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 **A new nation,
conceived
in liberty**
Abraham Lincoln

**Gettysburg Address
delivered
November 19, 1863**

**Comments and
reprint distributed
on Memorial Day,
May 29, 2023**



Lincoln delivered this famous speech at the dedication of the Gettysburg National Cemetery on November 19, 1863. PHOTOGRAPH OF 1905 LITHOGRAPH BY HERITAGE IMAGES

The Battle of Gettysburg was fought for only three days starting July 1, 1863. With over 50,000 casualties, killed and wounded, it was one of the bloodiest battles of the United States Civil War. Part of the battlefield was to be dedicated as the Gettysburg Civil War Cemetery on November 19 of the same year. President Lincoln was invited to attend and address those gathered.

This bloody conflict was already over two years old and would continue almost two more years. As President Lincoln traveled to the battleground, he was tired from the battle, but his leadership instincts were brilliant as ever. He'd been asked some days earlier to deliver words of dedication. Perhaps Lincoln wondered about his real role because he wasn't the featured speaker. That role was filled by Edward Everett, a former dean of Harvard University and a famous orator.

The when/where of the writing of Lincoln's speech has become many-faceted and myth-like – lots of stories of scraps of paper and pencil stubs and last-minute changes. More likely it was thoughtfully produced over a few days, but probably wasn't completely finished until he stood to speak. That's the way he did things.

Everett spoke for two hours, and the President waited still. Unfortunately Mr. Lincoln wasn't feeling well. He admitted to his associates that he felt dizzy. Finally, he stood above everyone to speak. It was consistently reported that the crowd automatically became hushed, only to interrupt him with their support several times while he spoke. And he still finished in about two minutes.

Those with the President reported that during his address he looked mournful and haggard. Later he became feverish and weak. He had smallpox – a mild case. Nevertheless, Lincoln

delivered his message admirably because he was committed to the importance of his message.

When finished, he reached out to the main speaker Edward Everett, congratulating him on a job well done. Everett knew better than to simply accept the compliment. He is quoted as replying "Ah, Mr. President, how gladly I would exchange all my hundred pages to have been the author of your twenty lines."

Despite partisan criticism of this speech its powerful content overwhelmed such criticism. It's now considered one of the most powerful speeches of all time. While reading it, think about what he could have changed to make it better. I think it's perfect. Paraphrasing the compliment expressed by Edward Everett: "President Lincoln nailed it!"

Carefully read the following text:

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth, on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battlefield of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field as a final resting-place for those who here gave their lives, that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate—we 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 here 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.