Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America Study Guide

Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words that Remade America by Garry Wills

Contents

Plot Summary

This book is about one speech given at one place on one occasion, that is — President Abraham Lincoln's famous speech at the dedication of the cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Lincoln spoke at a ceremony held November 19,1863, about four months after the Battle of Gettysburg.

The Battle of Gettysburg was the turning point of the Civil War. General Robert E. Lee had tried to invade the north with his Confederate Army of about 75,000. They were met by the Union Army of 97,000 led by General George S. Meade at Gettysburg. After three terrible days of fighting, July 1-3,1863, over 40,000 lay dead. Lee retreated into Virginia, and Meade was faulted for not pursuing him. Nevertheless, Lee never again tried a full-force invasion which, changed the course of the war.

Lincoln's job was to find meaning in this terrible tragedy, and to justify the continuation of the slaughter that was the Civil War. He was called upon to give only a few brief remarks. The main speaker, Edward Everett, spoke for over two hours and gave a detailed account of the battle. Both Lincoln and Everett were aware of the traditions and rules of Greek oratory, as the United States was experiencing a fad for ancient Greek. The Greek revival was particularly evident in architecture and oratory. Both speeches followed the forms of Greek funeral oratory.

The people of this era were living in what Wills calls "a culture of death." It was fashionable then to visit cemeteries and make a public display of mourning for loved ones. Rural cemeteries, in particular, offered the best opportunity for people to contemplate the meaning of life and death and have a "transcendent" experience of God and the universe, according to the current philosophical movement called "transcendentalism."

Wills writes that the Gettysburg Address achieved a "revolution in thought" and "a revolution in style." Although Lincoln's speech followed the structure of a Greek oratory, his words were simple, direct, and modern, unlike the flowery ornamental style of the leading orators of his times like Everett, Webster and Clay. The style of the Gettysburg Address influenced subsequent politicians to speak more plainly.

Lincoln's words changed the course of American history and caused not only a revolution on style but also in thought. Wills argues that Lincoln defines the United States as a people united by three ideals of freedom that were first articulated in the Declaration of Independence. These ideals are that 1) all men are created equal; 2) they have the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness; and 3) a government's job is to protect the rights of the people. This is a radical change from the older theory that kings have the divine right to rule, and people have no rights except those bestowed by their king. The Declaration of Independence, with its ideals of government, becomes the United States' founding document instead of its Constitution. The Constitution is a work-in-progress, constantly changing and becoming updated to better reflect the ideals of the Declaration.

By referring to the ideals of the Declaration, Lincoln implies that slavery is wrong because all men, regardless of race, nationality or origin, have inalienable rights. By referring to the United States as one people, he does not acquiescence to the fact that the South has already seceded from the Union. Indeed, throughout his presidency, Lincoln referred to the Confederate Army as "rebels" not an enemy, and caught up in a "rebellion" not a war. He thought of himself as president of both the North and South, and that the Civil War was a police action to quell rebellion in one section of the country. This gave him more political leeway to sign the Emancipation Proclamation as a military measure. Freed slaves could help the Northern Army quell the rebellion. Lincoln was unique as a war leader in that he never used the language of victory and triumph.

In his Second Inaugural Speech, Lincoln refers to Southerners as "neighbors," and implores "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies." Author Wills believes that a combined study of the Gettysburg and the Second Inaugural speeches gives a true picture of Lincoln's beliefs about his country and slavery. In the Second Inaugural, slavery becomes a sin. God requires the entire country to pay for the sin of slavery by shedding blood during the Civil War.

Wills believes that Lincoln found the words that "remade America." He writes "In the crucible of the occasion, Lincoln distilled the meaning of the war, of the nation's purpose, of the remaining task, in a statement that is straightforward and magical."

Prologue

Prologue Summary

The Battle of Gettysburg was a turning point in the Civil War. It took place near a small Pennsylvania farming town of about 2500 residents between July 1 and 3, 1863. The commander of the Confederate forces, General Robert E. Lee, made the mistake of trying to invade the North, and instead found his forces dying by the tens of thousands in that disastrous three-day battle. When Lee retreated, General George Meade, commander of the Northern forces, let Lee and his army slip through his fingers. Both Meade and Lee offered to resign over the mistakes they made at the Battle of Gettysburg, but their respective leaders - Jefferson Davis, president of the Confederate States, and Abraham Lincoln, president of the United States - refused to accept their resignations.

Although both sides made colossal mistakes at Gettysburg, both Davis and Lincoln, as politicians, had to put what we would call today, the best "spin" on the Gettysburg tragedy because they both were leading the struggle to win this horrible war. Lincoln had to claim victory at Gettysburg. He had to find words to comfort the thousands of families who lost loved ones in this battle, and somehow make that loss seem worthwhile. He had to keep up the morale of his Union army. He would speak at the dedication of the cemetery for the soldiers who died at Gettysburg, which would provide a chance to make sense of the tragedy. Lincoln would not be the main speaker. Edward Everett, the foremost orator of his day, would give the main address.

Even though it was three months after the battle, there were still thousands of unburied bodies everywhere. Each side lost at least 20,000 men in those fateful three days. Flies and buzzards hovered over thousands of unidentified, gas-extended bodies giving off an overpowering stench. Farmers could not plow or harvest near Gettysburg without finding human arms or even human heads in their way. Someone had to properly identify and bury the bodies rotting on the abandoned battleground.

The governor of Pennsylvania, Andrew Curtin, put David Wills, a young but prominent citizen, in charge of the cemetery operation. Wills worried that the coming winter frost would make burials impossible, so he tried to keep up a pace of burying 100 corpses a day. He had seventeen acres near Gettysburg to use for a new cemetery, and the government was sending him thousands of coffins a week. Wills and his team had to identify bodies, catalog possessions of dead soldiers like Bibles and mess kits, and burn bloody clothing, blankets and animal carcasses to prevent the spread of disease. Despite everyone's best efforts, many soldiers were buried as "unknown soldiers," and many Confederates were probably included in the cemetery at Gettysburg by mistake.

At this period in history, people enjoyed gathering to hear speakers and "oratory" the way modern people enjoy rock concerts. It was common for a crowd to listen to speeches lasting two or more hours. Edward Everett, a former Secretary of State, was

one of the best orators of his time. So when David Wills thought about having a dedication ceremony for his Gettysburg cemetery, he asked Everett to come and serve as the main speaker and highlight of the program. The program was typical of its time, featuring music, remarks by Lincoln, and a benediction by a minister. This kind of event was very popular and expected to attract a huge crowd .

Wills originally wanted to hold his dedication ceremony in October, but Everett said he needed more time to prepare his remarks. He had been the main speaker in the dedications of the Revolutionary battlefields of Lexington, Concord and Bunker Hill, and he always liked to carefully research the battles from witnesses. Everett told Wills he could not possibly be ready until the middle of November. Wills reluctantly agreed to the date of November 19, 1863.

While Wills negotiated back and forth with Everett, he also asked Abraham Lincoln to come to the ceremony and deliver a few passing remarks. Historical evidence suggests that Lincoln was well aware that Everett would be the highlight, and he knew that his own remarks were supposed to be brief. This was not an insult to Lincoln, as such ceremonies were typically planned around one main speaker. Lincoln would attend mostly in a ceremonial way - the way a king may attend a ribbon cutting or ship's christening.

Although Lincoln's part in the ceremony would be small, he nevertheless wanted to attend this dedication for political reasons. First of all, there would be a big crowd. Talking up the North's "victory" at Gettysburg was important propaganda for the war effort. Curtin was up for re-election in Pennsylvania, and Lincoln wanted to help him win. Lincoln at this time was actively looking for venues to speak where he could better define the aims of the war and encourage soldiers and their families. One piece of evidence that points to the fact that Lincoln wanted to make sure he attended the Gettysburg event is that he left earlier than scheduled. Instead of taking a 6 AM train from Washington, he arrived the night before. In actuality, had he taken that 6 AM train, he would have missed giving the Gettysburg Address.

