

Why the Civil War was fought: Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

Overview: In this lesson students will analyze Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address and his Meditation on the Divine Will to better understand why Lincoln thought the Civil War was being fought.

Materials:

Meditation on the Divine Will, September 30, 1862
Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, March 4, 1865

Citations:

Meditation on the Divine Will:

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=1090>

Lincoln's Second Inaugural: <http://www.nationalcenter.org/LincolnSecondInaugural.html>
Content/Teaching Notes from: The American Pageant, 13th Edition Textbook, Chapter 21

Aim/Essential Question: According to President Lincoln, why was the Civil War fought?

Background Information:

Content/Teaching Notes

I. Bull Run Ends the "Ninety-Day War"

- A. When President Abraham Lincoln called for 75,000 militiamen on April 15, 1861, he and just about everyone else in the North expected a swift war lasting about 90 days, with a quick suppression of the South to prove the North's superiority and end this foolishness.
- B. On July 21, 1861, ill-trained Yankee recruits swaggered out toward Bull Run to engage a smaller Confederate unit. They expected one big battle and a quick victory for the war.
 1. The atmosphere was like that of a sporting event, as spectators gathered in picnics to watch.
 2. However, after initial success by the Union, Confederate reinforcements arrived and, coupled with Stonewall Jackson's line holding, sent the Union soldiers into disarray.
- C. The Battle of Bull Run showed the North that this would not be a short, easy war and swelled the South's already too-large ego.

II. "Tardy George" McClellan and the Peninsula Campaign

- A. Later in 1861, command of the Army of the Potomac (name of the Union army) was given to 34 year old General George B. McClellan, an excellent drillmaster and organizer of troops, but also a perfectionist who constantly believed that he was outnumbered, never took risks, and held the army without moving for months before finally ordered by Lincoln to advance.
- B. At Lincoln's urging, he finally decided upon a water-borne approach to Richmond (the South's capital), called the Peninsula Campaign, taking about a month to capture Yorktown before coming to Richmond.
 1. At this moment, President Lincoln took McClellan's expected reinforcements and sent them chasing Stonewall Jackson, and after "Jeb" Stuart's Confederate cavalry rode completely around McClellan's army, Southern General Robert E. Lee launched a devastating counterattack—the Seven Days' Battles—on June 26 to July 2 of 1862.

2. The victory at Bull Run ensured that the South, if it lost, would lose slavery as well, and it was after this battle that Lincoln began to draft an emancipation proclamation.
- C. With the quick-strike plan a failure, the Union strategy now turned to total war. Summed up, the plan was to blockade, divide, and conquer. The plan included...
1. Suffocate the South through an oceanic blockade.
 2. Free the slaves to undermine the South's very economic foundations.
 3. Cut the Confederacy in half by seizing control of the Mississippi River.
 4. Chop the Confederacy to pieces by marching through Georgia and the Carolinas.
 5. Capture its capital, Richmond, Virginia.
 6. Try everywhere to engage the enemy's main strength and grind it to submission.
 7. This was essentially General Winfield Scott's "Anaconda Plan."

III. The War at Sea

- A. The Union blockade started with many leaks at first, but it clamped down later.
- B. Britain, who would ordinarily protest such interference in the seas that she "owned," recognized the blockade as binding, since Britain herself often used blockades in her wars.
- C. Blockade-running, or the process of smuggling materials through the blockade, was a risky but profitable business, but the Union navy also seized British freighters on the high seas, citing "ultimate destination" (to the South) as their reasons; the British relented, since they might have to do the same thing in later wars (as they did in World War I).
- D. The biggest Confederate threat to the Union came in the form of an old U.S. warship reconditioned and plated with iron railroad rails: the Virginia (formerly called the Merrimack), which threatened to break the Union blockade, but fortunately, the Monitor arrived just in time to fight the Merrimack to a standstill, and the Confederate ship was destroyed later by the South to save it from the North.
 1. The lessons of the Monitor vs. the Merrimack were that boats needed to be steam-powered and armored, henceforth.

