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Three American presidents in three American wars, 1942.

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THREE AMERICAN PRESIDENTS IN THREE AMERICAN WARS

Washington, Lincoln, Roosevelt

WRHS



By
Dr. Abba Hillel Silver

At
The Temple

On
Sunday morning, February 15, 1942

There have been three great wars in American history and in each of these wars a great man arose as if summoned by destiny. The first was the American Revolution. The American Revolution was motivated by two things: the first, the desire for political independence. The thirteen colonies were growing up. They believed that they should have a voice in the important decisions which affected them. That voice was denied them. They were subjected to numerous laws and regulations and because they were not self-imposed, or with their consent, were regarded as terrible. They believed there was no solution except dissolving their connection with their motherland.

There was another motive. It was a revolution against an ancient system of government, the system of Monarchy. The American Revolution was a bold experiment to set up a democratic system of government, a government of the people, for the people, instead of the old system that prevailed throughout the world based upon the rule of the one, sanctioned by the Divine Right.

There were Americans in those days who favored the one and did not favor the other, who wanted political independence, a separate political set-up for the American colonies, who were afraid of this thing called democratic government, who were afraid of the popular voice, afraid of the masses who wanted to establish an independent government.

Then, of course, there were those who were opposed to both, those who were opposed to a break from the mother country. They were opposed to those dangerous doctrines which Jefferson, Thomas Paine and Adams advocated -- that government derived its just power from the consent of the governed. People have the right to alter or abolish a form of government which they do not like. This was dangerous radicalism. They were opposed to it. And there were the cultured people of that day, most of the upper classes, the Tories, who believed in the status quo - avoid all change and new innovations.

It took seven long years to achieve the two objectives of this American Revolution. It was a hard and long war. The country was not united. It was torn asunder. The armies which were finally raised were poorly equipped, poorly provided for. Except for Washington and one or two other men of military skill, the army was poorly officered, poorly led. There was apathy in the nation. There was sharp factionalism among the people. There was treachery of the type of Benedict Arnold. There were military blunders. There were tragic times such as Valley Forge. And this army, poorly led, poorly equipped, challenged the most powerful empire at that time, an empire which possessed the most powerful Navy in the world, which was skilled, disciplined.

During the Revolution General Wayne said: "Our hospital, or rather our House of Carnage, beggars all description and shocks all humanity to visit; there is no medicine or regimen suitable for the sick, no beds of straw to lie on, no covering to keep them warm other than their own thin wretched clothing."

In 1782, nearly six years after the war started, General Greene declared: "Our men are almost naked for want of overalls and shirts and the greater part of the army barefoot."

During the war it was only by the most heroic efforts that a force of thirty or forty thousands privates out of a population of three million, could be kept in the field." The morale of this army was terribly low. "After the battle of Long Island whole brigades, Washington reported, on the appearance of the enemy ran away in the greatest confusion without firing a shot."

This was the army with which the Revolution challenged the great empire with its trained soldiers. And it won! Why? How? Largely because destiny provided the American Revolution with a man who ~~matched~~ matched the hour, who was adequate for the occasion, a man who believed profoundly in the cause of

of the American Revolution, who was determined to see it through, who was steadfast to the end. Someone said of Washington: "Washington was a giant in stature, a tireless and methodical worker, a firm ruler yet without the ambitions of a Caesar or a Cromwell, a soldier who faced hardships and death without flinching, a steadfast patriot, a hard-headed and practical director of affairs." Notice the terms: "tireless, firm, steadfast!"

Here was a man who had all those virtues which the revolutionary individualistic young man lacked. Washington did not have to inspire the revolution. The inspiration was there. The agitation was there. He had to keep the revolution from destroying itself. He had to steady it, discipline it, put iron in its purpose and patience in its soul. That desperate hour called for a man who could kindle the loyalty of the people and keep it alive during a long hard war after the first flush of idealism had run down and weariness and defeat had begun to sweep the morale of the people. Washington was just that man.