Myth has it that Lincoln jotted down the Gettysburg Address on the back of an old envelope as he rode the train. Actually, Lincoln carefully composed the speech in Washington, DC as early as November 15, when he told a friend he had already rewritten it two or three times. Lincoln actually researched the plan of the cemetery before he went to Gettysburg.

The town of Gettysburg was so crowded with people it was hard to find lodging. Everett's daughter had to sleep with two other women, and the bed broke under their weight. Lincoln himself slept at Wills' house.

Lincoln rode a horse out to the battle site early on the morning of November 19. Only a third of the bodies had been buried, and on the day of the dedication, workers were still digging graves.

By mid-morning, about twenty thousand people assembled by the platform to hear the speeches. Everett spoke in a low deep baritone voice for over two hours. Lincoln spoke less than three minutes in his high tenor. By all accounts, everyone, including the journalists who recorded the event, thought both speeches were successful.

But Lincoln's 272 words at Gettysburg lived on to become one of the greatest writings of American history. He found the words that defined America as a great experiment in democracy and something worth dying for. As author Garry Wills writes, "Lincoln found the language, the imagery, and the myths that are given their best and briefest embodiment at Gettysburg."

Prologue Analysis

The battle of Gettysburg was a disaster for both the Confederate and Union armies. It was Abraham Lincoln's job to go to the battleground on November 19, 1863, where over 40,000 soldiers had died three months earlier, and somehow find the words that would give meaning to this horrific event.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

At this time in American and European history, ancient Greece was in style. Keats, Shelley, Byron and other writers were working with Greek themes in their plays and poems. There was a Greek revival movement in architecture. Edward Everett, holding a chair in Greek studies at Harvard University, was very much in keeping with this fashion. He was famous as a teacher, having taught people like Ralph Waldo Emerson, and famous as a speaker, being called the new "Pericles" of his time because his speeches imitated the oratory of ancient Greece. Just like Pericles and other ancients, Everett often spoke at the dedication of war memorials and war cemeteries.

Ancient Greece had ideals for speakers. The speech should be short, balanced, and almost musical. For funerals it should not be about an individual's sorrow and grief, but a general "lament." In this way Lincoln's address was closer to the Greek ideal than Everett's. Lincoln's speech is dignified and unemotional ("it is altogether fitting and proper that we do so"), short and balanced in its phrasing - like a prose poem. "The world will little note or long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here" is an example of balanced phrasing. Wills says the speech has "the chaste and graven quality of an Attic frieze." It has a cadence or beat such as found in this sentence: "We cannot dedicate, we cannot consecrate, we cannot hollow this land."

Lincoln has the Greek classic sense of balancing contrasts like birth and death, then and now. As Plato advises, Lincoln "extols the dead and exhorts the living." Wills analyzes Lincoln's Gettysburg address in terms of the nine parts of a classic Greek funeral oration. It has two main parts: praise for the dead (*epainesis*) and advice for the living (*parainesis*).

The *epainesis* section of ancient Greek funeral oratory, praise for the dead, has five parts: *logoslergion, dirkaison, progonoi, and autochthones.* Part one is *logoslergion* or the idea that an orator's words are supposed to give the dead proper respect, and what the soldier did is more important than what is being said. Lincoln says in the Gettysburg address that the world will not remember what he says here, but it will never forgot what the soldiers did here on this battlefield. That is *logoslergion.*

Dirkaion is the part of the speech that mentions the propriety or necessity of having the dedication ceremony to give the dead respect. Lincoln employs *dirkaion* when he says, "it is altogether fitting and proper" that we are dedicating this cemetery.

Progonoi and *autochthones* were parts of an ancient Greek speech that refer to the ancestors of the soldiers. Lincoln achieves *progonoi* when he says "Four score and seven years ago our forefathers brought for upon this continent a new nation." The idea is that the mission and death of the soldiers at Gettysburg was part of a bigger mission that began before they were even born.

Paideia refers to how soldiers were primed to war and the necessity of their struggle. In the Gettysburg Address, Lincoln achieves *paideia*, when he explains why the soldiers had to prepare for battle when he talks about the country being engaged in a great battle that will test whether or not the nation will endure.

Arete is Greek for courage and valor. Lincoln emphasizes the soldier's valor when he talks about these brave men "who gave their lives that the nation may live." The *parainesis* or advice for the living is the second part of a Greek funeral oratory. It has two parts: *paramythetikon* and *protreptikon.*

Paramythetikon is that part of the speech that comforts the living because the soldiers died gallantly. The living have a duty to carry on the mission of the dead soldiers so their deaths will not be in vain. In Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, *paramythetikon* is the part when he says, " "It is for the living...to be dedicated to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced," and "they gave the last full measure of devotion." These sentences point out the soldiers' valor.

Protreptikon is that part of the speech when the Greek orator advises the living to live so that they are worthy of the soldiers' sacrifice for them. Lincoln's protreptikon comes at the end of the Gettysburg address when he says "that we highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain but that this nation shall have a new birth of freedom, etc."

Chapter 1 Analysis

Lincoln had the tremendous task of making the deaths of over 40,000 people seem worthwhile. One of his themes is "life-through-death" or that their sacrifice made possible a rebirth for the living. The dead saved their country but left a job for the living to complete. Lincoln uses the images of birth and death to emphasize that death is necessary for life to continue. Phrases like "fathers brought forth," "conceived in liberty," and "a new birth of freedom" form the "birthing" motif of the speech. Phrases like "died in vain," "perish from this earth," and the "honored dead" contrast the birth motif with one of death. Sentences like they "gave their lives so that others may live" connect the two themes of birth and death.

Edward Everett was a famous Greek scholar who often spoke at cemetery dedications. He was considered to be the "Pericles" of his time, a gifted speaker who, like the ancient Greek orator Pericles, could find just the right words for such solemn occasions. Yet an analysis of Lincoln's brief address at Gettysburg shows that his speech was actually a perfect representation of Greek oratory in that it followed the form of a classical funeral speech and lived up to the Greek ideals of brevity, simplicity and balance.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

During this period in American history, there was a different attitude toward death than there is today. It was stylish and romantic to mourn for loved ones who had died and to make a public display of grief by wearing black clothes and armbands, to avoid festivities for a year after a family member's death, and to visit graves. There was a "culture of death."

Séances, mesmerism, dreams and other forms of spiritualism were very much in style. When Lincoln's wife consulted psychics and participated in séances to contact the souls of her dead children, this was considered normal and fashionable.

Abraham Lincoln himself suffered from what we would call depression, but known in his own times as "the melancholy." In Lincoln's case, he would become so depressed he would withdraw from his normal activities and go off by himself, sometimes for weeks at a time. He called this suffering from "the hypo." During these times, his friends and later his wife, Mary Todd, would worry he might kill himself. Today this behavior would be a sign of mental instability, but in his times, people not only admired Lincoln's melancholy, they considered it a sign of genius. The belief of the times was that experiencing the sadness of life only deepened a person's understanding. "Melancholy dripped from Lincoln," Wills says, "and this was an attractive quality for his contemporaries." Lincoln's Gettysburg Address has to be understood in the context of this "culture of death."

The leading philosophers and writers of his time, led by Ralph Waldo Emerson, were into "transcendentalism," a movement that assumes there is an ideal spiritual reality that "transcends" the reality we experience through our senses. By spending time in nature, a person can "transcend" normal everyday life and get in touch with this ideal spiritual reality. They were especially interested in "liminal" experiences, or the threshold where opposites meet, because such thresholds provide the best opportunity to have a transcendental experience. For example, the transcendentalists would often gaze at the horizon where sky meets earth or in their thinking, where heaven meets earth.

One of the best places to have a transcendental experience was in a rural cemetery. Here a person can see the beauty of nature in trees, sky and flowers, but is also aware of death. The transcendentalists encouraged everyone, especially children, to go to cemeteries and contemplate death and the meaning of life in a beautiful natural setting. The best known of these cemeteries was Mount Auburn in Boston, but they were sprouting up everywhere, even in Lincoln's own hometown of Springfield, Illinois. Gettysburg was only one cemetery of many built at this time. People enjoyed going out to cemeteries, and they came by the thousands to cemetery dedication ceremonies styled on ancient Greek models.

