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# The Editors 'Will Little Note Nor Long Remember': Ohio's Newspapers Respond to the Gettysburg Address

## **Abstract**

It was simple: 272 words, woven together into an appropriate poem and meant to dedicate both a cemetery and a nation to a cause. Its words are now eternal; they are sacrosanct lines that have left an indelible mark on the foundation and ideals of America. When selecting a subtitle for his 1992 Pulitzer Prize winning volume *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, Garry Wills called the Gettysburg Address “the words that remade America.” On the other hand, the humble Lincoln, within his address, suggests that “the world will little note nor long remember what we say here.” Quite the contradiction: one, simple speech being unworthy of a mere thought from posterity, yet at the same time being the words that gave a nation “new birth.”

## **Keywords**

Gettysburg Address, newspapers, Ohio

# THE EDITORS ‘WILL LITTLE NOTE NOR LONG REMEMBER’: OHIO’S NEWSPAPERS RESPOND TO THE GETTYSBURG ADDRESS



BRIAN M. JORDAN

It was simple: 272 words, woven together into an appropriate poem and meant to dedicate both a cemetery and a nation to a cause. Its words are now eternal; they are sacrosanct lines that have left an indelible mark on the foundation and ideals of America. When selecting a subtitle for his 1992 Pulitzer Prize winning volume *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, Garry Wills called the Gettysburg Address “the words that remade America.”<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the humble Lincoln, within his address, suggests that “the world will little note nor long remember what we say here.” Quite the contradiction: one, simple speech being unworthy of a mere thought from posterity, yet at the same time being the words that gave a nation “new birth.”

If these truly *were* the words that remade America, then it is appropriate they were made on Pennsylvania’s soil. Pennsylvania, from the conception of the America, has been the place where that nation has been saved. In 1776, at Philadelphia, Thomas Jefferson wrote the words that Lincoln lived by: the words of the Declaration of Independence.<sup>2</sup> It was the document that saved thirteen ragged colonies from Britain’s oppression. In 1787, fifty-five delegates met in that same Pennsylvania city and reached numerous compromises that helped form a living Constitution that continues to perpetuate this nation. In 2001, the passengers and crew of hijacked Flight 93 rushed the terrorists that had seized the plane, crashed it into a field near Somerset, and most likely saved either the White House or Capitol building. Today, adding Lincoln’s 1863 utterance at the dedication ceremony for the cemetery at Gettysburg to this list of noteworthy dates would occur without thought; however, the Gettysburg Address’ importance would not have been as obvious to the editors of contemporary newspapers reporting the event for the first time. The contradiction previously revealed between Wills’ conclusion and Lincoln’s own interjected reflection of the speech comes into an even clearer focus when the newspaper coverage of the dedication ceremony is analyzed for a particular geographic region. This paper will analyze contemporary newspaper reports from all corners of one of the most politically important states for the Lincoln administration – the state of Ohio. In addition to analyzing papers from different regions of Ohio itself, it will also look at Democratic and Republican papers and compare their reactions, even though the difference between their respective coverage is often subtle. Before any analysis is done or any conclusions are made, the reader must first understand Ohio during the Civil War.

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<sup>1</sup> Garry Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

<sup>2</sup> Richard J. Carwardine, *Lincoln: Profiles in Power* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2003); Don E. Fehrenbacher, ed., *Abraham Lincoln: A Documentary Portrait Through His Speeches and Writings* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1964); Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*.

## Ohio's Role in the Civil War

If Pennsylvania was the soil on which the nation was continuously saved, then Ohio was the breeding ground for greatness in the American Civil War. Ohio provided leadership to the Union cause both politically and militarily, in addition to supplying over three-hundred thousand fighting men. In proportion to state population, this contribution of fighting men was ranked first among all Union states.<sup>3</sup> The Buckeye State was home to two influential cabinet secretaries: Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase, who eyed the presidency, and War Secretary Edwin McMasters Stanton, who managed the war from 1862 onward. Brilliant military commanders Ulysses S. Grant, William Tecumseh Sherman, Phil Sheridan, George A. Custer, and Quincy Adams Gillmore, capable leaders that delivered victories in multiple theaters, were also native Ohioans. Many historians argue that without the contribution of these generals, most notably Sherman's capture of Atlanta, Lincoln would not have won re-election.<sup>4</sup> One of the most influential wartime members of the U.S. Senate, Benjamin Wade, hailed from the Western Reserve.<sup>5</sup>

Ohio was important beyond its supply of able leaders and fighting regiments of men, however. Politically, Ohio was one of the most important states for Lincoln because of its size and own internal political situation. Only Pennsylvania and New York had supplied more regiments to the Union cause; in addition, as one of the largest and most populated Union states, it was a prize in terms of electoral votes and had become a virtual requisite for presidential nominees to carry in order to win the White House.

