

LINCOLN LORE

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AXIOMS CREDITED TO LINCOLN, UNAUTHENTIC

During the past year or more there has been used in several trade journals a series of sayings arranged in antithesis which have been credited erroneously to Abraham Lincoln. On February 2, 1949 they appeared in The Congressional Record and later on they were separately printed. A full page display in Look magazine for January 17, 1950, featured the somewhat revised Congressional version which promises a much wider distribution and therefore should be given some notice in Lincoln Lore.

The ten axioms were first released in 1942 by The Committee for Constitutional Government at New York. The secretary of the committee writes that the sayings were worked up by the committee "out of material and suggestions that came to it from its own advisers and from the outside." He further continues, "We do not attribute them to Lincoln." The axioms were first printed in a leaflet containing some authentic words of Lincoln on one side and on the other side the ten axioms under the caption: "The Ten Points—They Cost So Little." An editor copying the data for his magazine inadvertently inserted a credit line to Abraham Lincoln—a case of mistaken authorship.

About the only instance where one of the "cannot" axioms approaches a similar wording to one of Lincoln's actual sayings is found in point ten. On July 1, 1854, Lincoln wrote, "In all that the people can individually do for themselves, government ought not to interfere."

In order that this bulletin may do something more than call attention to the error in authorship made inadvertently, we are submitting in bold type, under each of the axioms prepared by the Committee for Constitutional Government, genuine statements of Abraham Lincoln properly authenticated which do at least carry the sentiments expressed by the widely circulated axioms.

1. You cannot bring prosperity by discouraging thrift.

"Property is the fruit of labor; property is desirable; it is a positive good in the world. That some should be rich shows that others may become rich, and hence is just encouragement to industry and enterprise."

Washington, March 21, 1864

2. You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong.

"We proposed to give all a chance, and we expected the weak to grow stronger, the ignorant wiser, and all better and happier together."

Springfield, Fragment, July 1, 1854.

"Capital has its rights, which are as worthy as any other rights."

Washington, Message to Congress, Dec. 3, 1861

3. You cannot help small men by tearing down big men.

"Let not him who is houseless pull down the house of another, but let him work diligently and build one for himself, thus by example assuring that his own shall be safe from violence when built."

Washington, March 21, 1864.

"There is no permanent class of hired laborers amongst us. . . . The hired laborer of yesterday labors on his own account today and will hire others to labor for him tomorrow."

Springfield, Fragment, July 1, 1854.

4. You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich.

"It is best for all to leave each man free to acquire property as fast as he can. Some will get wealthy. I don't believe in a law to prevent a man from getting rich, it would do more harm than good. So while we do not propose any war on capital, we do wish to allow

the humblest man an equal chance to get rich with everybody else."

New Haven, Conn., March 6, 1860.

"Men who are industrious and sober and honest in the pursuit of their own interests should after a while accumulate capital and after that should be allowed to enjoy it in peace."

Cincinnati, Sept. 7, 1859.

5. You cannot lift the wage-earner by pulling down the wage-payer.

"If they (industrious, sober and honest men) should choose, when they have accumulated it, (capital) to use it to save themselves from actual labor, and hire other people to labor for them, is right."

Cincinnati, Sept. 17, 1859.

"The results of a year or two's labor is a surplus of capital . . . in course of time he has enough capital to hire some new beginner."

Cincinnati, Sept. 17, 1859.

6. You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than your income.

"No country can sustain in idleness more than a small percentage of its members."

Milwaukee, Sept. 30, 1859.

"Universal idleness would speedily result in universal ruin."

Springfield, Dec. 1, 1846.

"You do not work much merely because it does not seem to you that you could get much for it. This habit of uselessly wasting time is the whole difficulty."

Letter to John J. Johnston, Jan. 2, 1851.

7. You cannot further the brotherhood of man by inciting class hatred.

"Let us discard all this quibbling about this man and the other man, this race and that race and the other race being in favor . . . and unite as one people throughout the land."

Chicago, July 10, 1858.

"We feel that all legal distinction between individuals of the same community founded on any such circumstance as color, origin, and the like are hostile to the genius of our institutions and incompatible with the true history of American liberty."

Cincinnati, May 31, 1841.

8. You cannot establish sound security on borrowed money.

"An individual who undertakes to live by borrowing soon finds his original means devoured by interest and next, no one left to borrow from, so it must be with a government."

Whig Circular, March 4, 1843.

9. You cannot build character and courage by taking away man's initiative and independence.

"That each one of you through this free government which we enjoyed have an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise and intelligence."

Washington, Aug. 22, 1864.

"We must inquire what it is that has given us so much prosperity . . . This cause is, that every man can make himself."

Kalamazoo, Mich., Aug. 27, 1856.

10. You cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they could and should do for themselves.

"The legitimate object of government is to do for the people what needs to be done but which they cannot, by individual effort, do at all, or do so well, for themselves."

Springfield, Fragment, July 1, 1854.