

History 225

Source: Wills, L at-6

Re: Notes w/ Gettysburg

Lesson of Gettysburg.

Back in 1863 there was reason for the North celebrating the Union "victory" at Gettysburg. Meade was an instant hero in many Northern hearts. His stock was up.

But a contemporary could also take a critical look at what happened at this small cross-roads town in south-central Pennsylvania and wonder what all the celebration was really about. Not taking anything away from the incredible dedication and courage displayed there by both sides nevertheless the Three Days of Gettysburg were three days of muddle, missed chances, and unexampled death and mayhem. Some 50,000 casualties sustained in the battle.

For Lee it was the ultimate folly to assault the Union lines on the third day. He offered to resign his command.

On the Union side, Meade's failure to counterattack after the repulse of Pickett's Charge meant that he threw away a almost certain opportunity to destroy Lee's Army of Virginia (and w/ news of Vicksburg on July 4th) bring Old Dixie down. *Instead, Lee gets reprieve - goes on almost 2 more years*

For Lincoln it was another (Antietam) prize opportunity to have ended this terrible war. He could not even vent his frustration by sending Meade the anguished letter he wrote him for fear of tarnishing the the moment for Northerners who were desperate to relish a victory by the Army of the Potomac no matter how hollow it might have been.

It was really Lincoln who made Gettysburg the prominent symbol of national purpose, pride, and ideas ~~w/it's~~ for posterity with his 272 words we know as the Gettysburg Address.

** NOTE: Case of "Lincoln + Black Freedom"*

*SACRIFICE
COURAGE
MORALE
OF LEE*

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a. Occasion: Was the dedication of the cemetery the Soldiers' National Cemetery honoring the Union dead who fell at Gettysburg. It was undertaken in part as a way to take permanent care of the 8,000 corpses left on the battlefield in temporary graves. An interstate commission was established by the various states to come up with funds to get the fallen into permanent grave sites.

Since it was a state affair the keynote speaker and program was arranged by the committee. Edward Everett was chosen Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, James Whittier, and William Cullen Bryant declined the honor.

Several months after selected of Everett an invitation was sent to Lincoln to say "a few appropriate remarks."

b. Lincoln had business at Gettysburg:

The President was quick to accept. The gathering--expected to attract thousands--was a prize political opportunity to do some fence-mending w/ the divided Pennsylvania Republicans looking to the state elections coming up in November; and for Lincoln's aides to circulate among all the attending state governors to get a fix on their boss's popularity, etc. To press some flesh and, in effect, to take some political temperatures

c. Lincoln was determined to use the occasion to speak to the nation. he took over his own schedule for the trip. Cancelling Lamon's (head of WH security) program of leaving early in the morning of the day of dedication to be at Gettysburg in time for the dedication

Lincoln scrapped that schedule for fear that he would not make the 80 miles in time for the program. He decided to leave the day before. Keep in mind that the First Family was still in mourning for the loss of Willie who had just died.

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d. Preparation of the Address

Its safe to say that Lincoln used his time in Washington days before the event to carefully prepare his thoughts.

All the business about him writing the speech on the back of an envelop on the trip to Gettysburg and other variants that allude to his almost instant inspiration as though guided by the Muse are all nonsense.

We know that days before the Address he invited the architect of the cemetary, a William Saunders, to visit the WH where he went over with Saunders the layout of the cemetary,etc. . . and otehr particulars.

It appears on first notice peculiar that Lincoln does not mention the battle site by name. He does not mention the Emancipation Proclamation(as the new war aim). He abstains from mentioning in any particular the Union dead by name, or units; nor is there a single reference to any of the celebrated Union heroes of the threew day battle--either officers or men in the ranks.

It is as though he purposely set out to avoid the particular, the local, or the divisive(no mention of the defeated enemy and the cause they represented). Of course, that was what he intended.

What he sets out to accomplish at Gettysburg is a revoltuion in thought. To elevate as the founding doctrine the spirit and ideals of the Declaration of Independence over the Constitution. (remind that Lincoln regarded the Constituion with its protection of slavery as an incomplete statement of the American creed).

The Constitution--the gift of the founding fathers--was tolerant or slavery and made no reference to equality. Lincoln at Gettysburg is essentially "refound-ing" the nation. Correcting the Constitution and insisting that the creed of America from the first was based on the proposition that all men are ccreated equal.

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What we have with the GB Address is a clever assault on the constitutional past. A reinventing of that past and giving the people at Gettysburg a new past to live with that would change their future indefinitely.

This new past that was forged in the refining fire of this terrible war. The sacrifice and bloodshed had to in the final accounting mean more than just that initial war aim--the restoration of the Union. With Lincoln it brought forth a new birth of freedom and in so doing it corrected the Constitution without overthrowing it.

His Proclamation
It is implied in that "new birth of freedom" the commitment to equality. A commitment that will ultimately have to be implemented in amendments to the Constitution that will be permanent--not just a war measure like the Emancipation Proclamation.

For those then and now who argued that Lincoln was betraying the Constitution. That he was bending out of shape the "original intent" of the Founding Fathers. . . well let them argue with Lincoln.