Many speeches at cemeteries used the image of the dead being returned to "Mother" earth. Lincoln instead emphasizes the founding "Fathers" in his cemetery speech, and many scholars have written that this is a false piety on Lincoln's part. They refer to the speech he gave in 1838 at the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield. Here Lincoln says the founding fathers took a gamble by allowing people to govern themselves, and if they had failed, they would have been called fools and knaves. He then warns of an ambitious man, who "thirsts and burns for distinction, whether it be at the expense of emancipating slaves or enslaving freedom." Such a man could take over a democratic government unless people were united to frustrate his plans.

Some scholars think Lincoln was talking about himself in the Lyceum speech. These "psychobiographers" believe Lincoln wanted to be like his hero, George Washington, and resented the fact that the founding fathers had the biggest chance in American history to do something heroic. Lincoln wanted to be the great Caesar who did heroic things like emancipating slaves - he wanted to be the very person he warned about at Lyceum.

Gary Wills, however, actively disagrees with this point of view. The Lyceum speech was about warning people against Andrew Jackson, and similar to what other politicians were saying at the same time. It was not about Lincoln's ambitions.

Wills argues that Lincoln admired not only Washington, but also Thomas Jefferson. "The act of bringing forth a new nation conceived in liberty is always an *intellectual* act for Lincoln," Wills argues, not a heroic one. The founders begot a national "idea," and Union soldiers fight for an idea. To be a son of the founding fathers means you have to accept and perpetuate the idea of America. Being American therefore is not the same as being Irish, German or French or whatever, but about accepting the truths of the Declaration of Independence.

Chapter 2 Analysis

The Gettysburg Address has to be understood in the context of its times. In this era (1860s), there was a fascination with death and mourning. Fashionable people often spent Sunday afternoons visiting cemeteries in the countryside and contemplating the brevity of life and eternality of death. Lincoln's address was delivered at the dedication of such a rural cemetery. Still he was able to summarize the meaning of the American experience in just 272 words. One of the greatest contributions of the speech is that Americans are united around the idea of liberty, not that they belong to a certain nationality or place.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Lincoln did not talk about the issues that faced his country in his Gettysburg Address. For example, although he had recently signed the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln did not talk about the fate of freed slaves, or whether they should have the right to vote.

Lincoln had the reputation of being a shrewd politician who could either be silent or evasive about major issues. In his times it was easier for politicians to speak in a way that would be popular in a certain place, and speak in a different way in another place because there was no national media. Lincoln took a pro-slavery stand in the northern area of Illinois, his home state, and yet he would soften that stand when he spoke in the southern and central parts of this state.

In the Lincoln/Douglas debates about slavery in the late 1850s, Lincoln would play to the crowd. He would elicit laughter by implying that Stephen Douglas was interested in equality for African-Americans because he had a sexual interest in African American women. Lincoln stated that while he believed that the two races were not intellectually and morally equal, he also believed slavery to be wrong. "I do not perceive," he said, "that because the white man is to have the superior position that the Negro should be denied everything. I do not understand that because I do not want a Negro woman for a slave I must necessarily want her for a wife."

Lincoln, as a politician, had to avoid the emotional "hot button" issue about the two races mixing socially and intermarrying, while standing for the abolition of slavery. He emphasized in speeches made before he won the Presidency that it was wrong to keep human beings as property. Sometimes he would use logic - you can not "set free" other forms of property such as your house or your horse, so how can a human being, which can be set free, be a form of property? Referring to the half-million freed slaves, Lincoln said, "How comes a vast amount of *property* to be running about without owners?" He also was clear that every person, even a slave, has the right to own his own labor and to be paid for his work.

But as Lincoln went around speaking against slavery, he frequently pointed to the Declaration of Independence as the main version of American ideals. If a person owns a human being, he becomes like a king who takes other people's labor and uses it for himself. America is about a struggle for human rights for everyone and against the idea that kings have divine rights over other people. He said in one debate against Douglas that the black man has the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness the same as any white man, as written in the Declaration of Independence. All men are created equal means all men, despite nationality, race, size, intellect or social capacity.

Douglas, on the other hand, argued that the very author of the Declaration, Thomas Jefferson, was a slave owner himself. The implication was that one could skirt the issue

of slavery and still believe in the ideals of the Declaration. Douglas argued that the Constitution not the Declaration was the law of the land. Lincoln countered him by saying the Declaration is the ideal that transcends political considerations of a certain time, and the original Constitution was written as an early reflection of the ideal. America is about a constant movement toward the ideals of the Declaration, and the changes to the Constitution reflect that.

William Herndon, Lincoln's law partner and close friend, indicated that Lincoln's beliefs on slavery came closest to those of a Transcendentalist preacher named Theodore Parker. Parker wrote that America was the first government to be formed around three ideas: 1) Each man has rights; 2) Every man is equal in terms of rights; and 3) Government is to protect each man's enjoyment of his rights. There has never been anything like this democracy before. "By Democracy," Parker writes, "I mean government over all the people, by all the people, and for the sake of all the people." Parker's words of course echo the Gettysburg Address.

Parker and Lincoln both believed in human progress, which was called "evolution" even though this was before Darwin. The Declaration of Independence was a great step forward in this evolution of mankind, a new idea that marked a new stage of human development.

Both men recognized slavery as an attack on this ideal of human freedom. Lincoln argued that confining slavery to the South would eventually cause it to disappear, but there were too many people now actively working to spread slavery into other territories. If slavery spread throughout the United States and into new territories, it would eventually defeat the ideals of the Declaration.

Parker believed that certain events like allowing Cuba and Haiti to become slave territories, the Fugitive Slave Act, the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Dred Scott case, and the current President keeping silent on the issue of slavery were all part of a conspiracy to spread it over the entire nation. Lincoln likewise believed in a conspiracy to keep the institution of slavery alive and acceptable. They both pointed out that it was becoming harder to speak out against slavery in the 1850s. The South had laws against such speech, and the Democratic Party in the North was silencing anti-slavery speakers and writers like ministers and textbook writers in a subtler but equally effective way. Democratics were making it socially unacceptable to support abolition because it caused fights and emotional arguments. How can you have a government by the people when people are being asked to keep quiet in the name of keeping the peace?

Lincoln spent a good part of the 1850s giving speeches that related slavery to the ideals of the Declaration. For this reason, when he got up to speak at Gettysburg, he did not have to mention slavery specifically. When he spoke in terms of the United States now being at time of testing its ideals, he meant the ideals in the Declaration of Independence - all men are created equal, and they have certain inalienable rights. If all men are created equal, they cannot be property.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Throughout his career and before his election to the Presidency, Abraham Lincoln spoke often against the institution of slavery, although he apparently did not believe that African-Americans were equal to whites socially, morally or intellectually. Privately, he was similar in his thinking to Theodore Parker, a minister and abolitionist. He did believe it was wrong to keep human beings as property and not to pay people for their labor. Publicly, he had to say things that were politically acceptable. He believed that if slavery were confined to the South, it would eventually die out. Early on, Lincoln connected the evils of slavery as being contrary to the ideals of the Declaration of Independence.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Wills continues to trace the influence of abolitionist Theodore Parker's thought and political activism upon Lincoln. Then he points to two other leading Whig politicians of the times —Henry Clay and Daniel Webster— as other important influences on Lincoln's thinking and framing of the issues in his Gettysburg address.

Henry Clay was a slaveholder from Kentucky who was a master at getting the two sections of the country to compromise. He fought for the peaceful preservation of the Union through compromise and legislation during his thirty-year career in the Senate and House of Representatives. Clay was a leading orator of his time, and worked toward gradual emancipation. Lincoln borrowed many ideas from Clay, but he thought Clay should have condemned slavery and supported the ideas of the Declaration of Independence. Lincoln considered the Declaration, not the Constitution, to be our nation's major *founding* document.

Daniel Webster was a leading constitutional lawyer from New England with the reputation of being a great orator in a time when people prized oratory. He argued 180 cases before the Supreme Court, and was a great legal defender of the Union. Justice Joseph Story was friendly to Webster's arguments and provided legal help in bolstering the idea that it was illegal for the South to secede. One of Webster's most famous quotes is "Liberty and Union, now and forever, one and inseparable." He also said, "Our government is not the creature of state governments." Although Webster and Clay represented two very different regions of the country, they could both agree and work for the preservation of the Union.