IV. The Pivotal Point: Antietam

- A. In the Second Battle of Bull Run, Robert E. Lee crushed the arrogant General John Pope.
- B. After this battle, Lee hoped to thrust into the North and win, hopefully persuading the Border States to join the South and foreign countries to intervene on behalf of the South.
 1. At this time, Lincoln reinstated General McClellan.
- C. McClellan's men found a copy of Lee's plans (as wrapping paper for cigars) and were able to stop the Southerners at Antietam Creek on September 17, 1862 in one of the bloodiest days of the Civil War.
 1. Jefferson Davis was never so close to victory as he was that day, since European powers were very close to helping the South, but after the Union army displayed unexpected power at Antietam, that help faded.
 2. Antietam was also the Union display of power that Lincoln needed to announce his Emancipation Proclamation, which didn't actually free the slaves, but gave the general idea; it was announced on January 1, 1863. Lincoln said the slaves would be free in the seceded states (but NOT the border states as doing so might anger them into seceding too).
 - a. Now, the war wasn't just to save the Union, it was to free the slaves as well.
 - b. This gave the war a moral purpose (end slavery) to go with its political purpose (restore the union).

V. A Proclamation Without Emancipation

- A. The Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves in not-yet-conquered Southern territories, but slaves in the Border States and the conquered territories were not liberated since doing so might make them go to the South; Lincoln freed the slaves where he couldn't and wouldn't free the slaves where he could.
- B. The proclamation was very controversial, as many soldiers refused to fight for abolition and deserted.
- C. However, since many slaves, upon hearing the proclamation, left their plantations, the Emancipation Proclamation did succeed in one of its purposes: to undermine the labor of the South.
- D. Angry Southerners cried that Lincoln was stirring up trouble and trying to incite a slave insurrection.

VI. Blacks Battle Bondage

- A. At first, Blacks weren't enlisted in the army, but as men ran low, these men were eventually allowed in; by war's end, Black's accounted for about 10% of the Union army.
- B. Until 1864, Southerners refused to recognize Black soldiers as prisoners of war, and often executed them as runaways and rebels, and in one case, at Fort Pillow, Tennessee, Blacks who had surrendered were massacred.
 - 1. Afterwards, vengeful Black units swore to take no prisoners, crying, "Remember Fort Pillow!"
- C. Many Blacks, whether through fear, loyalty, lack of leadership, or strict policing, didn't cast off their chains when they heard the Emancipation Proclamation, but many others walked off of their jobs when Union armies conquered territories that included the plantations that they worked on.

VII. Lee's Last Lunge at Gettysburg

- A. After Antietam, A. E. Burnside (known for his sideburns) took over the Union army, but he lost badly after launching a rash frontal attack at Fredericksburg, Virginia, on Dec. 13, 1862.
- B. "Fighting Joe" Hooker (known for his prostitutes) was badly beaten at Chancellorsville, Virginia, when Lee divided his outnumbered army into two and sent "Stonewall" Jackson to attack the Union flank, but later in that battle, Jackson's own men mistakenly shot him at dusk, and he died.
- C. Lee now prepared to invade the North for the second and final time, at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, but he was met by new General George G. Meade, who by accident took a stand atop a low ridge flanking a shallow valley and the Union and Confederate armies fought a bloody and brutal battle in which the North "won."
 - 1. In the Battle of Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863), General George Pickett led a hopeless, bloody, and pitiful charge across a field that ended in the pig-slaughter of Confederates.
 - 2. A few months later, Lincoln delivered his Gettysburg Address, which added moral purpose to the war saying a new goal was to make sure those who had been killed had not died in vain.

VIII. The War in the West

- A. Lincoln finally found a good general in Ulysses S. Grant, a mediocre West Point graduate who drank too much whiskey and also fought under the ideal of "immediate and unconditional surrender."

