

# LINCOLN'S WORDS, EMBOSSED IN KENOSHA COUNTY CEREMONIAL COURTROOM, RING TRUE TODAY

“Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well-wisher to his posterity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country, and never to tolerate their violation by others.”

Abraham Lincoln spoke these words as part of his “Address Before the Young Men’s Lyceum of Springfield, Ill.” in January 1838. One of his earliest published speeches, Lincoln delivered this speech when he was just 28 years old, 23 years before he became President.

This same quote is etched in gold leaf, encircling the upper walls of the Kenosha County Ceremonial Courtroom — now only partially visible by gazing through a 1980s air conditioning system installation and dropped ceiling panel array. Here we are in July 2023, nearly 250 years since the Declaration of Independence, and 185 years since Lincoln affirmed the importance of its principles, celebrating the revolutionary legacy that brought us independence. Early patriots and visionaries found themselves swept up in the moment of great importance as British colonies stepped out on their own, collectively, rising to the call of a distinct moment when onto a world stage came a modern-day democracy — a government of the people, by the people, for the people.

Today I’m considering the connection across democratic forms of government that touch and shape the everyday lives of individuals and organizations celebrating with us over the coming days. Lincoln, in the quote above, spoke to an expansive sense of liberty, but in the same breath, celebrating the revolutionary legacy challenged us to never violate our own laws. It conveys to me a very serious sense of personal responsibility for the health of this great experiment in democracy that remains with us today.

Admittedly, a lot of these high-minded notions are taken-for-granted but no less remain vital to everyday life. Democracy (still) requires consensus-building (often hard-fought) to determine, for example, how and where public funds are spent and invested. Elections and referendums (still) hand over the reins to elected officials, appointed leaders, and occasionally the general public-at-large to serve directly in governance roles, administering and directing critical institutions. Democratic participation in the political process (still) means minority rights amidst majority rule, free and fair elections, rule of law, and a heavy reliance on civic participation locally. No doubt, democracy requires a serious responsibility from us all.

The Kenosha Community Foundation, like so many organizations and institutions serving local communities, has benefited from a legacy of democracy, and is likewise governed by a representative Board of Directors and many volunteer committees. These bodies strive to represent diverse interests and reach shared decisions through informed, inclusive, and transparent processes.

In the case of KCF, our business model reflects democratic principles because our more than 60 fund advisors and growing base of donors act out of enlightened self-interest in making their gifts, directing their philanthropic giving to causes that reflect their interests and values while enjoying significant tax benefits. (How fortunate for me — and you — that even our own IRS tax code enables and promotes philanthropy!)

You might be left asking yourself “What am I doing to demonstrate responsibility for the democratic structures impacting daily my life today?” Get involved on a Board, make a gift to a nonprofit, pay your taxes. Heck, you could even consider joining me in the fundraising campaign for the Kenosha County Ceremonial Courtroom Restoration Project underway, bringing back to light that Lincoln passage set within a local and truly stunning, historical gem.

Cheers to all during this very special holiday.

**Amy Greil**

*Executive Director*