

LINCOLN LORE

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MOST TIMELY EDITORIAL—FEBRUARY, 1944

Editorial writers throughout the nation on February twelfth demonstrated the tremendous inspirational resources available in the life and works of Abraham Lincoln. It is doubtful if there has ever been a more significant display of writings referring to the Emancipator, with the possible exception of the comments released during the Lincoln Centennial celebration in 1909. Following are titles of a few of the editorials appearing on Lincoln's birthday, 1944:

What Lincoln Saw
Lincoln's Selflessness
Man of the People
For This We Fight
A Great American
What is Good Writing
In Deeds Not Words
His One Great Love
Lincoln's Character and Leadership
One Great Man Who was Different
Lincoln is With Us
How Lincoln Died
In Lincoln's Faith
Lincoln's Politics
Lincoln Saw Them All
Lincoln's Unfinished Task
"It is for us the Living"
Lincoln's Prayer
"Let us strive on"
When Lincoln Ran a War
Memo from A. Lincoln
Lincoln's Example
Abraham Lincoln Righted Wrong
Without Hate
Lincoln, Legacy of the Country
Lincoln in 1944
Lincoln's Philosophy
Lincoln's Ageless Vision

The Lincoln Foundation Advisory Group, consisting of nineteen of the nation's outstanding students of Lincoln, selects each year, by ballot, the most timely newspaper editorial written during the week of Lincoln's birthday. This year, Mr. R. L. Duffus, a member of the editorial staff of the *New York Times*, was given the supreme recognition for his editorial, entitled, "Lincoln's Unfinished Task," which appeared in the February 12 edition of the paper. Through the kindness of the *New York Times* we are permitted to print Mr. Duffus' editorial in full in this issue of *Lincoln Lore*.

Six of the members of the Advisory Committee serve by virtue of the fact that they are secretaries of Lincoln organizations. One change has recently occurred in the personnel of this group; William E. Baringer has replaced Harry E. Pratt, as secretary of the Abraham Lincoln Association, and has kindly consented to serve with the group. Two members of the Advisory Committee have been lost by death, George P. Hambrecht and Ida M. Tarbell. Their places have been filled by Professor Roy P. Basler, of the University of Arkansas, and Professor Harry E. Pratt, of Ball State Teachers College.

Lincoln's Unfinished Task by R. L. Duffus

Mr. Lincoln's war cannot be closely compared with the one we have now. For one thing, Mr. Lincoln didn't have the same kind of enemies we have. There were bad deeds on both sides in his war, but there was chivalry, too. Lincoln could find room in his heart for compassion for a defeated enemy, and no room at all for vengeance. We have a sterner task. Our enemies look on chivalry as a weakness of fools. And it is for their victims, who are so many and have suffered so cruelly, that our compassion is needed.

Nevertheless this generation can understand Abraham Lincoln a little better than it could three years ago, because this, too, is a time of stress for the Republic and this, too, a time of decision. And in many ways what we are seeking now is what Lincoln was seeking between 1861 and 1865.

Lincoln did not strive to save the Union because he believed that large countries were preferable to small ones. It was not magnitude he had in mind. It was quality. It was the quality of human life, which he believed with all his soul would steadily grow richer in a democracy and steadily poorer under an autocracy. He believed that the halves of a disunited nation could not be or become democratic. He foresaw endless wars along a deadly and unnatural new frontier. In those wars he thought that all he had learned to love of American ways and traditions, all the last best hope for humankind, would perish.

He was determined to keep alive the conditions under which men could grow to their full stature, as he had seen them do on the prairies of Illinois. We have been required by history to pursue that undertaking further. The time has not come, and may never come, for a union of all nations comparable with the Union of these States. Yet it is not stretching the significance of our present battles to say that the war aims of the United Nations are, and ought to be, to create all over the earth conditions which will make for peace, for justice and for democracy. Lincoln knew too sadly well that no immediate Utopia on this continent would result from Appomattox. We, too, have to realize that our victory parades will not ring in the millennium. What Lincoln sought for the common man in America, what we ought to seek for him everywhere, was the hope, the opportunity, the trust in himself that distinguishes the free man, however hard pressed, however erring, from the slave, however well cared for, however perfect in his desperate skills.

Abraham Lincoln would understand our war and the reasons for it. He would be sorrowful that it had to be fought, but he would not ask that it be suspended before its purpose had been fulfilled. We ought not to invoke him now as a sort of tribal god. He was not that. He was an American, with the American earth on his boots, the American traditions in his heart, the American aspirations a part of his very soul. He was what we have been and also what we may become. In this sense he marches with us now, stands beside every wounded soldier, comforts every bereaved wife and mother, sees with pitying eyes the sufferings of millions. He came out of the people. He returned to them. Seventy-nine years dead, he lives.