

rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address

A Rhetorical Analysis of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address: A Deep Dive into Persuasion and Reconciliation

Introduction:

Four score and seven years after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, a nation fractured by civil war stood poised on the precipice of either destruction or rebirth. Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, delivered on March 4, 1865, wasn't just a political speech; it was a masterclass in rhetoric, a potent blend of humility, forgiveness, and a vision for a scarred nation's healing. This comprehensive analysis delves into the masterful use of rhetorical devices employed by Lincoln to achieve his objectives. We'll examine his appeals to ethos, pathos, and logos, explore the underlying themes of divine judgment, national responsibility, and the arduous path to reconciliation, and ultimately understand how this brief address continues to resonate with audiences today. Prepare to be captivated by the power of words and their enduring impact on history.

I. The Context: A Nation Divided

Before dissecting the speech's rhetoric, understanding its historical context is crucial. The Civil War was raging, claiming countless lives and tearing the nation apart. The Union's victory seemed imminent, but the cost was staggering. Lincoln wasn't simply addressing a celebratory crowd; he was speaking to a nation grappling with its own mortality, its moral failings, and the uncertain future. This backdrop of devastation and uncertainty informs the tone and message of the address, shaping its rhetorical power. The looming question – how to rebuild a shattered nation – hung heavy in the air, coloring every word.

II. Ethos: Establishing Credibility and Authority

Lincoln's ethos, or credibility, was already firmly established. As the President leading the nation through its greatest crisis, he held a position of immense authority. However, he strategically reinforces his ethos within the speech itself. His humble tone, devoid of self-congratulation, is a striking contrast to the triumphant narratives often associated with wartime leaders. Phrases like "with malice toward none, with charity for all" project an image of compassionate leadership, further solidifying his authority not just through power, but through moral strength. His direct engagement with the nation's shared suffering fosters a sense of shared experience and trust.

III. Pathos: Appealing to Emotion and Shared Experience

Lincoln masterfully manipulates pathos, appealing to the audience's emotions. The speech avoids celebratory rhetoric; instead, it acknowledges the profound suffering inflicted by the war on both sides. His careful use of language—referencing God's judgment and the shared burden of suffering—evokes a sense of national mourning and collective responsibility. He doesn't shy away from the grim realities of the conflict but frames them within a larger context of divine justice and national atonement. This strategic use of pathos fosters a sense of empathy and shared responsibility, crucial for reconciliation.

IV. Logos: The Logic of Reconciliation and National Unity

While pathos dominates the emotional core, Lincoln's logos, or logical appeal, is equally powerful. He subtly yet effectively links the war's cause to the nation's foundational principles, suggesting that the conflict was a divine test of the nation's commitment to its ideals. This logical framework justifies the immense sacrifices made, providing a narrative that transcends mere political struggle. His call for "malice toward none, with charity for all" is not merely an emotional plea; it's a pragmatic necessity for national healing and future stability. The logic is simple: unity is paramount for survival and progress.

V. Key Rhetorical Devices: Analyzing the Techniques

Lincoln masterfully employs various rhetorical devices to amplify his message. The use of biblical allusions, particularly references to divine judgment and the concept of "testing" the nation, resonates deeply with his audience's religious beliefs and provides a moral framework for understanding the conflict. Anaphora, the repetition of phrases like "with malice toward none," emphasizes the message's core values and creates a powerful rhythmic effect. His concise and carefully chosen words avoid verbose pronouncements, enhancing the speech's impact. The use of parallel structure further reinforces the message's clarity and memorability. Each device contributes to the speech's overall rhetorical potency.

VI. Themes of Divine Judgment and National Responsibility

The recurring themes of divine judgment and national responsibility underscore the speech's profound message. Lincoln doesn't shy away from suggesting that the war was a punishment for the nation's sins – specifically, slavery. This attribution of the war's origins to divine justice provides a moral framework for understanding the immense suffering and offers a path to reconciliation through atonement and a commitment to national unity. He subtly yet firmly links the war's outcome to the nation's moral reckoning, urging a commitment to justice and equality.

