

## **The Gettysburg Address: An American Treasure Lesson Plan for Website**

**Title:** The Gettysburg Address: An American Treasure  
**Author:** Adapted from lesson by Dr. Donald Roberts, ExplorePA History  
**School:**  
**Target audience:** High School  
**Estimated Time:** Two days

### **Overview:**

Students will find evidence of the development of the ideals expressed in the Gettysburg Address in Lincoln's speeches and letters, and in Republican Party statements. In a persuasive speech, they will borrow one or more of the ideals Lincoln used in the Gettysburg Address and then apply them to the current political, social, and/or economic realities of the 21st century. This lesson focuses on 1859 to 1865.

### **Objectives:**

Students will:

1. Demonstrate an understanding of the key concepts expressed in the Gettysburg Address.
2. Categorize the concepts and political ideals presented in the Gettysburg Address.
3. Use effective research skills to locate political ideals in other primary sources created by Abraham Lincoln.
4. Apply conceptual information found in Lincoln's writings to create a persuasive speech on a current topic.
5. Demonstrate that they can work effectively with others.

### **Standards of Learning:**

Virginia and United States History

Skills: VUS.1. The student will demonstrate skills for historical and geographical analysis, including the ability to

- a) identify, analyze, and interpret primary and secondary source documents, records, and data, including artifacts, diaries, letters, photographs, journals, newspapers, historical accounts, and art to increase understanding of events and life in the United States;
- f) develop skills in discussion, debate, and persuasive writing with respect to enduring issues and determine how divergent viewpoints have been addressed and reconciled;
- h) interpret the significance of excerpts from famous speeches and other documents.

Content: VUS.7. Civil War and Reconstruction: 1860 to 1877. The student will demonstrate knowledge of the Civil War and Reconstruction Era and its importance as a major turning point in American history by

- b) analyzing the significance of the Emancipation Proclamation and the principles outlined in the Gettysburg Address.

### **Historical Background:**

Lincoln's skill with the English language permitted him to craft a powerful ten-sentence statement, but the speech is more than the arrangement of words. The words speak of ideas, not specifics of the recent battle.

The ideas were not new, but there is nothing wrong or un-American with that. In fact, you could argue that Declaration of Independence was the product of political theorists and philosophers of the Enlightenment, not Thomas Jefferson's imagination.

So, too, were the words in the Gettysburg Address. The ideas so persuasively expressed on November 19, 1863, were not new. They were embedded in the Republican Party platforms of 1860 and 1864. They also found expression in other speeches that Lincoln gave during his political career, both before and after the Gettysburg Address, as well as in personal letters and other primary sources.

For additional background see [Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of the Civil War \[link\]](#)

### **Materials (Worksheets and Primary Sources):**

#### **Student worksheets:**

- \* Worksheet #1: Origins of the Gettysburg Address
- \* Worksheet #2: Gettysburg Address Ideas Found Elsewhere
- \* Worksheet #3: Persuasive Speech

#### **Primary sources**

- \* Text of The Gettysburg Address

#### **Documents A:**

- \* **Source 1:** Wisconsin State Agriculture Society Speech, 1859
- \* **Source 2:** Republican Party Platform, 1860

#### **Documents B:**

- \* **Source 3:** First Inaugural Address, 1861
- \* **Source 4:** Letter to the Widow Bixby, 1864

### **Strategies/Procedure**

#### Day 1

1. **Hook:** Begin with a quick brainstorming session to check students' associations by writing the words "Lincoln's Gettysburg Address" on chalkboard or flip chart. The purpose is to find out where students start on this topic. Distribute copies of the [Gettysburg Address](#) to all students and introduce students to it by having two or three able students—to whom you have given the speech ahead of time to practice—read it.
2. The second activity will provide students with a basic historical context for the Gettysburg Address. Give each student a copy of **Worksheet #1: The Origins of the**

**Gettysburg Address.** Ask students to read the worksheet and answer the questions to get information about how this famous speech was regarded in 1863, when it was given. Students can compare their answers with a partner once they have completed the reading and questions. Then have students re-read their copies of the Gettysburg Address.