But although Ohio contributed so much to aid the cause of the Union, it was not without divided sentiments. Although the Western Reserve and some areas along the Ohio River were alive with a frenzy of Underground Railroad and abolitionist activity, other areas were opposed to interference with slavery and were certainly against emancipation. Clement Laird Vallandigham, a Dayton lawyer, was the most rabid "Copperhead," a term used to describe a Southern sympathizer during the war. One of Lincoln's sharpest critics, he gave an impassioned speech that denounced the war and called for the removal of the president. This fiery invective led to his arrest and conviction by military tribunal.<sup>6</sup> Ohio was certainly divided. According to James M. McPherson, this division could be explained through Ohio's composition as a "microcosm of the North itself," with the southern portions of the state being populated by Southern immigrants and the Western Reserve being populated by Puritans and New Englanders naturally opposed to slavery.<sup>7</sup> This dichotomy of values created a continuous, political power struggle that animated the Lincoln administration.

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<sup>3</sup> George W. Knepper, *Ohio and Its People* (Kent: Kent State University Press, 1989), 251-52.

<sup>4</sup> John C. Waugh, *Reelecting Lincoln: The Battle For the 1864 Presidency* (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1997), 298; Reid Mitchell, *The American Civil War 1861-1865* (New York: Pearson Education, 2001), 63.

<sup>5</sup> Whitelaw Reid, *Ohio in the War: Her Statesmen, Generals, and Soldiers* (Columbus: Eclectic Publishing Co., 1893), 13-15.

<sup>6</sup> *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Vallandigham, Clement."

<sup>7</sup> McPherson quoted in Bill Eichenberger, "Steps toward freedom," *Columbus Dispatch*, September 14, 2003, <http://www.dispatch.com/> (accessed September 13, 2005).

With the situation on the battlefield becoming increasingly trying for the Lincoln administration, and with the 1862 election of Democrat Horatio Seymour as New York governor, Lincoln knew that the political climates of both Pennsylvania and Ohio were crucial to his own re-election in 1864. He watched the 1863 Ohio gubernatorial election with extreme caution; Republican John Brough, a talented public speaker, was running against Vallandigham himself. Lincoln was well aware of the ramifications of Vallandigham's election. "The President says he feels nervous [about the returns in Ohio]," Navy Secretary Gideon Welles wrote in his diary.<sup>8</sup> Lincoln was so nervous that he sent the color-bearers of the Republican Party in Ohio, including Secretary Chase and Senator John Sherman, home to campaign for Brough.<sup>9</sup> In the end, Lincoln carried the day and Brough won the election in a landslide. After this reassuring victory for his administration, Lincoln proclaimed, "Glory to God in the highest: Ohio has saved the Union."<sup>10</sup>

Thus politically, Ohio was "ground zero" during the American Civil War. As noted by George W. Knepper, the eminent authority on Ohio's history, Ohio was a state that "no party or leader could afford to ignore."<sup>11</sup> It was still ensconced in military dynamics, though. In 1863, Confederate raider John Hunt Morgan plundered his way across the southern and southeastern counties, giving Ohioans a taste of war's privations and giving rise to a small battle at Buffington Island in July. Morgan's foray into Ohio was the culmination of the longest raid of the Civil War.<sup>12</sup> And, of course, every family, hometown, and local newspaper in the state anxiously awaited news from the frontlines where brothers, sons, cousins, residents, and readers were fighting.

### Ohio Responds: An Overview of Findings

Not only was Ohio a "microcosm" of the political sentiments of the North, it was a geographic microcosm of the nation, as well. Ohio had it all: western rural farmlands, which included Wyandot County; major cities of industry and commerce activity, such as the capital Columbus, Cleveland, Toledo, and Cincinnati, and smaller towns and rustic county seats with often sharp political consequence, such as Steubenville, Fremont, Canton, Akron, and Dayton.<sup>13</sup> Cincinnati was the largest and most significant Ohio city during the Civil War era, known as the "cultural capital of the west."<sup>14</sup>

Despite the often stark contrast between these areas, each of their newspapers had a similar reaction to the delivery of the Gettysburg Address. Generally, the editors of Ohio's Civil

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<sup>8</sup> Howard K. Beale, ed., *The Diary of Gideon Welles* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1960), 1:469-70.

<sup>9</sup> Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 245.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 228.

<sup>12</sup> Lester V. Horwitz, *The Longest Raid of the Civil War* (Cincinnati: Farmcourt Publishing, 1999).

