

The Ideals of the Gettysburg Address

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“Four score and seven years ago”...eighty-seven years then, almost two hundred and thirty-three now. Yet the basic principles of freedom and liberty on which our nation was built still stand today as guardians of this country’s legacy. Not just the battle of Gettysburg, but the entire American Civil War in general tore our country apart state by state. President Abraham Lincoln was the one man who was able to piece in back together as effectively as he could. The Gettysburg Address was one of the most important compositions in American history, no matter its length. Its message still reverberates through the hearts and minds of Americans one hundred and forty-five years later.

Some of the most important lines of the Gettysburg Address can apply to situations today. First, the line “all men are created equal” in the opening paragraph of the Address was something Lincoln had always been serious about. His determination to beat the Confederacy and free the slaves was an influential factor in the North’s victory over the South. Yet, even after the abolition of slavery, blacks were still mistreated by whites. When segregation was prevalent, the line “all men are created equal” still meant nothing in the American society. Even separate doors were used to keep blacks and whites apart. Yet with figures such as Martin Luther King and Rosa Parks, blacks and whites gradually began to establish peace between each other. In fact, on December 10, 1948, the United Nations stated that “No one shall be held in slavery or servitude.” Today, the first African American president has been elected. This is an example of the fact that all of us are equal and by no means should any race be more powerful than another in our country.

In the second paragraph of the Gettysburg Address, there is another such line that is represented in modern times. That line is “those who gave their lives that that nation might live”. Over the years following the end of the American Civil War, there have been many other wars in which Americans have fought. From World War I through World War II and the Korean conflict, American soldiers have given their lives not only to protect our nation, but nations around the globe. Today, as our men struggle to maintain the safety of our nation and the country of Iraq as well, they continue to perish in service. We must not forget those who died to save the nation in the Civil War and those who continue to save nations today.

Lincoln proclaimed, “The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here have consecrated it [this ground], far above our poor power to add or detract.” The struggles encountered and horrors witnessed by soldiers cannot be overstated by those who were not involved in battle. My grandfather, Steven Rosenthal, is one of those Americans who entered service to protect the nations of the world. In an interview conducted on the second of December 2008, I uncovered many facts about the war in Vietnam from my grandfather. “I was very scared, knowing that someone over there was shooting at me to save himself just like I was shooting at him to save myself,” said Rosenthal. “It was also very lonely. Many of my friends died in service and I was unable to contact my family.” Even today, men and women continue to endure the hardships of war as battles carry on in places such as Iraq and Afghanistan.

One final interesting quote from Lincoln's Gettysburg Address is "...this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom..." In my opinion, the birth of freedom Lincoln was referring to was the abolition of slavery. Although this event did come to pass, it was not the only milestone that changed our country forever. Over the years, there have been many "births of freedom," such as the Civil Rights movement and Women Suffrage. President John F. Kennedy, who was assassinated on November 22, 1963, was a man who supported the Civil Rights movement. After his tragic death, congress passed the Civil Rights Act of 1964. This law banned segregation in any public areas such as hotels and restaurants. African Americans were not the only people who suffered discrimination. Women, too were denied certain rights when it came to jobs and other basic things. In 1920, Amendment 19 was added to the constitution. This amendment stated that the rights of citizens would not be denied on account of gender. Figures such as Betty Friedan helped aid the Women's Movement so that they were included in the Civil Rights Act of 1964. All of these important events in American history are examples of new births of freedom.

The Battle of Gettysburg was a shock to both the Confederate and Union States of America. A total of 50,000 men died in the long three day fight in the fields surrounding the town. The supporters of the Union rejoiced at this immense victory and turning point in the war. The enthusiasm would not last for long, however, for the sorrow of the massive losses on both sides was overwhelming.

It was decided that a portion of the town was to be dedicated to the soldiers that had lost their lives in the battle. President Lincoln was asked to say a few solemn words for the occasion. The major speech of the day was given to the famous orator Edward Everett. Everett plowed on for over two hours, just as expected. Yet when Lincoln stood up, his short Gettysburg Address touched the hearts and minds of more Americans in two minutes than Everett did in two hours. In his speech, he declared that his dream of “a new birth of freedom” was well worth dying for. It was one of Lincoln’s wishes that his writings would travel “to all distances of time and space.” Through Civil Rights, World Wars, and Women Suffrage, we can all be glad to say that they have.

A Bibliography to The Ideals of the Gettysburg Address by Andrew Newman

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