

Inquiring Minds: Seeking Inspiration Wherever You Can Find It

#55 July-August, 2019

“A single sunbeam is enough to drive away many shadows.” --Francis of Assisi

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Grateful we have friends who read and share

(First paragraph below amended one week after first posting.)

It was so thoughtful of our friend and neighbor, Judy, to give me yet another book she came across. A month before she loaned us *Hamilton: the Revolution* by Lin-Manuel Miranda and Jeremy McCarter; which provided side-notes to the lyrics in the musical and the backstories of the actors and agents, all over a backdrop of incredible photos of the musical. (If you've seen the musical, this is an invaluable insight into the making of the show.) Years before, Judy's husband Lance, after he heard the author speak at the Flynt Center, gave me the best book I ever read on Abe Lincoln, *Team of Rivals* by Doris Kearns Goodwin. It took me months to finish reading it—reading others in between—but was well worth it. Judy's most recent find was *Lincoln's Gettysburg: the words that remade America* by Garry Wills—no known relation to the lady pictured below.

Ever since I memorized his Gettysburg Address in eighth grade, something many of us had to do then, Abe Lincoln has always been one of my heroes. Years later, as a “non-history teacher” I used his speech as a tool for teaching word-processing to my middle school students and sneaking in my passion for this great man and for American history. Students would type out that oration and learn to footnote every word and reference they didn't know as I helped define the words and the history behind them. Extra credit was given for memorizing the first paragraph, and math students calculated the holes in the acoustical tiles in the classroom ceiling as a graphic visual for 60% of the 750,000 people ([recent est.](#)) who died in the deadliest war in US history—more casualties than all other American wars combined. One bright and motivated student from Russia memorized the full speech in two days, a task which took me a week forty years before! At the end of the year I would dress up as Lincoln and address all the classes I taught and take questions on the Civil War.

In another venue I donned my Lincoln duds and walked stone-faced down University Avenue to present white roses to the Women in Black who were silently protesting the our country's war in Iraq.



Giving Helen Wills a Rose of Thanks in 2006.

Before this book I never even heard of this author, Garry Wills, who was a prolific writer of non-fiction and won a Pulitzer Prize for this best seller in 1992 and other awards. (Maybe before my renewed interest in Lincoln.) We have similar interests, and I am looking forward to exploring other books by him. He's a classicist and was possibly ordained a Jesuit who left. He started out much more conservative, but, like many of us, became more liberal with the times. He also wrote a slew of books I might be interested in reading, but I think the earlier ones of a religious nature would be a little too Catholic or conservative and dated for the either of us now, but it's interesting to follow his growth over the years. (for [more](#))

So about the book itself in a nutshell...

If the reader is willing to skim over the parts that may be too detailed for the non-historian or even non-grammarians interested in the techniques of speech-writing developed by the Greeks with the various techniques labeled in Greek, there is much to be learned from this book. For one, at the end of the book I skimmed through the whole 2 hour speech of the person



Garry Wills at the LBJ Library

who preceded Lincoln's speech, [Edward Everett](#). His speech recounted every skirmish of the three day battle, and brimmed with details. I found it amazing: 1) that he recited it from memory, 2) that the crowd of 15,000 patiently endured it, and 3) That the president was not considered the main event After the Lincoln gave his 3 minute oration, Mr. Everett himself said if Lincoln had gone first, he would not have spoken at all.

In contrast, Lincoln's 272-word address did not deal with historical specifics, did not even mention the the name of the battlefield. but dealt with the ideals of redefining America, and without any legislation or decree he set forth a plan, even beyond the scope of the Constitution, harkening back to Declaration of Independence as the mainstay of our democracy. As such, Wills contends, it stealthily became the un-legislated updated standard and transcendental blueprint for the future.

Many examples were given of how Abe used his skills in the courtroom, employing the logic taken from his knowledge and mastery of [Euclid's Elements](#).

TAKE A MOMENT TO RE-READ AND APPRECIATE THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS ON THE NEXT PAGE.

Gettysburg Address

November 19, 1863

Four score 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.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war. We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced.

It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

One of the FOOTNOTES for my students to enter for their project involved a little math: *When was “four score and seven years ago,” and what happened on that date?*

A score is 20, and so “four score and seven” is $4 \times 20 + 7 = 87$ years ago. 87 years from the date of the speech which was in 1863 is 1776. Hint: it happened on July 4, 1776? The Dec. of Indep. written by TJ himself. And *Independence* means what? FREEDOM—another footnote. Great Lesson, the class average was B+ !

COMMENT: Abe Lincoln attributes the real birth of our nation to the ideals presented in the Declaration of Independence written in 1776 and not the US Constitution of 1789, as he sees those ideals more lofty and pure.

INVOCATION: May the re-reading of these inspired words help direct us to the great task remaining (ever) before us: that we will have the new birth of freedom (from ignorance, poverty, injustice, fear, etc.) so all the nations and peoples of the world shall strive to thrive and co-create their best reality. Amen.

ASIDE: I cannot blame Abe Lincoln for my tendency to write in compound-complex sentences, ones which no one would ever want to diagram; it's just that everything seems so inner-connected. —Best, Joe