3. The third activity will be done in groups of four or five students. The teacher will determine the size of each group based upon class size. For purposes of clarity in directions, the teacher should call one collection of documents “**Documents A**” and the other set of documents “**Documents B.**” Each group of students should receive two primary source documents created by Abraham Lincoln.
4. Each group of students should decide how they want to accomplish the task of reading and reacting to each primary source, but each student or pair of students should be responsible for one of the documents. Some are longer and more complicated, so group members may decide to have partners work on those documents. Students in each group can use a highlighter to go over the documents. They should highlight key passages or phrases that contain sentiments similar to those expressed in the Gettysburg Address. Then, the group will complete **Worksheet #2: Gettysburg Address Ideas Found Elsewhere** in which they list the name of the primary source where they found a similar idea expressed as well as cite the passage. They will present their findings to the class and discuss what they mean. Since some groups of students worked on the same documents, there may be different opinions expressed on each document.

## Day 2

1. **Wrap Up:** The final required activity asks students to select one or two of the ideas in the Gettysburg Address such as “government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.” Their task will be to write a persuasive speech focused upon the idea but updated to the present time period.
2. Use **Worksheet #3: Persuasive Speech.** Specifically, they will create a persuasive speech that uses the ideas in the Gettysburg Address to commemorate critically important events of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, like the September 11, 2001, tragedy at the World Trade Center, Pentagon, and in Somerset County, Pennsylvania or another major event that students suggest.

## Assessment

### Rubric for Worksheets

#### Worksheet 1

**Exemplary** Able to give detailed answers when required and explain why the Gettysburg Address is considered a great speech.

**Proficient** Provided details to completely answer the questions.

**Adequate** Factually answered all questions with no elaboration.

**Inadequate** Unable to answer all of the seven questions.

## Worksheet 2

**Exemplary** Could explain the common thread that connected the Gettysburg Address ideas with those found elsewhere in other Lincoln documents.

**Proficient** Located three or more ideas found in the Gettysburg Address that were embedded in other Lincoln documents.

**Adequate** Located at least two ideas found in the Gettysburg Address that were embedded in other Lincoln documents.

**Inadequate** Unable to locate key ideas in primary sources.

## Worksheet 3

**Exemplary** Speech selected and articulated one or two key ideas from the Gettysburg Address and made a clear and cogent connection to a recent critical event. The speech was concise (272 words or less) and the delivery of the speech showed evidence of careful rehearsal.

**Proficient** Final draft of the speech captured the essence of one of the key ideas in the Gettysburg Address.

**Adequate** Prewriting and first draft were adequate preparation for the final draft.

**Inadequate** Incomplete prewriting and/or first draft.

## Differentiation

Able readers can be provided more challenge by having them share the reading of the Gettysburg Address aloud at the beginning of the lesson. They should also be encouraged to take the more difficult documents when working in groups, perhaps alongside other students who might benefit from their skills. Less able readers could select the shorter documents during the group activity or work with average students to share the reading of harder documents. Before the lesson, the teacher could sort through all readings to select and compile a list of more challenging vocabulary words and their meanings to have on hand. Some of these words are *italicized* and a list of these words is included after primary sources.

## Additional Resources

### Web links for students

#### [The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln](#)

Sponsored by the [Abraham Lincoln Association](#), this is the electronic version of the 1953 publication of the complete writings of Abraham Lincoln.

#### [America's Civil War: Documents](#)

University of the South Professor John C. Willis' collection of speeches, correspondence, journalism, party platforms, legislation, military orders, and statistical tables.

#### [The Gettysburg Address Library of Congress](#)

Discussion of the various drafts of the Gettysburg Address. Also displays the only known photograph of Lincoln delivering the speech.

### [“Gettysburg Address” Encarta encyclopedia entry](#)

Concise story of the speech and what it has come to mean.

A very interesting site on the Gettysburg address that contains eight contemporary reactions and explains what happened to the Confederate dead.

[http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/good\\_cause/CU\\_copy\\_p2.htm](http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/good_cause/CU_copy_p2.htm)

### **Related Web Sites**

#### [The United States Civil War Center](#)

Index of Civil War Information on the Internet, a Special Collection of the Louisiana State Libraries, with the mission “Promoting the study of the Civil War from the perspectives of all professions, occupations, and academic disciplines.

### **Bibliography for teachers and able student readers**

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## **Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address**

*Delivered 19 November 1863*

*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.

### **Student Worksheets**

#### **Worksheet #1: The Origins of the Gettysburg Address**

Directions: The information presented in this reading can help you understand the Gettysburg Address better by giving you some background information on the speech, often described as the greatest speech ever delivered by an American president. Read the “Historical Context” and then answer the questions.

#### **The Gettysburg Address: A Historical Context**

The Battle of Gettysburg was a turning point in the Civil War. General Lee was turned back from his northern invasion into Pennsylvania by the Union army, led by General George Meade. This was the last time General Lee tried to bring the Army of Northern Virginia into the North.

