



A message from **THE PRESIDENT**

OF PRESIDENTS AND POETS

The third Monday in February has been designated in most of the United States as Presidents' Day. (Depending on where you live, you may be celebrating Washington's Birthday and/or Lincoln's Birthday!)

Recent history has given us all more-than-sufficient reason to contemplate the Presidency and those who have held this position of the greatest national (and global) significance. I find myself considering past and present holders of the most important office in the nation and their relation to the arts – in particular, poetry.

A number of presidents have possessed a marked feeling for verse. George Washington's favorite poet was Phyllis Wheatley, an enslaved person originally from West Africa who became the first African American to publish a book of poetry. Abraham Lincoln was fond of the work of Scottish poet Robert Burns. Closer to our own time, in 1961 John F. Kennedy asked Robert Frost to read at his inauguration; Maya Angelou and Miller Williams read at Bill Clinton's 1993 and 1997 inaugurations, respectively; and a young woman named Amanda Gorman electrified viewers around the world when she recited her poem "The Hill We Climb" at President Biden's inauguration in 2021.

Gorman's poem includes these lines which speak directly to the task that every President of the United States faces:

It's because being American is more than a pride we inherit.
It's the past we step into and how we repair it.

Gorman goes on to say:

We've seen a force that would shatter our nation, rather than share it.
Would destroy our country if it meant delaying democracy.
And this effort very nearly succeeded.
But while democracy can be periodically delayed, it can never be permanently defeated.

Repairing, uniting, and maintaining the republic, making good on the promises contained in the Constitution through the processes of democracy – these are truly the tasks of whoever inhabits the Oval Office. May the men (and, one day soon, the women) who hold the nation's fate and future in their hands always choose to realize our brightest dreams – and not our murkiest nightmares.

Sincerely,

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