
A Selection of Abraham Lincoln Speeches



Selection of Speeches by Abraham Lincoln

“A House Divided”

Abraham Lincoln

**June 16, 1858
Springfield, IL**

Mr. President, Gentlemen of the Convention:

If we could just know where we are and whither we appear to be tending, we could all better judge of what to do, and how to do it. We are now well into our fifth year since a policy was initiated with the avowed object and confident purpose of putting an end to slavery agitation.

However, under the operation of that policy, that agitation has not only not ceased, but has constantly augmented. In my opinion, it will not cease until a crisis shall have been reached and passed. “A house divided against itself cannot stand.”

I believe this government cannot endure permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved -- I do not expect the house to fall -- but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest this further spread and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is on a course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates shall press it forward, until it shall become alike lawful in all of the States, old as well as new, North as well as South.

Have we no tendency to this latter condition?

Our cause, then, must be entrusted to, and conducted by, its own undoubted friends -- those whose hands are free and whose hearts are in the work—who do care for the result. Two years ago the Republicans of this nation mustered some thirteen hundred thousand strong. We did this under a single impulse of resistance to a common danger, with every external circumstance against us. Of strange, discordant, even hostile elements, we gathered from the four winds; we fought the battle through under the constant hot fire of a pampered, proud, disciplined army. Did we brave all then only to falter now? -- now, when that same enemy is wavering, dissevered, and belligerent? The result is not doubtful. We shall not fail -- if we stand firm, we shall not fail. Wise counsels may accelerate, or mistakes delay, but sooner or later the victory is sure to come.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 6 and up

Selection of Speeches by Abraham Lincoln

**“First Inaugural
Address”**

Abraham Lincoln

**March 4, 1861
Washington, D.C.**

Fellow-citizens of the United States:

In compliance with a custom as old as the government itself, I appear before you to address you briefly, and to take, in your presence, the oath prescribed by the Constitution of the United States, to be taken by the President “before he enters on the execution of this office.”

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. Indeed, the most

ample evidence to the contrary has all the while existed, and been open to their inspection. It is found in nearly all the published speeches of him who now addresses you. I do but quote from one of those speeches when I declare that “I have no purpose, directly or indirectly, 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.” Those who nominated and elected me did so with full knowledge that I had made this, and many similar declarations, and had never recanted them.

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.”

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 battle-field, and patriot grave, to every living heart and hearth-stone, 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.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 4 and up

Selection of Speeches by Abraham Lincoln

**“Gettysburg
Address”**

Abraham Lincoln

**November 19, 1863
Gettysburg,
Pennsylvania**

Four score and seven years ago our fathers brought forth on this continent, a new nation, conceived in Liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.

Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation, or any nation so conceived and so dedicated, can long endure. We are met on a great battle-field of that war.

We have come to dedicate a portion of that field, as a final resting place for those who here gave their lives that that nation might live. It is altogether fitting and proper that we should do this.

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate—we can not consecrate—we can not hallow—this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 3 and up

Selection of Speeches by Abraham Lincoln

**“Address to 166th
Ohio Regiment”**

Abraham Lincoln

**August 22, 1866
Washington, D.C.**

I suppose you are going home to see your families and friends. For the service you have done in this great struggle in which we are engaged I present you sincere thanks for myself and the country.

I almost always feel inclined, when I happen to say anything to soldiers, to impress upon them in a few brief remarks the importance of success in this contest. It is not merely for to-day, but for all time to come that we should perpetuate for our children's children this great and free government, which we have enjoyed all our lives. I beg you to remember this, not merely for my sake, but for yours. I happen temporarily to occupy this big

White House. I am a living witness that any one of your children may look to come here as my father's child has. It is in order that each one of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence: that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations. It is for this the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthright - not only for one, but for two or three years. The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 3 and up

Selection of Speeches by Abraham Lincoln

**“Second Inaugural
Address”**

Abraham Lincoln

**March 4, 1865
Washington, D.C.**

At this second appearing to take the oath of the Presidential office there is less occasion for an extended address than there was at the first. Then a statement somewhat in detail of a course to be pursued seemed fitting and proper.

