The Prelude

First-person version, read as Lincoln · written by Lincoln presenter Whit McMahan

2:58:30 PM Eastern: begin the prelude

Central 1:58:30 · Mountain & Arizona 12:58:30 · Pacific 11:58:30 AM · Alaska 10:58:30 AM · Hawaii 9:58:30 AM

On the second of November, 1863, I received a formal invitation from the Honorable Judge David Wills to participate in the dedication of the National Soldiers' Cemetery near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Judge Wills, who had conceived the idea of a national cemetery and had organized the event, made it clear that I would have only a small part in the ceremony. Edward Everett, the former president of Harvard, Massachusetts Governor, U.S. Senator, and Secretary of State, was the keynote speaker and had received his invitation in September. He spoke before me for over two hours.

My own contribution would be a two- to three-minute speech of my own making.

Upon arrival by train at Gettysburg on November 18th at dark, I spent the night at the home of Judge Wills. The following morning, I arose and was escorted by the procession to the battlefield. Our gathering place was Cemetery Hill, the site of a mass Confederate bombardment, where as many as 18,000 witnesses had gathered. The speech was heard by most of those present and was over long before many had expected. As I closed, a long, polite applause could be heard, followed by sobs and cheers of people throughout the crowd. The testimonies of those in attendance varied widely as to its impression and reception.

The speech attempted to redefine the Civil War as a new birth of freedom for enslaved persons. With it, the values of liberty and equality were given a “new birth.”

I now offer you my full speech in remembrance of the 51,000 valiant Union and Confederate soldiers who were killed, captured, wounded, or missing on that battlefield.

Then, at 3:00 PM Eastern, begin the address on the next page.

The Gettysburg Address

Abraham Lincoln · November 19, 1863 · Bliss copy

3:00 PM Eastern: begin the address, together with every other state

Central 2:00 · Mountain & Arizona 1:00 · Pacific 12:00 noon · Alaska 11:00 AM · Hawaii 10:00 AM

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 battle-field 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.

Abraham Lincoln, November 19, 1863