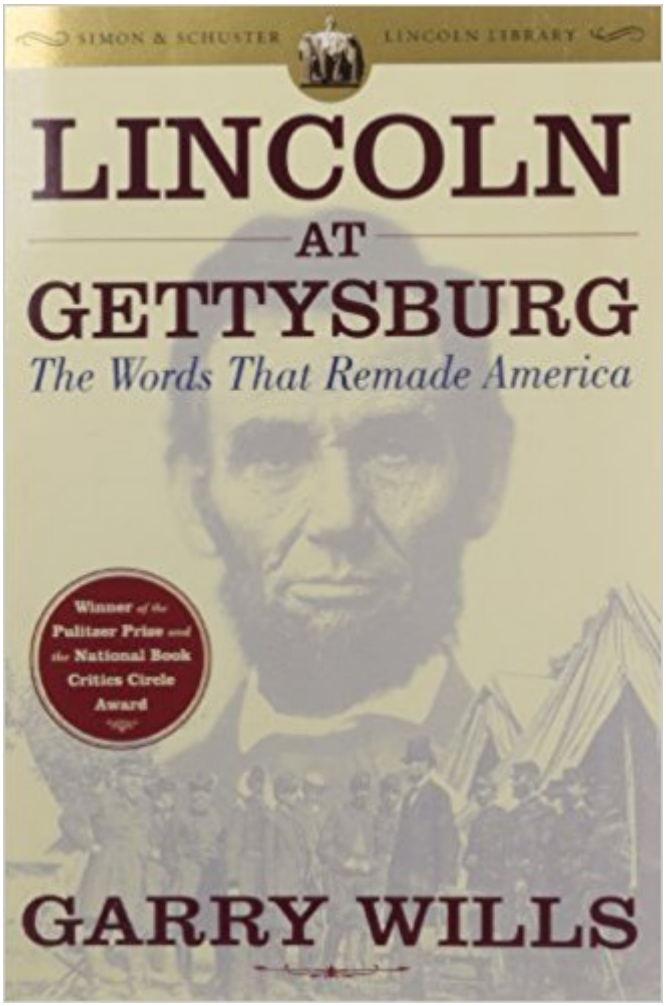
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# Lincoln At Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America (Simon & Schuster Lincoln Library)




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## Synopsis

In a masterly work, Garry Wills shows how Lincoln reached back to the Declaration of Independence to write the greatest speech in the nationÃ¢â ¬â„¢s history.The power of words has rarely been given a more compelling demonstration than in the Gettysburg Address. Lincoln was asked to memorialize the gruesome battle. Instead he gave the whole nation Ã¢â ¬Å“a new birth of freedomÃ¢â ¬Â• in the space of a mere 272 words. His entire life and previous training and his deep political experience went into this, his revolutionary masterpiece. By examining both the address and Lincoln in their historical moment and cultural frame, Wills breathes new life into words we thought we knew, and reveals much about a president so mythologized but often misunderstood. Wills shows how Lincoln came to change the world and to effect an intellectual revolution, how his words had to and did complete the work of the guns, and how Lincoln wove a spell that has not yet been broken.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Garry Wills has given our nation’s greatest gathering of words . . . new urgency . . . demonstrating that Lincoln’s words still have power." -- William McFeely, The New York Times"Dazzling . . . Wills is at his best, and his best may be the best that has ever been written about the Gettysburg Address as literature. Boldly revisionist and intoxicatingly original." -- Chicago Tribune"Garry Wills’ glowing reconstruction of Lincoln’s words and the circumstances gives us a real understanding of what we

rote-memorized as school children. This is what history is all about." -- Studs Terkel"True to its historical antecedents and politically triumphant . . . A brilliantly creative reading of a critically important, indeed, culturally transforming, political document." -- The Philadelphia Inquirer