Now, at the expiration of four years, during which public declarations have been constantly called forth on every point and phase of the great contest which still absorbs the attention and engrosses the energies of the nation, little that is new could be presented. The progress of our arms, upon which all else chiefly depends, is as well known to the public as to myself, and it is, I trust, reasonably satisfactory and encouraging to all. With high hope for the future, no prediction in regard to it is ventured.

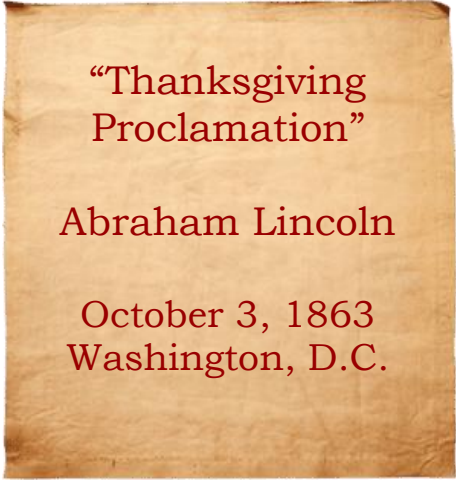
On the occasion corresponding to this four years ago all thoughts were anxiously directed to an impending civil war. All dreaded it, all sought to avert it. While the inaugural address was being delivered from this place, devoted altogether to saving the Union without war, urgent agents were in the city seeking to destroy it without war—seeking to dissolve the Union and divide effects by negotiation. Both parties deprecated war, but one of them would make war rather than let the nation survive, and the other would accept war rather than let it perish, and the war came.

Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsman’s two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said “the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether.”

With malice toward none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation’s wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and his orphan, to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 5 and up

Selection of Speeches by Abraham Lincoln



“Thanksgiving Proclamation”

Abraham Lincoln

October 3, 1863
Washington, D.C.

The year that is drawing toward its close has been filled with the blessings of fruitful fields and healthful skies. To these bounties, which are so constantly enjoyed that we are prone to forget the source from which they come, others have been added, which are of so extraordinary a nature that they cannot fail to penetrate and soften the heart which is habitually insensible to the ever-watchful providence of Almighty God.

In the midst of a civil war of unequalled magnitude and severity, which has sometimes seemed to foreign states to invite and provoke their aggressions, peace has been preserved with all nations, order has been maintained, the laws have been respected and obeyed, and harmony has prevailed everywhere, except in the theater of military

conflict; while that theater has been greatly contracted by the advancing armies and navies of the Union.

Needful diversions of wealth and of strength from the fields of peaceful industry to the national defense have not arrested the plow, the shuttle, or the ship; the ax has enlarged the borders of our settlements, and the mines, as well of iron and coal as of the precious metals, have yielded even more abundantly than heretofore. Population has steadily increased, notwithstanding the waste that has been made in the camp, the siege, and the battlefield, and the country, rejoicing in the consciousness of augmented strength and vigor, is permitted to expect continuance of years with large increase of freedom.

It has seemed to me fit and proper that they should be solemnly, reverently, and gratefully acknowledged as with one heart and one voice by the whole American people. I do, therefore, invite my fellow-citizens in every part of the United States, and also those who are at sea and those who are sojourning in foreign lands, to set apart and observe the last Thursday of November next as a Day of Thanksgiving and Praise to our beneficent Father who dwelleth in the heavens. And I recommend to them that, while offering up the ascriptions justly due to Him for such singular deliverances and blessings, they do also, with humble penitence for our national perverseness and disobedience, commend to His tender care all those who have become widows, orphans, mourners, or sufferers in the lamentable civil strife in which we are unavoidably engaged, and fervently implore the interposition of the Almighty hand to heal the wounds of the nation, and to restore it, as soon as may be consistent with the Divine purposes, to the full enjoyment of peace, harmony, tranquility, and union

A Selection of Great American Orators Speeches



Selection of Speeches by great American Orators



“Keynote Speech”

Barbara Jordan

July 12, 1976
New York City, NY

Abridged by Victoria Reinsel

We are a people in a quandary about the present. We are a people in search of our future. We are a people in search of a national community. We are a people trying not only to solve the problems of the present, unemployment, inflation, but we are attempting on a larger scale to fulfill the promise of America. We are attempting to fulfill our national purpose, to create and sustain a society in which all of us are equal.

Our concept of governing is derived from our view of people. It is a concept deeply rooted in a set of beliefs firmly etched in the national conscience of all of us.