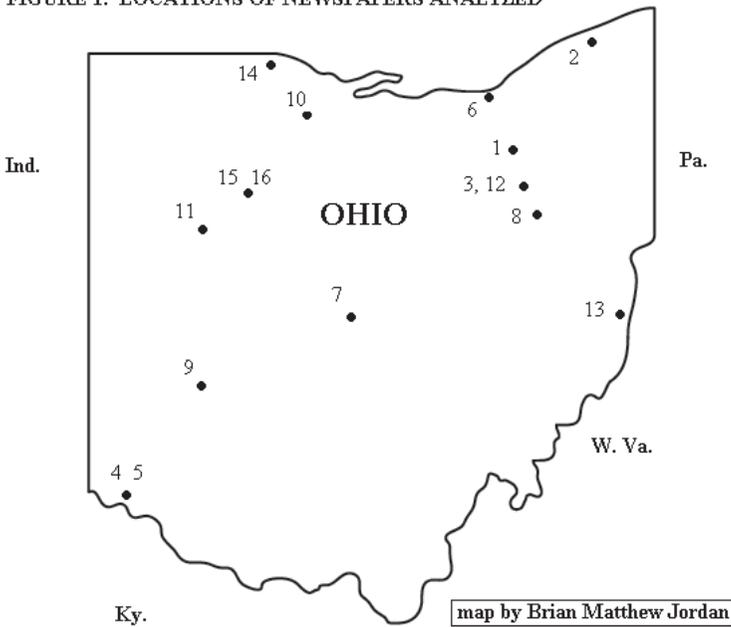
<sup>13</sup> Steubenville produced Secretary of War Stanton; Fremont produced President Rutherford B. Hayes; Canton produced President William McKinley; Akron was once home to abolitionist leader John Brown; Dayton produced the fiery Copperhead Clement Laird Vallandigham.

<sup>14</sup> Knepper, *Ohio and Its People*, 226.

War newspapers were more concerned with the activity on the battlefield, the progression of the armies and the progress of the war, and local, newsworthy events and people that directly affected their lives. Perhaps the question that most editors were asking in Ohio was something along the lines of “how could two-hundred and seventy-two words be important enough to warrant coverage?”

Of course in Lincoln’s time, newspapers were instruments of political parties.<sup>15</sup> Whenever analyzing the newspaper coverage, it is important to look at the paper’s partisan persuasion. Republican newspapers in Ohio gave far more attention to the dedication ceremony in Gettysburg than Democratic newspapers; furthermore, these pro-administration papers placed greater emphasis on Lincoln’s presence, attentiveness, and remarks than their Democratic counterparts did.

FIGURE 1. LOCATIONS OF NEWSPAPERS ANALYZED



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|--|---|
| 1 – <i>Summit County Beacon, Akron</i>       | 2 – <i>Ashtabula Weekly Telegraph</i>       |
| 3 – <i>Ohio Repository, Canton</i>           | 4 – <i>Cincinnati Daily Times</i>           |
| 5 – <i>Cincinnati Daily Enquirer</i>         | 6 – <i>Cleveland Plain Dealer</i>           |
| 7 – <i>Ohio Statesman, Columbus</i>          | 8 – <i>Ohio Democrat, New Philadelphia</i>  |
| 9 – <i>Dayton Journal</i>                    | 10 – <i>Fremont Journal</i>                 |
| 11 – <i>Hardin County Republican, Kenton</i> | 12 – <i>Stark County Republican</i>         |
| 13 – <i>Steubenville Daily Herald</i>        | 14 – <i>Toledo Blade</i>                    |
| 15 – <i>Democratic Union, Upper Sandusky</i> | 16 – <i>Wyandot Pioneer, Wyandot County</i> |

<sup>15</sup> Richard J. Carwardine, “Abraham Lincoln, the Great Communicator” (remarks, Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library Dedication, Springfield, IL, April 17, 2005).

When a transcript of the speech appears in print, it is only within a Republican paper. There exists a significant and sizeable disparity in the coverage of Lincoln's remarks by Republican and Democratic newspapers; however, once again, the coverage as a whole does not suggest the importance of the address that is today seen as one of the divine discourses of American history.

The in-depth survey of the original newspaper coverage that follows provides the evidence supporting these conclusions.

### **Making Sense of the Coverage**

*What was important to newspaper editors and the community at-large?*

According to Reid Mitchell in his 1993 volume *The Vacant Chair*, Northern soldiers could only make sense of the Civil War if they saw it in relation to the domestic components of their lives. The Northern soldier had to realize that the war he was fighting was a war for the Union; it was that Union that was the manifestation of his own home, community, family, and moral sense of self. Because of this manifestation, the Northern community provided both the impetus for his continued devotion to the principles of liberty and the adhesive that united the Union forces in the face of increasingly horrific challenges.<sup>16</sup>

