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(Smith/Blessey)
Draft One
January 3, 1990
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PRESIDENTIAL REMARKS: LINCOLN LECTURE
STATE DINING ROOM
SUNDAY, JANUARY 7, 1990
5:00 P.M.

Professor Donald, Ladies and gentlemen. Barbara and I want to welcome you to the White House. It is indeed a privilege to be with you. And to host this inaugural lecture on the Presidency of the United States.

To John F. Kennedy, the Presidency was "the vital center of action." To Teddy Roosevelt, it was the "bully pulpit," reflecting America's values and her dreams. And it was Dwight Eisenhower -- our beloved Ike -- who spoke of its power to "lead a great crusade" for freedom throughout the world.

To occupy this office is to feel a kinship with these and other Presidents. For each in his own way sought to do right, and thus achieve good. Each felt a sacred trust with every American. And often wondered, I suspect, how they could be worthy of that trust.

Perhaps no President had greater doubts -- nor more brilliantly resolved them -- than the subject of this inaugural lecture: Abraham Lincoln of Illinois.

As President, Lincoln abolished slavery. He saved the Union. Perhaps no leader has been so severely tested -- before,

It's not easy, of course -- as Lincoln himself affirmed with a story. // Maybe you've heard of how a stranger found him in the street with two of his sons. Both of them were sobbing uncontrollably.

"Whatever is the matter with the boys, Mr. Lincoln?" the stranger asked. "Just what's the matter with the world," Lincoln sadly replied. "I've got three walnuts, and each wants two." //

As this story implies, Lincoln was pulled in countless directions. As his predecessors were -- and successors have been. Yet he not only comforted his sons -- he unified the Nation. Dealing brilliantly with the problems that beset any President. Problems that don't attack one-by-one, like a row of toy soldiers -- but pell-mell, all at once, like the 49ers offensive line. //

In Lincoln's time, those problems were war, division, starvation, suffering. Today, they revolve around peace abroad and prosperity at home.

have gathered you together', he said, 'to hear what I have written down. I do not wish your advice about the main matter. That I have determined for myself.'" Jack continued, "Secondly, Abraham Lincoln had courage and the next President of the United States will need courage. He knew the storm that would be raised by the Emancipation Proclamation. But, when he went to sign that historic document, exhausted from several hours of shaking hands at the White House, he said to those present, 'if my name goes down in history it will be for this act. My whole soul is in it. If my hand trembles when I sign this proclamation, all who examine this document hereafter will say, 'He hesitated.' But Lincoln's hand did not tremble. He did not hesitate. He did not equivocate, because he was the President of the United States. Finally, I said Abraham Lincoln believed in foresight. During the darkest days of the Civil war, many were fearful of the outcome and when a delegation called upon the President to express their fears, Lincoln told them of a youthful experience. 'One night in November', he said, 'when I was a boy, a shower of meteors fell from a clear November sky. A friend standing by was panicked, but I looked up and between the falling stars I saw the fixed stars, shining serene in the firmament, and I said, 'Let us not mind the meteors; let us keep our eyes on the stars.'" In closing, Jack said, "We say to you, those of us who seek high office and high responsibility in this somber time in the life of our country, what Lincoln said when he left this city to go to Washington: 'My friends, I now leave with a task before me greater than any which has rested upon any President since the time of Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who attended him, I cannot succeed. With that assistance, I cannot fail.' In that spirit in 1960 we come here tonight and dedicate ourselves to this country, dedicate ourselves to its future, dedicate ourselves to moving this country forward again."

Jack received a standing ovation.

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LINC

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Professor Donald, Lynn Cheney, Honored guests, Ladies and gentlemen.

Barbara and I want to welcome you to the White House. It is indeed a privilege to be with you. And to host this inaugural lecture on an office to which my forty predecessors have consecrated the full measure of their lives: The Presidency of the United States.

To John F. Kennedy, the Presidency was "the vital center of action." To Teddy Roosevelt, it was the "bully pulpit," reflecting this Nation's values and her dreams. And it was Dwight Eisenhower -- America's beloved Ike -- who spoke of its power "to proclaim anew our faith," and summon "lightness against the dark."

To occupy this office is to feel a kinship with these and other Presidents. For each in his own way sought to do right, and thus achieve good. Each felt a sacred trust with every American. And often doubted, I suspect, how they could be worthy of that trust.

Perhaps no President had greater doubts -- nor more brilliantly resolved them -- than the subject of this inaugural lecture: Abraham Lincoln of Illinois.

As President, Lincoln abolished slavery. He saved the Union. Perhaps no leader has been so severely tested -- before, or since. And yet we remember Abe Lincoln not merely for what he did. We revere him for what he was.

Lincoln was a strong man -- an arm-wrestler, a rail-splitter. And yet a mix of kindness and humility. At once a hard and gentle person -- a man of grief, and yet of humor. For he knew, as he told Secretary of War Steward, that "If I did not tell stories, I feel my heart would break."

Let me tell you a story. // After all, Abe would probably want it that way. // A stranger once found Lincoln in the street with two of his sons. Both of them were sobbing uncontrollably.

"Whatever is the matter with the boys, Mr. Lincoln?" the stranger asked. Lincoln sighed, then observed, "Just what's the matter with the world. I've got three walnuts, and each wants two."

