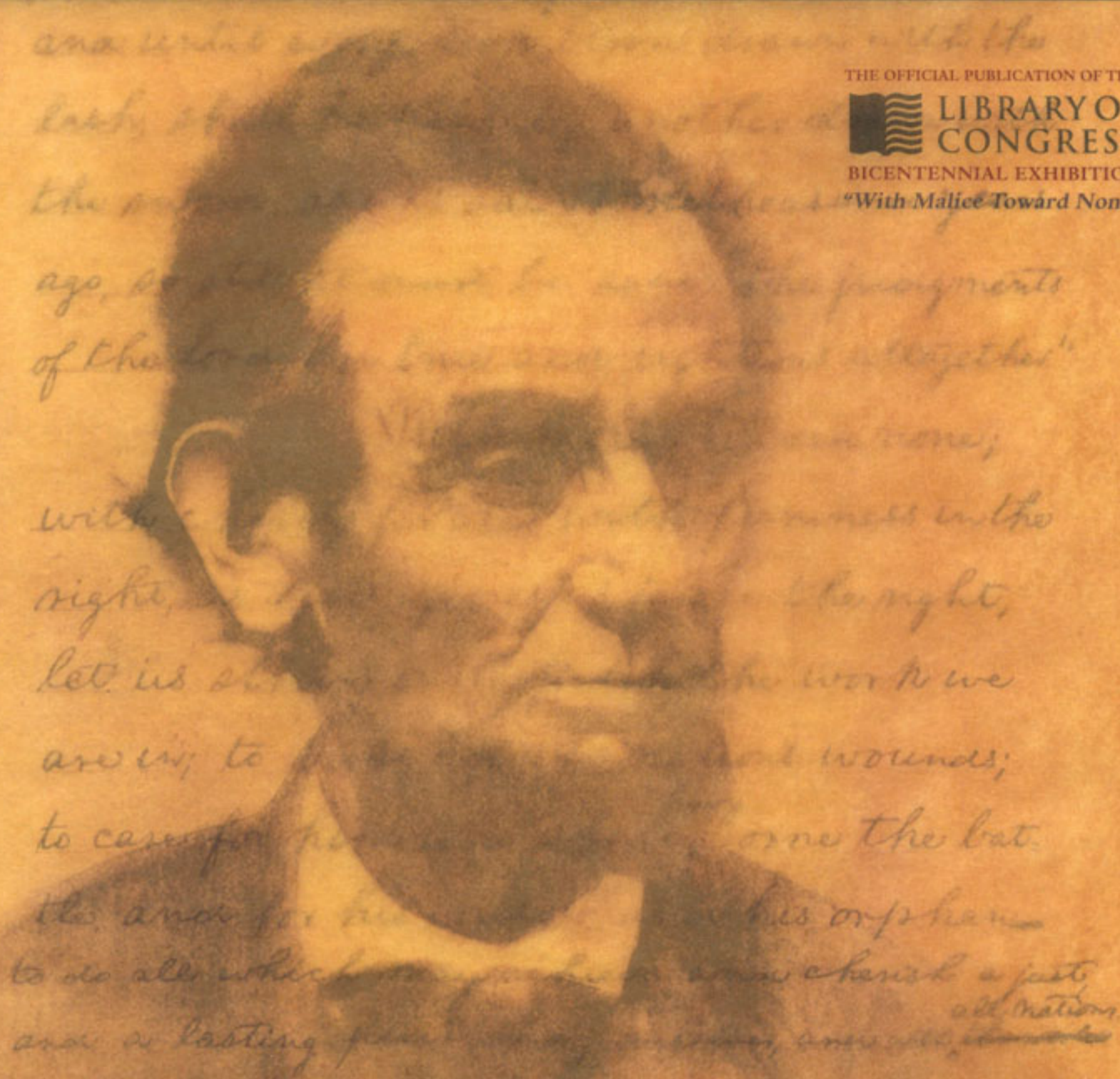


IN

LINCOLN'S HAND

HIS ORIGINAL MANUSCRIPTS



THE OFFICIAL PUBLICATION OF THE
 LIBRARY OF CONGRESS
 BICENTENNIAL EXHIBITION
 "With Malice Toward None"

WITH COMMENTARY BY DISTINGUISHED AMERICANS

EDITED BY HAROLD HOLZER AND JOSHUA WOLF SHENK

"I am naturally anti-slavery," Lincoln would write as president. "I can not remember when I did not so think, and feel." This persuasive rumination on the dominant issue of his political life testified to his long-standing, freedom-loving instincts, poignantly expressed in the year of his debates with Douglas.

