

Reactions to Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address March 4, 1865

"In the Second Inaugural, [Lincoln] revealed his most deeply held convictions to a national audience in a way that no other president has done throughout all of American history. In this religious belief, Lincoln had found strength to persevere, and at the time of his Second Inaugural when it was apparent that the Union cause would eventually be won, he publicly acknowledged its tenet that the final outcome had been foreordained all along. It must be emphasized that this view had not bred within Lincoln any passivity or Hamlet-like indecisiveness; rather, just the opposite."

—Historian Don E. Fehrenbacher in *The Slaveholding Republic: An Account of the United States Government's Relations to Slavery* (Oxford University Press, 2009), 320.

"That rail-splitting lawyer is one of the wonders of the day. Once at Gettysburg and now again on a greater occasion he has shown a capacity for rising to the demands of the hour which we should not expect from orators or men of the schools. This inaugural strikes me in its grand simplicity and directness as being for all time the historical keynote of this war."

—Union officer Charles Francis Adams Jr. to his father, the American minister to England, March 7, 1865, in *A Cycle of Adams Letters, 1861–1865*, ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford (New York, 1920), 2:257.

"At the conclusion of the ceremonies, a salute was fired, the band struck up 'Hail to the Chief,' and the thousands in attendance greeted the President with repeated huzzas."

—Journalist Lawrence Gobright in *Recollection of Men and Things at Washington During the Third of a Century* (Philadelphia, 1869), 343.

"Mr. Lincoln that was a sacred effort."

—Abolitionist and former slave Frederick Douglass in *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass: From 1817–1882*, ed. John Lobb (London: Christian Age Office, 1882), 321.

"The inaugural address of President Lincoln . . . has been looked for by the public with less interest than is usually exhibited, even in ordinary times, in regard to a public expression from the pen or lips of a President of the United States. The indifference is attributable, probably, to the fact that the people know too well how utterly his practice has been at variance with the professions he made in his first inaugural, to have any confidence in his utterances now. It was expected, however, that he would make some attempt to excuse his violations of the Constitution which he had sworn [*sic*] to support, and his

abandonment of principles which he had solemnly put forth as his rule of conduct. In lieu of any such attempt, however, he has given us the mere trash to which we refer our readers as unworthy of comment. In regard to the wide gulf between the professions in his first inaugural and his practices ever since, he has attempted no explanation. He had nothing to say, and he has said it.”

–*Valley Spirit* (newspaper), Franklin County, Pennsylvania, March 8, 1865.