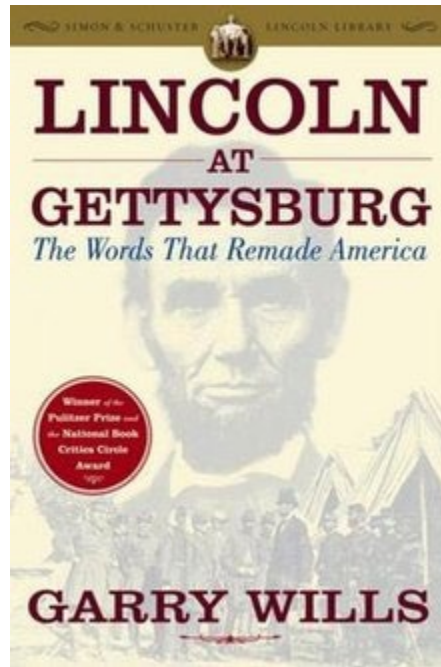


75th Book Discussion



Professor Bonner: the topic for discussion is Wills' LINCOLN AT GETTYSBURG, which the class will be reading before the event. I understand that my job is to set things up in the first half of the program and then guide discussion from there (devoting about half the session to a free for all). It's a good choice of a book and the trick will be to contain what we propose. I offer the below as general "info to be distributed."

“Lincoln’s 272 Words and America’s 1863 Refounding”

Gary Wills “Lincoln at Gettysburg” appeared in 1992, just after the PBS mini-series produced by Ken Burns rekindled national fascination with the American Civil War. Wills garnered a smaller audience than did Burns, but his account of the “words that remade America” resonated powerfully, and it still casts light on our own moment. The relatively short text (many of Wills’ books are much longer) established itself as one of the most thought-provoking recent accounts of American nationhood. Its basic argument rewards serious attention as long as legacies of the 1860s linger.

Robert Bonner (History department) will take Wills’ 1992 text as a starting point for a wide-ranging conversation about how Lincoln’s remarks at a new national cemetery stitched together past, present, and future of 1863. In Wills’ telling, Lincoln’s most consequential oration drew upon the Greek tradition of funeral oration; it inhabited a “transcendental present” associated with New England philosophy; and it looked ahead to a new nation that would recognize

Jefferson's Declaration, not the country's Constitution, as the moment when the ideal of American was first conceived. By the end of the session, we will have addressed the merits (and the shortcomings and silences) of Will's work and discuss how the book's key claims relate to the current state of our national life.
