

Gettysburg Address

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

November 19, 1863

THE PRESIDENT carefully prepared this text several days before delivering it at the consecration of a national cemetery on the field of Gettysburg, where the pivotal battle of the war had been fought the previous July. Some 15,000 people were present. After a lengthy address by the well-known orator Edward Everett, Lincoln rose to give this most famous of American speeches. "The tall form of the president appeared on the stand," recalled one spectator, "and never before have I seen a crowd so vast and restless, after standing so long, so soon stilled and quieted. Hats were removed and all stood motionless to catch the first words he should utter." Later Everett wrote him: "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."

Entire books have been devoted to the gestation of the Gettysburg Address, the culmination of Lincoln's development as a spokesman for the democratic ideal. The forerunners of its measured phrases can be found in Lincoln's speeches as early as 1838. Five manuscript versions of the Gettysburg Address exist, differing mainly in punctuation. This is the version prepared by Lincoln for publication in 1864.

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 can not 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.