And after the war, when the young nation was beset with so many great dangers, a disorganized society, a ruined economy, a staggering debt, a bankrupt treasury, bitter class struggle -- the hour called for a strong and calm and judicious leader, a man firm in principle, loyal in the spirit of the revolution and yet practical, conciliatory and yet not doctrinaire nor partizan. And Washington was just that type of a man.

And amidst all the fortitudes of those turbulent years, pre-revolution, revolution, and post-revolution, Washington remained steadfast to the two motifs of American life -- independence and democracy.

The closing words of his greatest address to the American people summons: "good laws under a free government, the ever-favorite object of my heart, and the happy reward, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labors and dangers."

This was Washington. This was the man whom destiny granted as a supreme boon ~~sent~~ to the American people in its first critical war.

The second war was the Civil War. And in the Civil War two other principles were involved not altogether unrelated: the preservation of the Union and the emancipation of the slaves. There were those who favored the one and not the other. There were those who believed strongly in the preservation of the Union, but were not concerned about the emancipation of the slaves. There were those who would sacrifice the freedom of the slaves for the preservation of the Union. There were those who would fight for the preservation of Union and not for the emancipation of the slaves. And of course there were those who would sacrifice the Union in order to maintain slavery, who were ready to tear the nation asunder ^{grew,} in order to keep slavery. That iniquitous conflict/gathering momentum for more half a hundred years. Statesmanship tried to reconcile by dividing up the Union as it were. They tried to discover regular devices to circumvent these regulations. Men argued, debated -- all to no avail. A great moral wrong had been permitted to entrench itself in American life and it had to be either cut out or it would kill. The framers of the Constitution, ~~had~~ dodged the issue and for decades after, sought to ^{avoid} ~~avoid~~ it. But that kind of wrong can not be avoided, cannot be dodged. So the bloody Civil War broke out, a long and hard war, four long bloody years of war. The North was divided. There were appeasers then even in the North who counselled that the North should acquiesce and let the erring sisters go in peace. There were traitors then. There were Quislings then. The nation was unprepared. They had looked forward to a speedy victory. They reasoned that the South was poor in comparison with the North. The North felt that it had a great humanitarian cause on its side. It looked for a speedy end against these rebels. Then came Bull Run, the Peninsula

Campaign, Fredericksburg; one defeat after another laid itself at the doorstep of Washington. In spite of this lack of preparedness, confusion of council, in spite of military blundering, military disasters, the North won. Why? How?

Why, then, too, there was a man the hour called for, a man strong enough and inspired enough and long suffering enough to hold the nation on its course undeterred, undivided through to the end, to lead it through all these dark years of suffering. And Abraham Lincoln was that man. Destiny had again blessed the American people with a great leader in a great crisis. He was a man who could hang on like a bull dog, who could sustain abuse, hate. He was subjected to hate and contempt not only from the South, but from the North. He could bend his broad shoulders to the burden. And with that amazing patience and determination of the man, there was also that very much needed spirit of moderation and friendliness. He knew that he was not waging a war against a foreign foe. He was waging war against a section of the American people --brothers who must be brothers again. And so, in his very first Inaugural Address, when several states had already seceded, he said: "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies! Later on he spoke of reconciliation, with malice toward none and charity to all. He looked ahead to reconciliation, to peace, to justice to the defeated.

In Abraham Lincoln, the great, sprawling democracy, far less homogenous than in the days of Washington, dominated far more by populist, pioneer traditions than in the days of Washington, fighting an aristocratic, slave-holding civilization found a man of homely sagacity and native shrewdness, but withal redeemed by a prophetic soul, a deep humanity and a kindly speech, and in the critical hours of decision, strong with the strength of the elements. That was the second man in the second American crisis.