- B. Grant won at Fort Henry and Fort Donelson, but then muffed-up and lost a tough battle at Shiloh (April 6-7, 1862), just over the Tennessee border.
- C. In the spring of 1862, a flotilla commanded by David G. Farragut joined with a Northern army to seize New Orleans.
- D. At Vicksburg, Mississippi, U.S. Grant besieged the city and captured it on July 4, 1863, thus securing the important Mississippi River. Grant redeemed himself here after blundering at Shiloh.

- 1. The Union victory at the Battle of Vicksburg came the day after the Union victory at Gettysburg, and afterwards, the Confederate hope for foreign intervention was lost.

IX. Sherman Scorches Georgia

- A. After Grant cleared out Tennessee, General William Tecumseh Sherman was given command to march through Georgia, and he delivered, capturing and burning down Atlanta before completing his infamous “March to the Sea” at Savannah.

- 1. His men cut a trail of destruction one-mile wide, waging “total war” by cutting up railroad tracks, burning fields and crops, and destroying everything.

X. The Politics of War

- A. The “Congressional Committee on the Conduct of the War” was created in 1861 and was dominated by “radical” Republicans and gave Lincoln much trouble.

- B. The Northern Democrats split after the death of Stephen Douglas, as “War Democrats” supported Lincoln while “Peace Democrats” did not.

- 1. Copperheads were those who were totally against the war, and denounced the president (the “Illinois Ape”) and his “nigger war.”

- 2. The most famous of the Copperheads was Clement L. Valandigham, who harshly denounced the war but was imprisoned, then banished to the South, then came back to Ohio illegally, but was not further punished, and also inspired the story The Man without a Country.

XI. The Election of 1864

- A. In 1864, the Republicans joined the War Democrats to form the Union Party and renominated Abe Lincoln despite a bit of opposition, while the Copperheads and Peace Democrats ran George McClellan.

- 1. The Union Party chose Democrat Andrew Johnson to ensure that the War Democrats would vote for Lincoln, and the campaign was once again full of mudslinging.

- 2. Near election day, the victories at New Orleans and Atlanta occurred, and the Northern soldiers were pushed to vote, and Lincoln smoked his opponent in the Electoral College, 212-21.

- a. The popular vote was closer: 2.2 million to 1.8.

XII. Grant Outlasts Lee

- A. Grant was a man who could send thousands of men out to die just so that the Confederates would lose, because he knew that he could afford to lose twice as many men while Lee could not.

- 1. In a series of wilderness encounters, Grant fought Lee, with Grant losing about 50,000 men.

- 2. At Cold Harbor, the Union sent soldiers to battle with papers pinned on their backs showing their names and addresses, and over 7,000 died in a few minutes.

3. The public was outraged and shocked over this kind of gore and death, and demanded the relief of General Grant, but U.S. Grant stayed. Lincoln wanted somebody who'd keep the "axe to the grindstone," and Grant was his man.

B. Finally, Grant and his men captured Richmond, burnt it, and cornered Lee at Appomattox Courthouse at Virginia in April of 1865, where Lee formally surrendered; the war was over.

XIII. The Martyrdom of Lincoln

A. On April 14, 1865, Abraham Lincoln was shot in the head by John Wilkes Booth and died shortly after.

B. Before his death, few people had suspected his greatness, but his sudden and dramatic death erased his shortcomings and made people remember him for his good things.

C. The South cheered Lincoln's death at first, but later, his death proved to be worse than if he had lived, because he would have almost certainly treated the South much better than they were actually treated during Reconstruction.

XIV. The Aftermath of the Nightmare.

A. The Civil War cost 600,000 men, \$15 billion, and wasted the cream of the American crop.

B. However, it gave America a supreme test of its existence, and the U.S. survived, proving its strength and further increasing its growing power and reputation; plus, slavery was also eradicated.

C. The war paved the way for the United States' fulfillment of its destiny as the dominant republic of the Western Hemisphere—and later, the world.

