

LINCOLN LORE

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MOST TIMELY EDITORIAL — FEBRUARY 12, 1948

The selection of the most timely editorial commenting on Abraham Lincoln, and appearing in the editorial columns of American newspapers for February 12 of each year, involves considerable effort on the part of the Foundation, and a willingness on the part of the Advisory Committee to serve as judges in the contest.

The first task is the acquisition of the sources, which calls for a letter being sent to 125 leading daily newspapers throughout the country published in cities of over 30,000 population. Stamps are enclosed for the cost of the paper and mailing. These letters go out a day or two before the papers are issued. Upon receipt of the February 12 edition of the papers, the Lincoln editorials are excerpted, with care taken in the correct identification of each contribution. These editorials are separately mounted on uniform size sheets for proper cataloging.

While it is admitted that the weeding-out process is not all that is desired and may work an injustice to a few contributors, yet some method of reducing the editorials to a selective group has to be undertaken. The descriptive adjective "timely" has been given first consideration. Editorials that deal with modern problems or have a "birthday" atmosphere about them are retained.

The purely mechanical barrier which the Foundation has set up may be its most unjust process of elimination, but quite early in this effort it was discovered that a word limit for editorials would have to be established. Inasmuch as newspapers as a rule are given to brevity, it seems that this attitude should also find expression in the editorial column. The great majority of contributions are under 500 words in length and this number has been used as a maximum. Lincoln's Gettysburg Address contained less than 300 words, and his Second Inaugural less than 700 words.

There is also an attempt to eliminate what is often referred to as canned editorials, writings distributed by syndicates, as well as monographs by columnists. Contributions which present a series of quotations from Lincoln, historical sketches, strictly partisan discussions, or presentations based on folklore or tradition, are subject to the preliminary cancellation.

Photostat copies of such editorials as seem to be especially timely, based on historical incidents and containing literary merit, are made available to the Advisory Committee of nineteen Lincoln students for final selection. Each member is furnished with two ballots, one to be sent to the teller of the Advisory Group, and one to the director of the Foundation.

The sources of the editorials are not known to the nineteen judges but are identified by numbers. Each member of the committee votes for three places, first, second and third—counting five, three and one points, respectively, in the final tabulation. Winners of the first two places are announced through Lincoln Lore. There are no prizes offered but the paper receiving recognition is advised about the award, and if the editor's name is available it is made known. The editorial receiving first place is published in Lincoln Lore and sometimes the editorial of the second place winner is used.

The Advisory Group decided that for February 12, 1948, an editorial in the *Indianapolis Star* entitled "Lincoln Still Lives" deserved first place, while an editorial in the *Washington (D. C.) Evening Star* was awarded second honors for a contribution under the caption, "The World Lincoln."

Many worthy editorials were released under a simplified title such as "Lincoln," "Abraham Lincoln," and "Lincoln's Birthday." Some other captions give a hint to

the timeliness of the subject matter, as may be observed from the following titles:

"With Malice Towards None;" "First of All—the Union;" "The Lincoln Way;" "Occasionally, a Great Man;" "Thoughts of U. S. Turn to Lincoln in Crises;" "The Unfinished Work;" "The Sixteenth President;" "Lincoln's Character;" "The Unchanged Lincoln;" "Lincoln Man of Peace;" "Lincoln Did It;" "Shall Lincoln's Ideals Triumph?;" "Following the Spirit of Lincoln;" "What Would Lincoln Do?;" "Advice from the Past;" "His Heart Beats On;" "If We are Steadfast in Abraham Lincoln's Ideals;" "We Should Know Lincoln Better;" "A Spirit, not Formulas from Lincoln;" "Marx and Lincoln;" "The Emancipator and the Slaves;" "The Strength of Lincoln;" "Looking Back to Lincoln."

LINCOLN STILL LIVES by Jameson G. Campaigne

The paintings of some men are timeless. The music of others reveals its beauty to each generation as though it were new. Great poetry, great sculpture or great oratory is great in any age and at any time. And so it is with the speeches of Abraham Lincoln, who was born poor on a farm in Kentucky just 139 years ago today.

Lincoln's speeches contain the distilled political wisdom of free men everywhere and at every time. His understanding of people—how they feel and think and aspire—is still unsurpassed. Not only did he clearly see the meaning of liberty and of democracy, and he was able to express it to the rest of us, so that we too could understand and glory in its bright hope.

"As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master," he said. "This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference is no democracy." Could any man make the meaning of democracy clearer?

When Americans come upon troubled times as we have been enduring and are still worrying through, we instinctively say to ourselves, "If only we had another Lincoln to lead us." We seek a great leader to relieve us of our own burdens. But while leadership in our republic is necessary to the success of self-government, what is far, far more important is the acceptance of the people themselves of the responsibility for governing themselves.

In other words, Americans do not need another Lincoln today. We simply need to rededicate ourselves to the democratic principles Lincoln so clearly saw and so simply expressed.

It would be a great and wonderful thing if Lincoln could sit again in the White House this year. But he himself would agree that it would be even greater and more wonderful if the American people should eagerly accept their responsibilities as citizens and participate with intelligence and vigor in their own self-government. For, as Lincoln knew, if Americans should take their duties as citizens as seriously as they take their rights, it makes little difference who lives in the White House that belongs to them.

In his few short years as a lawyer and public official Abraham Lincoln gave us a heritage of political wisdom that will serve as inspiration for every succeeding generation of free Americans. "Neither let us be slandered from our duty by false accusations against us, nor frightened from it by menaces of destruction to the government, nor of dungeons to ourselves. Let us have faith that right makes might, and in that faith let us to the end dare to do our duty as we understand it." If we do, Lincoln's deep faith in us will have again been justified.