Lincoln often was accused of having only "mystical" arguments for the preservation of the Union that were not fully grounded in legal theory. A leading question of the times was "Why don't the Southern states have the right to secede from the Union and create their own country?" One could argue in a practical way that the country needed to be united for economic and trade reasons, to enter into treaties with other countries, and in case it were attacked by a foreign power. But Lincoln needed legal justification for saying the South did not have the right to secede. Lincoln used Webster's and Story's arguments that the United States government had been formed by and for *one people* "that brought itself into being while issuing the Declaration." Wills argues there was nothing "mystical" about Lincoln's belief in the necessity of the Union, noting "Lincoln's constitutional view had concrete legal consequences that are hard, almost impossible, to understand if one treats his devotion to the Union as a mystical notion or sentiment."

The status of belligerents. In this subsection of Chapter 4, Wills points out that Lincoln thought of the Confederate Army as a band of outlaws, not a body of foreign belligerents. He did not acknowledge that any state had seceded, and thought of himself as President of the Southern states as well as the Northern. In that way, he was

also Commander in Chief of the Confederate Army. Military measures were taken to "restore domestic tranquility." Northerners and Southerners were equal citizens. It was Lincoln's duty as President to quash any rebellion from citizens no matter where they lived. Lincoln never used the word "traitor," and presented himself more as a policeman dealing with criminals than as a military commander. These points of view, even Wills acknowledges, were legal fictions.

The Emancipation Proclamation. When he ran for President, Lincoln assured the Southerners that he would not actively work against the Crittenden Amendment, a last ditch proposal to keep the South from secession by amending the Constitution to recognize slavery. When the Crittenden Amendment failed, the South seceded and the attitude was the Constitution no longer applied in the South. Lincoln refused to take this view.

With the Civil War raging in 1863, Lincoln signed an emancipation proclamation as a military move. Slaves in the South needed to be freed to help the North put down the "rebellion." Slaves become "commodities" of war, a necessary source of help much like better ammunition. Early Lincoln scholars deplored his "low" motive for declaring slaves free, but later historians, especially African-American historians, found this motive to be a recognition of freed slaves' contribution to the War. There is a dignity, they argued, about earning your freedom rather than having it bestowed upon you.

Wills notes again that Lincoln does not mention the Emancipation Proclamation in his Gettysburg Address, although he signed it that same year. The reason is that Lincoln was speaking in terms of universals, not local and divisive issues. The Proclamation, in Lincoln's mind, was a military measure. But the great task before the American people was one of trying to live up to the vision of one people, dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

By speaking in terms of one people and one nation at Gettysburg, Lincoln immediately changed people's thinking. Newspapers began to write of the United States as a singular noun, rather than plural — "The United States is a free government" rather than "The United States are a free government." By placing such importance on the Declaration of Independence as our country's founding document, Lincoln bought about a revolution in thought. Those who believe in states' rights' arguments can score their points, but their arguments lost their force in the popular mind after the Gettysburg Address.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This is the heart of Garry Wills' book, and the section where he presents his main idea - that Abraham Lincoln invented the idea of America in his Gettysburg Address. The United States becomes one people united by the ideals of liberty. Wills also proposes that Lincoln had to find legal justifications for what he did as president, including signing the Emancipation Proclamation. His main legal ploy was to refuse to recognize the

secession of the Southern states, and to act as if he were President of the entire nation. Under this scenario, the Confederate Army becomes a band of outlaws.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Edward Everett's stilted overblown style of speaking was typical of the times. However, the minute he sat down and Lincoln got up and delivered his Gettysburg Address, Everett's style became obsolete. Just as some say that all modern American novels come out of Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn, so it is not an exaggeration to say all modern political speech descends from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address.

On the surface, Lincoln's "plain" way of speaking seems natural and easy to do. However, Lincoln took years to perfect his simple and direct way of writing and speaking. He was a student of words or a "philologist." He and John Hay would get into long discussions about words. When they attended Shakespearean plays, they would afterwards discuss whether an actor emphasized the right word in each speech. Lincoln considered language the extreme invention of mankind and gave a great deal of thought to language as "what distinguishes us from savages."

Lincoln started out writing poetry and prose in the more common, flowery language of his day. In a letter to James C. Conkling, he used phrases like "feather-footed through the plashy fan" and "Uncle Sam's Web Feet have been present at all the watery margins." But he did not move toward a plain style by simply writing shorter, simpler sentences. After all, the last sentence of the Gettysburg Address is 83 words long.

Lincoln's writing became more easy to understand when he started using "pairings" that show balance and antithesis. The pairings often sounded pleasing and melodic: "In giving freedom to the slave, we assure freedom to the free" comes from an 1862 message to Congress. "With firmness in the right (as God gives us to see the right)" and "We shall nobly save or meanly lose.. the last best hope of earth" are two other examples of Lincoln's pairings.

In his rewriting of his First Inaugural Address, Lincoln's process becomes more apparent. He knows how to give a sentence more drama and style by pairing opposite words. For example, he improves this sentence: "We are not, we must not be aliens or enemies, but fellow-countrymen and brethren" to the more dramatic "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies."

Lincoln had studied Hugh Blair's work on rhetoric, who taught that the best writing and oratory was in keeping with the classical ideals of an economy of words and balance. Blair taught that writers should use language devices only to make their meaning clearer.

Lincoln's writing reflected the fact he used the writing process as a way of thinking and ordering his thoughts in a logical way. Principles of grammar and spelling appealed to him as logical. He liked to study geometry and other analytical exercises. During

debates with other politicians, Lincoln would point to their mistaken word choices as well as the errors of their arguments. He hated the loose use of words. As his friend William Herndon once said, "Lincoln was not impulsive, fanciful or imaginative but cold, calm and precise. In the search for words, Lincoln was often at a loss because there were, in the vast sore of words, so few that contained the exact coloring, power and shape of his ideas." Because he insisted on finding just the right word and just the right sentence structure, Lincoln's writing achieves clarity and beauty. Like all great art, his writing seems to be artless.

In today's world, television, film, the Internet and other modern devices have made for shorter attention spans. Similar things were happening in Lincoln's time. The telegraph and faster forms of travel like railroads and steamships were quickening the pace of life. These developments were affecting language. When you sent a telegram, your message had to be short, clear and to the point. Lincoln was very good at this, as these three telegrams illustrate: "Have none of it. Stand firm." "Watch it every day, and hour, and force it." "Hold firm, as with a chain of steel." This quick staccato beat is found in the Gettysburg Address: "We are engaged ... We are met ... We have come .. We cannot dedicate ... We cannot consecrate... We cannot hallow this ground."

The language of the Gettysburg Address is simple, unlike the ornamental speeches of its day. It is modern. Each paragraph is locked into the one before and after it by some recurring element. Wills writes, "Although Lincoln used fertility imagery from the cemetery movement, his message was telegraphic. He was a Transcendentalist without the fuzziness."

Will concludes this chapter by saying that Lincoln effected a revolution at Gettysburg by using words as weapons of peace in the middle of the bloody Civil War. His speech is "economical, taut, interconnected." He does not argue theory, but comes to Gettysburg to make history. "No other words could have achieved the effect," Wills writes. "Lincoln wove a magic spell at Gettysburg that has not yet been broken."

Chapter 5 Analysis

Although in other parts of this book author Wills traces the influence of Greek oratory on the Gettysburg Address, in this chapter Wills emphasizes the newness of Lincoln's style. That style is brief and concise. Every paragraph connects to the one before it. This simpler style affects all political speech to come, and is more in keeping with the faster pace of modern life.

Epilogue

Epilogue Summary

The only other writing Lincoln did that equals the eloquence of the Gettysburg Address is his Second Inaugural Speech. Together the two give a clear picture of Lincoln's thinking about the meaning of the war and slavery. The Gettysburg Address gives a noble expression to the Civil War, but the Second Inaugural Speech is about Lincoln's objection to war on moral and human terms.

