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Lincoln was principled, honorable

Happy birthday to President Abraham Lincoln — a man haunted by defeat, misunderstood by history and burdened with ruling a nation bent on self-destruction.

MASON WEAVER

As we honor the birth of our heroes, there are often many people trying to destroy their memories. Lincoln has not been spared.

We can often confuse and diminish accomplishments with rumors and lies. The story of Lincoln would be a great story of a great American without the Civil War, assassination or the issue of slavery. Lincoln would have been great because of his character.

I believe a hero is a person of character and principles given the opportunity to act upon them. It is what makes one rush into a burning building to save strangers, give assistance in emergencies or save buddies in battle. Character and principles propel and compel common people to uncommon valor.

On the topic of slavery, Lincoln told the Indiana Regiment, "I have always thought that all men should be free; but if any should be slaves, it should be first those who desire it for themselves, and secondly those who desire it for others. Whenever I hear anyone arguing for slavery, I feel a strong impulse to see it tried on him personally."

When I hear Lincoln compared with modern presidents, I wonder if it is fair. Lincoln understood failure and tragedy; he overcame a lot but he did so with character.

Many people think character is not as important as success over problems. However, Lincoln once said, "Nearly all men can stand adversity, but if you want to test a man's character, give him power." In his last public address, Lincoln said, "Important principles may and must be inflexible."

Perhaps the statues of heroes should be based not on what they did with their power, but what they did with their principles.

Principles should be beliefs and personal characteristics for which you are willing to lose an election. We should be asking people seeking public office what issues they are willing to stand on even if it means losing. The answers will give us insight into their character.

Lincoln seemed to have understood that when he said, "The probability that we may fail in this struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just."

The depths of character can be measured by the response to failure. How one responds to defeat is the key to that person's success. This is true for individuals, families, communities and nations.

Lincoln understood defeat and felt it was far less important than character: "If the good people, in their wisdom, shall see fit to keep me in the background, I have been too familiar with disappointments to be very much chagrined." A synopsis of Lincoln's victories and defeats should determine if he was an American hero.

1831: Failed in business; 1832: Defeated in bid for the Legislature; 1833: Failed again in business; 1834: Elected to Legislature; 1835: Sweetheart died; 1836: Suffered a nervous breakdown; 1838: Defeated for speaker of the Illinois Legislature; 1843: Defeated for Congress; 1846: Elected to Congress; 1848: Defeated for Congress; 1855: Defeated for Senate; 1856: Defeated for vice president; 1858: Defeated for Senate; 1860: Elected president.

"Die when I may, I want it said of me that I plucked a weed and planted a flower wherever I thought a flower would grow."

Mason Weaver is a columnist for The Californian and the North County Times.

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