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What Abraham Lincoln would say to Adolf Hitler, 1934.

WRHS



WHAT ABRAHAM LINCOLN WOULD SAY TO ADOLPH HITLER
On the Occasion of the Anniversary of the Great Emancipator

By
Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, February 11, 1934.

It is now, my friends, 125 years since the birth of Abraham Lincoln, and almost 70 years since his death. That is a period long enough to extinguish the memory of any other mortal. But the memory of Abraham Lincoln becomes more luminous and glowing from year to year and its radiance increases with the passing of years. And after all, is not that the true test of personality and greatness. Does the alchemy of time corrode that personality and ultimately destroy, or does the alchemy of time increase its preciousness and its appeal from one cycle of time to another?

I suppose that an individual can, if he try hard enough, beguile his own age, suborn his own generation, make it yield him a measure of fame or popularity. Many people have done that. But you cannot beguile and suborn the generations unborn. The future generations pass a very cool and objective and relentless judgment upon individuals. There is no special pleading that the judgment seeks of history. If you have not any elements or qualities of greatness which go toward insuring for yourself immortality, history forthwith consigns you to oblivion and destroys you.

For Abraham Lincoln, the passing years have bestowed the gift of immortality. Men will not let him die. Men need him too much in their lives. Life is made sweeter and nobler whenever

whenever men think that a Lincoln lived among them once upon a time and shared their common clay. Men warm themselves at the fires of his spiritual hearth. They kindle their torches in all parts of the world by its fires. Youth is made stronger and age is made wiser whenever the testament of this man's life is re-read.

A great life, my friends, is significant not merely for its own age, but for all ages. There is so much of eternal truth in the work or words of a truly great personality to make that personality at home in almost every generation, in almost every civilization.

In one of his letters, Franklin K. Lane writes: "I have recently read all his speeches and papers, and the man is true from the first day to the last. The same philosophy and the same reasoning were good in 1861 as in 1841."

If one would re-read all of Abraham Lincoln's speeches and papers today, he would find that they are true in 1934 -- the same philosophies, the same reasoning as he used in 1861 and 1841. The set of circumstances which surrounded Lincoln's life, his philosophy and reasoning, the set of ideas and ideals which he brought to play on them, is the same that holds good today.

In fact, one can say that the set of circumstances which confronted Lincoln in 1861 is not really different than that which confronts his descendants in 1934. There is almost an exact

counter-part in the political and social conditions of his day and of our day. The struggle which rent the Union in twain and which sent brother against brother in a war in 1861 contain issues which again make their painful appearance in the modern world. The ideals which men defended then are again being threatened in our day and again need to be defended. Race obsessions and race persecutions are again rife in the world. Intolerant political parties like the "No Nothing Party" of Lincoln's day are everywhere springing up today preaching hatred, division and exclusion. False and vicious conceptions of Americanism are again being spread.

So that Lincoln's life, his teachings and ideals have a peculiar relevancy to the age in which we find ourselves. That madness which we find in the world today, which is devastating the life of European nations today may be summarized in one word -- Hitlerism. What are the chief characteristics of this movement? There are two. First, the suppression of democracy, the stamping out of liberty and freedom; and the other is racial intolerance, racial exploitation, racial persecution. But these two are exactly the same issues as in the days of Lincoln. At bottom the issues are one and the same. Abraham Lincoln wrestled desperately for many dark and tragic years and his life was ultimately sacrificed on the alter of democracy of his time.

Why was the Civil War fought? The Civil War was fought

directly to preserve the Union, indirectly to settle once and for all the question of whether a race of men could be permanently denied their franchise, permanently enslaved and exploited in a land which proclaimed at the very heart of its existence, the doctrine that all men are created free and equal.

Had the race question not embittered the North and South there would not have been any threat of secession. But the race question which involved a fundamental definition of democracy, and which the American people had for decades prior to the Civil War fought by procrastination and dodging of the issue was finally forced by an inescapable destiny to make a decision. Is the idea of freedom and democracy valid and is it to be universally valid? Can it be particularly restricted to one race? Are there inferior and superior races? Should the superior races be created masters? Should the inferior races be slaves? Should America commit itself definitely to the doctrine of the division of mankind? Are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness really the inalienable rights of man over which the State has no power of veto? Has the State the right to trespass on the rights of man, to restrict, confine and, if necessary, to abolish these rights which the Declaration of Independence regarded as inalienable and beyond the jurisdiction of the States?