Lincoln himself served as an officer during the Black Hawk War in 1832. This experience took away any romantic notions he had about war. He talked about the evils of war frequently, and to Lincoln, even the American Revolution had a dark side. Lincoln wrote, "It breathed forth famine, swam in blood and rode on fire."

As a lawyer, Lincoln tried to settle legal disputes out of court. As a politician, Lincoln tried never to insult people, even when he spoke about slavery issues. Lincoln's rough background on the frontier provided him with plenty of opportunity to watch a hotheaded person start a barroom brawl over a disrespectful exchange. He wrote about how entire societies can develop suspicions and hostile attitudes toward other ones:

"Blood grows hot, blood is spilled. Deception breeds and thrives.

Confidence dies, and universal suspicion reigns. Each man feels an

Impulse to kill his neighbor, lest he first be killed by him."

While General U.S. Grant spoke about "the strategy of annihilation," and James McPherson wanted "a policy of unconditional surrender," Lincoln talked about the South in terms of "neighbors" and "friends." Lincoln's nonviolent approach was revealed in his granting many pardons to soldiers scheduled to be executed, as he would insist, "I am trying to evade the butchering business."

Despite his gentle compromising spirit, Lincoln was ruthless in his determination to get the war over with as quickly. As the war became bloodier, and became an all-or-nothing matter to many Southern leaders, Lincoln nevertheless restrained his rhetoric. This makes him almost unique as a war leader - he never boasts about victory or vilifies his enemy. He shows his humility when he speaks about things that he does not understand must somehow be the Will of God. For example, he wrote, "If I had my way, this war would never have commenced ... We must believe He permits it for some wise purpose of His own .."

In the Second Inaugural Speech, Lincoln says that this terrible war may be the price the United States has to pay for "our presumptuous sins." American slavery is an offense to God, and He now wills that slavery must be removed. Lincoln attributes the sin of slavery not just to Southerners, but to the entire country, in the same way he speaks at

Gettysburg of one people. The war becomes divine retribution in which "every drop of the blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword."

Toward the end of this same speech, Lincoln says that a redemptive period will follow the war's end. It will be a time to "bind up the nation's wound, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and this orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations." This ties into the "great task remaining before us" that he spoke about at Gettysburg. The two speeches work together to give an understanding of what Lincoln believed about the Civil War.

Epilogue Analysis

Students of Lincoln need to read the Gettysburg Address in concert with his Second Inaugural Speech to understand Lincoln's vision of the Civil War. The Gettysburg Address gives a lofty justification for the terrible bloodshed. Lincoln speaks in terms of a great nation being formed around the ideals of liberty, and that the war is a test as to whether such a nation can endure. However, in his Second Inaugural, Lincoln is more forthcoming about the terrible costs of the war. He suggests it may be God's punishment for the evils of slavery. Since the United States is and has always been one nation, God's punishment was inflicted on everyone, not just slave owners. Lincoln personally hated fights of any kind and tried in his legal practice, political life and rhetoric to avoid insults and to find compromise in differing viewpoints.

Appendix 1

Appendix 1 Summary

What were Lincoln's exact words at Gettysburg? Lincoln copied the speech in longhand at least five times, but there are slight differences in each version. Which one is the "real thing?" Which one is actually the word-for-word speech he gave at Gettysburg? Each of these texts differs by a few words or phrases.

Newspaper texts: Four newspapers sent transcribers to the ceremony to take down the exact words of the speeches. One reporter even asked Lincoln if he could look over his written text, and Lincoln complied. The newspaper versions all have Lincoln using the phrase "our poor power" instead of "our power" as in other texts.

The Nicolay text: John Nicolay claims that the handwritten copy he owned was the one Lincoln took out of his pocket and read from at Gettysburg. It is partly in pencil. However, this text leaves out three phrases that the newspapers included in their reports and has no pencil underlining. Lincoln would underline certain words in his speeches to remember to emphasize them when he spoke. Many scholars DO NOT believe this draft was the delivery text.

Wills text: David Wills was chairman of the Gettysburg event and cooperated with the later production of a memorial publication of the speeches. It was his job to get copies of all speeches and forward them to Everett, who in turn, would review and forward them for publishing. Many people believe Lincoln gave Wills a copy after the event, and he used that as the authoritative text for reproduction. This memorial publication is slightly different from the newspaper versions, so it may have been the authentic version. So far no one has been able to find the Wills text in Lincoln's handwriting.

The Hay text: Discovered in 1906, some people believe Lincoln made his copy to forward to Wills, but Hay kept it for himself as a souvenir. This document is sloppily copied with a copyist's mistakes, such as left-out words and transpositions. It seems to be a later version than the Nicolay text.

The Springfield text: Lincoln gave Everett a handwritten copy of his address to be printed with Everett's remarks for a presentation volume sold at public auction. This text differs from the Wills text because it has the words "Under God" in it.

The Baltimore text: This is the version most likely pinned up in schoolrooms. Lincoln copied the Gettysburg address in his own handwriting. It was lithographed and sold at the Baltimore Sanitary Fair of February 1864. He added a few more polishes to his version, changing a word or two.

Appendix 1 Analysis

Abraham Lincoln hand-copied his Gettysburg Address at least five times. These copies have slight differences in the text, but nothing meaningful. John Nicolay's copy is usually the one that historians believe Lincoln took from his pocket and read from at Gettysburg, but new evidence suggests this is not true.

Appendix 2

Appendix 2 Summary

Today the National Park Service runs Gettysburg battlefield and cemetery. Tourists always want to see the spot where Lincoln stood as he gave the Gettysburg Address. The obvious spot is where the Soldiers' National Monument now stands, in the center of a half-circle of graves.

However, an 1865 note written by David Wills to W.Y. Selleck indicates that is the wrong spot. He says Lincoln stood with the graves behind him on a speaker's platform facing the town. This seems more likely because the crowd would have had more open ground to stand upon. Also the graves would have been more protected from looters.

However, Frederick Tilberg, a respected park historian, argued in a 1973 article that reporters wrote that Lincoln stood on a "rise" with a view of the entire landscape. This puts him back on the Selleck site. Journalists at the scene of the Gettysburg Address also wrote that the monument would soon be placed where Lincoln and the other speakers stood - i.e., where it is today.

The Harrison Site: Kathleen Georg Harrison more recently argued Lincoln actually stood at or near the Brown family vault built in 1954 in a local cemetery. She came to this conclusion in 1984 by comparing two photographs of the crowd taken the day of the Gettysburg dedication. At that time there were no graves on the "Harrison site." The area was more open and unfenced than it is today. The "Harrison site" enables Lincoln to stand on a rise, and eliminates the main problem Tilberg had with his site - that the crowd would have had to trample over graves to take their places.

If Harrison is correct, she still has the problem that reporters wrote about, that a monument would soon be placed where the speakers stood. However, there is one newspaper report noting that a monument will be placed where a flagpole is now erected. This account matches with actual photographs of the day. The flagpole is in the middle of the semi-circle of graves, but it is not where Lincoln stood. Today most historians believe that Harrison's ideas are accurate. In fact there is even a marker at the Brown family vault to commemorate the correct spot where Lincoln actually spoke.

Appendix 2 Analysis

Tourists often visit a memorial at the site where Lincoln gave his Gettysburg speech. However, this is probably not the real site. Based on evidence from photographs taken at the dedication ceremony November 19, 1863, Lincoln most likely stood where the Brown family vault is today in what is now a private cemetery.

Appendix 3 Part 1

Appendix 3 Part 1 Summary

Pericles' speech makes somewhat difficult reading, even though Wills divides it into the parts discussed in Chapter 2: The Revival of Greek Oratory. Wills marks each part so that the reader can follow the form of the speech. Pericles gave this speech after the first battles of the Peloponnesian war. He talks at length about the value of democracy and the virtues of his city, Athens. Like Lincoln, Pericles stresses that Athens was worth dying for. Pericles praises the soldiers who died valiantly, and offers advice to the living to carry on their work. Gorgias' piece is short. It has about 14 stanzas of verse made up of four lines of poetry that do not rhyme in English.