Garry Wills is an Emeritus Professor of History at Northwestern University. Born in Atlanta in 1934, he has taught widely throughout the United States. A prolific writer and scholar, Wills is the author of more than twenty books, including the Pulitzer Prize-winning Lincoln at Gettysburg, Papal Sin, and What Jesus Meant. He is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The Gettysburg Address is one of the best-known and least-understood speeches in world history, and that is a sad reflection, because this 272-word, 10-sentence oration is one of the most important definitions of the purpose of government and the philosophy of what the United States thinks it should be, ranking alongside the Declaration of Independence and The Constitution. Simultaneously, it pays tribute to the incredible sacrifices of men who gave their lives to save that country and make its philosophy of government permanent.Professor Wills's book attempts to plumb the well of how this speech came to be, its immediate, rhetorical, and historical roots. No, President Lincoln did not write it on the back of an envelope on the way up to Gettysburg. He dedicated considerable time to the speech in advance. He even gave a preview of it right after the Gettysburg victory, making a brief, off-the-cuff speech to people at the White House, celebrating that triumph and Vicksburg, referring to some of the themes he would expand upon. Yes, reaction to the speech was mixed -- the media of the day was as partisan as it is today -- and some newspapers publicly called it "dishwater utterances," with one paper in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, openly hoping that the "veil of oblivion" would pass over the remarks. The keynote speaker, on the other hand, Edward Everett, who spent two hours narrating the course of the encounter, sent Lincoln a note wishing he had come to the point as well in two hours as Lincoln did in two minutes.All of these subjects, and more, are taken up by Professor Wills, and his literary, historical, and scholarly analysis shows why this speech rapidly became an almost sacred text in the United States, all 272 words being reprinted on plaques across America, ranging from one side of the interior of the Lincoln Memorial to an obscure marker in a side alcove in the City Hall of Newark, New Jersey. One cannot go anywhere in America without being confronted with this speech and its vitally important message.There is, of course, an irony. My father's generation was required in its public school to learn and memorize the speech. I was merely required to learn it -- we didn't have the time to

memorize it. I tried anyway, and didn’t do very well.A few months ago, I got a call from a communications person at a public relations firm who wanted my boss, Cory A. Booker, at that time Mayor of Newark, to appear at her PR company with the "Grumpy Cat." I said, "Aren’t all cats grumpy?" having had a number of them as pets.She giggled and explained that this "Grumpy Cat" had just appeared on the NBC Today Show that morning, and they wanted to get a photo of him with the Mayor. I had just turned down requests from NBC and CNN to interview the Mayor, and knew that if he was seen posing with the "Grumpy Cat," those two networks would demand my head, and I shot the request down. I then asked why on Earth a "Grumpy Cat" was newsworthy, and she told me the cat had an agent."An agent? How do they communicate? One ’meow’ is ’Yes?’ Two ’meows’ is ’No?’"She giggled, and our conversation moved on to the importance of importance, and it wandered over to Gettysburg, as we were close to the 150th anniversary of the Address.She didn’t know what it was."You know who the ’Grumpy Cat’ is, but you don’t know what the Gettysburg Address is," I said, exasperated. "And you’re in the communications business."She giggled. "Is that the speech that starts off ’Four score and seven years ago?’" she asked.I told her it was.She wasn’t familiar with it.I told her to order this book, gave her the  link, and the conversation wrapped up. Then I wondered how many other people in positions of importance in this land there are who cannot tell me the importance of Abraham Lincoln’s words. They should all read this book. Then they can get back to me. There will be a test in the morning.This is the book that explains the background for the single most important speech in American history, and maybe the world’s history.

Will’s Lincoln at Gettysburg was a well-written and a very engaging book that I was fortunate to have finished reading one month before the 150th anniversary of Lincoln’s assassination. It is fitting that this book first appeared in the June 1992 issue of the Atlantic Monthly, one of the oldest American literary and cultural magazines that endorsed Lincoln for President of the United States in 1860 and spent its first years covering the Civil War.What I most enjoyed about this book is that it gave a generally interdisciplinary discussion of this great funeral oration by touching on the influences of the 19th century rural cemetery movement, the Transcendentalist movement, the Greek Revival movement, as well as the influences of the 19th century American abolitionist minister Theodore Parker. In explaining how the Gettysburg Address was written in just a few words, the author made it easy to understand by literally tearing the document apart by discussing why Lincoln wrote it in the style we are familiar with.In conclusion, let me say that although the Gettysburg Address is easy enough for an elementary school student to recite, it takes an adult to

fully understand the written history of this great speech, so Will's book served that purpose.

