SECOND INAUGURAL ADDRESS
by Abraham Lincoln

Lincoln’s prospect for reelection for a second term as president was not overwhelmingly encouraging. The nation was involved in the Civil War and military failures combined with a resurgence of desire for peace created intense criticism by many Americans of his policies. Although a victory seemed imminent by the time of Lincoln’s inauguration, he was faced with the task of reorganizing the South and reuniting the Union.

[1] FELLOW-COUNTRYMEN: At this second appearance to take the oath of the presidential office, there is less occasion for an extended address than at the first. Then, a statement somewhat in detail of the course to be pursued seemed very fitting and proper; now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have constantly been called forth concerning every point and place of the great contest which still absorbs attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself. It is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With a high hope for the future, no prediction in that regard is ventured.

[2] On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago, all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it. All sought to avoid it. While the Inaugural Address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, the insurgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union, and divide the effects by negotiating. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let it perish, and war came. One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but located in the southern part. These slaves contributed a peculiar—but powerful interest. All knew the interest would somehow cause war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected the magnitude or duration which it has already attained; neither anticipated that the cause of the conflict might cease even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph and a result less fundamental and astonishing. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God. Each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any man should dare to ask a just God’s assistance in wringing bread from the sweat of other men’s faces: but let us judge not that we be not judged. The prayer of both should not be answered; that of neither has been answered fully, for the Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses, for it must needs be that offense come; but woe unto that man by whom the offense cometh."

[3] If we shall suppose African slavery one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which having continued through His appointed time. He now wills to
remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war, as was due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern that there is any departure from those divine attributes which believers in the living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away; yet if it be God's will that it continue until the wealth piled by bondmen by two hundred and fifty years' unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said that the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.

[4] With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphans; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.
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Answer the following questions:
1. Who was opposed to the reelection of Lincoln to the Presidency in 1864?

2. What is the purpose of the inauguration besides giving an address (speech)?

3. Why does Lincoln say there is "less occasion for an extended address than the first"?

4. What is the "great contest" Lincoln is referring to?

5. What were all thoughts directed to as he referred to in paragraph 2?

6. Who does Lincoln blame for the start of the war?

7. What caused the war according to Lincoln?

8. What did "both parties" not expect of the war?

9. Summarize what Lincoln says about the "Almighty."

10. Summarize the 1st sentence of paragraph 3.

11. What does Lincoln mean by "two hundred and fifty years' unrequited toil shall be sunk?"

12. Explain paragraph 4 in your own words.