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LINCOLN DAY ADDRESS

by

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Before I thought about what I was going to say today--the day we celebrate the birth of Abraham Lincoln--I took a look at Sanburg's early life, "The Prairie Years", to recall what that first birthday was like. Tom and Nancy Hanks Lincoln, Abe's parents, lived on a little farm on the Big South Fork of Nolin's Creek, about two and a half miles from Hodgenville, Kentucky. The house was a cabin of logs, the floor packed-down dirt, one door and one small window. Dennis Hanks, the nine year old adopted boy of their neighbors, the Sparrows, ran over when he heard the news. He asked to hold the baby.

"Be keerful, Dennis," Nancy said, "for you air the fust boy he's ever seen!" But Dennis handed the baby to Betsy Sparrow and said to her: "Aunt, take him! He'll never come to much."

Dennis didn't think much of the baby's looks either--"Its skin look just like red cherry pulp squeezed dry," he remarked, "in wrinkles".

The child grew to a gawky youth, but strong; to manhood, awkward but with rangy power in his long body. The wrinkles had gone, and in their place came deeply-marked lines.

The Douglas debates came, and the politicians following Douglas thought he would be President. Lincoln said they saw in Douglas's "round, jolly, fruitful face, post offices, law offices, marshalships..." And then he added: "Nobody has ever expected me to be President. In my poor lean, lank face nobody has ever seen that any cabbages were sprouting out."

Lincoln became President, and almost immediately the war between the States broke out. He had sworn to preserve, to protect, to defend the government; and this he did through the next four years of the agony of war.

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Today when we celebrate his memory in the midst of another war, we think of the qualities that made him great and that made him loved by his fellow Americans: his kindliness, his patience, his humor, and his strength. Do you remember he once said that God must have loved plain people because He made so many of them? And in that humility which made them know that he was always one of them, that he was the President of all the people because he was no different from them, he never lost the common touch. That he was so sensitive to their suffering, to the terrible, increased suffering to everyday Americans that the war had brought, added to the weight of his sadness. This pressure of sadness and the other pressures--the disloyalties, the graft and waste that went along with the war, the long series of military defeats--these bent his shoulders and deepened the lines of his face. But they could not break the steady firmness of his will, his slow but unshakable strength, nor ever destroy the tolerant sense of humor that played like a friendly light about his [redacted].

He liked to laugh at himself as much or more than anyone else. The humor was not sharp, never bitter. But it searched deep. When someone asked him how it felt to be President, he answered by telling a story about a man who had been tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail. When asked how it felt the man answered: "Well, except for the honor, I'd just have leave of walked..."

If his quiet ghost were with us here today, I think he would be very proud of his country. I don't mean only of the magnificence of the achievements in the physical world--the riches, the comfort, the living standards of men and women who work, the vast production; he would be even

prouder of the spiritual values that he sees--yes, even in the midst of this new war. He would see the unity of all of the nation, turning his mind back eighty years ago when the country was torn and divided, and at times it seemed as if union could not continue.

I suppose he would listen, but not too long, to the murmurs of discontent against the controls and inconveniences that come with war. He would not be surprised that so rich and happy and strong a people should grumble because for a while they have to suffer a reduction in their standard of living--not a very heavy reduction, at that--so that they might preserve through battle those riches and that happiness. For he had heard, in another war, the same complainings, and the same continual criticism of what the government was doing, what labor was doing, what Congress was doing. And he would not be discouraged, as he views the picture as a whole, and sees it steadily. For against these not unnatural surface irritations he would see the magnificent army, built in two years out of a shell; the expanded Navy, sweeping two seas; the magical production of arms, doubling, quadrupling, so that it must mean the closest union of management and of labor, the common invincible will to win.

Lincoln was a practical man. He knew that the slaves could not be emancipated at once, there was not enough unity of opinion, of popular approval, in 1861. He must bide his time. First he must hold the country together, lest the secessionists break away from the Union. He could be patient, but he knew freedom would come. And when the time came, and he knew the time was ripe, he issued the famous Emancipation Proclamation. The country could no longer continue half slave and half free.

And so today he would be hurt to see the gross injustices which Negroes are still suffering. In some places the old prejudices, bred in

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years of slavery, have disappeared, but by no means everywhere; and you cannot argue away with words so deep, if blind, an emotion, even if right is on your side.

Looking back to his own time, he would note a gradual improvement through those years, though he would find that we still have a long way to go. In the professions this has been striking. In 1890, according to figures used by Chandler Owen, the well-known Negro publicist, there were 12,159 Negro clergymen in the United States; in 1930 there were 25,034. In 1890 there were 15,008 Negro teachers; in 1930 there were 54,439. In 1890 there were 208 Negro physicians and surgeons; in 1930 there were 3,805. In 1890 there were 120 Negro dentists; in 1930 there were 1,773. In 1890 there were 431 Negro lawyers, justices and judges; in 1930 there were 1,247.

