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“Washington and Lincoln,” 1906 February 17.

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Written for "The News",  
Saturday, February 17, 1906

- WASHINGTON and LINCOLN -

Americans should be the most patriotic of all peoples. Of all the nations we have most cause for patriotic love of country. To me, February is always a month of patriotic inspiration. February is distinguished among all the months of the year by its two National Holidays. It is consecrated by the memory of the two great Americans - George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

We should remember their birthdays, not for celebration of the days, but for the powerful message which they speak. Unfortunately, all the Holy Days of our American National calendar have been transformed by the worldly spirit of our generation, to public holidays. The day of the Declaration of Independence and our National Day of Memorial are not consecrated as days of noble thought of country and of national uplift, but are desecrated by almost universal merrymaking and feasting, pleasure-seeking and sport. The birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and of George Washington should bring personal inspiration to every true American. They plead eloquently for the upliftment of our national ideals. They have power to strengthen the moral fibre and the moral purpose of the nation.

Whenever I look upon the rude log cabin which was the birthplace of Abraham Lincoln, I am reminded that scarce one of us was born in a home so poor and under conditions so lowly. The hardships and privations of his childhood and youth are a lesson to every American. Wonderful is the story of his wonderful life. It proclaims the possibilities of poverty in a democracy, where the people rule and where the door of opportunity stands open. Remembering how and where he was born, behold Lincoln in the day of his death - the leader of a great nation, the saviour of the Union, the emancipator of millions. Lincoln, the son of poverty, in history ranks above kings and emperors. The day of his birth speaks the message of hope to all of America, and to all of the oppressed of the world.

Wonderful, and equally inspiring, is the story of Washington's wonderful life. He was not born the child of poverty. He was not trained in the hard school of adversity. Lincoln was born to poverty and disadvantage. Washington was born to privilege, to advantage, and to fortune. Both of them were born to opportunity and to freedom. Both of them were great Americans.

Washington seems born to leadership. In his young manhood he reveals his energy and his capacity. He had the spirit of the pioneer. He was master of himself and therefore master of his work. He was a soldier in his youth and in his manhood. Almost all the years of his life he devoted to the service of his country. He was not selfish. He served his country at the sacrifice of and not for the enrichment of his personal fortune and personal interests. He was not ambitious for power, or station, or honors. Behold him, strong and brave and modest; honored by all, but not spoiled by honor; and how simple. He was noble and sincere in word and heart and deed. What a lesson the public men of our own time might learn from the life and memory of Washington.

George Washington and Abraham Lincoln are the two great Americans. Lincoln was the child of poverty - Washington the child of wealth. Both of them were great because of character, because of qualities of mind and heart.

Study the life of Lincoln. It renews our faith in democracy. It strengthens our trust in the people, and our faith in a government of the people. Remember his name with honor. His character is an inspiration to us all. He was a great man - strong and tender - just and merciful. As President Roosevelt said, ~~ten years ago~~, "Every American is richer by the heritage of the noble deeds and the noble words of Washington and Lincoln." Washington and Lincoln belong to the great men of all the ages.

They are the two great Americans. Both of them lovers of their country; both lovers of mankind - honorable in their public life and clean in their personal life. The two greatest of Americans - among the greatest in all the world - George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.