

The legacy of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln

Monday's commemoration of Presidents Day was a moment to pause and reflect on the legacy of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

Both were living proof of the adage, "commeth the moment, commeth the man." But the passing of centuries has indicated there was more depth to them than any recent occupant of the Oval Office.

They did not live in an instant, Twitter age. Their innermost thoughts appeared only in legislation, speeches and letters, the latter sometimes only revealed decades after their deaths. Historians have agonized over their words for clues to their character. Perhaps inevitably, their stature has risen as time has passed.

More books have been written about Lincoln than any other American. And with good reason. Preserving the Union from a north-south breakup and freeing the slaves must rate as significant as declaring independence from King George III and embarking on this remarkable experiment.

Marking the first president's birthday was born of an era in which the memory of Washington was nurtured and venerated. His restraint in resigning his officer's commission before becoming president then leaving the presidency after two terms was the essence of how he built our nation, historians have noted.

So there is good reason to study their lives. In perilous times, Washington and Lincoln showed us the way. In doing so, they defined America, and they set a standard by which their successors should be judged. If we lose sight of their example, we will be doomed to a succession of deeply flawed, mediocre presidents.

In the modern era, historians have dissected the lives of Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower. Both men have come out favorably. The morality of Truman's decision to use the atomic bomb on Japanese cities — taking civilian lives to save military lives — is debated more outside the United States than within. But he was a man of his time, placed in charge by Franklin D. Roosevelt's death and acting in his best conscience.

Eisenhower's often-quoted departing remarks were

among the most memorable of speeches during the entire last century. "In the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the military-industrial complex," he said. "The potential for the disastrous rise of misplaced power exists and will persist."

And in the same 1961 farewell address, he also cautioned, "We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow."

These remarks addressed escalating military budgets and the burdensome national debt with striking clarity and foresight. Almost 60 years later, it is a cause for regret that we are still wrestling with both.

Since Ike's day, our modern presidents have seemed a tad more flawed, in part because more sophisticated and broader media coverage has revealed their shortcomings.

Today, the role of president of the United States exists in a fast-changing world. The parameters of the influence of the other superpowers, Russia and China, wax and wane with every news cycle. Europe is in a state of flux with the departure of Great Britain from its political union. South America's long-predicted rise to significant clout in world affairs still has not properly materialized.

In this context, the man or woman we elect to go to work in the Oval Office juggles weighty domestic and international issues in a fishbowl. We can see all their flaws and often know their innermost thoughts with striking, sometimes troublesome, clarity.

It is therefore timely that we should pause at least once a year to ask: What would Washington do? What would Lincoln do?

The answers to those theoretical questions should help provide a grounding. Perhaps no human in the White House will ever measure up to those two immortals. But they offer an example of service with humility that we could all embrace, and that is severely lacking in 2020's current strategies.



FARMER'S FATE

Work hard, love harder

Kerchuck... kerchuck... kerchuck. The baler plunger rhythmically rocked the tractor forward and back. I blinked hard, trying to wipe away the sleep from my eyes. I squint into the dark at the rows of oat hay gleaming in the tractor headlights. I am almost to the top of the hill. I look around to see where the other tractor is — and in that moment, the baler plugs up. We had rented another tractor and baler, and apparently neither of the machines were very happy about the arrangement. The baler refused to eat the oats, and the tractor seemed indifferent to either of us.

The pick up reel was still spinning, so I assumed there were no broken bolts — it had just plugged up. I shut the PTO off, and picked up the phone to call my husband for help. Cleaning out the chamber is a nasty, miserable job, and, well, misery loves company. He answers as I throttle the tractor down, and start looking for my boots. While everyone else shows up for nighttime baling in the same outfit as their daytime baling, I am not embarrassed at all to be sporting pajamas and slippers. I slide one boot on and open the tractor door, stepping down onto the first rung.

"I don't think anything broke. It's just plugged up again," I say, squeezing the phone between my ear and shoulder as I press my head under the steering column trying to reach back in for my second boot.

"OK, I'll be there in a minute," my husband says.

I can almost touch the leather on my boot, and I wriggle a tiny bit more under the steering wheel, the shift-lever poking into my shoulder blade. I stepped back in and my fingers had just tightened on the pull-strap of my boot when the lever over my shoulder moved. I had bumped



Brianna Walker

the lever into neutral. The tractor and baler started rolling down the steep hill, the heavy baler urging the tractor faster and faster. I stumbled back into the seat and grabbed at the control

lever, at the throttle — stomping on the brakes. I wasn't familiar with the controls, and they didn't respond like I expected. The tractor picked up speed — as did my pulse. The bottom of the hill appeared in my headlights before I got the tractor stopped.

"What in the world just happened?" my husband's voice shouted at me from the floorboards. My phone was laying under the clutch pedal — the tractor door still open, and my second boot still on the floor.

My hands shook as I picked up the phone. I was lucky. Another step out the door and I could have fallen under the dualed-up tires; I could have rolled the other direction and into the 20-foot drop off at the end of the field; my husband could have already been under the baler when that had happened. I eased around the controls as I got out of the tractor this time, thanking God for his careful watch over us.

