

REMARKS, GOVERNOR VIC ATIYEH
REPUBLICAN CENTRAL COMMITTEE ANNUAL LINCOLN DAY DINNER
COLUMBIA GORGE HOTEL, HOOD RIVER
FEBRUARY 12, 1983

PREPARED TEXT

SADLY, MANY OF US TODAY THINK OF LINCOLN AS LITTLE MORE THAN A FACE ON THE FIVE DOLLAR BILL. YET LINCOLN'S LIFE AND HISTORY HAVE MUCH TO SAY TO EACH OF US. I AM HAPPY TO BE ABLE TO SAY A FEW WORDS ABOUT HIM TODAY ON THE 174TH ANNIVERSARY OF HIS BIRTH.

WHEN WE LOOK BACK ON GREAT FIGURES IN OUR HISTORY, IT IS EASY TO REMEMBER THE LEGEND, BUT MORE DIFFICULT TO REMEMBER THE HUMAN ASPECT AS WELL. LINCOLN IS NO EXCEPTION.

I THINK THAT LINCOLN HIMSELF WOULD FIND THE EXTENT OF HIS REPUTATION TODAY BOTH AMUSING AND EMBARRASSING. WE HAVE MADE HIM A MAN OF THE AGES, YET HE NEVER PRETENDED TO BE ANYTHING MORE THAN A MAN OF HIS TIMES.

SOME OF THE TROUBLE STEMS FROM OUR PROBLEM OF THINKING OF LINCOLN AS A LEGEND INSTEAD OF A HUMAN BEING. TODAY, IN HONOR OF HIS BIRTHDAY, I HOPE YOU WILL ENJOY EXPLORING WITH ME SOME OF LINCOLN'S HUMAN DIMENSION, AND LOOKING AT A FEW LITTLE-KNOWN FACTS OF INTEREST TO US TODAY.

DID YOU KNOW, FOR EXAMPLE, THAT LINCOLN WAS ALMOST AN OREGONIAN? HE WAS OFFERED THE GOVERNORSHIP OF OREGON TERRITORY IN 1848 WHEN HE HAD NO CHANCE FOR REELECTION AFTER A SINGLE TERM IN CONGRESS. HE WAS A LITTLE UPSET WITH THE UPS AND DOWNS OF PUBLIC LIFE AT THE TIME -- AND SO REFUSED THE OFFER AND RETURNED TO PRIVATE LIFE.

THERE IS THE LOG CABIN TOO, OF COURSE. HE WAS BORN IN THE KENTUCKY WILDERNESS OF DANIEL BOONE IN A ONE-ROOM DIRT-FLOOR CABIN PUT UP BY HIS FATHER THAT SAME WINTER. LINCOLN AND HIS FATHER NEVER GOT ALONG VERY WELL, AND IT TOOK HIS STEPMOTHER'S INTERVENTION TO GET HIM HIS FORMAL SCHOOLING.

IT MIGHT INTEREST YOU TO KNOW THAT SCHOOLS IN THOSE DAYS WERE CALLED "BLAB" SCHOOLS. PUPILS STUDIED ALOUD AT THEIR DESKS, AND THE SCHOOLMASTER JUDGED THE AMOUNT OF THEIR CONCENTRATION BY THE VOLUME OF THE NOISE.

HE DEVELOPED MANY QUALITIES FROM THIS PIONEER BACKGROUND THAT STOOD HIM IN GOOD STEAD FOR THE REST OF HIS LIFE; AMONG THEM, PRACTICALITY, PATIENCE, HUMOR, AND A RARE GIFT FOR SELF-EXPRESSION. I WILL TRY TO ILLUSTRATE FOR YOU A FEW OF THESE QUALITIES.

