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The Claremont Institute--PRECEPTS | February
1, 2000 | No
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. 213

On February 10th, in Washington, D.C., we will be celebrating our Fourth Annual Lincoln Day Colloquium and Dinner. Former Reagan speechwriter Peggy Noonan, and Mark Helprin--novelist, Wall Street Journal contributor and Claremont Institute Senior Fellow--will be among the speakers.

There are a number of reasons why it is right to celebrate and remember Lincoln. Among them, consider what is called his Lyceum Address. Unlike the great House Divided speech or his poetic Second Inaugural, it is not well-known. But the speech has meaning for us today, because it contains a statement such as only Lincoln could make of the problem of preserving free government, and because it contains a tragic prophecy that came true in Lincoln's time, and that could come true again in our own. Speaking in 1838 as a young man of 29, Lincoln describes a world rather like our own:

"In the great journal of things happening under the sun, we, the American People, find...ourselves in the peaceful possession, of the fairest portion of the earth, as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil, and salubrity of climate. We find ourselves under the government of a system of political institutions, conducing more essentially to the ends of civil and religious liberty, than any of which the history of former times tells us."

But Lincoln goes on to say that the greatest challenge America will face in the future will come not from across the ocean, but from internal dissension. During the Revolution--when Americans were united in their effort to throw off the chains of foreign domination--the passion for victory in war suppressed any political differences that might otherwise divide them. But once free government was established, the passions of the people would become the greatest difficulty for the maintenance of that government.

Today we face that problem again. Our politics are guided more by feelings than by reason, as much by partiality as by Justice. The academic world has taught us that reason can reach no conclusions beyond the subjective, and thereby they encourage us to follow our own preferences, which are in turn reduced to the status of whims or mere "values."

In Lincoln reason--"cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason"--can furnish the materials for the support of free government. Reason is the ground of "sound morality," which is expressed in politics as "a reverence for the Constitution and laws." He meant the Constitution that is written down, no one having the power to alter it except by the processes it makes plain. He meant the Constitution that does not change with the changing of fashion.

We should remember this speech today. More than that, we should study it. You can read the entire speech at <http://www.founding.com>. And if you will be in Washington, D.C. next Thursday, I invite you to join us at the Mayflower Hotel to celebrate Lincoln's birthday. For more information, visit <http://www.claremont.org/Events/lincolnday2000.cfm>, or go to our home page at <http://www.claremont.org>. To register please send an e-mail to info@claremont.org, or call (909) 621-6825.

Sincerely,
Larry P. Arnn
President, The Claremont Institute

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