggested “a state of manifest intoxication” (Goodwin 697). Lincoln sat silently through it all, mostly with his eyes closed, appearing, as one observer noted, “to retire into himself as though beset by melancholy reflections” (Donald 565). The entire episode did not end until “outgoing Vice-President Hannibal Hamlin forcibly tugged at Johnson’s coattails to get him to stop” (Guelzo 416). After Johnson took the oath of office, Lincoln leaned over to the parade marshal and whispered, “Do not let Johnson speak outside.” (Donald 565).

The President and his retinue spilled out onto the wooden platform at the east front of the

Capitol, and as he was recognized, “cheer upon cheer arose, bands blatted the air, and flags waved all over the scene” (Donald 565). Once the noise retreated to the outer edges of the crowd, the President stepped forward with his speech printed and pasted, line-by-line, on a single page (Donald 566). “Just at that moment, the sun burst through the clouds and flooded the scene with light.” (Donald 566). As newspaperman Noah Brooks reported, “[e]very heart beat quicker at the unexpected omen.” (Guelzo 416). Abraham Lincoln’s heart was beating quicker, too.

The swollen sea of faces, 50,000 by some estimates (Goodwin 697), looked up expectantly, but this speech had no guaranteed applause lines. Rather, it was crafted to evoke thinking, to suggest the cause and meaning of the nation’s fiery trial. His real audience stretched far beyond those huddled against the wind and rain; he was speaking today to both North and South, those seeking revenge, and those soon to be vanquished, and to a race of oppressed people entitled to freedom and justice.

Abraham Lincoln was no present-day Moses in possession of revealed, fundamental truths. After all, there was no denying that his own thinking (or at least that which he was willing to publicly express) had undergone a profound philosophical, and more recently, theological evolution in the span of four years. In his first Message to Congress, on July 4, 1861, he described the basis of the war in these simple terms:

[The war] 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.

(White, The Eloquent President 98).

Even then, however, there was a hint that he considered the contest as hinging on more

than simply whether the only democracy in the world was about to fly apart – that is, the Union was also fighting to vindicate certain moral principles. Lincoln explained:

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 paths of laudable pursuit for all – to afford all, an unfettered start, and a fair chance, in the race of life.

(White, The Eloquent President 98; Wilson 98).

As Lincoln saw the unfolding contest, it would either vindicate the “leading object” of the Declaration of Independence, the core principle that “all men are created equal,” or it would establish forever the cynical proposition that power and some notion of a superior hierarchy were all that counted in the world (Miller 150). In Lincoln’s view, the Secessionists’ argument that they were throwing off the yoke of tyranny, much as an earlier generation of Americans had done, was a cruel mockery of that effort; he felt their position was a masquerade, anarchy wearing liberty’s clothes (Miller 150).

Two years later, his words at Gettysburg forged an even stronger bond between the war’s purpose and the Declaration’s egalitarian tone by asking the American people to see the conflict as a test, “whether that nation or any nation [] conceived [on the “proposition” that “all men are created equal”] . . . can long endure.” Therefore, as he went on to say, to prevail, the American people must do more than simply dedicate a national cemetery, they must dedicate the nation, and themselves, to putting down a rebellion that was a betrayal of the country’s organic ideals.

What was so elusive about these beliefs, however, so mysterious as a matter of theological or philosophical understanding, was why these noble, just, and righteous goals had not been

rewarded with a swift, or earlier, victory. Today, at his second inaugural, he would tell the American people why the “question” he posed to Congress nearly four years before remained unanswered; why the “People’s contest” had not only endured but may even continue; and why the “increased devotion” and sacrifices called for at Gettysburg (and pursued since then by even more “honored dead”) had not yet yielded a new “birth of freedom.”