After three days of fighting (July 1-3, 1863), nearly 40,000 soldiers were killed and many more were wounded. Residents of Gettysburg raised the idea of creating a national cemetery on the site. Pennsylvania Governor Curtin responded quickly and by mid-July a plan was put into operation. Bodies were gathered together and buried in a large site located on Cemetery Hill.

A United States Cemetery Board of Commissions was placed in charge of creating the national cemetery. They wanted to dedicate the ground in a formal ceremony that would

honor the final resting place for so many fallen soldiers. They selected the Honorable Edward Everett of Massachusetts, one of the best-known speakers in America.

Others well-known people were invited, too, including the President Lincoln, cabinet members, General Meade, members of the diplomatic corps, and members of the House and Senate. The formal invitation to the President was sent on November 2nd, weeks after Everett's invitation. The invitation asked Lincoln say something briefly at the conclusion of the ceremony. Edward Everett's oration was the central focus; President Lincoln was the conclusion. The invitation said, "It is the desire that, after the Oration, you, as Chief Executive of the Nation, formally set apart these grounds to their Sacred use by a few appropriate remarks." This he agreed to do, and he went on to do it in two minutes with ten memorable sentences totaling 272 often quoted words.

Mr. Everett spoke for two hours and four minutes that afternoon. What he said was not a surprise to the audience because the text of his speech had been published and widely distributed days before the event. There did not appear to be much interest in what the President would say. His reputation as a storyteller had even made some Board of Commissions members fear that he would not be up to such a solemn occasion. How wrong they were.

The day following the dedication, Mr. Everett sent a note to President Lincoln congratulating him for his address. He said, "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." In his reply Lincoln noted that Everett was expected to make the long speech. He said, "In our respective parts yesterday, you could not have been excused to make a short address, nor I a long one."

Not everyone at the time agreed with Mr. Everett's assessment of the Gettysburg Address. The *Harrisburg Patriot and Union* newspaper made fun of his short speech, "We pass over the silly remarks of the President; for the credit of the nation we are willing that the veil of oblivion shall be dropped over them and that they shall no more be repeated or thought of."

The same Gettysburg Address later memorized by generations of school children and widely proclaimed as the greatest American speech ever given was also criticized by the *Chicago Times*, "The cheeks of every American must tingle with shame as he reads the silly, flat, and dishwatery utterances of the man who has to be pointed out to intelligent foreigners as the President of the United States."

Many other newspapers felt as Edward Everett did. They recognized the beauty, clarity, and simplicity of the word. They sensed that these words would live on because they condensed the unique American experience into a timeless expression of the national values of freedom, liberty, and equality.

The *Springfield Republican* called it, "a perfect gem; deep in feeling, compact in thought and expression, and tasteful and elegant in every word and comma." The *Providence*

*Journal* had high praise, “We know not where to look for a more admirable speech than the brief one which the President made at the close of Mr. Everett’s oration...”

Lincoln’s ability with the English language permitted him to craft a ten-sentence statement that would bring admiration from wordsmiths, but the speech is more than the arrangement of words. The words speak of ideas, not the recent battle.

The ideas were not new, but there is nothing wrong or un-American with that. In fact, you could argue that Declaration of Independence was the product of political theorists and philosophers of the Enlightenment, not Thomas Jefferson’s imagination.

So, too, were the words in the Gettysburg Address. The ideas so persuasively expressed on November 19, 1863, were not new. They were embedded in the Republican Party platforms of 1860 and 1864. They also found expression in other speeches that Lincoln gave during his political career, both before and after the Gettysburg Address, as well as in personal letters and other primary sources.

(The four newspaper quotes come from the website:  
<http://rnc.library.cornell.edu/gettysburg/ideas>)

### **The Origins of the Gettysburg Address: Questions**

1. List two things that were special or significant about the Battle of Gettysburg.
2. How can you tell that the people in charge of the cemetery dedication didn’t think President Lincoln would be an important part of the ceremony?
3. What newspapers were critical of the Gettysburg Address and why?
4. Give some examples of what those who praised this speech in 1863 thought of it.



## Worksheet #2: Gettysburg Address Ideas Found Elsewhere

Directions: Read the primary source documents in your group. Then look for passages (sentences and/or phrases) in these documents that support the following key ideas expressed in the Gettysburg Address. You can use a highlighter on the document to mark the passages. Then copy them onto this worksheet.