VII. The Legacy: Enduring Resonance and Relevance

Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address isn't just a historical artifact; it's a timeless testament to the power of rhetoric and its ability to shape national narratives. Its enduring relevance lies in its exploration of themes that continue to resonate – the importance of national unity, the pursuit of justice, and the enduring struggle for reconciliation. The call for "malice toward none, with charity for all" remains a powerful ideal, a beacon guiding efforts towards healing and understanding in the face of societal divisions. The address serves as a potent reminder of the power of words to transcend historical context and offer lasting guidance.

VIII. Conclusion: A Masterpiece of Presidential Rhetoric

Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address stands as a masterpiece of presidential rhetoric, a concise yet profoundly impactful statement that transcends its historical context. Through a masterful blend of ethos, pathos, and logos, Lincoln delivers a message of humility, forgiveness, and a vision for national unity. The speech's enduring power lies in its ability to connect with audiences on an emotional and intellectual level, inspiring hope and offering guidance even in the darkest of times. Its message of reconciliation remains a powerful reminder of the crucial importance of empathy, understanding, and the enduring pursuit of a more perfect union.

Name of Book/Article Outline:

Rhetorical Analysis of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address: A Comprehensive Guide

Introduction: Hook, overview of the analysis, and its objectives.

Chapter 1: Historical Context and Background: The Civil War, the political landscape, and Lincoln's position.

Chapter 2: Ethos: Establishing Credibility: Lincoln's established authority and his strategic reinforcement of it within the speech.

Chapter 3: Pathos: Appealing to Emotion: Lincoln's manipulation of pathos through shared suffering and divine judgment.

Chapter 4: Logos: The Logic of Reconciliation: The logical framework underpinning Lincoln's call for unity.

Chapter 5: Rhetorical Devices: Analysis of specific techniques (anaphora, biblical allusions, parallel structure).

Chapter 6: Themes: Divine Judgment and National Responsibility: Exploring the intertwining of these crucial themes.

Chapter 7: Legacy and Enduring Relevance: The continuing impact of the address on contemporary society.

Chapter 8: Conclusion: Summary of key findings and the lasting significance of the speech.

(Article explaining each point of the outline has been provided above in the main body of the blog post.)

FAQs:

1. What is the primary purpose of Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address? The primary purpose was to address the nation at the cusp of victory in the Civil War, focusing on reconciliation, healing, and charting a path towards national unity.
1. What rhetorical appeals does Lincoln primarily use? Lincoln masterfully employs ethos (credibility), pathos (emotion), and logos (logic) to achieve his objectives.
1. How does Lincoln use religious imagery in his address? He uses biblical allusions and references to divine judgment to provide a moral framework for understanding the war and its aftermath.
1. What is the significance of the phrase "malice toward none, with charity for all"? This phrase encapsulates the spirit of reconciliation and forgiveness that forms the core message of the address.
1. What is the role of divine judgment in Lincoln's address? Lincoln suggests that the war was a divine test of the nation's commitment to its ideals, prompting reflection on national sins and the need for atonement.
1. How does the speech reflect Lincoln's leadership style? It reveals his humility, compassion, and his ability to connect with the nation's collective suffering.
1. What are some of the key rhetorical devices used in the speech? Anaphora, biblical allusions, parallel structure, and concise language are prominent examples.

1. Why is this address considered a masterpiece of rhetoric? Its masterful use of rhetorical appeals, its timeless themes, and its enduring impact on national discourse make it a significant piece of American rhetoric.
1. How does the Second Inaugural Address continue to resonate today? Its themes of reconciliation, justice, and national unity continue to be relevant in addressing contemporary societal divisions and promoting healing.

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Ronald C. White, 2006-11-07 In the tradition of Wills's Lincoln at Gettysburg, Lincoln's Greatest Speech combines impeccable scholarship and lively, engaging writing to reveal the full meaning of one of the greatest speeches in the nation's history.

