

THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

GREAT AMERICANS AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

GREAT AMERICANS AND THEIR ACHIEVEMENTS

LESSON 04 SESSION 03

4.7 Daniel Webster

Daniel Webster belongs to the first generation of Americans who knew no other form of government than that established by the Federal Constitution. So intimately is his name associated with that great document that he has become known to history as the greatest expounder of the Constitution.

4.7.1 Tampering with the Constitution.

When but 20 years old, he delivered an address which contained the following:

*"The experience of all ages will bear us out in saying that alterations of political systems are always attended with a greater or less degree of danger. The politician that undertakes to improve a constitution with as little thought as a farmer sets about mending his plow is no master of his trade. If the Constitution be a systematic one * * * its parts are so necessarily connected that an alteration in one will work an alteration in all, and the cobbler, however pure and honest his intentions, will in the end find that what came to his hands a fair, lovely fabric goes from them a miserable piece of patchwork * * *."*

4.7.2 Representative government.

As a further caution against a pronounced tendency, he declared:

"The true definition of despotism is government without law. It may exist in the hands of many as well as one. Rebellions are despotisms, factions are despotisms, and loose democracies are despotisms. These are a thousand times more dreadful than the concentration of all power in the hands of a single tyrant. The despotism of one man is like the thunderbolt which falls here and there, scorching and consuming the individual on whom it lights; but popular commotion, the despotism of the mob, is like an earthquake, which in one moment swallows up everything. It is the excellence of our Government that it is placed in a proper medium between these two extremes, that it is equally distant from mobs and from thrones."

Webster clearly understood our representative form of government and the importance of avoiding the dangerous extremes of either hereditary (autocratic) government or direct (democratic) government.

4.7.3 Reply to Hayne.

Webster's replies to Hayne in the United States Senate are considered as the greatest debate that has ever occurred in any legislative body in the history of the world. His second reply began with the following words:

"Mr. President, when the mariner has been tossed for many days in thick weather and on an unknown sea he naturally avails himself of the first pause in the storm, the earliest glance of the sun, to take his latitude and ascertain how far the elements have driven him from his true course. Let us imitate this prudence and before we float farther on the waves of this debate refer to the point from which we departed that we may at least be able to conjecture where we now are."

This indicates a wholesome state of mind with which to approach important discussions concerning the philosophy of our Government as expressed in the Constitution. Before we drift farther toward direct action and socialistic tendencies, we should return in study and thought to the work of the men who wrote the Constitution and ascertain how far we are departing from the course therein laid down."

4.8 **Abraham Lincoln**

George Washington gave us the Union. Abraham Lincoln saved the Union.

Log cabins were common in this country 100 years ago. It was not a log cabin that gave distinction to Abraham Lincoln, although he was born in the poorest of such cabins on February 12, 1809.

4.8.1 Limited education.

His honors were not conferred upon him because of a university education. Two short terms in a Kentucky school, followed by three in Indiana, less than a year in all, does not give much foundation for scholastic attainments.

4.8.2 Handicaps.

To study the life of Lincoln makes one almost believe God purposely placed every conceivable handicap upon him just to prove his staying qualities, and to set an

example in purpose, principle, and perseverance that would act as an inspiration for young and old possessed of the ambition and endurance, the vision and character, necessary to success.

Abraham Lincoln was homely, yet he possessed the beauty of soul dedicated to relieving the burdens and sorrows of humanity.

He was a rail splitter. In his rugged physical strength he was as gentle as a woman. His was a lowly birth, yet "his spirit is the richest legacy of the United States."

4.8.3 Lawyer.

He was a "saddlebag" lawyer, yet, with a copy of Blackstone, a Webster's Dictionary, and the fundamental law of God and human rights in his heart and head he won his way to the respectful consideration of all opponents.

With his sense of humor and ability as a story teller there was in him a supersense of justice, and he often fitted a story to emphasize a truth that otherwise might have been forgotten.

4.8.4 Preservation of the Union.

"A house divided against itself cannot stand." Upon that issue — the preservation of the Union — Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States. Tolerant with all who opposed, kind to all who hated, charitable to those who denounced, he held firmly to the single purpose of saving the Union, in the belief that in union only could our Nation endure.

The beauty of diction, the reverence, sympathy and love, the magnanimity and charity, and the vision of the worth of the price paid for the preservation of our Union, as set forth in his Gettysburg speech, will make him acclaimed after all other orators are forgotten.

4.8.5 The nation incarnate.

He was the nation incarnate. In all its struggles, its doubts, its agony, and in the solemn days of victory Abraham Lincoln lived alone for his country.

No one man has ever rendered greater service nor paid a greater price for faithful performance. As he has given us a rich legacy in his spirit and example, so he has left us a great responsibility.

That we highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain; that this Nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom; and that government of the people, by the people, and for the people shall not perish from the earth.