This World War is being fought to preserve for ourselves and for mankind what earlier wars achieved -- Independence, Democracy, Human Freedom. There is a new foe today, a foreign foe, a combination of foreign foes which is challenging and which is endangering us, what America has achieved through a century and a half of struggle. What Democracy Survive? Shall equality and brotherhood and freedom live? Or shall there be a black-out of all these things in the world - the things for which Washington and Lincoln endured so much allowed to perish from the earth?

This war found our people unprepared, our counsel confused. There have been colossal blunders, great conflict. There is still considerable conflict and confusion. Every effort to prepare for this war has been thwarted, fought delayed, either by sincerely misguided people or by outright traitors of foreign nations. Fumbling in high places. We are now in the darkest hour of the war. Fortunately for America, it has again been favored by destiny with a man who matches his hour, a man of the stature of Washington and Lincoln, with the same clear vision and undeterred by opposition and criticism to which he has been subjected almost as much as Abraham Lincoln -- a man who is close to the line of basic principles, strong, capable, shrewd, not fanatical but of strong conviction, not visionary but of strong ideals, a shrewd and astute leader capable of circumventing the cunning and treachery of the x ruthless enemy. This man is Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

He understood the social structure which was behind this war. He had the insight to understand that social and economic reconstruction of society was imperative, that it was bound to come, that in some countries it was coming by way of revolution and terror and bloodshed and dictatorship. He wanted to avoid that procedure in this country. He wanted to use our democratic machinery

and our democratic procedure to achieve that which had to be achieved, that which must be achieved. He read well the trend of his times. He also read well the implications in the rise of Nazism and Fascism in the world. He understood them better than most other statesmen in the world, than most of the American people. He clearly saw the implication, the danger to world peace and security inherent in the doctrinaireism of Nazism and Fascism. Clearly, clairvoyantly he saw that these desperadoes were bent upon world conquest and he set about warning the American people. Years ago, in Chicago, he declared that that these desperadoes must be quarantined. He summoned the free nations of the earth to unite and quarantine these aggressors. He warned them that if they did not unite, they would be destroyed one by one. And he was denounced as a meddler, a war-monger, denounced by these super-patriots, these practical men of affairs who know it all.

December 7 was the final and important vindication of this manifestation. He is strong, purposeful leader, and American may feel itself safe under his leadership.

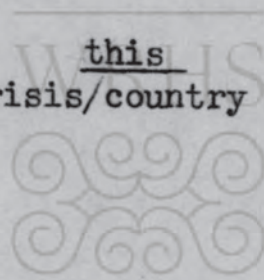
Three wars -- three men. Basically there was one theme running through the three wars and one spirit running through the three men. Lincoln understood it. In one of his debates with Douglas he made the following very keen observation of the real issues of the Civil War.

"That is the real issue. That is the issue that will continue in this country when these poor tongues of Judge Douglas and myself shall be silent. It is the eternal struggle between these two principles -- right and wrong -- throughout the world. They are the two principles that have stood face to face from the beginning of time, and will ever continue to struggle. The one is the common right of humanity, and the other the divine right of kings. It is the same principle in whatever shape it develops itself. It is the same spirit that says: 'You work and toil and earn bread, and I'll eat it.' No matter

in what shape it comes, whether from the mouth of a king who seeks to bestride the people of his own nation and live by the fruit of their labor, or from one race of men as an apology for enslaving another race, it is the same tyrannical principle."

is
And that/the divine truth for which the Revolution was waged, the Civil War and the present war -- the tyrannical principle in the world, the principle of domination, of subjugation, of exploitation, of enslavement. It is ~~a~~ a war of the free spirit of man which will never accept shackles. One principle runs through three wars, and one spirit through three men -- Washington, Lincoln and Roosevelt - loyalty to that free spirit of man, uncompromising devotion unto the death.