Now what are these beliefs? First, we believe in equality for all and privileges for none. This is a belief -- This is a belief that each American, regardless of background, has equal standing in the public forum -- all of

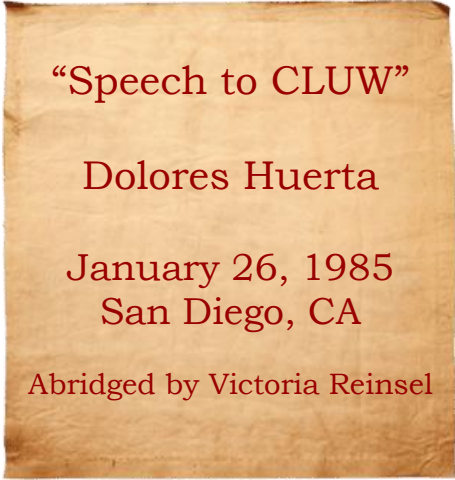
us. Because -- Because we believe this idea so firmly, we are an inclusive rather than an exclusive party. Let everybody come...

We are a heterogeneous party made up of Americans of diverse backgrounds. We believe that the people are the source of all governmental power; that the authority of the people is to be extended, not restricted.

This -- This can be accomplished only by providing each citizen with every opportunity to participate in the management of the government. They must have that, we believe. We believe that the government which represents the authority of all the people, not just one interest group, but all the people, has an obligation to actively -- underscore actively -- seek to remove those obstacles which would block individual achievement -- obstacles emanating from race, sex, economic condition. The government must remove them, seek to remove them.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 4 and up

Selection of Speeches by great American Orators



“Speech to CLUW”

Dolores Huerta

January 26, 1985
San Diego, CA

Abridged by Victoria Reinsel

Thirty-one months ago, a regional meeting of 25 union women was held in Washington, D.C. A principal task was to decide if and how they should pursue a family benefit in their upcoming negotiations despite high unemployment. They decided to go for it...

Thirteen months ago, their international union convention adopted a parental leave resolution for the first time...

What is the union? It is the United Mine Workers...How many will this clause affect? Eighty thousand; less than two percent of whom are women.

Parental leave is not only a “women’s issue,” it is a family issue. There is no other way it could have come so far in so few months.

Isn’t this a great story? It’s a model of how one union has responded to the changing needs of today’s family.

And today’s family is changing. The typical nuclear American family of yesteryear—a breadwinning father, a mother who took care of the house and two children—is today “a distinct minority (7 percent) of America’s population...” according to John Naisbett, author of the bestseller Megatrends. Today’s family can be a single parent with one or more children, a two-career couple with no children, a female breadwinner with a child and househusband, or a blended family...from...previous marriages.

Unions will be as pro-family tomorrow as they have been in the past. In fact, union bargaining and lobbying efforts have advantaged not only their members and families, but all families. For example, labor has fought against child labor; and is still fighting for the reduced work week, paid holiday, vacation leave, minimum wage, ... publicly funded child-care programs, and anti-discrimination laws...

When labor has not been wholly successful, it has at least pricked the social conscience and responsibility of corporations and governments. This reminds me of a story about Sojourner Truth. As a well-known antislavery speaker, she drew her share of hecklers. One...said to her once, “Old woman, do you think your talk about slavery does any good?... Why, I don’t care any more for your talk than I do for the bite of a flea.”

Sojourner Truth answered him, “Perhaps not, but the good Lord willing, I’ll keep you scratching.” That’s a part of labor’s role. That’s a part of ours.

Labor has historically played an integral role and willingly accepted its responsibility in forging workplace practices, policies, and benefits to accommodate the family. It is no less today. Thank you.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 5 and up

Selection of Speeches by great American Orators

**“Speech at the March
on Washington”**

John Lewis

**August 28, 1963
Washington, D.C**

Abridged by Victoria Reinsel

We support the administration’s civil rights bill. We support it with great reservations, however. Unless Title III is put in this bill, there is nothing to protect the young children and old women who must face police dogs and fire hoses in the South while they engage in peaceful demonstrations.

As it stands now, the voting section of this bill will not help the thousands of black people who want to vote. It will not help the citizens of Mississippi, of Alabama and Georgia, who are qualified to vote, but lack a sixth-grade education. “One man, one vote” is the African cry. It is ours too. It must be ours!