As this story suggests, Lincoln was pulled in countless directions. Yet he not only comforted his two sons. He comforted the Nation. And by acting extraordinarily in times of peril, preserved for future generations the canons of democracy.

Tonight, we have here a man who will tell us about those times. His name is David Donald. He is the Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard University. As a Yale

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Tonight, we have here a man who will doubtless tell some stories. About how by acting extraordinarily in times of peril, Lincoln preserved for future generations the canons of democracy. His name is David Donald -- the Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard University.

A native of Mississippi, Mr. Donald graduated from the University of Illinois, where he was a student of the great Lincoln scholar, J.G. Randall. He has taught at some of America's greatest universities -- and has written eight books about Lincoln and the Civil War -- twice, receiving the Pulitzer Prize in biography. Moreover, our guest is now working on a new biography of America's 16th President.

Earlier, I spoke of kinship. Well -- I'm sure David Donald would agree -- any President's kinship with Lincoln is perhaps the most personal of all.

So often I pass the Lincoln Bedroom which then served as Lincoln's Cabinet Room and office. On his desk, to the left of the fireplace, is an original copy of the Gettysburg Address.

man, I am proud that he will give this first lecture of the Presidential Lecture Series on the Presidency. And when he finishes, I invite you to join him in the East Room for refreshments.

A native of Mississippi, David Donald graduated from the University of Illinois, where he was a student of the great Lincoln scholar, J.G. Randall. Since then, he has taught at Columbia University, Princeton University, the University of Oxford, and the Johns Hopkins University.

In five books, he has written about Lincoln and the Civil War -- twice, receiving the Pulitzer Prize in Biography. And always willing, as Lincoln said, to "think anew," he is now working on a new biography of America's 16th President.

Earlier, I spoke of kinship. Well -- I'm sure David Donald would agree -- any President's kinship with Lincoln is perhaps the most personal of all.

Each day I pass the room which served as Lincoln's office. My office is the Lincoln Study. To the left of my desk is one of only five copies of the Emancipation Proclamation. And just above me here is a portrait of Lincoln painted by George Healy 121 years ago. In it you see Lincoln's agony, and his greatness. A man who nightly fell on his knees to ask guidance from God.

Here, in this house, Lincoln lives -- even now. Teaching, and inspiring. And nowhere more than in another portrait that I talked about last month off the coast of Malta before meeting Chairman Gorbachev. And that I'd like to close with now. It

hangs on the wall of my study. And it portrays the decency -- and humanity -- of Abraham Lincoln.

The painting pictures Lincoln and his generals, meeting near the end of a war that pitted brother against brother. Outside, at that moment, a battle rages. And yet what we see in the distance is a rainbow -- that symbol of hope, of the passing of the storm. The painting's name? The Peacemakers.

For me, this painting is a constant reassurance that the cause of peace will triumph. As it did in Lincoln's time. As it must, for us. And that ours can be a future that Lincoln gave his life for -- a future free of both tyranny and fear.

One hundred and twenty-nine years ago, leaving Springfield to assume the Presidency, Lincoln addressed his home people at the Great Western Railway Station. He told them: "All the strange checkered past seems now to crowd upon my mind."

Even now, the memory of Abraham Lincoln crowds upon our memory. It is a great privilege, then, to introduce a man who has devoted his lifetime to the study of its tragic, almost mystic glory. Professor David Donald.

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"Whatever is the matter with the boys, Mr. Lincoln?" the stranger asked. Lincoln sighed, then observed, "Just what's the matter with the world. I've got three walnuts, and each wants two." *Justin*

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Tonight, we have here a man who will tell us about those times. His name is David Donald. He is the Charles Warren Professor of American History at Harvard University. ~~And, yes, even as a Yale man, I am proud that he will give this first lecture.~~

A native of Mississippi, David Donald graduated from the University of Illinois, where he was a student of the great Lincoln scholar, J.G. Randall. He has taught at some of America's greatest universities -- and written five books about Lincoln and the Civil War -- twice, receiving the Pulitzer Price in Biography. Moreover, always willing, as Lincoln said, to "think anew," our guest is now working on a new biography of America's 16th President.

Earlier, I spoke of kinship. Well -- I'm sure David Donald would agree -- any President's kinship with Lincoln is perhaps the most personal of all.

So often I pass the Lincoln Bedroom which then served as Lincoln's Cabinet Room and office. On his desk, to the left of the fireplace, is an original copy of the Gettysburgh Address. And on the mantle is a plaque marking an equally noble legacy. Here, the Great Unifier signed the Emancipation Proclamation.

Next, look above me at this portrait of Lincoln painted by George Healy 121 years ago. In it you see the agony, and the greatness, of a man who nightly fell on his knees to ask the help of God. And nowhere do we learn more about Lincoln, even now, than in another portrait that I talked about last month off the coast of Malta before meeting Chairman Gorbachev. It, too, is by George Healy. It hangs on the wall of my study. And it portrays the decency -- and humanity -- of Abraham Lincoln.

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[AFTER SPEECH]

Thank you, Professor Donald. And now, won't all of you join David, Barbara, and me for supper in the East Room?