Earlier in the book, author Wills talks about Gorgianisms - which are balanced sentences or phrases as found in the Gettysburg Address. "The world will little note or long remember what we say here, but it will never forget what they did here" is one of Lincoln's balanced antithetical phrases. In the oration by Gorgias, there are several of these. Two examples are "We have a deathless yearning for the dead" and "One for choosing a course, the other for pursuing it."

Appendix 3 Part 1 Analysis

Garry Wills includes two Greek funeral orations to contrast with Lincoln's and Everett's speeches at Gettysburg. He notes that John F. Kennedy was at his best when he too allowed his speeches to be influenced by classical oratory. For example, Kennedy's famous words from his inaugural address —"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country"— is what Wills calls a Gorgianism or a language device straight out of Greek oratory. Lincoln's sentence "The world will little note nor long remember what we said here, but it can never forget what they did here" is another example of antithesis resembling a Gorgianism.

Appendix 3 Part 2

Appendix 3 Part 2 Summary

Edward Everett's entire speech is printed in the Appendix as an example of funeral oratory. It is very long and hard to read because of its stilted old-fashioned language. It is in the style of a nineteenth century orator, so there are sentences like:

Who that hears me has forgotten the thrill of joy that ran through the country on the 4th of July -auspicious day for the glorious tidings, and rendered still more so by the simultaneous fall of Vicksburg-when the telegraph flashed through the land the assurance from the President of the United States that the army of the Potomac, under General Meade, had again smitten the invader?

Everett's work is much harder to read than Lincoln's. In a comparison of two writing samples, Everett averages 78 words per sentence, an average word length of five letters, and with sentences as long as 200 words. Lincoln's writing averages 23 words per sentence, with four-letter average words.

Everett's speech has 58 numbered paragraphs, and is divided into nine parts. The shortest part has only three paragraphs, and the longest has eleven. It is a detailed recapitulation of the events that led up to the battle of Gettysburg, the battle itself, and its aftermath. Everett blames the South for causing the bloodshed, and paints the North as heroes who are charitable in victory.

In the first part or *The Athenian Example,* Everett describes how ancient Greeks honored their war dead by ceremonies, parades, prayers and oratory, and how the name of each one was inscribed on monuments. He believes these were the right things to do because warriors save civilization from aggressors.

Part two is *Southern Aggression*, in which Everett traces the origin of the Civil War to southern "rebels" and "nameless ruffians" who play a "murderous part in the treasonable drama." He carefully describes the Confederate plan to invade Washington, D.C. and traces all the aggressive movements of the army of the South that led to Gettysburg. He considers the Southerners to be "invaders," which means the people of the North are acting only in self-defense. Invasion by rebels in one's own country is more dangerous than invasion from foreign "aliens."

In the next section, entitled *Northern Response,* Everett details General Hooker's as well as General Lee's movements that led up to the great battle, which he claims, was inevitable because of the enemy's aggression. The next three parts of this speech are *First Day (July 1), Second Day (July 2) and Third Day (July 3).* Everett's extensive research on the events at Gettysburg really shows as he recreates the battle on almost an hourly basis. He blames the South's defeat on their failure to renew the battle on the morning of July 2, giving the Northern army time to rest and to get their reinforcements

in place. "Had the contest been renewed," he says, "...nothing but a miracle could have saved the army from a great disaster."

In *Aftermath,* Everett describes Lee's defeat and retreat, and Meade's pursuit of the Rebels. He claims the South lost about 37,000 men either killed or wounded. The 7,540 who were left on the field received "the Christian care of the victors." He names all 24 generals killed or wounded on both sides, and counts only 2,843 Union soldiers killed, 13,709 wounded and 6,643 missing. By his counts Gettysburg was much worse for the South, yet most historians record the losses as more or less equal.

In the next part, *Crime of Rebellion,* Everett is clear that the war is the South's fault through "the ambitious men who rebelled...against the lawful and constitutional government of the United States." He calls this rebellion a criminal act and compares it to many other similar acts in history. He discusses the fact that the Constitution does not give states the power or right to secede from the Union. He says the North cannot yield to the Rebel's demands because the North would lose too much territory and its access to seaports, would become vulnerable to foreign attacks, and would subject African-Americans to "a reign of terror as remorseless as that of Robespierre."

However, in the last part of the speech, *Reconciliation,* Everett says the North must press on and win even as it continues to be fair and play down the bitterness between the two sides. He refers to other historical examples of civil wars, and the importance of the Union after the war is over. "The heart of the people, North and South, is for the Union." Because the stakes are so high for everyone, people "down to the latest period of recorded time" will come to believe that "in the glorious annals of our common country, there will be no brighter pages than that which relates the Battles of Gettysburg."

Appendix 3 Part 2 Analysis

Everett's speech shows a lot of careful preparation and research into the Battle of Gettysburg. Everett mentions by name every General who was killed and gives exact figures on wounded and dead soldiers. Although the language is stilted and flowery today, he held the audience's attention for two hours.

Appendix 3 Part 3

Appendix 3 Part 3 Summary

It is impossible to read even a summary of *Lincoln at Gettysburg* without going over the text of Abraham Lincoln's speech at least once. For this reason it is reproduced here:

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 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.

Appendix 3 Part 3 Analysis

The brief 272-word speech is considered one of the foremost documents of American history. It is a concise summary of the ideals of the United States of America and justifies the Civil War by maintaining that it was a test of American ideals. The speech is notable for what it does not mention: slavery, the South, the Emancipation and other important issues of the time. Wills argues Lincoln omitted these issues deliberately so that the Address would be universal and timeless.

Characters

Abraham Lincoln

Abraham Lincoln was President of the United States in 1863. The Civil War broke out almost immediately after he took office in 1860. Three years later, the fighting was getting bloodier and bloodier with no end in sight. Gettysburg was the worst battle of the war in terms of casualties - both sides lost over 20,000 men. But in that same year, another 36,500 died at Chickamauga, and still another 30,000 at Chancellorsville. In November 1863, Lincoln was under tremendous pressure to win the war. He had recently signed the Emancipation Proclamation, an act that made him even more hated in the South. Lincoln was the sixteenth president and considered one of the greatest. He spoke for about two minutes at the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery on November 19, 1863.

Edward Everett

Edward Everett held a chair in Greek studies at Harvard University in 1863 and later became president of that university. An ordained Unitarian minister, Everett served as both U.S. Representative and Senator from Massachusetts. He was Secretary of State under Millard Fillmore, and ran unsuccessfully for U.S. vice-president. He was considered one of the most dramatic and entertaining speakers of his time in a period of history known for its oratory. One of his specialties was speaking at battlefields, and he would often enthrall his audience with detailed accounts of battles for hours at a time. He spoke for about two hours at the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery on November 19, 1863

David Wills

This 31-year-old attorney was appointed by Governor Andrew Curtin to take charge of the Gettysburg Cemetery. This was a huge job as there were over 40,000 bodies to be identified and buried. He helped design the cemetery and planned its dedication. Wills asked Everett to be the main speaker at the dedication of the cemetery, with Lincoln to provide a few appropriate remarks. Lincoln stayed at Wills' house the night before the ceremony.

Andrew Curtin

Andrew Curtin was Republican governor of Pennsylvania in 1863, and up for re-election. Lincoln wanted to help him win.

General Robert E. Lee

General Robert E. Lee was in charge of the Southern Army's defeat at the three-day battle of Gettysburg, where he lost over 20,000 men.

General George S. Meade

General George S. Meade led the Northern Army to victory at Gettysburg, but it was a hollow victory. He suffered over 20,000 casualties and allowed Lee's army to escape.

Theodore Parker

A Transcendentalist philosopher and minister who supported the abolition of slavery, Parker influenced Lincoln intellectually..

Daniel Webster

Daniel Webster was a leading constitutional lawyer who had argued many cases before the Supreme Court. His legal arguments against states' right and secession influenced Lincoln.

Henry Clay

The foremost legislator of American history and known as the "Great Compromiser," he was behind many of the compromises in the Senate and House of Representatives that kept war from breaking out between the North and South before 1860.

