**Abraham Lincoln**

**First Inaugural Address**

**Monday, March 4, 1861**

…**Apprehension** seems to exist among the people of the Southern States that by the **accession** of a Republican administration their property and their peace and personal security are to be endangered. There has never been any reasonable cause for such apprehension…

I have no purpose…to interfere with the institution of slavery in the States where it exists. I believe I have no lawful right to do so, and I have no inclination to do so...I add, too, that all the protection which, consistently with the Constitution and the laws, can be given will be cheerfully given to all the States when lawfully demanded, for whatever cause—as cheerfully to one section as to another.

...It is seventy-two years since the first inauguration of a President under our National Constitution. During that period fifteen different and greatly distinguished citizens have in succession administered the executive branch of the Government. They have conducted it through many perils, and generally with great success. Yet, with all this scope of precedent, I now enter upon the same task for the brief constitutional term of four years under great and peculiar difficulty. A disruption of the Federal Union, heretofore only **menaced**, is now formidably attempted.

I hold that in contemplation of universal law and of the Constitution the Union of these States is perpetual. **Perpetuity** is **implied,** if not expressed, in the fundamental law of all national governments. It is safe to assert that no government proper ever had a provision in its organic law for its own termination. Continue to execute all the express provisions of our National Constitution, and the Union will endure forever, it being impossible to destroy it except by some action not provided for in the instrument itself.

…in 1787, one of the declared objects for ordaining and establishing the Constitution was "to form a more perfect Union." But if destruction of the Union by one or by a part only of the States be lawfully possible, the Union is less perfect than before the Constitution, having lost the vital element of perpetuity.

It follows from these views that no State upon its own mere motion can lawfully get out of the Union; that resolves and ordinances to that effect are legally **void**, and that acts of violence within any State or States against the authority of the United States are **insurrectionary** or revolutionary, according to circumstances.

…I shall take care, as the Constitution itself expressly **enjoins** upon me, that the laws of the Union be faithfully executed in all the States…In doing this there needs to be no bloodshed or violence, and there shall be none unless it be forced upon the national authority. The power confided to me will be used to hold, occupy, and possess the property and places belonging to the Government…but beyond what may be necessary for these objects, there will be no invasion, no using of force against or among the people anywhere…

That there are persons in one section or another who seek to destroy the Union at all events and are glad of any **pretext** to do it I will neither **affirm** nor deny; but if there be such, I need address no word to them. To those, however, who really love the Union may I not speak?

Before entering upon so grave a matter as the destruction of our national fabric, with all its benefits, its memories, and its hopes, would it not be wise to **ascertain** precisely why we do it?

…Plainly the central idea of **secession** is the essence of **anarchy**. A majority held in restraint by constitutional checks and limitations, and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments, is the only true sovereign of a free people. Whoever rejects it does of necessity fly to anarchy or to **despotism**. **Unanimity** is impossible. The rule of a minority, as a permanent arrangement, is wholly inadmissible…

…One section of our country believes slavery is right and ought to be extended, while the other believes it is wrong and ought not to be extended. This is the only substantial dispute…Physically speaking, we cannot separate. We cannot remove our respective sections from each other nor build an impassable wall between them. A husband and wife may be divorced and go out of the presence and beyond the reach of each other, but the different parts of our country cannot do this. They cannot but remain face to face…

…If the Almighty Ruler of Nations, with His eternal truth and justice, be on your side of the North, or on yours of the South, that truth and that justice will surely prevail by the judgment of this great tribunal of the American people.

…My countrymen, one and all, think calmly and well upon this whole subject. Nothing valuable can be lost by taking time…Intelligence, patriotism, Christianity, and a firm reliance on Him who has never yet forsaken this favored land are still competent to adjust in the best way all our present difficulty.

In your hands, my dissatisfied fellow-countrymen, and not in mine, is the momentous issue of civil war. The Government will not **assail** you. You can have no conflict without being yourselves the aggressors. You have no oath registered in heaven to destroy the Government, while I shall have the most solemn one to "preserve, protect, and defend it."

I am loath to close. We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory, stretching from every battlefield and patriot grave to every living heart and **hearthstone** all over this broad land, will yet swell the chorus of the Union, when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.