

The Gettysburg Address



The toll of the three-day battle was mind-boggling: as many as 51,000 men dead, wounded, or missing. More than 7,000 rotting bodies were left on the field, many of them quickly buried in shallow graves where they lay with little identification. Officials soon saw that they had to create a proper burial ground for the Union dead.

President Lincoln wasn't the featured speaker at the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery on November 19, 1863. Edward Everett, a famous orator, gave the main address. He spoke for two hours in soaring language about the battle and the courage of Union soldiers. But it is Lincoln's simple remarks—272 words that lasted less than three minutes—that we remember today. Invoking images of rebirth, and stressing the ideals of the Declaration of Independence, he gave Americans a new understanding of the war's—and the nation's—purpose.

Here's a look at some of Lincoln's key points.

1 **Four score and seven years ago:** The year 1776. A score is 20; Lincoln is counting back 4 times 20 years plus 7, or 87 years.

4 **testing whether that nation can long endure:** Lincoln refers to the primary goal of the North in the Civil War: to preserve the young nation in the face of the Confederacy's rebellion.

6 **consecrate/hallow:** Consecrate and hallow are synonyms, meaning "to declare something sacred or set it apart for a holy use."

7 **The world will little note:** The Gettysburg Address became one of the most treasured and quoted speeches in U.S. history.

10 **a new birth of freedom:** Without actually saying it, Lincoln makes it clear that along with preserving the Union, ending slavery is a key goal of the Civil War. At the start of 1863, he had issued the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring the South's slaves free.

1 **Four score and seven years ago** our fathers brought forth on this continent a new **2** **nation**, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that **3** **all men are created equal**.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, **4** **testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.** We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a **5** **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 **6** **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. **7** **The world will little note**, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget **8** **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 **9** **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 **10** **a new birth of freedom**—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

2 **nation:** Lincoln uses the word **nation** five times to drive home his view of the U.S. as a unified country under a central government, not just a loose alliance of states.

3 **all men are created equal:** A quote from the Declaration of Independence, written in 1776.

5 **a final resting place:** About 3,500 Union soldiers would be buried at Gettysburg. (Most of the Confederate dead were buried at Hollywood Cemetery in Richmond, Va.)

8 **what they did here:** The Battle of Gettysburg is credited, along with the Battle of Vicksburg in Mississippi, with turning the tide of the war for the North.

9 **great task remaining:** In November 1863, a Northern victory was far from assured. The Civil War finally ended after four years in 1865, following General Lee's surrender to Union General Ulysses S. Grant at Appomattox Court House in Virginia.