These were the issues which troubled the minds of Lincoln's generation and which had to be fought on the battlefield and

these are the very issues which are again arising and troubling the minds of men in our generation and which, if they are not solved peacefully, will again have to be vindicated upon the bloody field of battle.

Let us see how Abraham Lincoln faced his issues. Lincoln's faith in democracy, in freedom, in the equality of all men never for a moment wavered through all those terrible years of strife. Next to Thomas Jefferson who framed the Declaration of Independence, Abraham Lincoln was its most devoted and most passionate and most uncompromising champion. Lincoln would regard a Fascist, if he lived today, with the same instinctive abhorrence as he regarded the slave-dealer of his day, for the Fascist threatens to trample under foot the same basic rights which were dear to the heart of Abraham Lincoln, the indispensable values of human life.

In 1859 he delivered an address on the principles of Thomas Jefferson. When you read it you feel that Lincoln almost prophetically and intuitively anticipated our day and our problems. He wrote:

"The principles of Jefferson are the definitions and axioms of free society. And yet they are denied and evaded, with no small show of success. One dashinglly calls them 'glittering generalities.' Another bluntly calls them 'self-evident lies.' And others insidiously argue that they apply to 'superior races.' These expressions, differing in form, are identical in object and effect -- the supplanting the principles of free government,

and restoring those of classification, caste, and legitimacy. They would delight a convocation of crowned heads plotting against the people. They are the vanguard, the miners and sappers of returning despotism. We must repulse them, or they will subjugate us. This is a world of compensation; and he who would be no slave must consent to have no slave. Those who deny freedom to others deserve it not for themselves, and under a just God, cannot long retain it. All honor to Jefferson -- to the man who, in the concrete pressure of a struggle for national independence by a single people, had the coolness, forecast, and capacity to introduce into a mere revolutionary document an abstract truth, applicable to all men and all times, and so to embalm it there that to-day and in all coming days it shall be a rebuke and a stumbling block to the very harbingers of reappearing tyranny and oppression."

Over and over again, through that age of confusion and clashing of opinion, Abraham Lincoln called his people to return to hold fast to the basic doctrines enunciated in the Declaration of Independence, to the eternal truth of that doctrine, because that truth consists of just two things: first, that governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Governments exist because people called them into existence and have rights only because people grant them its rights. Governments possess no rights other than those people,

citizens grant them. Governments have no divine rights any more than kings have divine rights to limit the rights of citizens, to say what man may or may not do. Governments exist for the sake of increasing the rights of the citizen. Hitler and Mussolini have a different conception. There the citizen is made the tool of the State. "There is no power beyond the State", said Mussolini. The citizen must submit to the authoritarian absolute and to the State.

What is the State? It is a nation in the hands of a few individuals or of one individual. That which the Declaration of Independence denounced 150 years ago is again being pledged and is again gaining popularity in our day. It has millions and millions of followers all over the world. Dictatorships have become very popular in the world today. This is the first essential doctrine of the Declaration of Independence.

The second is the equality and freedom of all men. As you enslave your neighbor, you enslave yourself. You cannot really be free when others are not. You cannot live in an airtight compartment completely free while all about you men are enslaved politically, economically and socially.

Abraham Lincoln, in 1858 wrote:

"These communities, by their representatives in old Independence Hall, said to the whole world of men: "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain

inalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." This was their majestic interpretation of the economy of the Universe. This was their lofty, and wise, and noble understanding of the justice of the Creator to his creatures. Yes, gentlemen, to all his creatures, to the whole great family of man. In their enlightened belief, nothing stamped with the Divine image and likeness was sent into the world to be trodden on and degraded and imbruted by its fellows. They grasped not only the whole race of man then living, but they reached forward and seized upon the farthest posterity. They erected a beacon to guide their children; and their children's children, and the countless myriads who should inhabit the earth in other ages. Wise statesmen as they were, they knew the tendency of prosperity to breed tyrants, and so they established these great self-evident truths, that when in the distant future some man, some faction, some interest, should set up the doctrine that none but rich men, or none but white men, or none but Anglo-Saxon white men, were entitled to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, their posterity might look up again to the Declaration of Independence and take courage to renew the battle which their fathers began, so that truth and justice and mercy and all the humane and Christian virtues might not be extinguished from the land so that no man would hereafter dare to limit and circumscribe the great principles on which the temple of liberty was being built.

