

# LINCOLN LORE

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## EMPHASIS ON THE GETTYSBURG PREPOSITIONS

There has been a tendency on the part of those reciting the Gettysburg Address to come to the famous phrase, "Government of the people, by the people, for the people," with a tremendous emphasis on the three prepositions. There is some doubt whether or not Lincoln placed any emphasis on them, certainly none on the first one, and probably but little on the other two. Facsimiles of the five copies which he made of the speech, reveal no punctuation mark after the word government, which would create three prepositional clauses of equal value, nor are there any emphasis marks over or under the prepositions. There is but one change in terminology of the famous saying, and that is what is known as the preliminary copy. Here Lincoln writes "that this government of the people," and in all subsequent writings the word "this" is omitted.

There does not seem to be any reminiscence extant put down in writing at the time the address was delivered that notes any unusual emphasis on the three prepositions. Surely such an emphasis would have been noted, if so given, while the general stress on the word people would not have so dramatic an ending and would cause no special comment.

An approach may be made to the most probable manner in which Lincoln spoke the famous words by studying the sources to which he had access, and the terminology used on other occasions when he was attempting to express the same thought he conveyed at Gettysburg.

The idea of popular government was expressed by Cleon, a Greek, as early as 430 B.C. Cooper, in England in 1794, commenting on America, noted that "the government is the government of the people and for the people." A speaker by the name of Schinz, in Switzerland, in 1830, referred to a government: "from all the people, by all the people, and for all the people."

It would be interesting to know where Lincoln first heard or read his famous expression. Chief Justice Marshall, as early as 1819, was discussing what he termed "all-men power: government over all, by all, and for the sake of all." The following year, James Monroe referred to "a government which is founded by, administered for, and is supported by the people. A book called, *Porter's Rhetorical Reader*, was published in 1831, which contained an exercise including these words: "A government where all power is from the people, and in the people, and for the people." Nathaniel Pitcher, governor of New York, on July 24, 1834, wrote in a letter, "A government established by

the people, should be administered by the people and for the people."

Some of the writings of Theodore Parker were made available to Lincoln. As early as 1850 and often in 1854, Parker was talking about "a government of all the people, by all the people, for all the people." Other addresses made by Parker in 1858, contain passages with reference to the people's government. In a speech on May 26, he used these words, "Democracy—The all-man-power; government over all, by all and for the sake of all." A few weeks later, on July 4, he said, "Democracy is direct self-government, over all the people, for all the people, by all the people." Lincoln is said to have placed brackets around these quotations in copies sent to Herndon, leaving the impression that they were the source of the Gettysburg phrase. We need better evidence than is now available, however, before concluding that Lincoln personally made the marks on the Parker pamphlets. Parker at this time was stressing the inalienable rights of the blacks as well as the whites, and his stress was on all the people. Parker was far too radical for Lincoln and apparently his writings had but little influence over him.

Abraham Lincoln had a personal acquaintance with Daniel Webster, and they were often in the same group during Lincoln's term in Congress. When Lincoln was elected to the presidency and was confronted with the task of writing an inaugural address, one of his primary sources is known to have been *Webster's reply to Hayne* in the famous debate of 1830. The internal evidence of the First Inaugural very definitely points to the use of this source book.

Of vital importance to Lincoln at this time were Webster's remarks on "the origin of the government and the source of its power." Webster raised this question: "Whose agent is it? Is it the creature of the state legislature, or the creature of the people?" After an exposition on the government being an agent of the people, Webster came to this interesting conclusion, "It is, sir, the people's constitution, the people's government; made for the people; made by the people and answerable to the people." It would appear as if Webster placed the emphasis in this version of the famous quotation on the people.

Time and again through the First Inaugural Address Lincoln related to the authority of the people as emphasized by Webster. The President referred to "My rightful master, the American people." He stated that "This country with its institutions belongs to the people." He claimed to "ful-

ly recognize the authority of the people," and that amendments should "originate with the people," and finally acknowledged that "the Chief Magistrate derived all his authority from the people." Here in Lincoln's words we have the essence of Webster's theory of the people's government.

With Webster's theory of government still fresh in his mind, but four months after the inaugural had been delivered, he presented his first message to Congress on Independence Day, 1861. He came to a place in his message where he elaborated on the far reaching extent of the controversy between the North and the South, and concluded, "This issue embraces more than the fate of the United States. It presents to the whole family of man the question whether a constitutional republic or democracy—a government of the people by the same people—can or cannot maintain its territorial integrity against its own domestic foes." There was no emphasis of prepositions here.

When Lincoln came to prepare his Gettysburg Address, two years later, the question was still unsettled; "Whether that nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure." With Webster's arguments about the authority of the people vs. the authority of the state still in mind, and with his own reaction to the sovereignty of the people, so clearly expressed in the July 4th message of 1862, more firmly established in his mind, it is not likely that he would change the emphasis from "the people," in whom the power of government was vested to an emphasis on the people as vehicles through which the government was operated.

It is difficult to find the least authority for supposing that Lincoln placed any emphasis, whatever, on the first preposition "of," as he was referring simply to Democracy (Demokratos—the government of the people.) In the use of the prepositions "by" and "for" there may have been some slight emphasis, but apparently the main emphasis was placed on the word people.

The beauty and dignity of the Address would be enhanced by a bombastic conclusion such as the undue emphasis of the three prepositions would bring about. With no emphasis on the preposition "of," with possibly a slight emphasis on "by" and "for," and with the main stress on the word people, the desired literary ending of the oration would be achieved without detracting from the climax of the Address which had been reached in the preceding clause.