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War



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Analysis of Lincoln's Gettysburg Address

In his eulogy to President Abraham Lincoln, Senator Charles Sumner, noted that the Gettysburg address was a monumental act. He further added that Lincoln thought, the world will forget what he said, but he was mistaken, as the world did remember and the speech was more important than the battle itself. This in a nutshell proves the significance and the effect the speech had. In an extremely reverent speech, Lincoln not only bids a fitting farewell to the martyred soldiers, but through the tone, subject and manner of his speech, sends a message of unity to the entire nation. The Gettysburg address, made by Lincoln on November 19, 1863, is arguably one of the most, if not the most, famous speeches in American history. Made at the Gettysburg Soldiers' National Cemetery, the speech was made to honor those soldiers who lost their lives during the battle of Gettysburg, which was a crucial battle of the civil war, with the Union army emerging victorious. The speech though brief conveys a colossal message for both the American nation and to the humanity in general. Being the skillful orator he is, Lincoln have in a time span of under two minutes, made a huge impact both on the immediate audience and many people who later read/heard the speech. The aim of this essay is to analyze the context, text, persuasive strategies, audience, and usage of pathos and style in the speech, to gauge the reasons behind the impact this brief speech produced.

The battle of Gettysburg was fought on July 1863 and resulted in a huge number of casualties, the maximum in the entire war. The reburial of the soldiers begun on October 17, and Lincoln was invited to make a speech as

the Chief Executive of the nation, and set apart the burial ground to their sacred use. Lincoln used the speech to both honor the dead soldiers and to redefine the goals of the war. At two years into the civil war which resulted in massive number of life losses, the audience of this speech where filled with bereavement, grief and perhaps even anger. The audience was not just the crowd gathered in the burial ground, but an entire nation, who looked upon its leader for guidance and some comprehension of the enormous calamity suffered by them.

The number of American servicemen dead in the civil war is more than the combined total of those died in the World wars and Vietnam. People were obviously weary and devastated at the extent of the loss. It was up to the President of the nation to somehow justify this war and make people understand why it is necessary to continue with this war despite the loss of so many lives. And this Lincoln achieved in less than two minutes. Edward Everett, who also made a speech alongside Lincoln, in that event, reportedly, told to him,

“ I should be glad, if I could flatter myself that I came as near to the central idea of the occasion, in two hours, as you did in two minutes.”

The now famous " Four score and seven years ago", the starting line of the speech, refers to the period of 1776, eighty seven years before the speech was made, when the Declaration of Independence was drafted. The country was free from colonial rule but now it faced a threat from inside, which challenged its freedom. Thus Lincoln used the memorial service of the deceased soldiers of an important battle, to convey his views on the ideals for which the war was fought. Secession of the southern states was threatening the unity of the country and slavery practiced by the southern

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states was against the principles of human liberty and equality, the very ideals the country was based on.

He appeals to the emotions of his audience when he says,

“ Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure.”

Through pathos, he conveys how this war was a test of character to the nation, which was found on the philosophy that all men are equal. He then extends the purpose of the fight beyond the borders of America. He says it is not just a question whether America could survive this war, but rather a question of whether any nation in this world, which is based on the principles of equality and individual liberty, could stand against the forces threatening their values. Thereby he extends the nobility of the cause of the war many a folds.

Lincoln uses the contrast effectively when he says we have come to honor those soldiers

“ who here gave their lives that that nation might live.”

“ we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground”

Dedicate, consecrate and hallow are the three words he uses to stress, on how the ground is already made sacred by the sacrifice of the soldiers, and that he and the gathering need not do anything extra to make it special.

Lincoln, having created the desired emotional state in his audience, uses it as a springboard to launch his next words which aim at giving them hope for the future. He encourages the people to keep fighting for those who have already made the noblest sacrifice a man can do for the sake of his nation.

He says

“ It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us — . — that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain — that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom”

As any great orator and leader would do, he uses simple, yet sincere and powerful words to inspire and inculcate hope in his audience. He persuades his audience, the citizen of the nation and any free men who believes in individual freedom, to ensure that these soldiers and all the people who have perished in the war did not die in vain. He calls for his fellow countrymen to continue the task left unfinished by the martyrs and to ensure that the country is governed by an elected government which upholds the values of freedom and liberty. His call of action is for the people to take increased devotion in their cause, and ensure that the American values for which the soldiers fought did not perish from our world. He again uses the powerful triple - ‘ by the people, for the people and of the people’, which is even today used by most teachers across the world, to define democracy to their students.

Lincoln intentionally chose shorter, uncomplicated words because he did not want to appear more intelligent than his audience. The aim of the speech was to connect with them not to inspire awe in them. He also used many ‘ honorary’ words, like nobly, consecrate, and highly, to denote the nobleness of the soldiers’ sacrifice and the cause of the war. With just 10 precise sentences and as many as 271 words, Lincoln was able to connect and convey his thoughts not just to that particular gathering in 1863, but was able to give hope and inspiration to people across borders and generations. The style of speech was not that of a President making a political speech to <https://assignbuster.com/free-essay-on-lincolns-gettysburg-address/>

his countrymen, but a bereaved patriot sharing the grief of a loss with his fellow mourners, and a leader who is guiding his followers to get over their anguish and finish the task the deceased soldiers gave their life for. The ethos of the speech come from Lincoln's authority as the President of the country, and the pathos come from the emotional appeal he makes to the people about the nature of the sacrifice of the soldiers, and the logos lies in the way he explains the need to move forward.

The speech, though is eloquent and contains all those elements a persuasive speech should possess, did not touch a chord with the audience just because of its content, structure or tone, but it did make such a huge impact because of the sincerity and the vision of the man who uttered them.

Works Cited:

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