Lincoln had been pondering these matters for some time. His thoughts surfaced in concrete form early in 1864 in private correspondence, but they were not new even then. Some two years earlier he penned a few sentences, probably after the defeat at Second Bull Run, and filed them away (Guelzo 326). What his secretaries, John Hay and John Nicolay, later found and called his Meditation on the Divine Will offered these fragmentary thoughts:

The will of God prevails__ In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be wrong. God can not be for, and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party – and yet the human instrumentalities, working just they do, are of the best adaptation to effect His purpose. I am almost ready to say this is probably true – that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet__ By his mere quiet power, on the minds of the now contestants, He could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest__ Yet the contest began__ And having begun He could give the final victory to either side any day__ Yet the contest proceeds.

(Wilson 254).

Clearly then, the Almighty had his purposes, but what could they be? At age fifty-three, Abraham Lincoln was confronting, perhaps for the first time, “the central riddle of human existence” (Catton 584).

By that time, a year into the war, if Abraham Lincoln had any comfortable assumptions about its natural outcome, they were overwhelmed by the reality of defeat and mounting losses. It

was therefore natural for a man who constantly sought the philosophical meaning behind events to consider, and at times guardedly express doubts about, the North's war aims (Wilson 254). After all, securing both the Union and popular democratic government, while noble, must not be what the Almighty intended from this war else a Northern victory would already have been achieved; and as for slavery, could it be that God was going to leave that in place and turn away from a triumphant "vindication of freedom" (Guelzo 326)?

And so, as the war stretched on, Abraham Lincoln's mind sought a theological explanation for why God was requiring the nation to walk through a sea of blood. Surely, God's inscrutable purposes, and the nation's hopes, were not perfectly aligned (Guelzo 327-28).

It would have been astonishing to those who knew Abraham Lincoln (his former law partner and confidant, William Herndon, for example, or his secretary, John Nicolay) to hear that he was thinking about God's purposes (Guelzo 312, 325; Wilson 261). Most likely, Lincoln began his presidency something of a skeptic; as one leading historian, Allen Guelzo notes, he was largely then a man who promoted "a civil religion of . . . morality and [who practiced] a private non-religion composed of 'Laws'" (Guelzo 325). And, if he saw the handiwork of God at all, it was in the basic assumption that eventually, through some sort of Divine intervention, the "monstrous injustice" of slavery would yield to some immutable natural law (Guelzo 188).

One thing seems reasonably sure. Lincoln never talked about his religious beliefs, let alone any private spiritual journeys, and never became what one would characterize as "conventionally religious" (Wilson 261). Although he would attend Presbyterian churches with Mary in both Springfield and Washington, he never made a profession of faith, joined a denomination, or accepted any particular religious creed (Miller 406). But things seemingly

changed after their son Willie died in February 1862 – Mary certainly sensed it – because for the first time her husband began to think about religion and to question God’s purposes; the war only fueled this growing religiosity (Wilson 251-52; Guelzo 325).

A confluence of events and Lincoln’s religious awakening seem to have played a hand in the one gambit that would have been unthinkable at the start of the war, emancipation of the slaves. Equally astounding was his reason for why emancipation must be done – a private vow fulfilled by God (Guelzo 341). From Lincoln’s point of view, prosecuting the war meant that slavery – the institution that united the Southern people, sustained the Confederate war effort, and provided food for its armies – must be turned in favor of the Union (Guelzo 336). The Emancipation Proclamation was a practical war measure, an effort to remove an asset from one side’s ledger so it could be added to another’s; a matter of simple arithmetic (Guelzo 347-48). Events had also taught him that the whisperings of Providence must be heeded; no longer would he conclude that God was remote and that the progress of humanity would unfold naturally, with justice eventually triumphant (Guelzo 336). So, as he later explained to his cabinet, he made a private vow to God: give the Union a victory (a clear indication of Divine Will), and he would move forward with the proclamation composed and sitting in his desk (Guelzo 341).

In September, Antietam proved victory enough and revealed to Lincoln why God had brought this war; as he surmised in the Meditation, it had been “something different” than the purpose of either party (Guelzo 341). Now, with Divine assurance, he would free the slaves in order to save the Union, reconciling his moral beliefs with his legal duty (Miller 261). From this day on, the Union that Lincoln wanted to save was not one that included slavery (Miller 266).