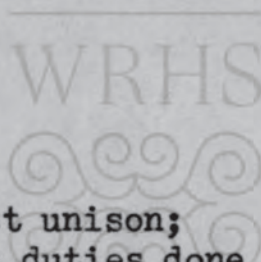
this
(in all hours of crisis/country blessed with leadership of a man who matched the hour). . .



THE ETERNAL STRUGGLE

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Lincoln in Debate with Douglas



Soldier and statesman, rarest unison;
High-poised example of great duties done
Simply as breathing, a world's honors worn
As life's indifferent gifts to all men born;
— Modest, yet firm as Nature's self; unblamed
Save by the men his nobler temper shamed;
— Rigid, but with himself first, grasping still
In swerveless poise the wave-beat helm of will;
Not honored then or now because he wooed
The popular voice, but that he still withstood;
— Broad-minded, higher-souled, there is but one
Who was all this and ours, and all men's,
--Washington

1) 3 wars - The Amer. Revol.

(a) Pol. independence - grew - intolerable

(b) Rev. against ancient system of Govt - Monarchy
Bold experiment - democ. system - of the people
divine rights

(c) There were Americans who favored (a) desire
but no (b) - afraid - radical step - worse thing

(d) There were - opposed both - Tories - enclined
no break - no dangerous doctrines - "Govts derive
their just powers from the consent of the governed"
"People have the right to alter or abolish a form
of Govt - which they do not like."

2) 7 years - required - 1 hard, long war!

Poorly equipped - untrained officers - unprovided

Apathy - fortune-telling - Treachery - deserters -

Military Blunders - Valley Forge

(2)

Gen. Wayne: "Our hospital, or rather our House of Carnage, beggars all description and shocks all humanity to visit; there is no machine or regimen suitable for the sick, no beds of straw to lie on, no covering to keep them warm other than their own thin wretched clothing."

In 1782 - Gen. Greene - "Our men are almost naked for want of overalls and shirts and the water proof, the Army barefoot."

During the war - "it was only by the most heroic efforts that a force of 30 or 40 thousand privates, out of a population of 3 million, could be kept in the field."

Low morale: "After the battle of Long Island while the brigades, Washington reported, on the appearance of the enemy, "ran away in the greatest confusion without firing a shot." —

These people challenged the most powerful empire on earth in the world - Navy and sea - well trained & disciplined army - And won. How?

2). Washington - Commander-in-chief - He was watched this hour. ① He believed in the cause
② Determined to see it through - Standfast to the end.

"W. was a giant in stature, a tribes and methodical worker, a firm ruler yet without the ambitions of a Caesar or a Cromwell, a soldier who faced hardships and death without flinching, a steadfast patriot, a hard-headed and practical director of affairs"

Notice the adjectives: tribes - firm - steadfast - He had those virtues which the ebullient, unsubduable young nation did not have.

He did not have to inspire revolution - Keep it from destroying itself - steady it - put back descent - put iron in its purpose and patience in its soul -

The House called for a man who could kindle the loyalty of men ^{in a long + bitter war} after the first flush of patriotic enthusiasm had died down, and weariness and desertion and defeat were draining their words - We are such a man!

The critical years after the war - when the unwieldy democracy met the newly born republic - a drapery society - a mixed economy - a straggling debtor bankrupt treasury - little class struggle - of which Shays' rebellion was symptomatic - called for a strong calm pragmatic leader - firm in principle - loyal to the spirit of the Amer. people - but practical - combative - not defensive in partisan - W. was such a man -

~~He wanted~~ He wanted almost all virtues - he remained true to 2 virtues, his first two, ① Ind. + democracy

"good laws under a free government - the ever-favorite object of my heart, and the happy result, as I trust, of our mutual cares, labors and dangers" (1796 - Farewell address). (Quote) James Russell Smith (4)

3/ Civil War - (1) Union (2) liberate slaves

(a) There were Am. who formed first and offered second. who would sacrifice second for first - who would fight for the first and not for second - Most men of North belonged to this class - up to & then most of Am. War -

(b) There were then who would sacrifice the Union to maintain slavery. Tear the nation asunder.