"Think nothing of me -- take no thought for the political fate of any man whomsoever -- but come back to the truths that are in the Declaration of Independence. You may do anything with me you choose, if you will but heed these sacred principles. You may not only defeat me for the Senate, but you may take me and put me to death. While pretending no indifference to earthly honors, I do claim to be actuated in this contest by something higher than an anxiety for office. I charge you to drop every paltry and insignificant thought for any man's success. It is nothing; I am nothing; Judge Douglas is nothing. But do not destroy that immortal emblem of Humanity -- the Declaration of American Independence!" --a very prominent speaker, a man of great vision.

Abraham Lincoln rejected the doctrine of Superior and Inferior races. He knew that there were advanced races and backward races. He did not set up any fictitious idea of the absolute equality as far as attainment was concerned. What he believed was that given the same opportunities of growth and development, men will reach a fair equal average in civilization.

Alexander Stephens, who was vice-president of the Confederacy and one of the brilliant minds/of that day spoke of the new constitution which was adopted by the Confederacy - I again ask you to bear in mind the program of the Nazis:

"The new Constitution has put at rest for ever all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution, African slavery. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and

and present revolution. The prevailing ideas entertained by Jefferson and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the old Constitution were that the enslavement of the African was wrong in principle socially, morally, and politically. Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not the equal of the white man; that slavery -- subordination to the white man -- is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first in the history of the world based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth. The great objects of humanity are best attained when there is conformity to the Creator's laws and decrees."

Slavery was exalted into a principle morally sanctioned by the advocates of slavery, exactly as Hitler has exalted Aryanism into a moral principle. Abraham Lincoln in all his speeches and addresses attacked this doctrine with all the power at his command.

In his day you will recall there was a Silver Shirt Party, just as in our day. It was then called the American Party. It is strange how these reactionary groups always arrogate unto "Americanism" whatever is reactionary. In his day it was called the "Know Nothing Party." It was a combination of a fraternal order and a political party. It had lodges, secret rites, grips and passwords. It was secret organization. If anyone asked them anything, they answered,

"I know nothing." It was not a negligible party in his day. It was the Ku Klux Klan of those days. What did Abraham Lincoln have to say about it? He wrote:

"I am not a Know-nothing; that is certain. How could I be? How can any one who abhors the oppression of negroes be in favor of degrading classes of white people? Our progress in degeneracy appears to me to be pretty rapid. As a nation we began by declaring that "all men are created equal." We now practically read it "all men are created equal, except negroes." When the Know-nothings get control, it will read "all men are created equal, except negroes and foreigners and Catholics." When it comes to this, I shall prefer emigrating to some country where they make no pretense of loving liberty, -- to Russia, for instance where despotism can be taken pure, and without the base alloy of hypocrisy."

I wish to God we had a Lincoln today to speak with that fearlessness and broad humanity of his. America, Abraham Lincoln maintained, was built upon spirit and not upon blood. Hitler says that nationalism is a matter of blood. Only those who belong to the race ~~cult~~ of the Aryans should be allowed to be citizens. That is preposterous. This new idea of nationalism which has been set up in Germany has disfranchised hundreds of people. What did Abraham Lincoln think about nationalism based on a race cult or blood? He spoke of that too on the Fourth

of July in 1858 to a group of fellow citizens. With that I shall close.

"We hold this annual celebration to remind ourselves of all the good done in this process of time, of how it was done and who did it, and how we are historically connected with it. We have -- besides these, men descended by blood from our ancestors -- among us perhaps half our people who are not descendants at all of these men; they are men who have come from Europe, -- German, Irish, French, and Scandinavian, -- men that have come from Europe themselves, or whose ancestors have come hither and settled here, finding themselves our equals in all things. If they look back through this history to trace their connection with those days by blood, they find they have none, they cannot carry themselves back into that glorious epoch and make themselves feel that they are part of us; but when they look through that old Declaration of Independence, they find that those old men say that "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal"; and then they feel that that moral sentiment taught in that day, evidences their relation to those men, that it is the father of all moral principle in them, and that they have a right to claim it as though they were blood of the blood, and flesh of the flesh, of the men who wrote that Declaration; and so they are. That is the electric cord in that Declaration that links the hearts of patriotic and liberty-loving men together, that will link those patriotic hearts as long as the love of freedom exists in the minds of men throughout the world."