As late as April 1864, eleven months before his inaugural, Lincoln offered public remarks

recounting that whatever had happened in the war, and whatever would happen, “was precisely what God wanted to happen” (Wilson 254). These words revealed for public display what would become “the intellectual core of the [future] Second Inaugural” (Wilson 254).

So now, with the death knell of the Confederacy stayed only by Robert E. Lee’s diminished army, Abraham Lincoln, the unpopular incumbent nearly sacked by his own party and whose re-election had been written off, faced perhaps his greatest challenge, peacefully reuniting two parts of a warring nation. A vengeful reconstruction, a ruinous guerilla war, the likely release of thousands of slaves – these things and more threatened any hope of a lasting peace; but just as clearly, the nation could not return to “what the war had destroyed” (Catton 584). So, during the week leading up to the inauguration, Lincoln announced he would “not receive callers”; he needed to devote time to crafting a speech that just might lay the foundation for reconciliation (Goodwin 697).

After four years of bitter fighting and recrimination, to articulate the notion that both sides were to blame for the cause of the war was brilliantly sublime. But this was not merely rhetoric. Lincoln actually saw the war as being “about the violation of those inalienable rights spoken of in the Declaration, and that complicity in the offense of slavery was not confined to the Confederacy, but rather extended to the entire country, North and South” (Wilson 262). Both sides had offered liberal helpings of scripture to support their positions, and Lincoln intuitively turned there for his argument.

So, on that Capitol platform, as he glanced down at the crowd and then at his speech, the moment had arrived for Abraham Lincoln to speak of shared blame, shared cost, and a shared victory – a triumph “of all men together over a common affliction” (Catton 584). First, however,

he offered a matter-of-fact opening (Wilson 268). These are Lincoln's words:

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.

Lincoln apparently thought this might bring some applause because, as a reporter noted, he paused, but none came. This flat, business-like pronouncement landed with a thud among those expecting something hopeful and encouraging. But the words were meant to convey the impression that he had a specific point to make, and indeed he was soon moving on to recall the events surrounding his first inaugural, a useful context to understand the “limitations of human purposes” (Tackach __; White, Lincoln's Greatest Speech 124). As Lincoln put it:

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.

(emphasis in original).

For the first and last time the speech was interrupted by applause. In Lincoln's version of events, nobody wanted the war and no one started it; the war just came, with no more human

initiative, involvement, or control than would exist over the coming of a summer storm or any other Act of God.

But now Lincoln offered some history as he set the stage for a surprising scriptural explanation for such a phenomenon, phrases a church-going audience would have heard before:

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.

(emphasis in original).

Lincoln's even-handedness reveals that at some point, perhaps while sitting in those church pews with Mary, he had absorbed one of the basic tenets of the Christian religion. God's purposes were larger than he or the country had first come to see. The war came because it was God's "punishment for the offense of slavery, an offense for which both sides, North as well as South, were to blame and to whom punishment was therefore due" (Wilson 271). For effect, Lincoln lifts a jarring passage from the book of Matthew [18:7], followed by what he sees as God's message (Tackach __):

"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?

(emphasis in original).

Douglas Wilson, a preeminent Lincoln scholar, calls “the idea of Northern complicity in the offense of slavery,” the “master rhetorical stroke” of the address (Wilson 272). Lincoln underscores this shared responsibility by referring to the institution as not simply “slavery,” but “American Slavery.” Here, Lincoln is recalling that slavery never existed in a vacuum; in fact, it could not have survived if the North had not aided and abetted its culture and economy. Northern industries wove cotton picked by slaves, some Northern states prohibited entry to even free blacks lest they compete with whites for jobs, and the entire country winked at a clandestine slave trade that profited Northern shipyards but which brought misery to thousands (Miller __). Yes, the time for the removal of slavery had finally come, but this terrible war was punishment for all (Guelzo 417).