The intertwining of home, community, and the continuation of the war was a significant factor in the lives of Northern soldiers continuing the struggle. As Mitchell points out, Northern communities never lost their authority over their troops. One of the most important ways for the community to exert their continuing authority was through newspaper coverage. In a sense, newspapers monitored the behavior of the troops and actively informed attentive family members and neighbors at home of movements and setbacks on the battlefield. Therefore, any military telegraph, battlefield news, soldier letter, officer's report, administration policy or battlefield map was of crucial importance to readers. Likewise, the news of the war had political motives for both the Democratic and Republican presses. News of sluggish armies and incompetent generals created worries that motivated anti-administration factions. On the other hand, news of the war and a continual focus on the importance of an unconditional victory bolstered the administration's proponents. It is reasonable, then, to conclude that the "few, appropriate remarks" of Abraham Lincoln, conceived as nothing further than "dedicatory remarks" by the *Ohio Statesman*, were not as important as military news or a policy speech.<sup>17</sup>

The latter is evidenced through the overt emphasis on the war itself and the queer, bizarre, and often dark human-interest stories that it created. For example, the *Ohio Repository* placed the cumbersome reports of Secretary of War Stanton and Secretary of the Navy Welles

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<sup>16</sup> Reid Mitchell, *The Vacant Chair: The Northern Soldier Leaves Home* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

<sup>17</sup> "The Gettysburg Ceremonies Last Thursday," *Ohio Statesman* (Columbus, Ohio), November 22, 1863.

prominently on the front page of its December 16, 1863 issue.<sup>18</sup> These reports lack poetic flourish and the panache that would denote them as memorable pieces of writing, so the assumption can be made that the legal-sounding, militaristic content was of great importance. These banal, “important” reports provide quite a contrast to the utterly poetic Gettysburg Address, and they also make a strong statement of the contemporary interpretation of the Gettysburg Address as a document meeting its specific dedicatory purpose only.

As with the reports of Stanton and Welles that found an important place on the front page of the newspaper, other military items dominated the prominent columns. *The Stark County Republican* was diligent in updating readers on the activities of the 107th Ohio Volunteer Infantry.<sup>19</sup> Large battlefield maps, depicting the troop positions at both Chattanooga and McMinnville, Tennessee graced the front pages of the *Cincinnati Daily Times* in late November 1863.<sup>20</sup> Reappearing columns in most of the papers, titled “Telegraphs” and “Dispatches,” were given priority on the page with bold typesetting as they divulged updates from the front lines.

One instance of a human-interest story also originates in the *Cincinnati Daily Times*. Just one week after they covered the Gettysburg Address and dedication ceremony with a generic, seventy-seven word report, the paper gave 137 words to a “shocking accident” at Gettysburg. According to the report of this accident, a man was observing a boy in the streets who was playing with a live shell, probably from the battlefield. The man decided to remove the charge from the shell for the boy’s safety, and when he did so, it exploded, consuming them both.<sup>21</sup> It was certainly an ironic tragedy that was a direct extension of the horrors of battle; however, it is more significant to this study that the paper gave more attention to a seemingly random incident than it did to Lincoln’s address. It showcases the address’ *general* lack of importance to contemporary news editors and the importance of militaristic reporting.

But of course Lincoln was commander-in-chief of the Union armies, and he was certainly a military figure in that role. Likewise, when he acted in that role as one of his many presidential duties and responsibilities, he received coverage. The lavish attention given by papers of all persuasions to his Third Annual Message to Congress and corresponding Amnesty Proclamation supports this argument tenably. The Annual Message was a policy speech the president was expected to provide to Congress once a year; appropriately, the newspapers and readers came to expect the text of it as well. On a bipartisan level, the newspapers anticipated Lincoln’s Annual Message in the same way certain publications and media releases are anticipated today.

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<sup>18</sup> “The Report of the Secretary of War” and “Report of the Secretary of the Navy,” *Ohio Repository* (Canton, Ohio), December 16, 1863.

<sup>19</sup> *Stark County Republican* (Canton, Ohio), November-December, 1863.

<sup>20</sup> Battlefield map, *Cincinnati Daily Times* (Cincinnati, Ohio), November 27, 1863.

<sup>21</sup> “Shocking Accident at Gettysburg,” *Cincinnati Daily Times*, November 27, 1863.

The *Dayton Journal*, a Republican paper running opposite the *Dayton Empire*, a bastion of Copperheads, appeared most anxious. On December 7, the paper noted, “We expect the President’s Message by telegraph.”

If the House organizes without trouble we shall have it this afternoon. We would defer the publication of our Weekly in order to circulate it quickly, but the arrangement of the mails is not favorable to such an operation. We shall, however, print an extra number of dailies, so that the demand for the Message can be readily supplied.<sup>22</sup>

The next day, another paragraph appeared suggesting the anticipation of the Message. It noted that extra copies would be available, and even speculated as to how many columns the message would consume.<sup>23</sup> Subsequently, on December 9, an afternoon dispatch discusses what is “important and interesting” in the message, providing a primordial outline of the speech.<sup>24</sup> After three such days of growing anticipation and preparation for its release, the Third Annual Message consumed the entire second page of the paper on December 10.<sup>25</sup> It was followed the next day by a short piece that noted the “tribulation” the message caused the publisher; more importantly, it suggested the message was widely read and important enough to warrant analysis and editorial comment.<sup>26</sup>

