

# LINCOLN LORE

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## PRELIMINARIES AND AFTERMATH OF THE FIRST INAUGURAL

No official state paper was ever prepared with more care or caution than the first inaugural address by Abraham Lincoln, yet few manuscripts have brought forth such a variety of comments as to their worth and intent.

George D. Prentice, editor of the *Louisville Journal*, asked Lincoln for a copy of the inaugural which he was then writing in Springfield. Lincoln's reply to this request indicates very clearly the many revisions which the historic document passed through before it came to its final form. An excerpt from the letter follows:

"Yours of the 31st ult. requesting a copy of the inaugural is received. I have the document blocked out; but in the now rapidly shifting scenes, I shall have to hold it subject to revision up to near the time of delivery."

The original draft was set in type by a friend whom Lincoln entrusted with the manuscript, just before he left Springfield for Washington. A very few were printed and only one is known to have passed out of Mr. Lincoln's possession up to the time of the delivery of the address.

At least two men, O. H. Browning and Secretary Seward, are known to have read the document critically and suggested some changes in the wording of the paper, but it was Lincoln's own composition. His purpose was not changed and the ideas which he was trying to express were not qualified by any one, but a happier form of expression was suggested in some instances.

Lincoln might have used as a postscript to the document a reply made to one of his correspondents a year before who had pressed him for the meaning of the "house divided" statement. He wrote:

"Look it over carefully, and conclude I meant all I said and did not mean anything I did not say, and you will have my meaning."

This same letter in the very next sentence offers an appropriate transition to the aftermath of the inauguration. Lincoln, continuing the letter, advised his correspondent with reference to the "house divided" question:

"Douglas attacked me upon this, saying it was a declaration of war between slave and free states. You will perceive I said no such thing, and I assure you I thought of no such thing."

By far the most important reaction to the first inaugural which appeared in the form of an interpretation was given by Hon. Stephen A. Douglas in the Senate of the United States, March 6, 1861. His introductory statement follows:

### Reaction of Stephen A. Douglas

"I cannot assent to the construction which the Senator from North Carolina (Mr. Cingman) has placed upon the President's inaugural. I have read it carefully, with a view of ascertaining distinctly what the policy of the Administration is to be. The inaugural is characterized by ability, and by directness on certain points; but with such reservations and qualifications as require a critical analysis to arrive at its true construction on other points. I have made such an analysis, and come to the conclusion that it is a peace offering rather than a war message. Having examined it critically, I think I can demonstrate that there is no foundation for the apprehension which has been spread through the country that this message is equivalent to a declaration of war; that it commits the President of the United States to recapture the forts in the seceded States, and to hold them at all hazards, to collect the revenue under all circumstances, and to execute the laws in all the States, no matter what may be the circumstances that surround him. I do not understand that to be the character of the message. On the contrary, I understand it to contain a distinct pledge that the policy of the Administration shall be conducted with exclusive reference to a peaceful solution of our national difficulties. True, the President indicates a certain line of policy which he intends to pursue, so far as it may be consistent

with the peace of the country, but he assures us that this policy will be modified and changed whenever necessary to a peaceful solution of these difficulties."

### Press Dispatches

New York, New York.—"The all-absorbing topic of conversation and speculation to-night is, of course, the inaugural. Republicans of all shades express the utmost satisfaction with it. Democrats, while denouncing its treatment of the Southern question, yet give the author credit for honesty, firmness and patriotic intentions. Among border States men there is a difference of opinion. Some contend that it will strengthen the Union sentiment in their States, while others clamorously assert that it will drive them out in less than a month. Any one familiar with Mr. Lincoln's style will at once concede that the form and substance of the inaugural is of his own conception from beginning to end. It is now positively known, indeed, that in its preparation he was not assisted by any one. This independence of thought and action argues well for the future in the eyes of his friends."

New York, New York.—"Conservative Democrats say that Mr. Lincoln's inaugural, in connection with the proposed constitutional amendment regarding slavery in States, means peace, and that it will hold the border slave States with anything like forbearance on the part of Lincoln toward the seceding States. Colonel Burnett, of Kentucky, says the inaugural means war. General Hamilton of Texas, says he feels sad. Mr. Kellogg, of Illinois, hardly knows what to think. Mr. Spaulding of New York, speaks equivocally. Senator Green, of Missouri, has no opinion to express about it. A prominent Missourian also says every Union Man must like its sentiments. New Yorkers say the idea of 'No bloodshed and yet the enforcement of the law' is borrowed from his predecessor."

Buffalo, New York.—"A more difficult task was never imposed upon living man—the production of a document which should satisfy the Union sentiment of the country in the present crisis, and at the same time not afford additional fuel to the glowing flames of secession and revolution."

Louisville, Kentucky.—"In this city the Union men are rather favorably impressed but the sympathizers with the Southern Confederacy think it a declaration of war."

Raleigh, North Carolina.—"The inaugural was favorably received by the Unionists. They think it does well for Lincoln though they do not approve of all of it. The disunionists are dissatisfied with it."

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.—"The papers generally view the inaugural as a mild, though firm, expression of lofty manliness."

Washington.—"Mr. Weed is delighted and even Mr. Wigfall publicly declares it a most able paper. Its conciliatory tone and frank outspoken declaration of loyalty to the whole country captured the hearts of many heretofore opposed to Mr. Lincoln. Its firm enunciation of purpose to fulfil his oath, to maintain the Constitution and laws challenges universal respect."

Chicago, Illinois.—"No document can be found among American state papers embodying more wisdom and higher patriotism."

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.—"Discreditable and unworthy of the President. A weak declaration of war against the seceded states. A tiger's claw concealed under a fur of Sewardism."

Vicksburg, Mississippi.—"It is regarded unfavorably and generally considered a silly production."

Montgomery, Alabama.—"Mr. Lincoln's inaugural address is regarded here as a virtual declaration of war against seceding states."