PRACTICALITY, FOR EXAMPLE. HE WAS CHALLENGED TO A DUEL IN 1842 BY AN ANGRY POLITICAL OPPONENT, AND HE GOOD-NATUREDLY ACCEPTED -- PROVIDED HE COULD CHOOSE THE WEAPONS. NOW, YOU SHOULD REMEMBER THAT THE AVERAGE MAN OF LINCOLN'S DAY STOOD WELL UNDER 6 FEET IN HEIGHT, BUT LINCOLN HIMSELF STOOD 6 FEET 4 INCHES, AND HAD ENORMOUSLY LONG ARMS WHICH HUNG OUT OF HIS WRINKLED BLACK SUITS. SO WHEN HIS OPPONENT WAS INFORMED THAT LINCOLN HAD -- INSTEAD OF PISTOLS -- CHOSEN BROADSWORDS FOR THE DUEL, HE WISELY DECIDED TO CALL IT OFF AND MAKE IT UP.

LINCOLN ALSO HAD A GOOD SENSE OF HUMOR ABOUT HIS OWN FAILINGS. THE CLUTTER IN HIS LAW OFFICE WAS NOTORIOUS, AND WAS A CONTINUAL SOURCE OF IRRITATION TO HIS PARTNER, WILLIAM HERNDON. ON HIS DESK, LINCOLN KEPT PERMANENTLY ONE ENVELOPE MARKED "WHEN YOU CAN'T FIND IT ANYWHERE ELSE, LOOK INTO THIS." HISTORY DOESN'T TELL US WHAT ON EARTH HE KEPT IN IT.

FINALLY, LINCOLN WAS A GREAT TELLER OF STORIES. REPORTERS AND AIDES OFTEN HAD GREAT DIFFICULTY GETTING A RAPID ANSWER FROM HIM BECAUSE OF THIS HABIT. WHEN ASKED A DIRECT QUESTION HE WOULD OFTEN, LIKE AESOP, TELL A STORY TO INDICATE HIS ANSWER.

MY LAST ANECDOTE ILLUSTRATES THIS HABIT FOR YOU, AND PERHAPS HAS SOMETHING TO TELL US ALL ABOUT THE LIMITS OF PROBLEM-SOLVING.

IN THE DARKEST DAYS OF THE CIVIL WAR, AS THE SOUTHERN ARMY THREATENED WASHINGTON D.C. ITSELF, LINCOLN WAS ANGRILY ASKED BY A WASHINGTON REPORTER TO EXPLAIN HIS DECLARATION OF MARTIAL LAW AND CURTAILMENT OF CIVIL LIBERTIES. INSTEAD OF RESPONDING DIRECTLY, LINCOLN TOLD THE FOLLOWING STORY.

"WELL, YOU KNOW, THAT REMINDS ME OF THE OLD FIELD HAND WITH THE LONG RAKE, WHO WAS WALKING ALONE ONE NIGHT ALONG A COUNTRY ROAD. WHEN HE DREW NEAR A FARM, WHAT SEEMED TO BE A MAD DOG RAN OUT. THE DOG JUMPED STRAIGHT AT HIM, SO THE OLD MAN AND HIS RAKE MADE SHORT WORK OF PUTTING THE DOG OUT OF HIS MISERY.

"WELL, THE FARMER CAME OUT AND WAS FURIOUS, AS THE OLD MAN HAD KILLED HIS FAVORITE DOG. THE FARMER SAID, 'WHY DIDN'T YOU JUST USE THE BLUNT END OF YOUR RAKE, AND DRIVE HIM AWAY?'

"THE OLD MAN THOUGHT A MINUTE AND REPLIED, 'WELL, SIR, THAT DOG JUST DIDN'T COME AFTER ME WITH HIS BLUNT END . . .'"

LINCOLN DIDN'T ADD A MORAL, BUT I GUESS I CAN SAY THAT WE ALL HAVE TO DO THE VERY BEST WE CAN UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES WE FIND.

THANK YOU ALL VERY MUCH, AND HAVE A HAPPY LINCOLN'S BIRTHDAY.

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