In other words it is an electric chord of ideals which links the citizens of this nation. It is your faithfulness to the basic American principles that makes you an American, not race, ancestry, blood. Loyalty to its ideals. That's what makes an American.

I have frequently been asked, will America go Fascist? Will America go Nazi? I can't say. No one can. Everything can happen in this world. But I will say this: that America will go Nazi or Fascist only if it will betray Abraham Lincoln and all that he stood for; if it betray Thomas Jefferson and all that he stood for; if it trample under foot the Declaration of Independence and all that it contained; if it betray George Washington and the spirit that was his; if it betray the 150 years of a tradition of popular government and the rights of men; when America is ready to betray its foundation, its constitution, its sacred Bible, its remarkable spirit, the wisdom of a century and a half of experience, you may just as well go Fascist or anything else. As long as the hearts of the American people will respond unafraid to these dynamic words of Lincoln, Jefferson and Roosevelt, as long as it will respond to the electric chord which is in American life, so long is this country secure against Fascism and tyranny of all kinds.

One thing we might learn among many from Abraham Lincoln was that he was willing to fight, when necessary in behalf of these ideals. He was not a boastful man. He was a humble man, modest

and simple. When you turn your eyes to those boastful ignoramouses, in Germany today, Goehring, Goeboels and Hitler, you get an insight into the supreme greatness of this man. When these principles were in danger of being lost to the American people, this man did not hesitate to lead a nation to war. It may be necessary, my friends, in our generation to fight again for the preservation of these ideals of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and the inalienable rights of man, freedom and democracy, and if we have the strength and the courage and the loyalty of Lincoln we shall be as he was.



1. It's now 125 yrs since birth, A.L. - nearly 70 years since his death, a period long enough to have extinguished his memory among men. Nevertheless it is more luminous & glowing to-day than it ever was. It glows in radiance with the passing of the years. This is the true test of great personality. The alchemy of time - does it conquer ^{finally} destroy them or does it transmute them into greater precious dearer and more universal appeals. One can suborn or hijack his own age, no one can and wrest from it a measure of acclaim or fame. But no one can command the unborn generations. They pass cold objective judgments upon men. There is no special pleading help at the judgment seat of History. If one's life has not earned immortality, he is forthwith consigned to oblivion and forever destroyed.
2. The passing years have bestowed the charism of immortality on G.L. They want him to live when and how in this life. Life is renewed where and whenever we recall that he shared their common days. They warm themselves at his spiritual hearth. They kindle their torches at its radiant fires. Youth is made stronger and age is made wiser by the testament of his life.
3. A great life is significant not only for its own age, but for all ages. There is so much of eternal truth to a great in the work or words of a truly great man to make him at home to all ages. He is at home in all eternity.
4. Franklin K. Lane: (Just)
If one were to re-read his speeches papers to-day - one discovers that the man is the same in 1934 as he was in 1861 and in 1841. The set of circumstances which confronted him were different. His philosophy and reasoning - the set of ideas which he had to play upon them - is the same.
5. In fact, even the set of circumstances of his day has to a large degree its counterpart in our day. The struggle which tormented the country

in train in his day, and hurled both against both in bloody civil war, had in it crises which have made their baneful & tragic realizations in the world to-day. The ideals which were our lot to preserve in 1861 are again being threatened and attacked in 1934. Race obsessions and race persecutions are again rife in the world. Intolerant pol. parties like the Know-Nothing Party, to-day, are everywhere springing up, preaching hatred, division and exclusion. False and vicious doctrines of Am. are being spread to-day even as in the days of L.

5. So that ~~the movement of L.~~ his life and ideals and teachings have a particular relevance to our days and our troubled times

(A) The madness of our day may be summarized in Hitlerism. What are the chief charges of this movement which is denigrating the life, much to-day (1) Wastefulness & democracy (2) Racial intolerance & exploitation. There were the very crises with which L. was thrust then many dark and tragic years. At bottom these issues are one & the same.

(B) The Civil War was fought directly to save the Union; indirectly to settle the question whether a race ever could be permanently disfranchised, enslaved and exploited in a democr. which proclaimed with alacr. & truth that all men are created free and equal.