Objects/Places

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

It is impossible to understand *Lincoln at Gettysburg* without going over Lincoln's Gettysburg's Address, which is reproduced in the Summary section of this paper. The brief 272-word speech is considered one of the foremost documents of American history. It is a concise summary of the ideals of the United States of America and justifies the Civil War by maintaining that it was a test of American ideals. The speech is notable for what it does not mention: slavery, the South, the Emancipation and other important issues of the time. Wills argues Lincoln omitted these issues deliberately so that the Address would be universal and timeless.

The Battle of Gettysburg

This was the most important and most famous battle of the Civil War. This battle, the turning point of the Civil War, occurred over a three-day period, July 1-3, 1863. General Robert E. Lee decided to invade the north in June 1863 with his Army of Northern Virginia of 75,000 soldiers. They met the Union Army of the Potomac with its 97,000 soldiers commanded by General George Meade. The battle was the worst in history on American soil: between 40,000 and 50,000 perished. It was considered the turning point of the Civil War because Lee never again tried to mount a huge offensive, and the North scored its greatest victory, although Meade was criticized for not pursuing Lee's army.

Transcendentalism

Transcendentalism was a philosophical movement based partly on emotional and spiritual experiences in nature. Transcendentalism began among writers and philosophers like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott and others who lived mostly in New England in the nineteenth century. They believed in the innate goodness of man, that insight was more valuable than logic in the search for truth, and that there was an essential unity of creation. By spending time in nature and contemplating creation, a person could have a "transcendental" experience and gain insight into the essential nature of the universe. Transcendentalists liked to contemplate horizons like where the earth means the sky or places where death meets life.

The Gettysburg Cemetery Dedication ceremony

The Gettysburg Cemetery Dedication ceremony was held November 19, 1863, about four months after the battle of Gettysburg. Edward Everett was a leading speaker of the time, with a specialty in cemetery and funeral speeches. When President Lincoln was invited to give a few appropriate remarks, he and everyone else would understand that to mean he was to be very brief and that the keynote speaker would be Everett. About

twenty thousand people came to the small rural town of Gettysburg to attend this ceremony.

The Culture of Death

The Culture of Death is a phrase Garry Wills uses to describe the nineteenth century preoccupation with death, dying and mourning. It has nothing to do today's politicians who refer to a "culture of death" in terms of capital punishment, abortion, euthanasia and other modern issues.

In the nineteenth century it was fashionable to have a morbid preoccupation with death and dying. Etiquette dictated that you wore black clothing for the first year after the death of an immediate family member. England's Queen Victoria mourned for her husband Albert for over forty years, beginning in 1860. Deep mourning was a sign of a refined, sensitive character. Since between 600,000 and 700,000 people died in the Civil War, Lincoln's time was naturally a time of mourning and death for almost every American family.

The rural cemetery movement

The rural cemetery movement was a nineteenth century fad that came out of Transcendentalism. A person who communes with nature and contemplates such opposites as life and death, or heaven and earth can have an experience that "transcends" everyday life. A rural cemetery was the ideal place to contemplate life and death in the midst of the beauty of a natural countryside. It became chic to visit graves in rural cemeteries in the 1860's.

The Greek Revival

Greek Oratory came in style in the nineteenth century, replacing a former fad for ancient Rome. Americans imitated Greek forms of architecture, sculpture and design as well as speaking. Greek orators typically spoke at the funeral services of fallen soldiers. These services could last for days. Greek orators followed a pattern of speaking that included designated parts like lauding the soldiers for their valor, commenting on the propriety of the ceremony, referring to ancestry, and offering advice to the living about how to complete any incomplete tasks left by the dead. Lincoln followed this specific pattern perfectly in his Gettysburg Address. Edward Everett, the keynote speaker, was himself a scholar of ancient Greece at Harvard.

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address is discussed in the Epilogue. Wills believes that this piece coupled with the Gettysburg Address gives readers a complete understanding of Lincoln's views on the Civil War and slavery. While he avoided specific discussion of

slavery and the South at Gettysburg, he condemns slavery in the Second Inaugural as a national sin (not one committed only by the South) that demanded the blood of the Civil War as divine retribution.

Gettysburg, Pennsylvania

The town of Gettysburg was a small Pennsylvania farming community of about 2500 people in 1863. After the Battle of Gettysburg, residents faced the problem of over 40,000 bodies rotting on their fields. A local attorney named David Wills took charge of creating a cemetery and identifying bodies.

The Crittendon Amendment

The Crittendon Amendment was a last ditch attempt in Congress to keep the South from seceding from the Union and going to war with the Northern States. It would have recognized slavery in the U.S. Constitution.

False myths about Gettysburg

(1) Lincoln did not write his speech at the last minute in pencil: he actually worked on it for several days before the ceremony. (2) There is a false myth that no one at Gettysburg thought Lincoln's speech was good. Actually, there was frequent applause as he delivered the speech, and reporters raved about it in their newspapers. (3) Likewise there is a myth that no one liked Edward Everett's speech. Actually, he received a lot of praise for it and kept the attention of his audience for over two hours.

Themes

The Importance of the Gettysburg Address

This is the basic theme of *Lincoln at Gettysburg*. Author Garry Wills believes the speech was a turning point in American intellectual history. He takes the controversial stand that the Gettysburg Address caused a revolution in the way Americans thought about themselves and their country.

The Gettysburg Address framed the United States not as a locality where people share a similar nationality or language like France or Germany, but rather as a people who share an idea. America is a country "conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." If you believe that, you are an American. Wills also postulates that Lincoln used the Declaration of Independence not the United States Constitution as the founders' document. Using the ideals of the Declaration as "all men are created equal," Lincoln gained the ability to indirectly condemn slavery as anti-American. The U.S. Constitution becomes a working expression of the ideals of the Declaration. The Constitution changes over time as politicians work out the ideals of the Declaration.

The Nineteenth Century's Culture of Death

Wills provides extensive background about how people in Lincoln's time frequented cemeteries as a way to commune with nature and God. It was fashionable to wear mourning clothing and jewelry partly because depression and morbidity meant you were a person of deep character. Lincoln's own melancholic spells and his wife's participation in seances only made them appear more attractive to others. As part of this culture of death, people liked to listen to long funeral oratory based on ancient Greek models. Edward Everett was a master of such oratory.

Lincoln's Views on Slavery and the Civil War

Wills presents Lincoln as a person who saw slavery as such as evil institution and a national sin. In the Second Inaugural Address, Lincoln says that God demanded retribution for this sin through the horror of the Civil War.

However, Lincoln as a politician needed to modulate his views in order to get elected and keep the Presidency. He is unique among war leaders in that he does not use victorious language when the North scores victories. He calls the Southerners "neighbors" and refuses to recognize the secession of the Southern states. Legally, Lincoln considers himself President of the South as well as the North. He also carefully finds legal arguments for the Emancipation Proclamation as a military measure - the North needed to use the slaves for help in winning the war the way it needed to use horse or steam power.

Wills reprints both the Gettysburg Address and Edward Everett's speech at Gettysburg in the Appendix. These are a contrast in that Lincoln's piece is restrained and universal, whereas Everett talks about military victory and the moral superiority of the North.

Wills contrasts Lincoln's views with that of other politicians of his day like Henry Clay and Daniel Webster. He traces the intellectual roots of Lincoln's thought in the work of authors like Theodore Parker and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Style

Point of View

Garry Wills writes from a third person, scholarly point of view. He has very strong opinions about the Gettysburg Address and its effect on American intellectual history, but he presents his opinions as facts. Since his opinion is mixed in with historical fact, it is hard to separate the two. For instance, he writes the following factual paragraph: "The first meeting of the interstate commission was held in Altoona, where a rural architect named William Saunders was named as the perfect man to create the cemetery's layout. Saunders, trained in Scotland and employed by the Department of Agriculture, was steeped in the ideals of the "rural cemetery" movement."

Then he uses the same style of writing to present opinion, often very strong radical opinion: "Lincoln found the language, the imagery, the myths that are given their best and briefest embodiment at Gettysburg. ... Without Lincoln's knowing it himself, all his prior literary, intellectual and political labors had prepared him for the intellectual revolution contained in those fateful 272 words." Wills' basic idea that Lincoln affected a revolution in thought and style at Gettysburg is, of course, controversial.