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rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: War of Words Harry J. Maihafer, 2001-11-01 A shrewd politician, Abraham Lincoln recognized the power of the press. He knew that, at most, a few thousand people might hear one of his speeches in person, but countless readers across the nation would absorb his message through newspapers. While he was always under fire by some hostile portion of the openly partisan nineteenth-century media, through the careful cultivation of relationships Lincoln successfully wooed numerous prominent newspapermen into aiding his agenda. Whether he was editing his own speech in a newspaper office or inviting reporters to the White House to leak a story, the President skillfully steered the Union through the perils of war by playing his own version of the public relations game.

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rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: The Gettysburg Address

Abraham Lincoln, 2022-11-29 The complete text of one of the most important speeches in American history, delivered by President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War. On November 19, 1863, Abraham Lincoln arrived at the battlefield near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, to remember not only the grim bloodshed that had just occurred there, but also to remember the American ideals that were being put to the ultimate test by the Civil War. A rousing appeal to the nation's better angels, The Gettysburg Address remains an inspiring vision of the United States as a country "conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal."

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rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: The Eloquent President Ronald C. White, 2007-12-18 The fact that Abraham Lincoln is now universally recognized as America's greatest political orator would have surprised many of the citizens who voted him into office. Ungainly in stature and awkward in manner, the newly elected Lincoln was considered a Western stump speaker and debater devoid of rhetorical polish. Then, after the outbreak of the Civil War, he stood before the nation to deliver his Message to Congress in Special Session on July 4, 1861, and, as a contemporary editor put it, "some of us who doubted were wrong." In *The Eloquent President*, historian Ronald White examines Lincoln's astonishing oratory and explores his growth as a leader, a communicator, and a man of deepening spiritual conviction. Examining a different speech, address, or public letter in each chapter, White tracks the evolution of Lincoln's rhetoric from the measured, lawyerly tones of the First Inaugural, to the imaginative daring of the 1862 Annual Message to Congress, to the haunting, immortal poetry of the Gettysburg Address. As a speaker who appealed not to intellect alone, but also to the hearts and souls of citizens, Lincoln persuaded the nation to follow him during the darkest years of the Civil War. Through the speeches and what surrounded them—the great battles and political crises, the president's private anguish and despair, the impact of his words on the public, the press, and the nation at war—we see the full sweep and meaning of the Lincoln presidency. As he weighs the biblical cadences and vigorous parallel structures that make Lincoln's rhetoric soar, White identifies a passionate religious strain that most historians have overlooked. It is White's contention that as president Lincoln not only grew into an inspiring leader and determined commander in chief, but also embarked on a spiritual odyssey that led to a profound understanding of the relationship between human action and divine will. Brilliantly written, boldly original in conception, *The Eloquent President* blends history, biography, and a deep intuitive appreciation for the quality of Lincoln's extraordinary mind. With grace and insight, White captures the essence of the four most critical years of Lincoln's life and makes the great words live for our time in all their power and beauty. From the Hardcover edition.

rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: The Cambridge Companion to Abraham Lincoln Shirley Samuels, 2012-07-23 Abraham Lincoln's stature as an American cultural figure grows from his political legacy. In today's milieu, the speeches he delivered as the sixteenth president of the United States have become synonymous with American progress, values and exceptionalism. But what makes Lincoln's language so effective? Highlighting matters of style, affect, nationalism and history in nineteenth-century America, this collection examines the rhetorical power of Lincoln's prose – from the earliest legal decisions, stump speeches, anecdotes and letters, to the Gettysburg Address and the lingering power of the Second Inaugural Address. Through careful analysis of his correspondence with Civil War generals and his early poetry, the contributors,

all literary and cultural critics, give readers a unique look into Lincoln's private life. Such a collection enables teachers, students, and readers of American history to assess the impact of this extraordinary writer – and rare politician – on the world's stage.

rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: Lincoln's Moral Vision James Tackach, 2002 On March 4, 1865, Abraham Lincoln gave his Second Inaugural Address, the final great speech of his three- decades public career. Delivered a little more than a month before the end of the Civil War and forty-one days before he was assassinated, the speech reveals Lincoln coming to terms with vital moral and political issues with which he had grappled during his political life. This book traces how the speech addresses three critical issues that obsessed him: slavery, race, and religion. Although in early life Lincoln developed a personal distaste for slavery, he never embraced the abolitionist cause. Before his presidency, he endorsed a middle position on slavery, arguing that it could remain legal in the South where it was entrenched, but not be allowed to spread to new territories. On the matter of race Lincoln was a man shaped by the prejudices of his time and place. Before the Civil War he advocated no civil rights for blacks and often asserted that whites should hold a superior position in American society. In religious perspective Lincoln was a skeptic, even accused by one political opponent of being an infidel. But during the political turbulence of the 1850s and during Lincoln's presidency, his positions on these three burning issues shifted dramatically. The profound changes in Lincoln's thinking are evident in the Second Inaugural Address, in which he condemns slavery as a grievous national sin that prompted a just God to deliver upon the United States a fierce punishment in the form of a devastating civil war. This book argues that the Second Inaugural Address was Lincoln's resolution of the moral and political issues of his time and is the key document in Lincoln's entire literary canon. James Tackach, a professor of English at Roger Williams University, is the editor of *Slave Narratives* and *The Battle of Gettysburg* and the author of books for young adults, including *The Trial of John Brown: Radical Abolitionist* and *The Emancipation Proclamation: Abolishing Slavery in the South*.

rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution James M. McPherson, 1992-06-04 James McPherson has emerged as one of America's finest historians. *Battle Cry of Freedom*, his Pulitzer Prize-winning account of the Civil War, was a national bestseller that Hugh Brogan, in *The New York Times Book Review*, called history writing of the highest order. In that volume, McPherson gathered in the broad sweep of events, the political, social, and cultural forces at work during the Civil War era. Now, in *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*, he offers a series of thoughtful and engaging essays on aspects of Lincoln and the war that have rarely been discussed in depth. McPherson again displays his keen insight and sterling prose as he examines several critical themes in American history. He looks closely at the President's role as Commander-in-Chief of the Union forces, showing how Lincoln forged a national military strategy for victory. He explores the importance of Lincoln's great rhetorical skills, uncovering how--through parables and figurative language--he was uniquely able to communicate both the purpose of the war and a new meaning of liberty to the people of the North. In another section, McPherson examines the Civil War as a Second American Revolution, describing how the Republican Congress elected in 1860 passed an astonishing blitz of new laws (rivaling the first hundred days of the New Deal), and how the war not only destroyed the social structure of the old South, but radically altered the balance of power in America, ending 70 years of Southern power in the national government. The Civil War was the single most transforming and defining experience in American history, and Abraham Lincoln remains the most important figure in the pantheon of our mythology. These graceful essays, written by one of America's leading historians, offer fresh and unusual perspectives on both.

rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: Lincoln on the Verge Ted Widmer, 2020-04-07 WINNER OF THE LINCOLN FORUM BOOK PRIZE “A Lincoln classic...superb.” —The Washington Post “A book for our time.”—Doris Kearns Goodwin *Lincoln on the Verge* tells the dramatic story of America’s greatest president discovering his own strength to save the Republic. As a divided nation plunges into the deepest crisis in its history, Abraham Lincoln boards a train for

Washington and his inauguration—an inauguration Southerners have vowed to prevent. Lincoln on the Verge charts these pivotal thirteen days of travel, as Lincoln discovers his power, speaks directly to the public, and sees his country up close. Drawing on new research, this riveting account reveals the president-elect as a work in progress, showing him on the verge of greatness, as he foils an assassination attempt, forges an unbreakable bond with the American people, and overcomes formidable obstacles in order to take his oath of office.

rhretorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: Lincoln's Virtues William Lee Miller, 2003-02-04 William Lee Miller's ethical biography is a fresh, engaging telling of the story of Lincoln's rise to power. Through careful scrutiny of Lincoln's actions, speeches, and writings, and of accounts from those who knew him, Miller gives us insight into the moral development of a great politician — one who made the choice to go into politics, and ultimately realized that vocation's fullest moral possibilities. As Lincoln's Virtues makes refreshingly clear, Lincoln was not born with his face on Mount Rushmore; he was an actual human being making choices — moral choices — in a real world. In an account animated by wit and humor, Miller follows this unschooled frontier politician's rise, showing that the higher he went and the greater his power, the worthier his conduct would become. He would become that rare bird, a great man who was also a good man. Uniquely revealing of its subject's heart and mind, it represents a major contribution to our understanding and of Lincoln, and to the perennial American discussion of the relationship between politics and morality.

rhretorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: Lincoln's Sword Douglas L. Wilson, 2011-11-02 Widely considered in his own time as a genial but provincial lightweight who was out of place in the presidency, Abraham Lincoln astonished his allies and confounded his adversaries by producing a series of speeches and public letters so provocative that they helped revolutionize public opinion on such critical issues as civil liberties, the use of black soldiers, and the emancipation of slaves. This is a brilliant and unprecedented examination of how Lincoln used the power of words to not only build his political career but to keep the country united during the Civil War.

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during the Civil War and initiating the legislation that ended slavery in the United States. Abraham Lincoln is also remembered as a man of humble beginnings, who through determination and perseverance was elected to the highest political position in the United States. A humane, farsighted statesman in his lifetime, he became an American hero after his death. Lincoln has had a lasting influence on American politics, and his character, integrity, and intellect are best revealed in his speeches and letters. Book jacket.

rhretorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: Lincoln Fred Kaplan, 2008-10-28 An analysis of the literary life of the sixteenth president explores the ways in which his views were shaped by classic literature and how he used language as a vehicle for complex ideas and an instrument of change in both political and personal arenas.

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rhretorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: The Broken Constitution Noah Feldman, 2021-11-02 A New York Times Book Review Editors' Choice An innovative account of Abraham Lincoln, constitutional thinker and doer Abraham Lincoln is justly revered for his brilliance, compassion, humor, and rededication of the United States to achieving liberty and justice for all. He led the nation into a bloody civil war to uphold the system of government established by the US Constitution—a system he regarded as the “last best hope of mankind.” But how did Lincoln understand the Constitution? In this groundbreaking study, Noah Feldman argues that Lincoln deliberately and recurrently violated the United States’ founding arrangements. When he came to power, it was widely believed that the federal government could not use armed force to prevent a state from seceding. It was also assumed that basic civil liberties could be suspended in a rebellion by Congress but not by the president, and that the federal government had no authority over slavery in states where it existed. As president, Lincoln broke decisively with all these precedents, and effectively rewrote the Constitution’s place in the American system. Before the Civil War, the Constitution was best understood as a compromise pact—a rough and ready deal between states that allowed the Union to form and function. After Lincoln, the Constitution came to be seen as a sacred text—a transcendent statement of the nation’s highest ideals. The Broken Constitution is the first book to tell the story of how Lincoln broke the Constitution in order to remake it. To do so, it offers a riveting narrative of his constitutional choices and how he made them—and places Lincoln in the rich context of thinking of the time, from African American abolitionists to Lincoln’s Republican rivals and Secessionist ideologues. Includes 8 Pages of Black-and-White Illustrations

rhretorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: Lincoln and the Fight for Peace John Avlon, 2022-02-15 A groundbreaking and “affecting and powerful” (The New York Times Book Review) history of Abraham Lincoln’s plan to secure a just and lasting peace after the Civil War—a vision that inspired future presidents as well as the world’s most famous peacemakers. As the tide of the Civil War turned in the spring of 1865, Abraham Lincoln took a dangerous two-week trip to visit the troops on the front lines accompanied by his young son, seeing combat up close, meeting liberated slaves in the ruins of Richmond, and comforting wounded Union and Confederate soldiers. The power of Lincoln’s personal example in the closing days of the war offers a portrait of a peacemaker. He did not demonize people he disagreed with. He used humor, logic, and scripture to depolarize bitter debates. Balancing moral courage with moderation, Lincoln believed that decency could be the most practical form of politics, but he understood that people were more inclined to listen to reason when greeted from a position of strength. Ulysses S. Grant’s famously generous terms of surrender to General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox that April were an expression of a president’s belief that a soft peace should follow a hard war. While his assassination sent the country