(C) Had the race question not embittered the North & the South - the question of secession would not ever have arisen. The Am. people, ^{at long process of thought and} ~~the people~~ ^{of the North} ~~the people~~ ^{of the South} were finally forced by an irrepressible destiny to make the fateful decision. Is the democr. ideal ^{of freedom, tolerance, valid & just} ~~of human life~~ ^{of human life} permanently to be restricted to one race, to the deliberate exclusion of another race? Shall Am. commit itself permanently to a doctrine of superior & inferior races - the one to be master - the other to be slave? Is freedom life, liberty & the pursuit of happiness the unalienable rights of all men - or, what the State or govt. has no power of veto, or shall govt. arrogate to itself the right of suppressing, restricting or perverting these rights?

(D) You can see readily that these are the very issues which are involved in Hitlerism to-day.

R / let us see how L. answered them.

6. L.'s faith in liberty + Freedom ^{and equality, all men} ~~never wavered~~ ^{was} for a moment. After Thomas Jefferson himself, who framed the D. of F. - Lincoln was its most ardent and passionate devotee and champion. L. would regard the Fascist to-day with the same abhorrence as he regarded the slave-dealer of his day. He would wish to hit it and hit it hard!... For, the Fascists, ^{essentially} enslaving mankind, and trampling under-foot the inalienable rights of men - as ^{do} the slave-dealer.

(1) When L. spoke in 1859 - on the Principles, The Jefferson, he imparted prophetically and intuitively has had the Unus. & the Hitler, in day in mind - His words are so pertinent to a frightful (Just p 103-4).

(2) Over and over again he called his people, confused by clashing opinions and interests, to return to and hold fast to the simple, dynamic eternal truths, the Al. & Indef. - Consisted of 2 principles

✓ (1) "Governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent, the governed"

✓ (2) Equality & Freedom, all men - For you cannot really be free when others are not - (p. 98-9)

✓ (3) This was "a majestic interpretation, the economy of the universe" - not a mere fact (1888) (100-102)

7. Repeated doctrine of Superior & Inferior Races. - All men are created Equal -

(1) Alexander Stephens v. Pres. & South. Confed. (Just)

(2) Hitler - Argan - A blasphemy or a lie
deserter - prostitute - "reheating" - not inf. but diff.

8. Know-Nothing Party - Called itself "American" Party - Strange how all reactionary movements in Am. life, arrogate unto Es 100% Americanism - "Am. Plan" -

6 secret org - like K.K.K. - like Blue Shirts - a combination
7 pol. party + fraternal order - lodges, secret rites, grips,
pan-unions -

✓ (1) elasticity of foreignness

42) Roman Catholics

✓(3) Final exam:

9. What L. said & it. (p. 69) . 1855

10. To the Am. was a matter of spirit not blood
To Hitler - blood is every thing - new blood cult -

1858 - 4th July + 2 (b.92)

11. Here the line is as sharply drawn as it can possibly be.

→ Here is definition of True American! - faithfulness to ideals of country - not race - ancestry - not religion, creed or color.

12. Will America ever go Nazi? It may! all things may happen
but not before it will betray A. L. and all that he stood for.

Thos. Jefferson

.. .. . Geo Wash.

... .. Abbr. & Inst

Constitution
150 years of free traditions

13/ Ready to fight for them - had defense to-day - Fascism is
menacing the world! -

① Am. pointed way to world.

Am. Revol. preceded Fr. Revol.

Fascism is throwback -

We must not permit it.



"The new Constitution has put at rest for ever all the agitating questions relating to our peculiar institution, African slavery. This was the immediate cause of the late rupture and present revolution. The prevailing ideas entertained by Jefferson and most of the leading statesmen at the time of the old Constitution were that the enslavement of the African was wrong in principle socially, morally, and politically. Our new government is founded upon exactly the opposite idea; its foundations are laid, its corner stone rests, upon the great truth that the negro is not the equal of the white man; that slavery--subordination to the white man--is his natural and normal condition. This, our new government, is the first in the history of the world based upon this great physical, philosophical, and moral truth. The great objects of humanity are best attained when there is conformity to the Creator's laws and decrees."

From "Abraham Lincoln" by Lord Charnwood, Chapter VI, "Secession", Page 179.

"As I would not be a slave, so I would not be a master. This expresses my idea of democracy. Whatever differs from this, to the extent of the difference, is no democracy.--A. Lincoln."

From "Abraham Lincoln" by Lord Charnwood, Chapter XII, "The End", Page 456.

Franklin K. Lane

"I have recently read all his speeches and papers, and the man is true from the first day to the last. The same philosophy and the same reasoning were found in 1861 as in 1841."