There will only be one worksheet for each group. Complete it together after each group member has had the opportunity to search a document to find evidence that President Lincoln expressed his ideas in other speeches as well as in the Gettysburg Address.

### Passages from the Gettysburg Address

1. **“...a new nation...dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal. ...”**  
(*Words opposing slavery in our nation*)

List passages that express this idea:

The primary source document(s) that this was found in:

2. **“...a great Civil War, testing whether that nation...can long endure. ...”**  
(*Words questioning the affect of the Civil War upon our nation*)

List passages that express this idea:

The primary source document(s) that this was found in:

3. **“The world...can never forget what they (the brave men, living and dead) did here. ...”** (*Words praising the sacrifices and bravery of our soldiers*)

List passages that express this idea:

The primary source document(s) that this was found in:

### Worksheet #3: Persuasive Speech

Directions: Working on your own or in pairs, use one of the ideas in the Gettysburg Address to create a persuasive speech. The speech should be modeled on the concise presentation of ideas found in Lincoln's speech.

Lincoln stressed:

1. The enduring quality of our nation;
2. The idea that in the U.S. "All men are created equal";
3. Bravery and sacrifice will be remembered forever;
4. "That this nation under God shall have a new birth of freedom"; and
5. "Government of the people by the people and for the people shall not perish from the earth."

What can you say about any one of these ideas? Here is how to plan your speech:

- Pick one or two of these ideas as the basis of your speech;
- Do some pre-writing (brainstorming and creating web/clusters) to work with your ideas before you commit those thoughts to writing in the actual speech;
- Write a persuasive speech the approximate length of the Gettysburg address (272 words); and
- Rehearse the speech with a partner, and then deliver it to the class.

Brainstorm together as a class to generate relevant 21<sup>st</sup>-century events. Use one of these suggestions or another one as the central event for writing your persuasive speech.

Prewriting:

Use web/clusters as a prewriting exercise to expand upon an idea. Write a word in the center of the circle and on each of the lines radiating from the circle write a supporting detail that adds some information about the word. For example, if "Thanksgiving" were in the circle, then such words as tradition, turkey, family, holiday, etc. would radiate from the circle. Finish these web/clusters from words (ideas) that you have identified in your brainstorming list.

Write the title or topic of your speech here: \_\_\_\_\_

On the lines below (or on the back of this paper) write words, phrases, or ideas that come into your mind when thinking about the topic of your speech:

Rough Draft:

Now, write your rough draft on the lines below. When you have completed it, share it with a partner for peer editing. Then, write the final draft, rehearse it, and deliver the speech to the class.

## PRIMARY SOURCES

### **Source #1: Abraham Lincoln's Address Before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society**

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, September 30, 1859

. . . No other human occupation opens so wide a field for the profitable and agreeable combination of labor with cultivated thought, as agriculture. I know of nothing so pleasant to the mind, as the discovery of anything that is at once so new and valuable—nothing which so lightens and sweetens toil, as the hopeful pursuit of such discovery.

And how vast, and how varied a field is agriculture, for such discovery. The mind, already trained to thought, in the country school, or higher school, cannot fail to find there an exhaustless source of profitable enjoyment. ...

It is said an Eastern monarch once charged his wise men to invent him a sentence to be ever in view, and which should be true and appropriate in all times and situations. They presented him the words: "And this, too, shall pass away." How much it expresses! How chastening in the hour of pride! How consoling in the depths of *affliction!*...And yet let us hope it not quite true. Let us hope, rather, that by the best cultivation of the physical world beneath and around us, and the intellectual and moral worlds within us, we shall secure an individual, social and political prosperity and happiness, whose course shall be onward and upward, and which, while the earth endures, shall not pass away.

### **Source #2: Republican National Platform, 1860**

Resolved, That we, the delegated representatives of the Republican electors of the United States, in convention assembled, in discharge of the duty we owe to our constituent and our country, unite in the following declarations:

1. That the history of the nation during the last four years has fully established the propriety and necessity of the organization and perpetuation of the republican party, and that the causes which called it into existence are permanent in their nature, and now more than ever before demand its peaceful and constitutional triumph.

2. That the maintenance of the principles promulgated in the Declaration of Independence and embodied in the Federal Constitution, "That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed," is essential to the preservation of our Republican institutions; and that the Federal Constitution, the rights of the states, and the Union of the states, must and shall be preserved.

