

# LINCOLN LORE

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## MOST TIMELY EDITORIAL—FEBRUARY 1945

Seldom does one turn to the editorial page of any outstanding American newspaper, published on the date of Lincoln's birth, without observing some tribute to the Emancipator. During the season of some great national emergency this is especially true, because the ideals of Lincoln have become sort of a sounding board for the approval or disapproval of new measures.

For the past four years the Lincoln National Life Foundation has attempted to gather the more important editorials published on February 12 to be reviewed by the nineteen members of its Advisory Committee for the purpose of selecting what, from their viewpoint, may be the most timely contribution.

The editorials receiving recognition thus far in this annual contest are as follows: 1942, "As It Appears to the Cavalier," by Thomas Lomax Hunter, in the *Richmond (Virginia) Times Dispatch*; 1943, "Humility of Abraham Lincoln," by Ben Hur Lampman, in *The (Portland) Oregonian*; 1944, "Lincoln's Unfinished Task," by R. L. Duffus, in the *New York Times*.

This year the subjects submitted were so greatly influenced by a common theme that it took two ballots to finally come to a decision and even then the vote was so close that it has been decided to print both the first and second choices. The first place goes to F. Lauriston Bullard, with an editorial entitled, "Who 'Owns' Lincoln," printed in *The Boston Herald*, and second place to Harvey W. Southgate, with his contribution to the (Rochester, New York) *Democrat Chronicle*, entitled, "He Stands for Unity."

### Who "Owns" Lincoln?

Abraham Lincoln was one of that little company of rare men whose influence and significance cannot be limited to parties and groups or bounded by oceans and mountain ranges. He belongs to all parties and peoples as the world's exponent of democracy in action.

He began as a Whig and ended as a Republican, yet all his life he was a Jeffersonian. In 1858 he said that Henry Clay, the magnetic leader of the Whigs, had been his "beau ideal of a statesman." After that year he never quoted Clay and constantly referred to Jefferson. Chapters and verses may be quoted to show that Jefferson, Clay and Lincoln agreed in their hatred of slavery, their opposition to its extension into free territory, and their endorsement of colonization as the solution of the slavery problem. They held common views on union and secession, the tariff, the people as the source of political power.

Clay, as the "Great Pacificator," sought by compromise to hold the Union together half slave and half free. Lincoln predicted that it could not thus "endure permanently." To a committee in Boston he wrote in 1859 that "the principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of free society," and in Philadelphia in 1861 he declared that he "never had a feeling politically that did not spring from the sentiments" of the great document which Jefferson had penned.

He ran for the presidency on a platform which quoted the Declaration of Independence. According to a diary record by Gideon Welles, in 1864, Lincoln was speaking disparagingly of both Clay and Webster as "hard and selfish" Whig leaders who were interested mainly in "private personal ambitions."

Lincoln had been a shrewd politician. He came to the White House as the head of a new party which was a

huge conglomerate of groups held together by their antagonism to slavery extension. During his presidency he tended more and more to think of himself as the representative of all sections and all parties. He was the least partisan of all the members of his own party and went so far as to defy its powerful cliques.

The world regards him as the champion of that democracy which must not "perish from the earth." He owes his magnitude to his magnanimity, his intellect, his power of expression, his fellowship with the common man, and to the homely characteristics which made him quaint and unique. Upon his death, royalties and parliaments sent to Washington official tributes warm with real sympathy. Spontaneous non-official testimonials poured in from all over Europe, and fifty came from labor bodies in eight countries. Of all those messages none was more felicitous than one from a little town in Sicily which contained this sentence:

"Abraham Lincoln was not yours only—he was also ours."

F. LAURISTON BULLARD.

### He Stands for Unity

Many viewpoints on the many-sided life of Abraham Lincoln are stressed on each anniversary of his birth as the American people annually find light on their own problems from the luminous figure that shines through the years. One aspect which it is particularly appropriate to remember at this time is the unifying influence that comes down to us from Lincoln's example, bidding us forget minor differences and to raise the principles of humanity above all political distinctions.

The mass of Americans today do not think of Lincoln as the possession of any political group. Boys and girls grow up not knowing what party label he bore nor how he came to be elected. Those details are of interest to the student of political history and the biographers, for Lincoln of course was a politician, a shrewd one, and his political beliefs help to explain to some extent the President.

But Americans bowing before him today do not think of him with reference to a political party at all. Looking at him in the clear light of history, indeed, one sees only the rugged strength of the figure. One recognizes in Lincoln, above everything else, the intangibles of character which we like to think of as the American ideal. It is this quality that raises him above the level of most of the presidents.

The final proof of Lincoln's greatness is the non-partisan homage that today is paid to him. Elected at a time of violent strife and fiercely controverted issues, he has outlived all the political storms, become the symbol of a united national spirit. "His simplicity," says John Bright, the British liberal who staunchly supported the Union cause, "for a time did much to hide his greatness." Today we see that his simplicity was of the very stuff of greatness, that before it the complex and vexing issues of this present day boil down to simple words like courage, faith, purpose, good will.

Nothing that Lincoln says to us today sounds more clearly than this—principles above party, humanity above special interests, the world view above the narrow horizon.

HARVEY W. SOUTHGATE.