

LINCOLN LORE

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MOST TIMELY EDITORIAL—FEBRUARY 12, 1950

During the nine years that the Lincoln Foundation Advisory Group has been selecting annually the most timely Lincoln editorial for Feb. 12, there has not been a larger number of discussions available for consideration than were received this year. The contest for the best editorial was especially keen with a contribution entitled "A Chance For Every Man" appearing in the *Indianapolis Star*, receiving the highest number of points by the system used in compiling the ballots.

Inasmuch as this is the second time that the author of the editorial, James G. Campaigne, has received recognition by the advisory group it seems appropriate to present a brief biographical sketch of him. He was born at Brooklyn, New York, January 16, 1914. His elementary education was consummated at Monclair Academy and he received his A. B. at Williams with the class of 1936. He was first employed by Yardley & Co. and later as advertising copywriter for Compton Advertising Co. For three years he was with the Marines. He went to the *Indianapolis Star* as editorial writer in 1946. He is married and has four children.

Through the courtesy of the *Star* we are permitted to print his outstanding Lincoln editorial in full:

A CHANCE FOR EVERY MAN

Few men have had better cause to be thankful that he lived in a free society than Abraham Lincoln, whose birthday anniversary we celebrate today. Lincoln started life at the bottom of the ladder, in poverty, with little schooling, with few comforts. He understood what it was to be poor, and that is why he understood the problems of the poor. He understood what it was to do back-breaking labor for somebody else and that is why he understood the problems of the laboring man. He understood the position of the Negro slave, because he had to work like a slave in his early days, but because he was white he was able to rise above his condition of life. Because they were black they could not.

Some of Lincoln's greatest speeches concerning slavery were also those in which he dwelt on the difference between a society of free opportunity and a stratified and regimented one. In 1860 he said "I want every man to have a chance and I believe the black man is entitled to it—in which to better his condition; when he may look forward and hope to be a hired laborer this year and the next, work for himself afterwards, and finally hire men to work for him. This is the true system." This is the American system.

Ours is a system in which every man is supposed to have an equal chance in the race of life—a chance to go as far as his ability, his perseverance and his character will take him. That is the whole purpose of our governmental system—to give everybody a chance to do with their lives what they will.

It is true that not everybody in America has equal chances, has equal educational opportunities, has equal employment opportunities. We doubt that every person in any country will ever have exactly the same opportunities and exactly the same background. But America has progressed far beyond what it was in Lincoln's day, and will progress further in the years to come in granting opportunities to all. Our people and our governments still have the obligation and the right to find ways to eliminate inequalities that still exist in the states and to fulfill that central hope of Lincoln's "that every man have a chance."

But government owes nothing to the people except that "chance." No people who believe in freedom and who wish to live in liberty want any more from their government than that. For once government provides food and shelter and employment and security to men, it becomes their master. It has the power to direct them

and to keep them in their places. Those who seek government protection and government aid in such things are seeking to give up their liberties and at the same time their opportunities to rise, higher by their own efforts.

"If any continue through life in the condition of the hired laborer," said Lincoln, "it is not the fault of the system, but because of either a dependent nature, or improvidence, or a singular misfortune." Lincoln believed that most men could and should provide for themselves. He believed that any man with the ability and willingness to work should be able to rise above his fellows and attain the position in life he sought regardless of his birth.

That is the ideal of the American system. It is the ideal which we have not yet fully attained for all of our people, but one which we should defend and protect and expand with all our vigor for all our lives.

TIMELY SAYINGS

Some timely sayings culled from a few of the leading editorials are submitted with the title of the paper in which they appeared.

A wise Lincoln let humanity work through him. *New York Herald Tribune*.

Here is a man (Lincoln) who stood for what America means. *Grand Rapids Herald*.

It is not enough to praise Lincoln. He deserves to be emulated. *Fort Wayne Journal-Gazette*.

He (Lincoln) was constantly seeking higher guidance for his thoughts and actions. *Sioux Falls Argus-Leader*.

February 12 could well be a red letter day on the world's calendars. *Lincoln (Neb.) Journal and Star*.

He had that rare quality of statesmanship which enabled him to subordinate his own feelings to the general good. *Washington Post*.

The nation is fortunate that it has in its history such a man to serve as an undying symbol of our national spirit. *Miami News*.

The key to Lincoln is in his greatest utterance, "with malice toward none, with charity toward all." He lived that all his life. It made him more than liked. *Boston Post*.

Lincoln still is magnetic, still dynamic. He is one of the half dozen great world figures of the nineteenth century who continue to possess power to stir men's thoughts, to influence their actions. *Washington Star*.

In Lincoln's philosophy there was no place for a politico-social system that encourages people to believe their Government should supply their needs and gratify their desires. *New Bedford (Mass.) Standard-Times*.

His high-minded idealism blended with hard-headed political realism in remarkable combination. The mixture cast him in the mold of a great leader when the nation desperately needed that greatness. *Wheeling News-Register*.

In the maneuvers and shifting of political parties—both of them—there has been nothing of the honesty, the humanity and statesmanship of Abraham Lincoln. *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Mr. Lincoln had the richest of all instincts, which is rare in even the greatest of men, that of making words expressive of the spiritual heights toward which his mind and his soul were always reaching. *New York Journal American*.

Yes, Lincoln was rugged of feature, ungainly of form, and in some ways uncouth. But the same can be said of mountains and ravines, of stars and seas, and of all elemental things in which man finds grandeur and sublimity. These latter we find in Lincoln. *Evansville (Ind.) Courier and Press*.