

Sultan
Judea Christian
Spring 2000
Answer

In delivering his Gettysburg Address, Lincoln elevates his speech to the same level as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. In essence, Lincoln weaves a tapestry comprised of all four documents. In doing so, Lincoln ties together/makes one all four. In doing so, Lincoln reaffirms the principles of democracy and makes clear that the United States is the best last hope for all of mankind. To achieve this purpose, Lincoln did several things.

First, Lincoln invokes biblical/religious images. America was not created or made, it was "brought forth," the same way God "brought forth his only son". Similarly, the Declaration of Independence spoke in terms of "nature's God". By invoking religion, Lincoln is able to drum up images of goodness, righteousness and justice. From this image, Lincoln is able to jump to the second step.

With images of good now rearing through their minds of those present Lincoln is able to re-classify

the purpose of the Civil War. The invocation of religion and therefore God, necessarily invoke images of a battle between good and evil. The imagery of good and evil is then easily classified as a battle between those seeking to preserve liberty and democracy, the good, and those seeking to destroy it, the evil. By doing this Lincoln, takes the war out of the realm of slavery or states rights.

~~is~~ This theme of good and evil ~~is~~ clearly found in the three previous documents. The Bill of Particulars of the Declaration, the structuring of governmental power of the Constitution and the historical purposes behind the amendments of the Bill of Rights were all aimed at stopping evil that threatened to destroy mankind.

Next, Lincoln's address, talks in terms of sacrifice. Like Jefferson in the Declaration who pledged "lives, fortunes and sacred honor", Lincoln speaks of how

the ground they are there to consecrate has already been consecrated by the blood of those who sacrificed their lives so that freedom would not perish from the Earth. In doing this, Lincoln draws up support for the war by demonstrating that not to battle evil and thereby protect democracy, would be to dishonor both the memory of the forefathers and soldiers. In honoring the memory of the dead, Lincoln preserves democracy.

Lincoln, then makes the moral duty argument. Like the Declaration that spoke in terms of "facts being submitted to a candid world", the by creating democracy as a model for all men and like the Constitution, which spoke in terms of "posterity" Lincoln demonstrates that liberty, equality, human dignity and social justice, while the right of every person, brings with it a duty to preserve the system for future generations. In essence, true freedom

comes with a price. The price being the moral duty to preserve democracy even if it means giving your life. For if you are not willing to do so, "the last best hope for mankind" will perish.

Finally, it is important to note Lincoln's use of nature. Lincoln's use of words such as "perish" and "a new birth of freedom" evoke images of the life cycle. In essence Lincoln seems to demonstrate that while people are born and people die, freedom and democracy live and breathe forever. That because freedom and democracy are in a state of nature, the form they take may be re-born, taking its shape as a free society shall dictate. In essence like the person who dies, and is replaced by another, so too will the form of liberty and freedom ~~die~~ die and be replaced. But like the human race, that never dies but is replaced over and over again so too is liberty never to die but

just perhaps to take on new forms.

In sum, Lincoln weaves all four documents together and reappears the principles and importance democracy plays in this world.