

# LINCOLN LORE

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## TWO GROUPS DESPISED BY LINCOLN

Current events have contributed largely towards the choice of subjects discussed in Lincoln Lore. The United Press has just announced its selection of "the ten biggest news stories of 1951," three of which have to do with group moral delinquency. "Amateur Sport Scandals" is one of these three spotlight news features and the sensational basketball disclosures trace the origin of the athletes' demoralization to professional gamblers. At no time have the American people been so aroused against the gambling element as at present. Always a sport loving nation seeking her recreation in stadium or amphitheatre, citizens have greatly resented the fixing of athletic contests for personal gain. Abraham Lincoln might be called, as far as athletic ability is concerned, our "all-American" President and his keen interest and participation in sports would make any comment of his with reference to similar underground groups which operated in his day especially timely just now.

It is doubtful if the nation has ever produced an executive so free from any form of enmity or ill will towards his fellow men as Abraham Lincoln. During a civil war in which he was the commander-in-chief of the northern armies he is not known to have at any time spoken words of hatred or bitterness against his enemies. "With malice towards none; with charity for all" was not a phrase especially chosen to embellish a state paper but it was a characteristic state of mind with Lincoln.

There were two groups of people, and but two, as far as we can discover, that Abraham Lincoln loathed. One was the slave dealer. In a speech at Peoria, Ill. in 1854, directing his remarks to the people of the south he said, "You have among you a sneaking individual of the class of native tyrants known as the 'slave dealer.' He watches your necessities, and crawls up to buy your slaves at a speculating price. If you cannot help it you sell to him; but if you can help it you drive him from your door. You despise him utterly. You do not recognize him as an honest man." To his very closest friend, Joshua Speed of Louisville, Kentucky, Lincoln wrote: "Slave traders are a small odious and detested class among you."

Hon. John B. Alley of Massachusetts presented a petition to President Lincoln seeking the pardon of a person convicted for being engaged in the slave trade. Upon reading the letter of petition which was full of pathetic appeals on behalf of the prisoner, Mr. Lincoln is said to have made this statement, "My friend, that is a very touching appeal to our feelings. You know my weakness is to be, if possible, too easily moved by appeals for mercy, and if this man were guilty of the foulest murder that the arm of man could perpetrate I might forgive him on such an appeal; but the man who could go to Africa, and rob her of her children, and sell them into interminable bondage, with no other motive than that which is furnished by dollars and cents, is so much worse than the most depraved murderer, that he can never receive pardon at my hands. No! he may rot in jail before he shall have liberty by any act of mine."

The one other class of people for whom Abraham Lincoln had no sympathy and whose general behavior prompted one of the very few vindictive statements he

ever made against men as a group were professional gamblers, now so widely publicized in current events. It must be admitted that they have greatly increased in numbers and have done some climbing on the social ladder since Lincoln's day. In the year 1838 some notorious gamblers were hung by a mob at Vicksburg, Mississippi, but now over a century later in the neighboring state of Louisiana an indictment has been brought against four newspaper men for defaming three gamblers and criticizing public officials for their failure to enforce laws respecting gambling. It appears in this day and time as if a certain constituency would like to hang the critiques instead of the gamblers.

Lincoln gave a speech in Springfield, Illinois in 1838 on the subject "The Perpetuation of our Political Institutions." After dwelling upon our security as far as attacks from without were concerned he continued, "At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reaches us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad."

To illustrate this point he took the incident, already mentioned, of mob rule at Vicksburg and said, "In the Mississippi case they first commenced by hanging the regular gamblers; a set of men, certainly not following for a livelihood, a very useful, or very honest occupation, but one which, so far from being forbidden by the laws, was actually licensed by an act of the Legislature passed but a single year before."

Then, apparently fearing that his hearers might infer he was taking the part of and expressing some sympathy for the gamblers he continued: "Abstractly considered, the hanging of the gamblers at Vicksburg was but of little consequence. They constitute a portion of our population, that is worse than useless in any community; and their death, if no pernicious example is set by it, is never a matter of reasonable regret with anyone. If they were annually swept, from the stage of existence, by the plague of smallpox, honest men would, perhaps, be much profited by the operation."

This was harsh language for the tolerant Lincoln and possibly if he were here today and observed the advanced stage of respectability which the professional gambler has apparently achieved in the eyes of the people he would temper the words spoken in his idealistic youth. However, were he to observe the serious threat of the professional gambler to dominate American sports and debauch American youth he might allow his early opinion to stand.

The Federal gambler stamps which have been featured so much in the news of late have identified by name and set apart as a recognized group of American citizens an exceedingly large number of persons to be known as professional gamblers. It appears also that the gamblers who were hung by a mob at Vicksburg over a century ago were actually licensed by the legislature. Whether the purchasers of the modern Federal gambler stamp will receive the stamp of approval or disapproval of public sentiment depends much upon their attitude towards athletics and American youth.