

Abraham Lincoln papers

William H. Seward, Suggested Changes to First Inaugural Address¹, [February 1861]

1 At some point, Lincoln sent Seward, his prospective Secretary of State, a printed copy of the much-revised draft of his First Inaugural Address, for comments and suggestions. These notes, which constitute Seward's response, are keyed to page numbers of the printed text and also to line numbers written in by Seward himself. For this latter document, see Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, Second Printed Draft, with Line Numbers Added by William H. Seward [February, 1861].

Many of Seward's suggestions were eventually adopted, in whole or in part, by Lincoln. For more information on the drafting of the First Inaugural, see the headnote to Abraham Lincoln, First Inaugural Address, Final Version [March, 1861].

Because Seward's numbering of the leaves of his own document is apt to be confused with his references to the pagination of Lincoln's second printed draft, sequential numbers for each of the five leaves of Seward's document have been assigned and are shown in brackets at the beginning of each leaf.

[Leaf one]

Page 1

Lines 3 & 4 Omit the inverted commas—

5 Instead of electing write “nominating”

6 Instead of platform write “summary”,

7 & 8 Strike out all between “Upon” and “position” both included.

9 After the word “that” insert “the candidate “that” in the strike out “in his judgment and insert the words “in the judgment of the candidate the platform which he thus accepts and insert the summary binds the officer elected

11, 12, 13, 14, 15 Strike out all these lines and write “With this explanation I deem it my duty as I am disposed in feeling to follow so far as they apply to the Executive sphere the principles on which I was brought before the American People—”

Page 2

Line 5 After the words “cheerfully given” insert “in every case and under all circumstances”

Page 3

Line 1. Strike out “now”

4 Strike out “on the whole,” and write “generally”

7, 8 After the word “Union” strike out the rest of the sentence, and insert, “heretofore only menaced is now formidably attempted.”

31 Strike out the whole line.

33 For “nothing” write “void”

35 For treasonable write “revolutionary”

[Leaf two]

Page 4

Line 1 After the word “that” write in the view of the constitution and the laws

2 After the word care insert “as the Constitution itself expressly enjoins upon m[e]

5 Instead of “tangible way” write “authoritative manner.

6 & 7. Instead of “will have its own and defend itself” write will “constitutionally defend and maintain itself”

9. 10. 11. 12. 13 Strike out the whole and insert “The means committed to shall be used wi power confided to me shall be used indeed with efficiency but also with discretion in every case — and exigency, according to the circumstances actually existing and with a view and a hope of a peaceful solution of existin the national troubles and the restoration of fraternal sympathies and affections

14. 15 16. 17. 18. 19 In cases where the strict legal right Strike out the whole sentence and insert, “There are in this government as in every other emergencies where the exercise of power lawful in itself is less certain to secure the just ends of administration, than a temporary forbearance from

it with reliance on the ultimate consent of the community voluntary though delayed acquiescence of the people in the laws which have been made by themselves and for their own benefit I shall not lose sight of this obvious maxim"

[Leaf three]

Page 4

Line 24 After the word persons insert "in one section as well as in the other"

26 After the word "them" insert "because they I am sure they are must be few in number and of little influence when their policy is principle pernicious principles are f[ul]ly understood

Line 34 After the word right "any" write "distinct"

Page 5

Line 6. After the word "negations" write guaranti[es] and exceptions prohibitions

7 After the word "every" write "possible"

15 Strike out "submit" and insert acquiesce

17 Strike out "submission" & insert "acquiescence"

18 For "submit" write "acquiesce

21 For "South Carolina" write Alabam "Alabama or Florida"

23 For People write "communities"

26. 27. After the word "anarchy," strike out the next sentence and write A majority held in restraint by Constitutional checks and limitations and always changing easily with deliberate changes of popular opinions and sentiments is &c

34. and that the judicial constru After the words "the suit," Insert "and while they are entitled to very high respect and consideration in all parallel cases by all other departments of the government.

[Leaf four]

Page 6

Line 1 Strike out "rule" and insert "practice.'

Line 1 Strike out "But" and insert At the same time can the candid citizen must confess that

Line 3 After the word Court, strike out the words "it is plain that" and insert "made in the ordinary course of litigation between parties in personal actions."

Lines 4 & 5 After the word turned "having" strike out the rest of the sentence and write, practically confided resigned their government to it into the hands of that eminent tribunal"

Lines 9, 10, 11 Strike out the whole paragraph—

Line 12 After the word "section" insert of our country

Line 15 After the word "enforced" insert perhaps"

Line 16 Strike out the words "is against" and insert "imperfectly supports

L[ine 20] After the word "be" insert ultimately"

Line 36 Strike out — the whole sentence and insert While so great a diversity of opinion exists on the question what amendments if indeed any would be effective in restoring peace and safety it would only tend to aggravate the dispute if I were to attempt to give direction to the public mind in that respect²

2 The paragraph that follows, which represents Seward's suggestion of a more conciliating conclusion to the First Inaugural, Lincoln later adopted but transformed. It appears on the back of the sheet containing the preceding notes, which is not the last, but next to last, leaf containing Seward's suggestions.

I close. We are not we must not be aliens or enemies but countrym fellow countrymen and brethren. Although passion has strained our bonds of affection too hardly they must not be broken — they will not, I am sure they will not be broken. The mystic chords which proceeding from every ba so many battle fields and patriot so many patriot graves bind pass through all the hearts and hearths all the hearths in this broad continent of ours will yet harmon again harmonize in their ancient music when touched as they surely breathed upon again by the better angel guardian angel of the nation

[Leaf five]

[Line 10 After the words transmit it, insert “if possi[ble]”³

3 The reference to line 10 and all other line references on Leaf five relate to Lincoln's Second Printed Draft, page eight.

Line 14 Strike out the words “be on our side or on yours and insert “be on the side of the North, or of the South, of the East or of the West”

Line 19, 20 Strike out all the words to and including “chair” and insert

“While the people retain their virtue and vigilance no legislature and no administration can

Line 20 Strike out “can”

22 Strike out the words “take time” and insert think calmly”—

23, 24 Strike out all from “Nothing valuable to burning” both inclusive”.

Line 35 — Strike out the words “unless you first assail it.

38. 39. 40 Strike out all after the word, “defense”