The message warranted the use of the front page of the *Ohio Statesman*, *Ashtabula Weekly Telegraph*, *Cincinnati Daily Times*, *Democratic Union*, and numerous other papers.<sup>27</sup> The *Steubenville Daily Herald* accompanied its complete coverage of the message with a piece similar to the remarks of the *Dayton Journal*, conveying the importance of the message and the newspaper’s own lack of space for necessary analysis.<sup>28</sup> The *Wyandot Pioneer* was perhaps the most direct and representative of the newspapers, calling the message an “important document.”<sup>29</sup>

The Third Annual Message certainly was an important document in terms of administration policy and the course of the war; it was Lincoln looking to the future, envisioning peace, amnesty, and reunion. The newspaper editors in Ohio realized just that, and thus anticipated and worked tirelessly to ensure the proper release of the message because they knew the readers recognized this as well.

Unlike the coverage of the Third Annual Message, there was no great “anticipation” of the Gettysburg Address. In all of the papers analyzed, the only article preceding the actual coverage is a generic wire report delineating the names of the “principal dignitaries” making their way by train to Gettysburg. Unlike the excitement that radiated from the articles anti-

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<sup>22</sup> “The President’s Message,” *Dayton Journal* (Dayton, Ohio), December 7, 1863.

<sup>23</sup> “The President’s Message,” *Dayton Journal*, December 8, 1863.

<sup>24</sup> “Afternoon Dispatches,” *Dayton Journal*, December 9, 1863.

<sup>25</sup> “President’s Message,” *Dayton Journal*, December 10, 1863.

<sup>26</sup> Commentary, *Dayton Journal*, December 11, 1863.

<sup>27</sup> “The President’s Message,” *Ohio Statesman*, December 11, 1863; “The President’s Message,” *Ashtabula Weekly Telegraph* (Ashtabula, Ohio), December 19, 1863; “President’s Message,” *Cincinnati Daily Times*, December 10, 1863; “President’s Message,” *Democratic Union* (Upper Sandusky, Ohio), December 17, 1863.

<sup>28</sup> “President’s Message,” *Steubenville Daily Herald* (Steubenville, Ohio), December 10, 1863.

<sup>29</sup> “The President’s Message,” *Wyandot Pioneer* (Upper Sandusky, Ohio), December 4, 1863.

pating the arrival of Lincoln's message, this generic piece is a simple divulging of names. The only reference to Lincoln is the dignitary train's anticipated connection with Lincoln's train at Hanover Junction.<sup>30</sup>

The Gettysburg Address was also dissimilar from the Third Annual Message in that it was not an overt policy speech that had annual antecedents. Or at least it did not have the *appearance* of a policy speech. As the *Wyandot Pioneer* quite simply described the Third Annual Message, most papers also easily labeled Lincoln's 272 words at Gettysburg. The *Ohio Statesman*, in introducing the text of the speech, identified it as a "dedicatory speech." The *Hardin County Republican* used the same descriptor, considering the speech as nothing more than a banal sermon consecrating a cemetery. As the report of the ceremony continues, the rural paper also labels Lincoln's speech as "brief remarks." Nevertheless, the paper did describe the ceremony itself in an elegant way, suggesting that the service itself was worth memory.<sup>31</sup> The *Daily Toledo Blade* repeated this description of the address as simple "remarks," with the connotation of insignificance.<sup>32</sup> Edwin Stanton's hometown paper in Steubenville at least labeled Lincoln's words as a speech; according to its account of the ceremony, Lincoln delivered "a brief speech, well to the purpose."<sup>33</sup> Most papers were quick to point out the chief oration was given by Edward Everett, and often included excerpts from his speech. Furthermore, these papers appropriately recognized Lincoln's subordinate role at Gettysburg, and thus gave generally primordial coverage to the president's words. In doing so, they missed the mark; what they failed to realize was that Lincoln's speech had in content gone well beyond simple "dedicatory remarks" for a *cemetery*. It was certainly a dedicatory speech, but it was dedicating *a nation* to the new banner of emancipation that would save the Union. As Menahem Blondheim has noted, Lincoln was "speaking to the air," utilizing the platform at Gettysburg to speak to the nation.<sup>34</sup> For Lincoln, the 272 words he uttered at Gettysburg had meaning far beyond their time, place, and beauty. He *was* giving a policy speech; the content was tantamount to any other directive he had given or would give on the course of the war. He had gone far beyond the "few, appropriate remarks" by addressing his nation in place of his audience. Had the newspapers realized this, perhaps they would have given Lincoln the same coverage they gave him when he offered an overtly recognizable policy directive.