3. That to the Union of the States this nation owes its unprecedented increase in population; its surprising development of material resources; its rapid *augmentation* of

wealth; its happiness at home and its honor abroad; and we hold in *abhorrence* all schemes for disunion, come from whatever source they may; and we congratulate the country that no republican member of congress has uttered or *countenanced* the threats of disunion so often made by democratic members, without rebuke and with applause from their political associates; and we denounce those threats of disunion, in case of a popular overthrow of their ascendancy, as denying the vital principles of a free government, and as an avowal of contemplated treason, which it is the imperative duty of an indignant people sternly to rebuke and forever silence. . . .

5. That the present Democratic Administration has far exceeded our worst apprehension in its measureless *subserviency* to the exactions of a sectional interest, as is especially evident in its desperate exertions to force the infamous Lecompton constitution upon the protesting people of Kansas - in *construing* the personal relation between master and servant to involve an unqualified property in persons - in its attempted enforcement everywhere, on land and sea, through the *intervention* of congress and of the federal courts, of the extreme pretensions of a purely local interest, and in its general and unvarying abuse of the power entrusted to it by a confiding people.

6. That the people justly view with alarm the reckless extravagance which *pervades* every department of the Federal Government; that a return to rigid economy and accountability is indispensable to arrest the systematic plunder of the public treasury by favored partisans; while the recent startling developments of frauds and corruptions at the federal *metropolis*, show that an entire change of Administration is imperatively demanded.

7. That the new *dogma* that the Constitution of its own force carries slavery into any or all of the territories of the United States, is a dangerous political heresy, at variance with the explicit provisions of that instrument itself, with *cotemporaneous* exposition, and with legislative and judicial precedent, is revolutionary in its tendency and subversive of the peace and harmony of the country.

8. That the normal condition of all the territory of the United States is that of freedom; that as our republican fathers, when they had abolished slavery in all our national territory, ordained that no "person should be deprived of life, liberty or property, without due process of law," it becomes our duty, by legislation, whenever such legislation is necessary, to maintain this provision of the constitution against all attempts to violate it; and we deny the authority of congress, of a territorial legislature, or of any individuals, to give legal existence to slavery in any territory of the United States.

9. That we brand the recent re-opening of the African Slave Trade, under the cover of our national flag, aided by perversions of judicial power, as a crime against humanity, and a burning shame to our country and age, and we call upon congress to take prompt and efficient measures for the total and final suppression of that *execrable* traffic.

**Source #3: Abraham Lincoln's First Inaugural Address**  
Washington D.C., March 4, 1861

Fellow-Citizens of the United States:

In *compliance* with a custom as old as the Government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly and to take in your presence the oath prescribed by the Constitution of the United States to be taken by the President “before he enters on the execution of this office.” ...

I take the official oath to-day with no mental reservations and with no purpose to *construe* the Constitution or laws by any *hypercritical* rules; and while I do not choose now to specify particular acts of Congress as proper to be enforced, I do suggest that it will be much safer for all, both in official and private stations, to conform to and abide by all those acts which stand unrepealed than to violate any of them trusting to find *impunity* in having them held to be unconstitutional. ...

It is seventy-two years since the first inauguration of a President under our National Constitution. During that period fifteen different and greatly distinguished citizens have in succession administered the executive branch of the Government. They have conducted it through many perils, and generally with great success. Yet, with all this scope of precedent, I now enter upon the same task for the brief constitutional term of four years under great and peculiar difficulty. A disruption of the Federal Union, heretofore only menaced, is now formidably attempted.

I hold that in contemplation of universal law and of the Constitution the Union of these States is perpetual. *Perpetuity* is implied, if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments. ...

Continue to execute all the express provisions of our National Constitution, and the Union will endure forever, it being impossible to destroy it except by some action not provided for in the instrument itself. ...

Physically speaking, we can not separate. We can not remove our respective sections from each other nor build an *impassable* wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced and go out of the presence and beyond the reach of each other, but the different parts of our country can not do this. ... Can aliens make treaties easier than friends can make laws? Can treaties be more faithfully enforced between aliens than laws can among friends? Suppose you go to war, you can not fight always; and when, after much loss on both sides and no gain on either, you cease fighting, the identical old questions... are again upon you. This country, with its institutions, belongs to the people who inhabit it. ...

My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time. If there be an object to hurry any of you in hot haste to a step which you would never take deliberately, that object will be frustrated by taking time; but no good object can be frustrated by it. ... In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not assail you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You

have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to “preserve, protect, and defend it.”

I am *loath* to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and hearthstone all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.

