

On the Gettysburg Address

by

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Abraham Lincoln closed the Gettysburg Address with the line, "...and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth."

That line has shaped our thought about the Nation for more than a hundred years. But is it constitutionally correct?

Given the chance, I might rewrite it to reflect the constitution and it would turn out something like this:

"...and that government *of the nation, by the representatives of the people and states, for the preservation of freedom*, shall not perish from the earth."

The government derives its power from the people, but the path of that derivation must be both clear and secure or chaos would arise in short order.

The phrase *of the people* is misleading for the government has not been derived to govern the people, but the nation. In a free people, the people are to govern themselves in accordance with moral law or convention.

Neither is the government conducted *by the people*. For in the derivation of the power, it is recognized that a nation in which decisions are based on popular vote, or pure democracy, would decline into anarchy. Democracy leads to complete oppression of all groups less than 50% of the main one. So our government is government by representation: In which representatives are selected democratically.

Finally, the government derives its authority from a free people, via the path described, and it derives that authority for the purpose, the sole purpose, of maintaining the ability of the people to be a free people.

Lincoln's phrase is quotable, but does nothing to maintain the *informed electorate*.