Content from: The American Pageant, 13th Edition, Chapter 21 – The Furnace of Civil War

Objectives: Students will learn more content on the Civil War, including the progression of the war with specific events and battles. They will then analyze Lincoln's beliefs about why the war was being fought. This will help students understand the major decision Lincoln would make as president, especially toward the end of the war.

Motivation: Analyze and discuss Lincoln's Meditation on the Divine Will first. What do you think Lincoln believes to be the reason that the war began? What do you think he believes is the reason for its continuation? Do you have any guesses as to why Lincoln thinks this war is being fought?

Procedures:

1. Begin class with students reading Lincoln's Meditation on the Divine Will, and have them write a response to the motivation questions.

2. Start a teacher-directed lecture/discussion on the content notes of the Civil War, when teacher gets to "The Election of 1864," in content/teaching notes, stop to have students read the class sets of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address.

3. Have students read the Second Inaugural Address one time through silently, then have a student read the address aloud to the class.

Discussion Questions: Having read both Lincoln's Meditation on the Divine Will (1862) and his Second Inaugural Address (1865), why do you think Lincoln believes this war is being fought?

Summary: Students will analyze primary sources and engage in discussion with their peers before and after a period of teacher-directed lecture and discussion. Students will then decide why Lincoln believes the Civil War was fought.

Application Questions: From what you have studied and learned about Lincoln and about the Civil War, do you think Lincoln could have been accurate in his beliefs about why the Civil War was fought?

Class Activity: Take the Second Inaugural Address apart paragraph by paragraph in order to analyze it more fully as a class:

First paragraph: Lincoln sets the expectations for speech as low, and then builds throughout speech to climactic ending.

Second paragraph: Lincoln uses inclusive language “all,” he validates the intentions of the South in a conciliatory tone, and at the end of the paragraph he gently directs blame to the South: “one of them would make war...one of them would accept war...” (Similar sounds of consonants are used near each other—repetition is used as well—he uses the word war seven times in the paragraph, most times word is direct object, last sentence “war” became subject of sentence.)

Third Paragraph: Lincoln uses more inclusive language – “American slavery,” not just “slavery,” which would solely implicate the South; end of paragraph, he starts with “if we shall suppose that American slavery is 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 the woe due to those by whom the offense came...”

End of Third Paragraph gives Lincoln’s belief as to why the war is being fought: “Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of 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 "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

Documents:

Meditation on the Divine Will

Abraham Lincoln

September 30, 1862

The will of God prevails. In great contests each party claims to act in accordance with the will of God. Both may be, and one must be, wrong. God cannot be for and against the same thing at the same time. In the present civil war it is quite possible that God’s purpose is something different from the purpose of either party; and yet the human instrumentalities, working just as they do, are of the best adaptation to effect his purpose. I am almost ready to say that this is probably true; that God wills this contest, and wills that it shall not end yet. By his mere great power on the minds of the now contestants, he could have either saved or destroyed the Union without a human contest. Yet the contest began. And, having begun, he could give the final victory to

either side any day. Yet the contest proceeds.

*The Second Inaugural Address of
President Abraham Lincoln
March 4, 1865*

At this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper. Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the 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, and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

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 avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, urgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war; seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came.

One-eighth of the whole population were colored slaves, not distributed generally over the Union, but localized in the southern part of it. These slaves constituted a peculiar and powerful interest. All knew that this interest was some how the cause of the war. To strengthen, perpetuate, and extend this interest was the object for which the insurgents would rend the Union even by war, while the Government claimed no right to do more than to restrict the territorial enlargement of it. Neither party expected for the war the magnitude or the duration which it has already attained. Neither anticipated that the *cause* of the conflict might cease with or even before the conflict itself should cease. Each looked for an easier triumph, and a result less fundamental and astounding. Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other. It may seem strange that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not, that we be not judged. The prayers of both could not be answered. That of neither has been answered fully. The Almighty has His own purposes. "Woe unto the world because of offenses; for it must needs be that offenses come, but woe to that man by whom the offense cometh." If we shall suppose that American slavery is 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 the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a 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 God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman's two hundred and fifty years of 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 "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

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 his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.