On November 19th, 1863, Lincoln delivered ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“dedicatory remarksÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• at a service commemorating the recent battle of Gettysburg. These remarksÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •272 wordsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •became known as the Gettysburg Address, which I had to memorize and recite before my classmates when I was thirteen. In ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade AmericaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•, Gary Wills analyzes these brief remarks and clears up several misconceptions about LincolnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s role and intentions at the Gettysburg ceremony, where he was always meant to play second fiddle. Starring in this ceremonyÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“purgativeÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• and a ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“large scale solemn act of oratory, a kind of performance art with great power over audiences in the middle of the nineteenth centuryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •was Edward Everett, a former governor of Massachusetts and president of Harvard, who was both the Ken Burns and Demosthenes of his day.In LaG, Wills does offer his opinions on several historical controversies that have long dogged LincolnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s address. He tells the reader, for example, where he thinks Lincoln stood as he delivered his remarks. And he establishes the provenance of several copies of this addressÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •those possessed by Nicolay, Hay, Everett, Bancroft, and BlissÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •in order to clarify what wording Lincoln actually used as he spoke. Furthermore, he does provide EverettÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s full speech (more than two hours of Hellenistic reference and Gettysburg battle reportage) and funeral orations by Pericles and Gorgias. These are in the bookÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s appendix and worth scanning, since they do establish context and precedent for LincolnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s elegance, messaging, and brevity.Nonetheless, the highpoints of this rewarding book for this reader examine: 1) what Lincoln meant to accomplish in his remarks; and 2) the intellectual influence of transcendentalism on LincolnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s intellectual assumptions. Here:o Intentions: According to Wills, Lincoln considered the constitution a document of imperfect political compromise. In contrast, he believed the Declaration of Independence represented the best statement of the American missionÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •namely, that all men are created equal. In the Gettysburg Address, what Lincoln accomplished is to take this missionÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •equalityÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •and position it as the BIG issue implicitly addressed in the solemn event at Gettysburg and the carnage of the Civil War. In this way, he transformed the war, which to that point was largely viewed as the product of sectional disagreements and states rights, into an effort to regain first principles.Interestingly, Wills points out that this focus on the Declaration (ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“four score and seven years

agoÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â• counts back to 1776) provoked immediate protest from Northern Democrats, who protested in editorials that the U.S. Constitution does not use the word equality. Regardless, Lincoln, through his eloquence, did reformulate the mission of the war. Writes Wills: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“They walked off, from those curving graves on the hillside, under a changed sky, into a different America. Lincoln had revolutionized the Revolution, giving people a new past to live with that would change their future indefinitely.ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Â•o Transcendentalist influence: Lincoln, sui generis to be sure, was also a 19th century man and influenced by the intellectual currents of his time. These included Transcendentalism, which attempted to discern and feel ideal forms embedded within experienced reality. This disposed Lincoln to favor the Declaration, where he believed AmericaÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s political ideals are stated. And this made him view the constitutionÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •which does not mention slaveryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â •as an imperfect political document that, with luck, would move, over time, closer to our founding ideals.ThereÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s more of interest in this book. This includes WillsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s discussion of Daniel Webster, who profoundly affected LincolnÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s thinking on the Union; and WillsÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s comments about the rural cemetery movement. He observes: ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“The dedication of Gettysburg must, therefore, be seen in its cultural context, as part of the nineteenth centuryÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã â„¢s fascination with death in general and cemeteries in particular. ÃƒÂ¢Ã â ¬Ã Å“Honor the 150th Anniversary.Highly recommended.

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