I have never professed an indifference to the honors of official station; and were I to do so now, I should only make myself ridiculous. Yet I have never failed—do not now fail—to remember that in the republican cause there is a higher aim than that of mere office— I have not allowed myself to forget that the abolition of the slave-trade by Great Britain, was agitated a hundred years before it was a final success; that the measure had its open fire-eating opponents; its stealthy "dove card" opponents; its dollar and cent opponents; its inferior race opponents; its negro equality opponents; and its religion and good order opponents; that all these opponents got offices, and their adversaries got none— But I have also remembered that, ^{though} they blazed like tallow-candles for a century, at least they flickered in the socket, drew out, stank in the dark for a brief season, and were remembered no more, even by the smeller— School-boys know that Wilberforce, and Granville Sharp, helped that cause forward; but who can now name a single man who labored to retard it? Remembering these things I can not but regard it as possible that the higher object of this contest may not be completely attained within

the term of my ^{natural} life. But I can not doubt either that it will come in due time. Even in this view, I am proud, in my passing speck of time, to contribute an humble mite to that glorious consummation, which my own poor eyes may ~~never~~ ^{not} last to see—

I have never professed an indifference to the honors of official station; and were I to do so now, I should only make myself ridiculous. Yet I have never failed — do not now fail — to remember that in the republican cause there is a higher aim than that of mere office. I have not allowed myself to forget that the abolition of the Slave-trade by Great Britain, was agitated a hundred years before it was a final success; that the measure had it's open fire-eating opponents; it's stealthy "dont care" opponents; it's dollar and cent opponents; it's inferior race opponents; its negro equality opponents; and its religion and good order opponents; that all these opponents got offices, and their adversaries got none. But I have also remembered that ^{though} they blazed, like tallow-candles for a century, at last they flickered in the socket, died out, stank in the dark for a brief season, and were remembered no more, even by the smell. School-boys know that Wilberforce, and Granville Sharpe, helped that cause forward; but who can now name a single man who labored to retard it? Remembering these things I can not but regard it as possible that the higher object of this contest may not be completely attained within

the term of my ^{natural} life. But I can not doubt either that it will come in due time. Even in this view, I am proud, in my passing speck of time, to contribute an humble mite to that glorious consummation, which my own poor eyes may ^{not} never last to see.

William Wilberforce could not be indifferent to slavery. For twenty years, the wealthy heir to a merchant fortune worked unceasingly to end slavery in the British Empire. His labor bore fruit when Parliament acted in 1807 to abolish the slave trade.

Abraham Lincoln admired the Herculean efforts exerted by Wilberforce. Like his English counterpart, Lincoln could not be indifferent to the immorality of slavery. Lincoln and Wilberforce embraced the natural law principle of the equality of all men. Wilberforce drew upon the words of St. Paul: "God hath made of one blood all nations of men." Lincoln found his text in the "self-evident" equality principle of the Declaration of Independence: "All men are created equal."

In this speech fragment, Lincoln joins high principle to an honorable ambition, observing that "in the republican cause there is a higher aim than that of mere office." The self-tutored lawyer from Illinois could not understand those "dont care" politicians, such as Senator Stephen A. Douglas, who pretended indifference to involuntary servitude. Such men reminded Lincoln of Wilberforce's opponents who "blazed," "flickered," and "died," whereas the memory of Wilberforce endured.

Well-remembered for his first major, printed, antislavery speech of 1854 at Peoria, Lincoln would thereafter campaign tirelessly against the spread of slavery. He often predicted—as he does here—that slavery might not be extinguished in the United States "within the term of my natural life." On January 31, 1865—only a few months before his assassination—Congress passed the Thirteenth Amendment to abolish slavery. Lincoln himself had contributed more than his "humble mite to that glorious consummation." ◀