Lincoln then offers a hopeful prayer, that God in His wisdom will see that the American people, both North and South, have been punished enough for the sin of slavery:

Fondly do we hope – fervently do we pray – that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away.

But, Lincoln warned, if God is truly wielding a scourge, if retribution must still be sought for over two centuries of infamy, then the war may continue – if that is God’s will – if that is what must be done to end slavery:

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."

This last phrase comes from the Nineteenth Psalm and answers the earlier question Lincoln posed concerning why the "woe" of war had descended upon the country; it was simply one of the "divine attributes" of Providential judgment, mysterious to the finite mind but infinitely "true and righteous altogether." Lincoln was asking the American people to see these events unfold with the faith of Job, and with his own faith as well.

Having offered a fierce, unequivocal condemnation of a great moral wrong, Lincoln closes with the words for which the speech is best known. Sweeping in its call for magnanimity and healing, but with a firmness of purpose, it is directed to those Northerners who would punish the rebels, but also speaks to the white South and their former slaves, raising the vision of a cherished and lasting peace tempered with justice. These are Lincoln's final words:

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.

In all, it barely took five minutes. Almost immediately, Chief Justice Chase appeared at Lincoln's elbow to administer the oath of office, and then it was over (Guelzo 420). The President and his party turned to go into the Capitol, passing even closer now to the upper balustrade where among the packed crowd stood a seething John Wilkes Booth. Abraham Lincoln had just forty-one days to live.

The newspaper accounts of the speech took a predictably partisan turn (Maihafer 239). Lincoln probably expected as much. But he took pride in his writing and liked a compliment as much as anyone, so when he received a letter of congratulations from Thurlow Weed, he responded:

I expect the [Inaugural Address] to wear as well as – perhaps better than – any thing I have produced; but I believe it is not immediately popular. Men are not flattered by being shown that there has been a difference of purpose between the Almighty and them. To deny it, however, in this case, is to deny that there is a God governing the world. It is a truth which I thought needed to be told

(Wilson 276).

Perhaps Lincoln's greatest compliment, however, at least in his view, came from an ex-slave, Frederick Douglass; at first Douglass had been a frequent critic of Lincoln's policies, but with time and acquaintanceship, he grew to be a strong supporter. Each man admired the other. At the reception that evening, Douglass was first turned away by guards because of his race, but eventually gained admission through the President's intervention. There, in the greeting line, Lincoln asked Douglass's opinion of the address, adding that "there is no man in the country whose opinion I value more than yours." Douglass replied, "Mr. Lincoln, that was a sacred effort." (Donald 568). And so it was.

Standing there on that cold March day 144 years ago, in effect, on the nation's front porch, Abraham Lincoln could see that slavery was doomed in part as a result of his Emancipation Proclamation, and was about to be formally banished through more of his work, the Thirteenth Amendment. Soon, that Constitution and freedom would stretch as far as the might of Union arms.

But while the lash could be stayed, Abraham Lincoln knew his words alone would not spare this scourge from the nation's back – the haunting legacy of human bondage. Yet, he could offer this vision: until God removes all the ills borne to this country by the sin of slavery, the American people have a “great task” remaining before them, that is, to act “with malice toward none, [and] with charity for all.” Because when the day of absolution comes, as it surely will, future generations will know a just and enduring peace.

Today, in our nation's capitol, a pensive statue of Abraham Lincoln rests within a columned memorial. Go there day or night, and you will see fellow Americans, and people of many nations, silently reading two messages considered so important that an earlier generation inscribed them there: the remarks of Gettysburg and the 703 words of the Second Inaugural Address.

Now, of course, the site has achieved a status originally unforeseen but one that Abraham Lincoln would find reassuring, a place for national spiritual renewal where from time to time Americans can gather to reaffirm and hold the nation accountable to its pledge of human equality, and to ratify as its “leading object” the basic truth that in this country, all are to have “a fair chance, in the race of life.”

These transcendent principles – part of the promise, the hope and the dream of America – endure in the nation's character because we still hear the voice of Abraham Lincoln, and that is his true memorial.

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