My friends, let us not forget that we are involved in a serious social revolution. By and large, American politics is dominated by politicians who build their careers on immoral compromises and ally themselves with

open forms of political, economic, and social exploitation. There are exceptions, of course. We salute those. But what political leader can stand up and say, “My party is the party of principles”? Where is the political party that will make it unnecessary to march on Washington? Where is the political party that will make it unnecessary to march in the streets of Birmingham?

To those who have said, “Be patient and wait,” we have long said that we cannot be patient. We do not want our freedom gradually, but we want to be free now! We are tired. We are tired of being beaten by policemen. We are tired of seeing our people locked up in jail over and over again. We want our freedom and we want it now. We do not want to go to jail. But we will go to jail if this is the price we must pay for love, brotherhood, and true peace.

I appeal to all of you to get into this great revolution that is sweeping this nation. Get in and stay in the streets...until true freedom comes, until the revolution of 1776 is complete.

We will not stop. If we do not get meaningful legislation out of this Congress, the time will come when we will not confine our marching to Washington. But we will march with the spirit of love and with the spirit of dignity that we have shown here today. By the force of our demands, our determination, and our numbers, we shall splinter the segregated South into a thousand pieces and put them together in the image of God and democracy. We must say: “Wake up America! Wake up!” For we cannot stop, and we will not and cannot be patient.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 4 and up

Selection of Speeches by great American Orators

**“Until They Have
the Power”**

Jeannette Rankin

May 13, 1914

Abridged by Karen Richey

This is one of the grandest days that ever happened for women. All over the country women are asking for the vote, and you know that what a woman asks for she usually gets. And we should have the ballot. We are a force in life, a factor which must be considered in all problems. You know that when you are working a problem in mathematics you must take account of every factor if you are to get the right answer. So it is with government; unless you take account of every factor, the answer will always be wrong.

Emerging reports show that there are eight million women engaged in earning labor in the country. They are not there because they don't want to stay at home, but because they must work if they are to live.

If these women are to be safeguarded, they must have more than indirect influence upon the laws which concern them. Working women are without any power... to make their wishes felt. Until they have the power to influence the laws which govern them, their protests will be restricted by the fear of losing their jobs. The employer cares nothing for men or women as such, but in votes, whether they be cast by men or women, he is mightily interested. These girls alone knew the conditions under which they work, and they should have the power to improve them.

You men all know what the ballot has done for the working man. All of our labor laws are the result of the power placed in the laborers' hands by the constitution. Legislatures do not make laws and conduct investigations because they are interested in such things for themselves, but because they are interested in the votes which are affected by such things. We are asking for the ballot for working people that they may have a means of securing justice.

When women have the power to use their superior knowledge of matters which concern them most, they will be able to increase their efficiency. Votes for women bring happiness into the home. You men are inconsistent if you but knew it. Instead of making us come before you to ask for the right to vote, you should be trying to force the ballot on us, for you will benefit by our betterment.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 5 and up

Selection of Speeches by great American Orators

“Presidential Nomination Speech”

Barry Goldwater

**July 16, 1964
San Francisco, CA**

Abridged by Victoria Reinsel

My fellow Americans, we...understand freedom. We have earned it, we have lived for it, and we have died for it. This Nation and its people are freedom's model in a searching world. But, ladies and gentlemen, first we must renew freedom's vision in our own hearts and in our own homes.

...where examples of morality should be set, the opposite is seen. Small men, seeking great wealth or power, have too often and too long turned even the highest levels of public service into mere personal opportunity. Now, certainly, simple honesty is not too much to demand of men in government. We...demand it from everyone no matter how exalted or protected his position might be.

...those who seek absolute power, even though they seek it to do what they regard as good, are simply demanding the right to enforce their own

version of heaven on earth. And let me remind you, they are the very ones who always create the most hellish tyrannies. Absolute power does corrupt, and those who seek it must be suspect and must be opposed.

...we here in America can keep the peace only if...we keep our eyes open and keep our guard up...

...We must look beyond the defense of freedom today to its extension tomorrow...I can see in the...future, the outlines of a world worthy our dedication, our every risk, our every effort, our every sacrifice along the way.