(c) Unrepentant combat gathering momentum for $\frac{1}{2}$ c - statelessness - recruits - compromise - territories were staked out - lines were drawn - legal devices were enacted - all to no avail. - was argued - debated - reheated - pleaded - no use.

(d) A great moral wrong - is a cause - either cut out or it kills. - Constitution dodged it - avoided subject -

(e) Bloody and war finally broke - 4 yrs. of war was required to achieve both purposes - a long hard war - peace - North was divided - acquiesce in slavery and let the same - separates - go in - peace - opponents of Traitors & rebels -

Unprepared - Military incompetence - Disastrous Blunders

Speedy War (Japan) - North was rich - unorganized rebels

Bull Run - Penninsula Campaign - Fredericksburg -

Chancellorsville - Invasion of Washington -

4/ The Hun called for a man - ~~who~~ ~~not~~ strong enough -
wisdom enough - loyal enough - to lead his
nation thru the Dark Hour of tragic civil war -
A.L. was that man

Hang on with a bull-dog - Abuse - Hate - Contempt - Defeat - ^{Bare his ~~typed~~ shoulder to the ~~fight~~ ~~fight~~}

Moderation & forgiveness
We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies.
- With malice towards none, with charity for all -
- Look ahead - to reconciliation - to peace - to justice
to the defeated

- In him the great, sprawling Amur - far less substantive
homogenous > days, W. - dominated far more by
Republic, minor traditions > in days, W. - pygmy as
autocratic, slav holding civilization - forced the man
- of native family, religion & nature, shrewdness but, ^{with} redeemed by
common clay, fight refers, and a ^{prote} kindness
a prophetic soul, a deep humanity, a prote kindness
fresh - and valued in the critical hours of decision -
strong with the strength of the elements.

5/ World War II.

① To preserve for ourselves & mankind what earlier
was achieved - Independence - Democracy - Human Freedom

② For a new foe - a foreign foe - has challenged and
is endangering them. Shall Humor Survive? Shall equality thunder
and freedom live? or shall this be a black-art? Shall all that is best - perish for the

③ We are now fighting in 2 oceans - a combination
of enemies - plotted to destroy Human Freedom - to subjugate
all nations to them - to establish dictatorship - and Race Tyranny.

- heavy on world apart -

(6)

④ A long hard war - There has been confusion, constant
little confusion - Party strife - Class conflicts -
Every effort to prepare - thwarted, fought, delayed
sincere - hushes & traitors Foreign Agents
- There has been burglary & ransacking in high
places - and grave military disasters - without-alikes
- Darkest hour - Fear - there will be much more

⑤ How calls for a man - of the stature of W.L.
- Character - firm - undeterred - by opposition or
criticism - having clear the law of force .
principles - Not fanatical but of strong conviction
Not visionary but realistic - not and without an
a shrewd and astute leader capable of circumventing the
cunning and treachery of the enemies for enemy.

Franklin D.

⑥ It is such a man - Am. is favored - in finding
again in this perhaps present hour its destiny
a man matched to his hour -

⑦ Social struggle - behind this war - had the weight
that reconstruction is imperative - Saw it everywhere coming
by war Rev. Blood-Terror and Dictatorship
In Am. he visions a whole world of progress - the Am.
the dream - Then evolution - because of dream & act

(8) Read well the friend / his time. So also - rise /
Nazi-fascist system / ideas - Understood it better > (1)
Any other statesman - Saw the implications - danger -
World-crisis - Called for Union / Peace
No head - That him a meddler - a wa-monger

(9) Dec. 7 - Undeath.

(10) He is a strong - purposeful leader - and
Am. is safe in his leadership -

6/ Lincoln said - Debate with Douglas -

Same struggle

Strong leadership -
Loyal following -

