

Abraham Lincoln: 'The Judgments of the Lord'

Some might say he was clinging to his guns and religion. On March 4, 1865, Abraham Lincoln began his Second Inaugural Address with a reference to the military situation. Gen. Grant's powerful army then held the rebel Gen. Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia in a death grip, besieging it at Petersburg, with the Confederate capital of Richmond sure to fall to Union forces.

Lincoln expressed his satisfaction with "[t]he progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends" He moved on to a brief recitation of the causes of the Civil War. He offered no condemnation of his foes as he related in a factual manner the reason for this most terrible of all of America's wars.

By the time Lincoln spoke, most of the 630,000 lives that would be lost in this struggle had already perished. It was to protect and extend the institution of Negro slavery that white men came to sword points. "And the war came."

He "would not play the Pharisee," he often said. Almost alone among Northern leaders, Lincoln did not cloak himself or the Union cause in all righteousness. He knew what the Founders knew. Slavery was largely confined to the Southern States. He had told his dearest friend Joshua Speed how he "crucified his feelings" on seeing shackled slaves conveyed South "like trout on a line." Now, it was almost as if he were speaking to his slaveholding friend as he acknowledged the sin of the whole nation in the offense of slavery.

Lincoln knew Massachusetts was the home of Abolitionism. But its great ports had also carried on what president Jefferson had called that "execrable traffic." Great Yankee merchant families had made fortunes. And some of those fortunes were

built on bones.

Lincoln would not now disavow his anti-Slavery convictions. He evinced a decent respect for the opinion of mankind against “wringing one’s bread from the sweat of other man’s faces.” Still, he urged his countrymen to “judge not lest ye be judged.”

He knew how ships might leave West Africa with 600 souls crammed naked and chained into stinking cargo holds and arrive in the Americas with only 200 yet living. The worst of Southern plantations, Lincoln knew, could not approach horror of the Atlantic Slave Trade in the bondsman’s “two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil.”

While Confederate President Jefferson Davis railed against the barbarism of his Yankee foes, Lincoln condemned no one. He never accused. He never sought to pluck the speck from his neighbor’s eye. Instead, he had mused in private and sometimes among small groups how the Almighty might have given victory to either side on a single day during the four-year Golgotha of “this fiery trial.”

What if Pickett’s Charge had succeeded at Gettysburg? What if Vicksburg had held? What if Gen. Sherman had been defeated before Atlanta?

When Jefferson Davis tried to rally his ragged rebels against Sherman’s all-conquering host, he boasted that the grizzled red-haired devil would meet the same fate in Georgia that Napoleon met in Russia. In one of his few recorded jokes, Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant had replied: “And who will supply the snow?”

If we look for a sublime example of American Exceptionalism, we will find it here. What other nation could conclude a four-year bloody Civil War with such an address? Lincoln called for “malice toward none, charity for all.”

"The judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether," Lincoln said of the wholly unexpected bloody, protracted, and revolutionary struggle. Not only had the Union been preserved, but the cause of Disunion—human bondage—had perished in the fires.

Abolitionist editor and orator Frederick Douglass that day entered the White House, the first time a black man was an honored guest at an Inaugural reception. The president asked him his opinion of the address. "Mr. Lincoln, it was a sacred effort."

Lincoln called America "the last best hope of man on earth." Yet in our time, in our land, a thousand unborn children are beheaded daily by an organization that is sheltered and funded by our own taxes. This dread toll deprives our people of genius and industry. Every child born in America has the potential to earn a million dollars.

We know the truth about these unborn millions. "Ultrasound has made it impossible to deny that that thing in the womb is a human being," writes *Time* magazine's Joe Klein. We have seen the evidence of Klein's dictum in practical effect.

We agree with Lincoln that "nothing stamped in the divine image was sent into the world to be trod upon." And yet we proceed as if the judgments of the Lord are not intended for us, and that His justice will sleep forever.

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