Yet to generalize and say all news coverage of the ceremony was primitive is to overlook the great partisan disparity in the coverage. Even though almost all papers agreed on the so-called "limited" focus of the speech, Republican papers were quick to give far more column inches to Lincoln and the ceremony than Democratic presses. It is not difficult to understand and justify

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<sup>30</sup> "Special Excursion Train Left Harrisburg for Gettysburg," *Cincinnati Daily Times*, November 19, 1863. This same wire report can be found under the same title on November 19, 1863 in a majority of the papers consulted.

<sup>31</sup> "The Gettysburg Grave-yard Consecration – The Impressive Pageantry – The Distinguished Persons Present," *Hardin County Republican* (Kenton, Ohio), November 27, 1863.

<sup>32</sup> "The President at Gettysburg," *Daily Toledo Blade* (Toledo, Ohio), November 21, 1863.

<sup>33</sup> "Dedication, Gettysburg – Speech of the President," *Steubenville Daily Herald*, November 23, 1863.

<sup>34</sup> Menahem Blondheim, "Spinning Gettysburg: Lincoln and His War of Words," (lecture, FYS 183, Gettysburg College, Gettysburg, PA, November 10, 2005).

this disparity; as instruments of their own, respective ideology, each persuasion developed its own color-bearers and pariahs. This development was often colorful and ardent. Republican readers wanted their standard-bearer celebrated and covered; however, Democratic readers often wanted the president derided and alternative leaders such as Clement Vallandigham hailed. For example, the fiery, Democratic *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* on November 19, 1863 gave no mention to the events occurring in Gettysburg that day; rather, they gave lavish, front-page coverage to an address by Vallandigham given several days prior.<sup>35</sup> In similar fashion, the *Ohio Repository*, a Republican paper, printed a speech by the pro-administration governor-elect John Brough in early November that was not covered by the Democratic journalists.<sup>36</sup> The absence of Vallandigham's speech in Republican papers and the reciprocal absence of Brough's speech in Democratic papers illustrate the partisan desire of editors to give little press coverage to the addresses and activities of the opponent. It also provides a convenient, demonstrative parallel to the coverage of the Gettysburg ceremonials.

### *Partisan Disparity*

Although the coverage of the ceremony was only solid, complete, and most descriptive in Republican papers, perhaps the reporting of the *Fremont Journal* on November 27, 1863 was paramount. Under the sweeping title "Dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg," the paper describes the event as "a great day for the nation" in which the ground was dedicated "to valor, to patriotism, and to freedom." In describing the cemetery itself, the paper calls the site "commanding." Interpolated between these descriptions is the text of both the dirge, presented at the ceremony and written at Gettysburg by B.B. French, and Lincoln's remarks, including notations of "immense applause." The news reporting itself is nearly a minute-by-minute recounting of the proceedings, suggesting the significance the Republican editor placed on the event as a whole.<sup>37</sup>

Ironically, in a paper that was extremely detail-oriented, only the most general summary of Edward Everett's keynote oration appears. Unlike the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* and other urban, Democratic papers that included extracts from the principal speaker, the emphasis of the *Fremont Journal* and other Republican papers seems to be more on the ceremony as a whole and Lincoln's presence at Gettysburg. Lincoln is closely monitored in the *Fremont Journal* report, well beyond the simple inclusion of the text of his address. His attentiveness is thoroughly documented and applauded by the report, which cites the president as "perhaps the most attentive and appreciate listener."

He seemed to be absorbed in attention profound, till the spell was broken by a mistake of the orator in saying General Lee, when he should have said General Meade,

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<sup>35</sup> "The Patriot and Scholar – Address of Hon. C.L. Vallandigham," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer* (Cincinnati, Ohio), November 19, 1863.

<sup>36</sup> "Speech of the Hon. John Brough at Painsville," *Ohio Repository* (Canton, Ohio), November 4, 1863.

<sup>37</sup> "Dedication of the National Cemetery at Gettysburg," *Fremont Journal* (Fremont, Ohio), November 27, 1863.

which mistake caused the President to turn to Seward with a loud voice [,] say[ing,] “General Meade;” but the orator seemed not to hear it. At this time the orator made the same mistake, but the President corrected it loud enough to secure a correction by the orator.<sup>38</sup>

An elegant picture is painted with these words of both the abstract and the literal. The detailed, superior description expressed in the *Fremont Journal* is notably mirrored in almost all other Republican papers. The *Summit County Beacon*, for example, provided the same detailed descriptions of the cemetery, ceremonials, and Lincoln. Perhaps this newspaper comes closest to recognizing the lasting importance of the words imparted at Gettysburg, noting that November 19 “will long be remembered as the day the National Necropolis at Gettysburg was dedicated.”<sup>39</sup>

Beyond this striking contradiction to one of Lincoln’s own sentences, the *Summit County Beacon* also provides a moving anecdote that truly describes the importance of the Gettysburg Address far beyond the power of the historian to reflect and analyze. Immediately following the text of the speech, the report notes that “the President’s calm, but earnest utterance of this brief and beautiful address stirred the deepest fountains of feeling and emotion, in hearts of the vast throng before him; and when he had concluded, scarcely could an untearful eye be seen, while sobs of smothered emotion were heard on every hand.”

