

## GETTYSBURG ADDRESS

- **Occasion:** the dedication of the national cemetery for fallen soldiers at the Battle of Gettysburg
- **Date:** November 19, 1863
- **Background** on the dedication and the speakers
  - ✓ The original date was to be October 23, but Edward Everett, the orator selected to deliver the dedication speech, said he could not prepare a speech by that date. (Everett had run for Vice-President with John Bell on the Constitutional Union Party ticket.)
  - ✓ Lincoln was invited only seventeen days before the event and asked to deliver a few brief remarks on the purpose of the dedication, following Everett's oration.
  - ✓ An estimated 15,000 people attended the ceremonies, including Oliver P. Morton, governor of Indiana, and five other state governors.
  - ✓ Not even half the bodies of the fallen soldiers had been buried by the date of the dedication.
- **Inspirations (speculative)**
  - ✓ The Bible (Lincoln was a master of the language of the King James Version)
  - ✓ Pericles' Funeral Oration (Lincoln's speech parallels the structure of Pericles' speech)
  - ✓ A sermon by Theodore Parker (according to Lincoln's law partner William Herndon)
  - ✓ Daniel Webster (who once referred to the US government as "made for the people, made by the people, and answerable to the people," foreshadowing Lincoln's "government of the people, by the people, for the people")
- **Impact**
  - ✓ Brought the full force of the Declaration of Independence to play as a central issue of the war
  - ✓ Redefined the war as a struggle for freedom, not just an action to preserve the Union
  - ✓ Moved away from the cause of states' rights
  - ✓ Effectively countered anti-war sympathy in the North and Lincoln's sagging popularity
  - ✓ Stands as Lincoln's most enduring and renowned speech
- **Difficulties:**
  - ✓ Numerous variants of the speech exist, making its exact wording when delivered uncertain
  - ✓ The only copy bearing Lincoln's signature (written well after the dedication) is generally regarded as the official text

- ✓ Historical and documentary evidence belies the myth that Lincoln composed the address on the back of an envelope while traveling by train to Gettysburg
- Contemporary reactions
  - ✓ Some in attendance spoke and wrote of the speech's brevity (in a deprecatory manner) while others remarked on the less than hearty reception by the crowd
  - ✓ Governor Curtin of Pennsylvania recalled that the crowd was in awe of the President
  - ✓ Edward Everett wrote the following to the President: "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."
  - ✓ Journalistic responses split along party lines

### [The Text of the Speech](#)

Fourscore 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.

[The speech consists of only ten sentences.]