

LINCOLN LORE

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EQUALITY—THE GREAT FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE

The recurrent anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, delivered on November 19, 1863, and given more attention year by year, invites one to search for sources which might throw further light on the composition and delivery of the remarkable oration. Students have been so deeply concerned in attempting to establish the origin of the phrase "government of the people, by the people, for the people" that they have neglected the background of other equally significant comments in the address such as the nation being "dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal." This idea Lincoln thought to be "a great fundamental principle."

A letter which Lincoln wrote to J. N. Brown on October 18, 1858 contains these statements:

"I believe the declaration that 'all men are created equal' is the great fundamental principle upon which our free institutions rest . . . I say, with Mr. Clay, it is desirable that the declaration of the equality of all men shall be kept in view, as a great fundamental principle."

How early Lincoln began to appreciate the importance of the Declaration in which the expression is embodied is problematical, although he did say in Independence Hall at Philadelphia, "I have never had a feeling, politically, that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence." Would it be an exaggeration to say that as a boy his first political observations as an admirer of Henry Clay would give emphasis to the equality of men?

As early as 1852 when pronouncing a eulogy on Henry Clay, Lincoln remarked that "an increasing number of men, who, for the sake of perpetuating slavery are beginning to assail and to ridicule the white man's charter of Freedom, the declaration that all men are created free and equal."

It was not until his first debate with Douglas at Peoria in 1854 that he began to push to the front with any degree of emphasis this idea on equality,

and he lamented that so "many good men" were being forced into "an open war with the very fundamental principles of civil liberty." He further stated in this address, "Near eighty years ago we began by declaring that all men are created equal," and then concluded, "Now we have descended to the declaration that for some men to enslave others is a sacred right of self-government."

The debates with Douglas in the senatorial contest of 1858 found the equality pronouncement one of the chief points of argument and much time was taken by each speaker to fortify his position. Lincoln defines the equality phrase in these words: "I have said that I do not understand the Declaration to mean that all men were created equal in all respects. They are not our equal in color; but I suppose that it does mean to declare that all men are equal in some re-

WARREN'S TWENTY-SECOND ANNUAL SPEAKING ITINERARY

Possibly the shortening of the usual extensive speaking itinerary arranged for the Director of the Foundation during Lincoln's Birthday Season is an admission on his part that he is not as spry as in years past. The twenty-second annual itinerary has been confined this year to the central states. The offices of the Lincoln National Life Insurance Company in the cities visited are informed about the local engagements set up in their various communities. Program committees desiring to schedule an address by Dr. Warren should contact these offices. No remuneration is accepted for the services of Dr. Warren. The cities where he is to appear are listed below.

Kansas City, Mo., Jan. 30, 31.
St. Louis, Feb. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5.
Milwaukee, Feb. 6, 7.
Chicago, Feb. 8, 9, 10, 11, 12.
Minneapolis, Feb. 13, 14, 15.
Madison, Feb. 16, 17.
Detroit, Feb. 19, 20, 21, 22.
Grand Rapids, Feb. 23, 24.

spects; they are equal in their right to 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'

The position of Douglas in the debates may be summarized in these words: "No man can vindicate the character, motives, and conduct of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, except upon the hypothesis that they referred to the white race alone, and not to the African, when they declared all men to have been created equal."

The brief speech which Lincoln made on the evening of July 7, 1863 in response to a serenade growing out of the Gettysburg victory gave particular emphasis to the phrase which he was to weave into this speech at the battlefield dedication four months later. He started off with a rhetorical question, "How long ago is it—eighty odd years—since on the Fourth of July for the first time in the History of the world a nation by its representatives, assembled and declared as a self-evident truth that all men are created equal." After reviewing some historical episodes he mentioned the "gigantic Rebellion at the bottom of which is an effort to overthrow the principle that all men are created equal." Finally, reviewing the conclusion of the Gettysburg victory he referred to the enemy as "those who oppose the declaration that all men are created equal."

This three-fold emphasis of the equality clause was bound to find expression in the subsequent address at Gettysburg. The theme of his few remarks at the dedication was apparently chosen from these extemporaneous remarks on July 7, and the "all men are created equal" clause brought to a conclusion the first sentence of his address.

It is of interest to observe the evolution of Lincoln's presentation of this "Great Fundamental Principle."

Peoria, Ill., Oct. 16, 1854

"Near eighty years ago we began by declaring that all men are created equal."

Washington, July 7, 1863

"How long ago is it—eighty odd years— . . . a nation by its representation declared as a self-evident truth that all men are created equal."

Gettysburg, Nov. 19, 1863

"Fourscore and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."