At our side stood a stalwart officer, bearing the insignia of a captain’s rank, the empty sleeve of his coat indicating that he had stood where death was reveling, and as the President, speaking of our Gettysburg soldiers, uttered that beautifully touching sentence, so sublime and pregnant of meaning – “The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here...” the gallant soldier’s feelings burst over all restraint; and burying his face in his handkerchief, he sobbed aloud while his manly frame shook with no unmanly emotion.<sup>40</sup>

The inclusion of this moving description of the “stalwart officer” at the ceremonials suggests that the *Summit County Beacon* recognized almost immediately that the brief, poignant words of Lincoln had exceeded Everett’s protracted remarks. It is plausible to conclude that all Republican papers reached this same conclusion, because they all felt compelled to print the speech, much unlike their Democratic counterparts.

For Democratic papers like the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, it was Edward Everett that was most important, or at least more significant. Much unlike the *Ohio Repository*, which printed Everett’s speech a full week after it made Lincoln’s speech available, the *Plain Dealer* eschewed

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> “Dedication Day at Gettysburg,” *Summit County Beacon* (Akron, Ohio), December 3, 1863.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

any coverage of Lincoln and extracted remarks solely from Everett.<sup>41</sup> The *Ohio Democrat* offered its readers a reprint of the *New York Herald* coverage, and although this report noted the distinct character of the ceremonies, it gave only a passing reference to the President.<sup>42</sup> For the Democratic papers, exceptional coverage was non-existent. The same generic wire report the *Cleveland Plain Dealer* provided to its readers was transmitted by the *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, only buried on the third page.<sup>43</sup> The *Cincinnati Daily Times* followed suit with the simple wire story, and the *Wyandot Pioneer* only provided a one sentence summary of the ceremony in its “Latest News” column.<sup>44</sup> The *Democratic Union* of Upper Sandusky didn’t carry the ceremony at all.

Of course, a ceremony graced by the President’s presence, celebrating martyrs for Lincoln’s cause, was certainly beautiful to the Republican press and at the same time not worthy of comment from the Democratic press. Even though the speech was rarely recognized beyond its inferior position that day, it was still imparted by Republican papers because these were the words of Lincoln, and Lincoln *was* the embodiment of the struggle for reunion and unconditional surrender. Still, the Republican papers did not anticipate the address with the ebullient and frenetic energy that preceded the distribution of the Annual Message. They did not proffer much in the way of analysis, and didn’t allow the coverage to consume the front page or an extra. Beyond these trivial details, however, the more complete and attentive coverage of Republican papers evidences the important partisan disparity in the Civil War era press.

### *Coincidence?*

The partisan disparity in the coverage has already been revealed and explored, but one perplexing coincidence remains to be investigated. Placed in the column immediately to the left of the paramount coverage of November 19 in the *Fremont Journal* is a sound, preliminary endorsement of the re-election of Abraham Lincoln to the presidency of the United States, reprinted from the *Carlisle* [Pennsylvania] *American*. “When the life of a nation is at stake, there is no time to consider difference of opinion,” the endorsement proclaims, subsequently noting the firmness and practical leadership of the president.<sup>45</sup> Likewise, in the *Summit County Beacon*, the paper that had most closely mirrored the *Fremont Journal* coverage, a laudatory ode to Abraham Lincoln adjoins the Gettysburg report. Written in Brattleboro, Vermont, a month before the Gettysburg Address, author J.H. Elliot hails Lincoln as the determined captain, looking cautiously forward, at the wheel of the ship of state.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> “Dedication of the Soldier’s Cemetery at Gettysburg,” *Ohio Repository*, November 25, 1863; “Miscellaneous – Extracts from the Address of Edward Everett,” *Ohio Repository*, December 2, 1863; “An Eloquent Extract,” *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, November 20, 1863.

<sup>42</sup> “Consecration of the National Sepulchre at Gettysburg,” *Ohio Democrat* (Columbus, Ohio), November 27, 1863.

<sup>43</sup> “From Gettysburg,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, November 20, 1863.

<sup>44</sup> “The Dedication at Gettysburg,” *Cincinnati Daily Times*, November 20, 1863; “Latest News Items,” *Wyandot Pioneer*, November 27, 1863.

<sup>45</sup> “Abraham Lincoln and an Undivided Country,” *Fremont Journal*, November 27, 1863.

<sup>46</sup> “Poetry,” *Summit County Beacon*, December 3, 1863.

