

1 Second Inaugural Address
2 Abraham Lincoln
3 1865

4
5 FELLOW COUNTRYMEN: At this second
6 appearing to take the oath of the presidential office,
7 there is less occasion for an extended address than
8 there was at the first. Then, a statement, somewhat in
9 detail, of a course to be pursued, seemed fitting and
10 proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during
11 which public declarations have been constantly called
12 forth, on every point and phase of the great contest
13 which still absorbs the attention, and engrosses the
14 energies of the nation, little that is new could be
15 presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all
16 else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as
17 to myself; and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and
18 encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no
19 prediction in regard to it is ventured.

20
21 On the occasion corresponding to this four years
22 ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an
23 impending civil war. All dreaded it—all sought to avert
24 it. While the inaugural address was being delivered
25 from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union
26 without war, insurgent agents were in the city seeking
27 to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve the
28 Union, and divide effects, by negotiation. Both parties
29 deprecated war; but one of them would make war
30 rather than let the nation survive; and the other would
31 accept war rather than let it perish. And the war came.

32
33 One-eighth of the whole population were colored
34 slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but
35 localized in the southern half part of it. These slaves
36 constituted a peculiar, and powerful interest. All knew
37 that this interest was, somehow, the cause of the war.
38 To strengthen, perpetuate and extend this interest, was
39 the object for which the insurgents would rend the
40 Union, even by war; while the government claimed no
41 right to do more, than to restrict the territorial
42 enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war,
43 the magnitude, or the duration, which it has already
44 attained. Neither anticipated that the cause of the
45 conflict might cease with, or even before, the conflict
46 itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph,

47 and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both
48 read the same Bible, and pray to the same God; and
49 each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem
50 strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's
51 assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of
52 other men's faces; but let us judge not, that we be not
53 judged. The prayers of both could not be answered—
54 that of neither, has been answered fully. The Almighty
55 has His own purposes. “Woe unto the world because
56 of offences! for it must needs be that offences come;
57 but woe to that man by whom the offence cometh.” If
58 we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those
59 offences which, in the providence of God, must needs
60 come, but which, having continued through His
61 appointed time, He now wills to remove; and that He
62 gives to both north and south this terrible war, as the
63 woe due to those by whom the offence came, shall we
64 discern therein any departure from those divine
65 attributes which the believers in a living God always
66 ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope—ferverently do we
67 pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily
68 pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the
69 wealth piled by the bondman's two hundred and fifty
70 years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every
71 drop of blood drawn with the lash, shall be paid by
72 another drawn with the sword, as was said three
73 thousand years ago, so still it must be said, “the
74 judgments of the Lord are true and righteous
75 altogether.”

76
77 With malice toward none; with charity for all; with
78 firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right,
79 let us strive on to finish the work we are in; to bind up
80 the nation's wounds; to care for him who shall have
81 borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan—to
82 do all which may achieve and cherish, a just and a
83 lasting peace, among ourselves, and with all nations.

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85 *(Text from the Library of Congress)*