**Source #4: Lincoln’s Letter to the Widow Bixby, November 21, 1864**

Executive Mansion,  
Washington, November 21, 1864.

Dear Madam,

I have been shown in the files of the War Department a statement of the Adjutant General of Massachusetts that you are the mother of five sons who have died gloriously on the field of battle.

I feel how weak and fruitless must be any word of mine which should attempt to beguile you from the grief of a loss so overwhelming. But I cannot refrain from tendering you the consolation that may be found in the thanks of the Republic they died to save.

I pray that our Heavenly Father may assuage the anguish of your bereavement, and leave you only the cherished memory of the loved and lost, and the solemn pride that must be yours to have laid so costly a sacrifice upon the altar of freedom.

Yours, very sincerely and respectfully,

A. Lincoln

**Italicized words from primary sources 1-4:**

Source # 1

- Affliction

Source # 2

- Augmentation                      Pervades
- Abhorrence                         Metropolis
- Countenanced                     Dogma
- Subserviency                      Contemporaneous
- Construing                         Execrable
- Intervention

Source #3

- Compliance                        Perpetuity
- Hypercritical                      Impassable

- Impunity                      Loath

### **Additional background essay**

#### Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of the Civil War

The evening before Abraham Lincoln delivered his famous address at Gettysburg, some of his top aides went “loafing around” the small Pennsylvania town. They noticed that a crowd of people had gathered outside the home of local attorney David Wills. Inside the residence, which was situated just off the main square, President Lincoln was eating supper with Wills, the man who had organized the development of the new military cemetery. Hearing the restless crowd, Lincoln soon appeared at the door, “said a half a dozen words meaning nothing & went in,” according to the diary of John Hay, a 25-year-old presidential assistant.

Equally unimpressed as Hay, the group continued to make its way up and down the streets of Gettysburg, requesting speeches from other visiting dignitaries, a custom known as “serenading.” Eventually, they stopped outside a building where several of the president’s advisors had gathered, encouraging them to come out as well. One of the men, a Pennsylvania-born newspaper editor and political figure named John W. Forney, angrily confronted the group.

“My friends,” Forney began, “these are the first hearty cheers I have heard tonight. You gave no such cheers to your President down the street. Do you know what you owe to that Great man? You owe your country — you owe your name as American citizens.” Forney continued to rant for several minutes, before the other political advisors finally cut him off.

There was nothing about John Forney’s outburst on Wednesday, November 18, 1863, that deserves to overshadow the dignity of what Abraham Lincoln said the next day in honor of the war dead of the great battle. But this brief, very human scene recorded in John Hay’s diary reveals a great deal about the politics of the Civil War era.

While he was alive, Lincoln was not the titanic figure he is today. He was as vilified as any president in American history. His legitimacy in office was challenged, his personal habits ridiculed, and his life threatened and eventually taken.

Looking backward, it is easy to glorify the Civil War and the men and women from both sides who made such noble sacrifices for their beliefs. Yet despite all of the courage and tragedy of the wartime period, there was also confusion, uncertainty and despair. The whirlwind of troubles overwhelmed many lesser leaders, like Lincoln’s predecessor, and Pennsylvania native, James Buchanan. Their failures help explain why politics mattered so much, and why Abraham Lincoln remains so revered. He was the finest political leader during the nation’s worst political crisis.

Lincoln's path to greatness went through Pennsylvania. His political success was a product of the new Republican Party that first organized nationally in Pittsburgh and Philadelphia during the mid-1850s. As the second most populous state, Pennsylvania's twenty-seven electoral votes also held the key to his election as president. Without Pennsylvania in 1860, the Republicans could not win the White House.

More importantly, the Keystone State proved pivotal in winning the Civil War. Both of Lincoln's secretaries of war, and several of his leading generals, hailed from Pennsylvania. The state contributed over 360,000 men to the Union war effort, more than any other northern state except New York. Confederate forces frightened the commonwealth's residents with invasion or attack at least a half a dozen times, but the state continued to produce solid, if not always enthusiastic, support for the President and his policies.

Out of respect for the state's influence, Lincoln carefully cultivated friends in Pennsylvania: powerful politicians like editor John Forney and Governor Andrew Curtin. It is also partly why he came to Gettysburg in 1863 to deliver his eloquent statement about the meaning of the conflict. He knew that if he could rally the war-weary population of southeastern Pennsylvania, he might reasonably expect to keep holding the Union coalition together.

John Forney's outburst reminds us that victory did not always seem inevitable to those helping to achieve it, and that political leadership was an indispensable element of the Union's success.