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An Address that Changed History

The United States has had many events that have changed the course of the nation, for example the writing of the Declaration of Independence, entering WWII, and the crumbling of the Berlin Wall. Although these events are very important there's just one that stands out more to me and I believe many other Americans would feel the same way. I believe this event in history shaped what the United States is today and also started a push for equality for all and movements that would impact our country forever. I believe the most important and decisive one in American history was the Gettysburg Address. Even Martin Luther King Jr. paid homage to the address in his "I Have a Dream" speech. The Gettysburg Address was given by one of the most well-known presidents of the United States, President Abraham Lincoln. The elements contained in this speech not only changed the course of the nation, but also changed some (not all) of the mistreatments brought upon a certain group of people. The Gettysburg Address was delivered after one of the bloodiest battles in American history, pushed the U.S. to reunite, and awakened a call for equality.

The Gettysburg Address was given by President Abraham Lincoln on November 19, 1863, on the site of one of the bloodiest and most decisive battles of the Civil War. At the Battle of Gettysburg there were about 23,000 casualties for the Union and about 28,000 for the Confederacy. Both sides suffered terrible losses, but General Lee was the first to retreat, which would eventually become the surrender of the Confederacy. President Lincoln would give his

address about 4 months after the Battle of Gettysburg, at the National Cemetery of Gettysburg in Pennsylvania. His address had some new material, but also reflected back on the Declaration of Independence, and how all men are created equal. Lincoln said that the Civil War was a test to see if what the founding fathers fought for would be preserved. He then would state, “government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.” He was talking to the survivors when he said this because it’s now their duty to make sure that democracy reigns free. This isn’t the only significance of the address, because it would also shape the Union and old Confederacy into the United States of America in the near future.

Lincoln would always reference the Union in his speeches, but the Gettysburg Address caused a change in his vocabulary. He would instead reference “the nation” five times in the address, which complimented his push for equality and a united, central government. With the end of the war, Lincoln took priority in unifying the people and promoting liberty throughout the country. In just two years the Reconstruction period would begin, with the goal being to reintegrate the Confederate states into the United States. This era would then develop the Reconstruction Act of 1867, an act that would give newly enfranchised African Americans a voice in government and politics. I believe all these events would not have happened without Lincoln and the Gettysburg address. We would further see the effects of the Gettysburg Address through equal rights movements.

The Gettysburg Address was delivered only months after the Emancipation Proclamation (both speeches delivered by Lincoln), however I believe that the Gettysburg Address actually saw the most results after. There were probably more results because the war had ended and Confederate states would actually have to listen to Lincoln now. The Emancipation

Proclamation's main goal was to free the slaves in all of the southern states, although some slaves were freed many were still too scared of their owners and stayed slaves. The Gettysburg Address referenced the Declaration of Independence a few times and Lincoln used some of the words in that document to convey his message that there should be equality for all. As said earlier, African Americans were given more rights soon after the war ended and were even allowed to participate in government. Lincoln issued the Proclamation of Amnesty and Reconstruction on December 8th, which offered amnesty to any Confederate who would vow to be loyal to the United States, but only if they were willing to accept the emancipation of all slaves. Just about three months later, the Thirteenth Amendment was passed by the Senate and abolished slavery. However, the actual law wasn't in place until December 1865, when it was added to the Constitution.

The Gettysburg Address wasn't just any speech delivered after one of the bloodiest battles in American history. It led to the reunification of the United States of America and the abolishment of slavery. The speech was delivered by one of the greatest presidents of the United States. Lincoln himself eloquently called for a united nation, and one of liberty. Although Lincoln has many critics, like those saying that he didn't really care about the slaves and that he just pushed for emancipation because it was opposed by the Confederates, I believe later on in his presidency he really did want to free the slaves and he really wanted to see a nation united and free. Even Martin Luther King Jr. delivered his "I had a Dream Speech" at the Lincoln Memorial because of the respect he had for the president and the symbolism that it brought. Even though the Gettysburg Address was less than 275 words long, it resonated with the people at the time and was a good start for the rebirth of the nation. It not only caused

political change, but a social and economic change to the country as well. I believe it was also a stepping stone for equal rights movements in the 1900s, for example, women's suffrage and the civil rights movement. These are the reasons why I believe that the Gettysburg Address is the most decisive moment in changing the course of the nation.

Disclaimer: I know that I'm a Business and Spanish major, but I am very much interested in politics and history. I also am a registered Republican voter in my home state of Wisconsin. I applied for this scholarship because I need help funding my college education, but also even though I saw it was for the Liberal Arts College, I have met very few Republican women on campus and just thought I should give it a try. Thank You, for taking the time to look at this!

Sources

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