

Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865

Fellow-Countrymen:

1 AT this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an
extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be
pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public
declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which
still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be
presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the
public as to myself, and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for
5 the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to
an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was
being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to *saving* the Union without war, insurgent
agents were in the city seeking to *destroy* it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union and
divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would *make* war
rather than let the nation survive, and the other would *accept* war rather than let it perish, and
10 the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the
Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and
powerful interest. All knew that this interest was somehow the cause of the war. To
strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would
rend the Union even by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than to
restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or
the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict
15 might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier
triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to
the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men
should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other
men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be
answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes.
"Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to
that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of
those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having
20 continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both

1 North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous
5 altogether."

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.