careening off course, Lincoln's vision would be vindicated long after his death, inspiring future generations in their own quests to secure a just and lasting peace. As US General Lucius Clay, architect of the post-WWII German occupation said when asked what guided his decisions: "I tried to think of the kind of occupation the South would have had if Abraham Lincoln had lived." Lincoln and the Fight for Peace reveals with "its graceful prose and wise insights" (Jon Meacham, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *The Soul of America*) how Lincoln's character informed his commitment to unconditional surrender followed by a magnanimous peace. Even during the Civil War, surrounded by reactionaries and radicals, he refused to back down from his belief that there is more that unites us than divides us. But he also understood that peace needs to be waged with as much intensity as war. Lincoln's plan to win the peace is his unfinished symphony, but in its existing notes, we can find an anthem that can begin to bridge our divisions today.

rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: Abe David S. Reynolds, 2021-09-28 Now an Apple TV+ documentary, *Lincoln's Dilemma*. One of the Wall Street Journal's Ten Best Books of the Year | A Washington Post Notable Book | A Christian Science Monitor and Kirkus Reviews Best Book of 2020 Winner of the Gilder Lehrman Abraham Lincoln Prize and the Abraham Lincoln Institute Book Award A marvelous cultural biography that captures Lincoln in all his historical fullness. . . . using popular culture in this way, to fill out the context surrounding Lincoln, is what makes Mr. Reynolds's biography so different and so compelling . . . Where did the sympathy and compassion expressed in [Lincoln's] Second Inaugural—"With malice toward none; with charity for all"—come from? This big, wonderful book provides the richest cultural context to explain that, and everything else, about Lincoln. —Gordon Wood, Wall Street Journal From one of the great historians of nineteenth-century America, a revelatory and enthralling new biography of Lincoln, many years in the making, that brings him to life within his turbulent age David S. Reynolds, author of the Bancroft Prize-winning cultural biography of Walt Whitman and many other iconic works of nineteenth century American history, understands the currents in which Abraham Lincoln swam as well as anyone alive. His magisterial biography *Abe* is the product of full-body immersion into the riotous tumult of American life in the decades before the Civil War. It was a country growing up and being pulled apart at the same time, with a democratic popular culture that reflected the country's contradictions. Lincoln's lineage was considered auspicious by Emerson, Whitman, and others who prophesied that a new man from the West would emerge to balance North and South. From New England Puritan stock on his father's side and Virginia Cavalier gentry on his mother's, Lincoln was linked by blood to the central conflict of the age. And an enduring theme of his life, Reynolds shows, was his genius for striking a balance between opposing forces. Lacking formal schooling but with an unquenchable thirst for self-improvement, Lincoln had a talent for wrestling and bawdy jokes that made him popular with his peers, even as his appetite for poetry and prodigious gifts for memorization set him apart from them through his childhood, his years as a lawyer, and his entrance into politics. No one can transcend the limitations of their time, and Lincoln was no exception. But what emerges from Reynolds's masterful reckoning is a man who at each stage in his life managed to arrive at a broader view of things than all but his most enlightened peers. As a politician, he moved too slowly for some and too swiftly for many, but he always pushed toward justice while keeping the whole nation in mind. *Abe* culminates, of course, in the Civil War, the defining test of Lincoln and his beloved country. Reynolds shows us the extraordinary range of cultural knowledge Lincoln drew from as he shaped a vision of true union, transforming, in Martin Luther King Jr.'s words, the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony of brotherhood. Abraham Lincoln did not come out of nowhere. But if he was shaped by his times, he also managed at his life's fateful hour to shape them to an extent few could have foreseen. Ultimately, this is the great drama that astonishes us still, and that *Abe* brings to fresh and vivid life. The measure of that life will always be part of our American education.

rhetorical analysis of lincoln s second inaugural address: **Our Lincoln** Eric Foner, 2009 A collection of essays about Abraham Lincoln.

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