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## A Moment in Time

Commemorating the 150th Anniversary of the Gettysburg Address

By Josephine Matyas



On November 19, 1863 President Lincoln went to Gettysburg—the site of a devastating battle that killed thousands of Union and Confederate soldiers during the American Civil War—to speak as part of the dedication of a national cemetery for 3,500 Union dead.

In approximately 270 words, Lincoln described an eloquent and hope-filled vision for “a new birth of freedom.” At the time, reaction to the address was mixed, but today his two-minute Gettysburg Address is considered one of the greatest, most inspirational speeches in American history.

Now 150 years later, visitors to the Gettysburg National Park can take in Gettysburg first-hand and commemorate the anniversary of the Address. Here are just a few ways to step into the Gettysburg experience.

**Visit the Gettysburg Museum:** Beginning at the Visitor Center, tour the archive-rich museum. The collection of maps, letters, photographs and multi-media presentations, uniforms, armaments and small-scale dioramas outline the three-day battle. Then watch the film—*A New Birth of Freedom* narrated by actor Morgan Freeman—explaining how Americans’ differing views on slavery were a source of enduring conflict. By the time Abraham Lincoln was elected President in 1860, these strains threatened to tear the country apart. Civil War between North and South followed in 1861.

At the midpoint of the war, a watershed battle occurred at Gettysburg. From July 1 to 3, 1863, fierce engagements raged in the rolling hills surrounding the small town. When the three days were over, the Union claimed victory, but at a terrible cost: 51,000 casualties dead, wounded and missing amid a spectre of unspeakable devastation.

**Tour the grounds:** Pick up a free brochure to do the self-guided tour by car (no charge for entry to the battlefield itself), on foot, or bicycle; take a ranger-led walk, rent an iPad loaded with a fully interactive route or one of the expert-led tours (prices vary depending on tour size and mode).

**Landscape and monuments:** Stop at some of the 1,300 monuments and markers placed around the expansive rolling landscape. They mark memorial sites (including the North Carolina Monument, Virginia Monument and Pennsylvania Memorial) as well as key locations marking clashes in the three-day conflict such as Plum Run, The Peach Orchard and Little Round Top. Perhaps the most reflective spot is the Soldiers’ National Cemetery, hallowed ground in American history and the site of President Lincoln’s brief but famous speech.

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