It is ironic that these two detail-oriented, Republican papers would chose to print such meaningful encomiums to Lincoln the very same day they presented his Gettysburg Address to their constituency in Ohio. Is this a coincidence, or is this evidence that the editors of these two papers had recognized the true power of Lincoln's words at Gettysburg by choosing to link those words to such lofty, praiseworthy, and partisan pieces? Only the editors can provide the answer to that question. If the answer the editors provided negated the coincidence, then those editors were among the first of a very selective contemporary group that immediately recognized the significance of Lincoln's remarks.

### *The Mystic Chords of Memory*

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address has taken its place in American history as one of the divine discourses; the lines of the speech are so sacrosanct that they are embedded into the collective memory of America as words "far beyond" simple, dedicatory remarks setting apart a plot of blood soaked battlefield land as a burial ground. Today, we remember Lincoln's words as the words that dedicated not only a cemetery, but the words that dedicated a nation to the unfinished work of reuniting a fractured nation. We remember Lincoln's words as the words that dedicated a nation to the cause of freedom and emancipation. We remember Lincoln's words as the words that dedicated a nation to an ultimate victory through the remembrance those that made the initial sacrifices.

But all of this was not as apparent to the editors of contemporary newspapers in Ohio, a state whose politics, leaders, and fighting men were of the utmost importance to the Lincoln administration. Buckeye newspaper editors from both political parties were generally more concerned with military advances, the progression of the war, and local events that had direct impact and immediate meaning in the lives of their readers. As a result, battles, regimental news, and administration policy became a focus for newspaper coverage in Ohio during the Civil War. Lincoln's Third Annual Message to Congress and corresponding Amnesty Proclamation, an overt policy speech and war directive, fit nicely into this mold. The policy directives and course of the war as defined by Lincoln in this document would directly affect the lives of readers as citizens and suppliers of fighting men, and therefore was covered thoroughly by papers of all persuasions. Papers eagerly awaited the arrival of the document, and once they printed it, recognized its importance through analysis. Energy radiated from the anticipation of the message and the coverage itself, which usually bridged all of the columns on the front page.

The same was not true of coverage of the Gettysburg Address, which was generally primordial and without flourish or lavish treatment. Much unlike the coverage of the Third Annual Message, there was no coverage of Lincoln or the Gettysburg ceremonials in the days preceding November 19 beyond a banal wire report describing the dignitaries on a special excursion train making its way to Hanover Junction. In stark contrast to the descriptions of

significance and importance attached to the Third Annual Message, the Gettysburg Address was described by most papers as simple dedicatory remarks, implying that the speech had little significance beyond its immediate purpose.

The print media made a grievous error in failing to recognize these seemingly mundane, dedicatory remarks as something beyond the “few, appropriate remarks” David Wills had requested. What Lincoln did at Gettysburg was to form an idea, much larger than the cemetery he was consecrating, that represented any and every Civil War battle. The idea was a merger of the “event” with the “place.” The immediate event was the three day Battle of Gettysburg, although in reality, it was *any and every* engagement since the bombardment of Ft. Sumter. The immediate place was an emerging, crossroads town in south central Pennsylvania that awoke to unprecedented horrors just months before, although in reality, it was *any and every* like community that grappled with similar devastation and disorder. By merging the two, Lincoln attempted to engage the nation in deep self-reflection; he seized the sacrifice of the slain to provide his nation with direction, inspiration, and a meditation on values. The ramifications of these simple words were not immediately recognized; as a result, Lincoln’s words were bestowed with the marginal coverage explored above.

Despite this general coverage, a great disparity existed between Republican and Democratic newspaper responses. Understandably, as virtual extensions of their political party, newspapers on both sides of the aisle had different priorities and pariahs, and therefore chose to cover the Gettysburg dedication in their own, distinct ways. Democratic newspapers – in this study – placed more of an emphasis on Edward Everett, the chief orator, and never included a transcript of Lincoln’s remarks; nevertheless, Republican papers almost always carried a transcription of the speech and paid close attention to the attentiveness of the President and the propriety of the ceremony. Republican papers, with more detailed and diligent reporting of November 19 as a whole, confirmed their allegiances to the cause of Union and the cause of Lincoln, yet still fell short of recognizing the divinity of the address that is apparent today.

Needless to say, it is much easier to make conclusions about the importance of various historical events, persons, and speeches after scores of years have elapsed. The ultimate disparity, then, exists not in the differences between Republican and Democratic responses, but truly between the historians and the makers of history: the same contradiction explored in the introduction between Lincoln’s own words and Garry Wills’ humble historical analysis. As years pass, interpretations change. “The mystic chords of memory” that Lincoln described in his First Inaugural Address certainly do stretch from every battlefield and patriot grave, and they touch a new generation. Those chords, ultimately because they were touched by Lincoln’s steady focus, political genius, and skillfully crafted language, continue to swell the chorus of Union. In doing so, they allow history, much like the nation Lincoln described at Gettysburg, to have new birth.