



# Department of Justice

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ADDRESS BY

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to the

ABRAHAM LINCOLN ASSOCIATION

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"Not often in the story of mankind does a man arrive on earth who is both steel and velvet, who is as hard as rock and soft as drifting fog, who holds in his heart and mind the paradox of terrible storm and peace unspeakable and perfect." From reports across centuries of men alleged to possess these contrasts, Carl Sandburg found them most nearly approached in Lincoln. Sandburg agreed with Pascal that, "a man does not show his greatness by being at one extremity, but rather by touching both at once."

The million words Lincoln left tell more about him than any interpreter can. Few are strong enough to admit as did Lincoln his lack of divine guidance; doubt as to the answers to the profound issues of his time. In Springfield in 1858 he began the "House Divided" speech: "If we could first know where we are, and whither we are tending, we could better judge what to do, and how to do it."

As the Civil War began, he told John Hay, "My policy is to have no policy." Three years later when the tides of war turned his way, Lincoln volunteered, "I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me."

In the immortal second inaugural he says of South and North, "Both read the same Bible, and pray to the same God: and each invokes his aid against the other...The prayers of both could not be answered--that of neither has been answered fully...The Almighty has his own purposes...With malice toward none; with charity for all; with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive to finish the work we are in: To bind up the Nation's wounds...To do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

He found the answer to what he considered the great question of his time in the Bible: The Gospel according to St. Mark: Chapter 3, Verses 24 and 25.

"And if a Kingdom be divided against itself, that Kingdom cannot stand.

"And if a House be divided against itself, that House cannot stand."

It seemed perhaps a cruel fate for a man soft as drifting fog that it fell his lot to set things right. "Voorhees", he said, "Don't it seem strange to you that I, who could never so much as cut off the head of a chicken, should be elected, or selected, into the midst of all this blood?"

But he did his duty with a resolution hard as rock. "Fellow Citizens," he addressed the Congress in December 1862, "We cannot escape history...The fiery trial through which we pass will light us down, in honor or dishonor, to the latest generation. We say we are for the Union. The world will not forget we say this. The world knows we know how to save it...We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope of earth...The way is plain, peaceful, generous, just--a way which if followed, the world will forever applaud, and God must forever bless."

For Lincoln, union not slavery was the issue. He said after the Emancipation Proclamation, "If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong." But "...I have done no official act in mere deference to my abstract judgment and feeling on slavery."

And in 1858 under the pressures of an intense political campaign, he had said, "...I am not, nor ever have been in favor of bringing about in any way the social and political equality

of the white and black races...Of making voters or jurors of Negroes, nor of qualifying them to hold office, nor to intermarry with white people..."

For four score and four years the young nation had drifted toward separation. Decades before Harpers Ferry and Fort Sumter, when Lincoln was a boy, Jefferson warned of the "irrepressible conflict." In 1858 Lincoln knew "a House divided against itself cannot stand."

By his high resolve, it was decided in a great Civil War that this nation conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal could long endure. He saved the Union and gave us a new birth of freedom.

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Once again our House is divided: A division as clear and deep, as troublesome and tragic to our day as was slavery to Lincoln's. We are impelled toward crisis arising from a house divided by far swifter, more powerful, complex and pervasive forces than set the leisurely paces of the century past.

Call it black and white; the ghetto and the suburb; the haves and the have nots; advantage and discrimination; unequal justice; a failure of communication; another country; poverty, joblessness, poor education, bad housing; segregation; urbanization; racism. Call it like it is.

The poor, the young, the minorities are aliens in this house of ours and none more than the poor, young Negro.

He is seven times more likely to die in infancy and can expect to live seven years less than others. His home is an old shack and a decrepit 19th century building in a world that has confined more space in man's design and construction in the past 30 years than in six milleniums theretofore. He is jammed tight against hunger, vice, sickness, strangers, ignorance, crime and fear. His school is old and crowded; his teachers underpaid and often without understanding of how he must spend the seventeen hours a day, the week-ends, holidays and summers he is not in school. In a nation which has in 25 years increased its college student population from 1-1/2 to 7 million, he

constitutes roughly 12% of the college age population, but only 4-1/2% of the college kids. Sixty percent of those are in schools which, for all their goodwill, are sadly deficient, such as South Carolina State College.

In a nation where only 3.5% are unemployed--3.2% among whites and 6.8% among Negroes--1/4 of the Negro boys and 1/3 of the Negro girls cannot find jobs and, for many who do, there is low pay and little chance to advance.

He lives in physical segregation and psychological isolation. He is cut off from his chance. Fulfillment, the flower of freedom, is denied him. But he has courage, which can bring freedom. A small disadvantaged and segregated minority in a mighty and prosperous nation, he is frustrated and angry. "A House divided against itself cannot stand."

Jefferson found human nature the same on both sides of the Atlantic during the Revolution. Lincoln found it the same on both sides of the Mason-Dixon Line in the Civil War. It is the same on both sides of the street in America today. It is still as Aristotle said: "...the universal and chief cause of the revolutionary impulse is the desire for equality."

We are removing the barriers within our house as few people have ever done within the framework of social order under law. Legal rights are largely, though not entirely, secure. Open housing, fair employment, protection against the violation of individual rights, indiscriminate jury selection--these are the chief remaining defects in law. Now we must create the opportunity to exercise, to fulfill those rights. An immense and growing economic effort is underway; to rebuild cities, to educate all our people, to give every American the chance to live where he wants, to do whatever his abilities and energies make possible for him. We are only beginning in these last several years, but we can clearly succeed. We can succeed, if we have time, and in terms of history a very little time.

Conditions call for rare courage and new wisdom. As Lincoln found in 1862 "the dogmas of the quiet past are inadequate to the stormy present. The occasion is piled high with difficulty, and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves and then we shall save our country."

Our resolution must be of steel and velvet: Steel our determination and effort to build a better America; Velvet our understanding and compassion for those who suffer America's one huge wrong.

The essential things are to create ways for the exchange of views that are still possible to prevent disorder. Governments and people must keep repression from further dividing us. Our law, our purpose as a people, must have a clear and generous meaning of equality for all. We must strive to fulfill the obligation of a great nation; to achieve the needed reforms; to bind the nation's wounds.

Strong Negro leadership fully supported must help relieve despair and anger which lead to violence, riots and death; to disorders we know can be prevented. For these divide the nation more than all else. Suicidal for the small Negro minority, they can destroy the American dream. A few precious years to build and this nation finally united, perhaps truly indivisible, will offer liberty and justice for all.

Nor can we forget that when this is over, as it will be some day, whatever the terror of the storm through which we pass, as Camus observed of Algeria a dozen years ago, "We shall still have to go on living together forever on the same soil." Nothing else is possible.

We should race to meet this challenge for it is as President Johnson said at Howard University, "...the glorious opportunity of this generation to end the one huge wrong of the American nation, and in so doing, to find America for ourselves, with the same immense thrill of discovery which gripped those who first began to realize that here, at last, was a home for freedom."