...I know this freedom is not the fruit of every soil. I know that our own freedom was achieved through centuries, by unremitting efforts of brave and wise men. And, I know that the road to freedom is a long and a challenging road.

And I pledge that the America I envision in the years ahead will extend its hand in health, in teaching and in cultivation, so that all new nations will be at least encouraged...to go our way...

But our example to the world must, like charity, begin at home.

Back in 1858, Abraham Lincoln said this of the Republican party, and I, I quote him, because he probably could have said it during the last week or so: "It was composed of strange, discordant, and even hostile elements." Yet all of these elements agreed on one paramount objective: To arrest the progress of slavery, and place it in the course of ultimate extinction.

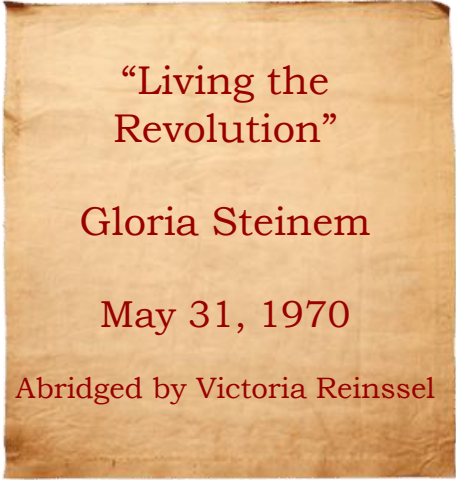
Today, as then, ...the task of preserving and enlarging freedom at home and of safeguarding it from the forces of tyranny...is great enough to...require all our strength. Anyone who joins us in all sincerity, we welcome.

Our...cause is to...light the way for liberty throughout the world.

Thank you.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 5 and up

Selection of Speeches by great American Orators



“Living the Revolution”

Gloria Steinem

May 31, 1970

Abridged by Victoria Reinssel

..this is the year of Women’s Liberation...a movement that some call “feminist” but should more accurately be called humanist; a movement that is an integral part of rescuing this country from its old, expensive patterns of elitism, racism, and violence.

The first problem for all of us, men and women, is not to learn, but to unlearn. We are filled with the Popular Wisdom of several centuries just past, and we are terrified to give it up. Patriotism means obedience, age means wisdom, woman means submission, black means inferior—these are preconceptions embedded so deeply in our thinking that we honestly may not know that they are there.

Clearing our minds and government policies of outdated myths is proving to be at least difficult. But it is also inevitable. Clinging to the comfortable

beliefs of the past serves no purpose, and only slows down the growth of new forms to suit a new reality.

Part of living this revolution is having the scales fall from our eyes. Every day we see small obvious truths that we had missed before.

We believed, for instance, that the vote had been “given” to women in some whimsical, benevolent fashion. We never learned about the long desperation of women’s struggle, or about the strength and wisdom of the women who led it. We heard about the men who risked their lives in the Abolitionist Movement, but seldom about the women; even though women, as in many movements of social reform, had played the major role.

This revolution has to change consciousness, to upset the injustice of our current hierarchy by refusing to honor it, and to live a life that enforces a new social justice.

I know it’s traditional on such an occasion to talk about “entering the world.” But this is an untraditional generation: you have made the campus part of the world. I thank you for it.

I don’t need to tell you what awaits you in this country. You know that much better than I. I will only say that my heart goes with you, and that I hope we will be working together. Divisions of age, race, class, and sex are old-fashioned and destructive.

One more thing, especially to the sisters, because I wish someone had said it to me; it would have saved me so much time.

You don’t have to play one role in this revolutionary age above all others. If you’re willing to pay the price for it, you can do anything you want to do. And the price is worth it.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 5 and up

Selection of Speeches by great American Orators

**“to Captain John
Smith”**

**Powhatan, Chief
of the Powhatan
Confederacy**

1609

Why should you take by force that from us which you can have by love? Why should you destroy us who have provided you with food? What can you get by war? We can hide our provisions and fly into the woods. And then you must consequently famish by wrongdoing your friends