Today nearly 100 universities and colleges are devoted exclusively to Negro education. Between 1916 and 1941 the number of students had grown from 1,643 to 40,000. There are now more than 200 Negro newspapers in our country.

In more recent years the Government has begun to help the Negroes with farm loans, housing, and in other ways. The Farm Security Administration, for example, has made 60,440 loans to Negro farmers, totalling some $50,000,000.

The steamship BOOKER T. WASHINGTON is a Liberty Ship under the command of Captain Hugh Mulzac, a Negro. The second and third officers and the chief engineer of the ship are also Negroes. Other officers are white, and the crew is made up of Negroes and men of other races, white included. Recently the Booker T. Washington made her maiden voyage, and

she has returned to her home port. The morale of the men was found to be first rate. They were eager to ship again immediately. While ashore, they invested a large part of their pay in war bonds. Each man gave a pint of blood to the Red Cross. And to give further vent to their feelings they all chipped in and bought the skipper a gold watch.

There will be more ships like the Booker T. Washington. There will be more skippers like Captain Hugh Mulzac. Men are training for it now. And I am informed by the Maritime Commission that one of the names already selected for a future Liberty ship is the George Washington Carver.

Yet eighty years ago, within the memory of men who are alive today, there was in our country the conception of a master race and a slave race. How far away that world of master and of slave seemed until recently! But now the Nazis and the Japanese War Lords have taught us that that world is not far away. In these past years we have seen slavery once more rise up to engulf whole peoples of the civilized world - in France, in Norway, in Poland, in parts of China, and the East Indies, in every country where these modern barbarians have conquered.

Early this month a small item appeared in the press, obscured in the heavy run of military and political news. Heinrich Himmler, the news reported, head of the German Gestapo - the dreaded German secret police which knows no law and is above all courts - the Gestapo had issued an order for the special registration with the Office of the Chief of Reich Security of all Negroes or persons with Negro blood in German territory. That office is the same that handles Jewish deportation and confiscation of property owned by Jews. The reporter added (I quote): "There

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can be no doubt what will happen after their registration, as Negroes are treated as all (so-called) 'inferior races.'" He went on to say that apparently there were no longer many Jews left in Germany, and the Germans were forced to find new objects of their racial policy. To perpetuate the myth of a superior race, you must also invent the myth of a race that is inferior. We know what has happened to the Jews under the new order.

One of the forms that Nazi and Fascist propaganda has taken in this country is to exploit the race prejudices that still exist among us. It would be lacking in sincerity to deny that they do exist. They do, and in certain areas with strong roots and easily renewed bitterness. In peace time they are serious evils; in a war their exploitation may become dangerous to the unity of the State. The existence of war must not be used to oppress minorities; nor should it be used by any group to inflame men's minds against old evils that cannot be swept away over night.

But our enemies will take every advantage to turn these differences, these ancient feelings and prejudices, into a resistance to the war effort. Only last month, as many of you know, a part of the Japanese effort to attack the loyalty of the Negro people of this country was brought to light in the indictment of an organization known as the Pacific Movement of the Eastern World, and three of its agents. Working in the Negro communities of St. Louis, these men are charged with attempting to convince their listeners that - and here I quote directly from the indictment: "The Japanese are brothers of the Negroes, and the Negro race will be better off under Japanese rule than white rule . . . This is a white man's war, and Negroes should not participate in it." Well, you know, or if not I think you can guess, how little success they had.

As a matter of fact, nobody has been more insistent on the apprehension and punishment of such traitors than the Negro people themselves. The Negro newspapers and magazines throughout the country, although they very properly protest, and passionately, against the wrongs done to members of their race, are loyal to their government and are all out for the war.

And today, if at times we may feel that in the stress of war the forces of ignorance and reaction are more vocative, yet we must remember that there is increasing tolerance and understanding; that improvement may be slow, but is steady; that intelligent and liberal leadership is increasing everywhere, in every state; and that above all, as Lincoln would have said, we must be patient and build into the future world.

He said that in the last year of the Civil War, in his second inaugural address, not many weeks before he was assassinated. His words now should be spoken again, because they touch these times that are so deeply stirring men's souls, and almost might be directed to the other peace that will follow this other war.

"With malice towards none, with charity for all, with firmness in the right, as God gives us to see the right, let us strive on to finish the work we are in, to bind up the nation's wounds, to care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow and orphans; to do all which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."

And now as we open this Club for the United Services—for all members of those services—here in Philadelphia, the name of a city that means the love of brother for brother, let us be proud that America is strong, not in spite of, but because of, the fact that many races have

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been forged into her democracy, many religions; people with different voices, and looks, and different ways of taking their pleasures and accepting sorrows. Yet we are one great American nation, banded close together to fight for the survival of our democratic ideal. The ideal has worked and will live because it is grounded in human tolerance, and friendliness, and faith.