In order that we may comprehend, to their full extent, our obligations to the martyrs and surviving heroes of the army of the Potomac, let us contemplate for a few moments, my friends, the train of events, which culminated in the battles of the 1st, 2d and 3d of July. Of this stupendous rebellion, planned as its originators boast, more than thirty years ago, matured and prepared for during an entire generation, finally commenced because, for the first time since the adoption of the Constitution, an election of President had been effected without the votes of the South (which retained, however, the control of the two other branches of the Government), the occupation of the national capital, with the seizure of public archives, and of the treaties with foreign powers, was an essential feature.

At the time this threat was made, the Rebellion was confined to the cotton growing States, and it was well understood by them, that the only hope of drawing any of the other slaveholding States into the conspiracy, was by bringing about a conflict of arms, and “firing the heart of the South” by the effusion of blood. This was declared by the Charleston press to be the object for which Sumter was to be assaulted, and the emissaries sent from Richmond, to urge on the unhallowed work, gave the promise, that, with the first drop of blood that should be shed, Virginia would place herself by the side of South Carolina. In pursuance of this original plan of the leaders of the Rebellion, the capture of Washington has been continually had in view, not merely for the sake of its public buildings, as the Capital of the Confederacy, but as the necessary preliminary to the absorption of the Border States, and for the moral effect in the eyes of Europe of possessing the metropolis of the Union.

I allude to these facts, not perhaps enough borne in mind, as a sufficient refutation of the pretence on the part of the Rebels, that the war is one of self-defense, waged for the right of self-government. It is in reality a war originally levied by ambitious men in the cotton-growing States, for the purpose of drawing the slaveholding Border States into the vortex of the conspiracy… and it is a most extraordinary fact, considering the clamors of the Rebel chiefs on the subject of invasion, that not a soldier of the United States has entered the States last named, except to defend their Union-loving inhabitants from the armies and guerillas of the Rebels.

And now, friends, fellow citizens, as we stand among these honored graves, the momentous question presents itself, which of the two parties to the war is responsible for all this suffering -- for this dreadful sacrifice of life -- the lawful and constitutional government of the United States, or the ambitious men who have rebelled against it? I say 'rebelled' against it, although Earl Russell, the British Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, in his recent temperate and conciliatory speech in Scotland, seems to intimate that no prejudice ought to attach to that word, inasmuch as our English forefathers rebelled against Charles I. and James II., and our American fathers rebelled against George III.

These precedents do not prove that it was just and proper for the “disappointed great men” of the cotton-growing States to rebel against “the most beneficent government of which history gives us any account,” as the Vice President of the Confederacy, in November, 1860, charged them with doing. They do not create a presumption even in favor of the disloyal slaveholders of the South, who, living under a government of which Mr. Jefferson Davis, in the Session of 1860-61, said that it “was the best government ever instituted by man, unexceptionably administered, and under which the people have been prosperous beyond comparison with any other people whose career has been recorded in history,”
rebelled against it because their aspiring politicians, himself among the rest, were in danger of losing their monopoly of its offices….

I call the war which the Confederates are waging against the Union a “rebellion,” because it is one, and in grave matters it is best to call things by their right names. The Constitution of the United States puts “rebellion” on a par with “invasion.” The Constitution and law not only of England, but of every civilized country, regard them in the same light, or rather, they consider the rebel in arms as far worse than the alien enemy. To levy war against the United States is the constitutional definition of treason, and that crime is, by every civilized government, regarded as the highest which citizen or subject can commit. Not content with the sanctions of human justice, of all the crimes against the law of the land it is singled out for the denunciations of religion….

Do not think that I exaggerate the consequences of yielding to the demands of the leaders of the rebellion. I understate them. They require of us not only all the sacrifices I have named, not only to cede to them -- a foreign and hostile power -- of all the territory of the United States at present occupied by the Rebel forces, but the abandonment to them of the vast regions we have rescued from their grasp--of Maryland, of a part of Eastern Virginia and the whole of Western Virginia; the seacoast of North and South Carolina; Georgia, and Florida; Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri; Arkansas, and the larger portion of Mississippi, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Missouri; Arkansas, and the larger portion of Mississippi and Louisiana, in most of which, with the exception of lawless guerillas, there is not a Rebel in arms; in all of which the great majority of the people are loyal to the Union. We must give back, too, the helpless colored population, thousands of whom are periling their lives in the ranks of our armies, to a bondage rendered tenfold more bitter by the momentary enjoyment of freedom. Finally we must surrender every man in the Southern country, white or black, who has moved a finger or spoken a word for the restoration of the Union, to a reign of terror as remorseless as that of Robespierre, which has been the chief instrument by which the Rebellion has been organized and sustained, and which has already filled the prisons of the South with noble men, whose only crime is that they are not the worst of criminals. The South is full of such men. I do not believe there has been a day since the election of President Lincoln, when, if an ordinance of secession could have been fairly submitted to the mass of the people, In any single Southern State, a majority of ballots would have been given in its favor. No, not in South Carolina. It is not possible that the majority of the people, even of that State, if permitted, without fear or favor, to give a ballot on the question, would have followed the agitators of the present day….

I do not believe there is, in all history, the record of a civil war of such gigantic dimensions, where so little has been done in the spirit of vindictiveness, as in this war, by the Government and commanders of the United States; and this notwithstanding the provocation given by the Rebel Government by assuming the responsibility of wretches like Quantrell, refusing quarter to colored troops, and scourging and selling into Slavery free colored men from the North, who fall into their hands, by covering the sea with pirates, and starving prisoners of war to death.

The people of loyal America will never take to their confidence, or admit again to a share in their government, the hard-hearted men, whose cruel lust of power has brought this desolating war upon the land, but there is no personal bitterness felt even against them. They may live, if they can bear to live after wantonly causing the death of so many thousands of their fellow-men; they may live in safe obscurity beneath the shelter of the government they have sought to overthrow….