What is the cause of your jealousy? You see us unarmed and willing to supply your wants if you come in a friendly manner; not with swords and guns as to invade an enemy. I am not so simple as not to know that it is better to eat good meat, lie well, and sleep quietly with my women and children; to laugh and be merry with the English, and, being their friend, to have copper, hatchets, and whatever else I want, than to fly from all, to lie cold in the woods, feed upon acorns, roots and such trash, and to be so hunted that I cannot rest, eat, or sleep. In such circumstances, my men must watch, and if a twig should but

break, all would cry out,

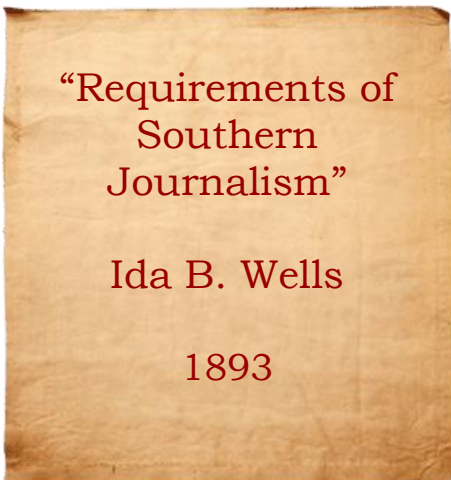
"Here comes Captain Smith." And so, in this miserable manner to end my miserable life.

And, Captain Smith, this might soon be your fate too through your rashness and unadvisedness.

I, therefore, exhort you to peaceable councils, and above all I insist that the guns and swords, the cause of all our jealousy and uneasiness, be removed and sent away.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 3 and up

Selection of Speeches by great American Orators



If indeed “the pen is mightier than the sword,” the time has come as never before that the wielders of the pen belonging to the race which is so tortured and outraged, should take serious thought and purposeful action. The lamentations, distress and want, of numberless widows and orphans appeal to you to do the only thing which can be done — and which is the first step toward revolution of every kind — the creation of a healthy public sentiment.

Scattered throughout the South are journals which for lack of capital and good business management fail to do the good they might. Some have gone into the profession not always because of a love for it, or

the desire to reach a high standard, but for personal aggrandizement or political preferment. Their weekly advent creates no ripples upon the body politic, disturbs no existing condition and if they can secure the wherewithal to feed the press — are permitted to exist, until they die a natural death. If it could be established, a fearlessly edited press is one of the crying necessities of the hour.

A prosecution of this work requires men and women who are willing to sacrifice time, pleasure and property to a realization of it; who are above bribes and demagoguery; who seek not political preferment nor personal aggrandizement; whose moral courage is strong enough to tell the race plainly yet kindly of its failings and maintain a stand for truth, honor and virtue.

This is the greatest need of all among the masses of the South — the need of the press as an educator.

Sheridan exclaimed on one occasion: “Give me a tyrant king, give me a hostile House of Lords, give me a corrupt House of Commons, — give me the press and I will overturn them all.” Gentlemen of the National Press Association, you have the press — what will you do with it? Upon your answer depends the future welfare of your race. Can you stand in comparative idleness, in purposeless wrangling, when there is earnest, practical, united work to be done?

Selection of Speeches by great American Orators

**Society of American
Indian Address**

**Gertrude Simmons
Bonnin**

Oct 2, 1919

We have come from our homes to this national teepee and we are talking with one another in a different language. We want our children to be proud of their Indian blood.

Now we are meeting a civilization from a race that came from Europe. We have to meet it each day—there is no dodging, and it is not easy. It is going to take courage; it is going to test your strength.

We are men and women with minds and hearts. ... We are here like other human beings and there is no reason why we should be afraid to hold up our heads. Let us stand up straight. Let us study conditions; let us give

reasons why. And if we fail at the first trial, shall we quit? No, we will try again. The first time you stand up for right and it is refused you, shall you quit? Then you do not believe in it. We must continue speaking and claiming our human rights to live on this earth that ... so that we may think our thoughts and speak them—that we may have our part in American life and be as any other human beings are.

It is necessary that we organize, that we may act as a body; that we may put our ideas together and choose the best. That is our work. Let us all express what seems to us the thing that is needed, and we will choose that which we must strive for at this time.

the American Indian must have a voice. He must say what is in him and by exchanging opinions, we are going to grow. I believe in that and that is why I am working with my brothers and I hope as time goes on, my sisters. Then they will help us carry on this work as it must be done so that we may succeed.

Suggested Grade Level:
Grade 4 and up