Besides Wills' point of view, readers of Lincoln at Gettysburg also learn the opinions that such historical figures as Abraham Lincoln, Henry Clay, John Fremont and Daniel Webster had on such topics as slavery, the Civil War, states' rights, secession and other legal topics.

Setting

The setting of *Lincoln at Gettysburg* is very specific: November 19, 1863 at the dedication of the cemetery in Gettysburg, PA, following the great battle of Gettysburg. Readers of this book get detailed descriptions of this physical place. Wills paints word pictures of a small town overrun with visitors, a battlefield where tens of thousands of soldiers died and where their bodies are still unidentified and rotting, and even views of how the podium where Lincoln stood was made. There are details of daily life that provide a sense of the times. For example, Lincoln emerges as the "un-imperial president" who rides a regular train, writes his own speech, comes outside to chat with ordinary people, and mounts his own horse. There are detailed pictures of not only principals like Lincoln and Everett but also people who play lesser roles like reporters and bodyguards.

However, what is really brilliant about this book is that Wills gives readers a complete understanding of the historical setting and context of the Gettysburg Address. He writes, "Lincoln's masterpiece had a setting too - the event that gave it a context of nineteenth century oratory, funerary conventions and the poetry of death," and goes on to explain these contexts. He presents not only the horror of the Civil War and small details of daily

life in the 1860s but also provides an intellectual setting through his long descriptions of Transcendentalism, oratory styles, "the culture of death," and the current political beliefs about slavery and the war.

Language and Meaning

Garry Wills is a scholar with widespread interest not only in American history but also biography, ancient history, philosophy and theology among other subjects. His readers and reviewers are at their most critical of his work when they discuss *how* Wills says things rather than *what* he says.

His style is difficult, often for no reason. His sentences are overly long and he chooses words of many syllables when shorter ones would do. He is at his best when he is making a short dramatic point and when he allows his passion for his subject to show:

"(Lincoln) came to change the world, to effect an intellectual revolution. No other words could have done it. The miracle is that these words did. ... At Gettysburg, he wove a spell that has not, as yet, been broken."

Wills is also capable of coming up with good figures of speech and similes: "Clay picked his way through the political swamp like a flamboyant heron, where Webster dashed in like a moody bull."

Wills is at his worst when he writes in a pedantic way. Sentences like this one are almost unreadable: "Beginning his sentences with repeated 'If's (anaphora), Lincoln rings all changes on the concessive clause (granting irrelevant assertions or assumptions for now) and the hypothetical clause (posing case after case for its own treatment)." The section of *Lincoln at Gettysburg* about Greek oratory is particularly pedantic.

Wills is unintentionally ironic in his chapter "Revolution in Style" in which he discusses how Lincoln's simplicity and brevity changed the world of oratory. He goes over how years of practice made Lincoln a great writer and how Lincoln's passion for clarity shaped his writing as deceptively simple and easy to understand. In other words, Wills knows better.

Structure

Lincoln at Gettysburg has a prologue, five chapters, an epilogue and an appendix. The prologue, epilogue and appendix are included in this summary because they are important to the book.

The first three chapters and the Prologue essentially set the stage for Wills' analyses of the Gettysburg Address. In the Prologue, Wills talks about the great battle of Gettysburg and the preparations for the dedication of the cemetery. Chapter 1 goes over the nineteenth century interest and imitation of Greek funeral oratory and how both Lincoln

and Everett used classical Greek elements when they designed their speeches for Gettysburg. Chapter 2 discusses the "culture of death" and how the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery was in keeping with the times. Chapter 3 traces Lincoln's thought and legal arguments about slavery and the Civil War and traces the influence of Theodore Parker and others.

Chapters 4 and 5 are called "Revolution in Thought" and "Revolution in Style." In the first of these, Wills explains how the Gettysburg Address changed the course of American intellectual history by defining the United States as an idea, not a place. In Chapter 5, Wills writes that Lincoln's simple and direct style at Gettysburg started a revolution away from the flowery oratory of the times. The Epilogue offers an explanation of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address as a continuation of his beliefs about the Civil War and slavery.

Copies of the Gettysburg Address, Edward Everett's speech and examples of Greek oratory are offered in the Appendix, as well as technical information about various drafts of Lincoln's speech and his exact position when he spoke at Gettysburg.

Quotes

Lincoln found the language, the imagery, the myths that are given their best and briefest embodiment at Gettysburg. *Prologue, Page 40*

Everett's interest in battles and burials had a common element: the fad for ancient Greece. *Chapter 2: Page 63*

The dedication of Gettysburg must be seen in its cultural context as part of the 19th century's fascination with death in general and with cemeteries in particular. *Chapter 2: Page 72*

In the crucible of the occasion, Lincoln distilled the meaning of the war, of the nation's purpose, of the remaining task, in a statement that is straightforward yet magical. *Chapter 2: Page 89*

Clay and Webster were important symbols to Whigs of Lincoln's background. Coming from different regions, divided in temperament, made rivals by their similar ambition, they offered the hope that a slaveholding Southerner like Clay could agree with a New England celebrant of the Pilgrims like Webster on the importance of finding ways to keep the nation together. *Chapter 4: Page 124*

Lincoln's constitutional view had concrete legal consequences that are hard, almost impossible to understand if one treats his devotion to the Union as a mystical notion or sentiment. *Chapter 4: Page 132*

Over and over again, and always, Lincoln talks of the emancipation as a purely military act he had to resort to in order to restore order in the Southern part of the United States (his task as the President of the entire nation) against armed insurrection. *Chapter 5: Page 142*

The Gettysburg Address has become an authoritative expression of the American spirit - as authoritative as the Declaration itself, and perhaps even more influential, since it determines how we read the Declaration. For most people, the Declaration means what Lincoln told us it means, as a way of correcting the Constitution itself without overthrowing it. *Chapter 4: Page 146*

By accepting the Gettysburg Address, its concept of a single people dedicated to a proposition, we have been changed. Because of it, we live in a different America. *Chapter 4: Page 147*

Hemingway claimed that all modern American novels are the offspring of Huckleberry Finn. It is no greater exaggeration to say that all modern political prose descends from the Gettysburg Address. *Chapter 5: Page 148*

Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg worked several revolutions, beginning with the one in literary style. *Chapter 5: Page 148*

Although Lincoln used fertility imagery from the cemetery movement, his message was telegraphic. He was a Transcendentalist without the fuzziness. *Chapter 5: Page 174*

Lincoln does not argue law or history as Daniel Webster did. He makes history. He does not come to present a theory, but to impose a symbol, one tested in experience and appealing to national values, with an emotional urgency entirely expressed in calm abstractions (fire in ice). He came to change the world, to effect an intellectual revolution. No other words could have done it. The miracle is that these words did. ... At Gettysburg, he wove a spell that has not, yet been broken. *Chapter 5: Page 175*

Lincoln's distinctive mark, one almost unique in the history of war leadership, was his refusal to indulge in triumphalism, righteousness or vilification of the foe. *Epilogue: Page 183*

Topics for Discussion

Why were the audiences of 1863 willing to listen to difficult oratory for hours on end, although most of the people of this era were not well educated?

Contrast Lincoln's gentle attitude toward the South with Edward Everett's ideas that the South was aggressive and to blame for the entire war. Back up your views with quotes from both speeches.

What was the eighteenth century attitude toward death in battle? How did the idea of the "glory of war" change in this century? Do you think there would be big dedications of war monuments today?

Discuss the motifs of death, birth and life in the Gettysburg Address. How was the Gettysburg Address typical of the "culture of death" at that time?

What other American presidents have been called upon to justify wars? Compare their speeches with Lincoln's speech at Gettysburg.

Discuss the relationship between the ideals of the Declaration of Independence and the institution of slavery. What did Lincoln believe about the Declaration and slavery?

How is the Gettysburg Address relevant today? Do you believe that the United States stands for an idea of freedom and democracy?

Wills points out that the Gettysburg Address produced a revolution in both style and thought. Discuss why Wills believes this, and whether or not you agree with him.

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