Less than a week later, I was in my happy place at the river, the incident with the tractor long forgotten in the hustle and bustle of summer harvest. It was an unusual Sunday, one in which I somehow had found myself free to spend the morning with my boys at our boathouse. We had read a few kids books. Then I decided to continue a paint project I had started earlier in the spring. I put a life jacket on the littlest, turned on an audiobook, and they both climbed in the boat while I lost myself in the relaxation of painting and World War II spies.

A big splash punctuated an intense moment in the audiobook. I look over about the second my oldest screams that my 3-year old had just fallen in — without his life-jacket. I don't remember setting down my paintbrush. I don't remember how I got across the room. I remember crossing the bow of the boat — but I couldn't be sure if I stepped in or jumped over. What I do remember is arriving on the other side and seeing my baby's blonde head about a foot under that murky green water. That image is burned into my mind, and while it could have only lasted a fraction of a second, that moment seems to play in extra-slow motion. Then I am in the water pushing him to the surface.

I hold his body tight — feeling the water run down my hair and mix with my tears as his breath comes in big gasps. We swim to the back of the boat and manage to get him in. I catch my breath before pulling myself into the boat — soggy shoes and all. We were both shaking, as I squeezed his little body into mine. I pulled him away just long enough to kiss his forehead.

"Thank you for saving me, Mommy," he whispered in his shakily toddler voice.

I hugged him again as the tears ran freely down my cheeks. The painting was forgotten about, harvest could wait another day — there were so many ways this could have ended differently. I wrapped up my baby in a towel, and we headed for the sun to dry out. Cuddled in a swing, a boy under each arm, we spent the day reading, coloring and playing in the sand box.

Life may not always be easy — but it's simple: work hard, love harder and thank God every day for another chance to do it even better.

Brianna Walker writes about the *Farmer's Fate* for the *Blue Mountain Eagle*.

Shooting the Breeze: Assembly line elegance

There can be little doubt that Bill Ruger, the late co-founder of Sturm, Ruger & Co., was a genius. Time and again, he was able to foresee what the public wanted even before they knew themselves. One such example was the introduction of the single-shot Ruger No. 1 in 1967.



Rod Carpenter

At the time, the bolt action was the hot ticket. All of the major manufacturers were working to improve on their designs and offer new chamberings. Everyone thought of Bill as nuts to try to market a relatively expensive single-shot rifle, but he certainly proved them wrong. The No. 1 took off and has been a steady seller ever since.

The No. 1 is built on an extremely strong falling block action with a trim but beautifully shaped two-piece stock. The gently sweeping cocking lever adds a nice touch. To many, including myself, the Ruger No. 1 is the most elegant production rifle ever created.

The Ruger No. 1 comes in many variations, from the trim Sporter No. 1 to the full-length stocked Mannlicher. It has been manufac-



Contributed photo

Bill Ruger introduced the single-shot Ruger No. 1 in 1967.

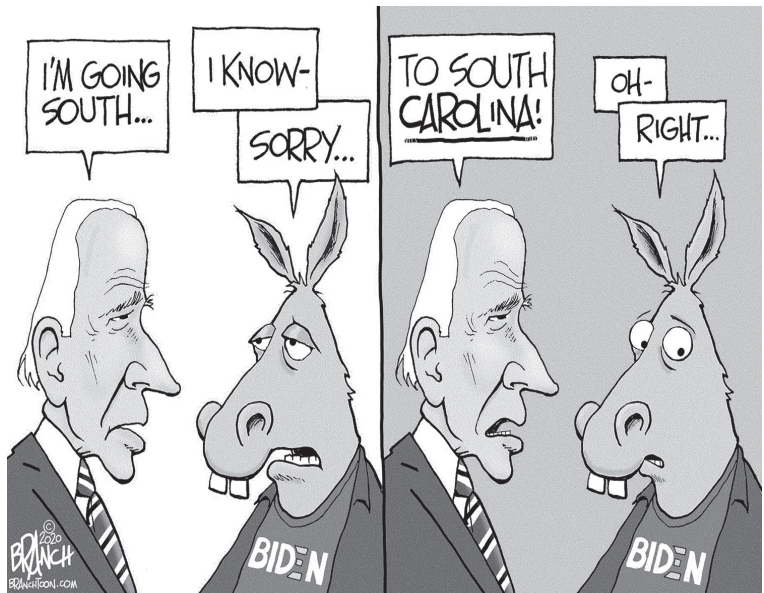
ured in everything from the little .204 Ruger to the mighty .450/400 Nitro Express. Because it is a single-shot action, barrels can be several inches longer than a repeating rifle and still maintain the same overall length. And, because there is no magazine to worry about, bullets can be seated to whatever length you want.

However, despite being a beautiful rifle, it is not all rainbows and butterflies. No. 1s can be amazingly accurate, or they can be downright miserable. Many attribute this to the two-piece stock, which can be difficult to bed correctly. It has strong integral scope ring bases, but they are positioned so far forward that a scope with generous eye relief is needed for a clear sight picture.

I have been lusting after a Ruger No. 1 for many years. A local gentleman took pity on me and sold me a No. 1 sporter in 6mm Remington with a nicely figured stock. An additional cool factor is that it was made in 1976 to commemorate the 200th anniversary of our great country. Even though I bought it mostly for a "lookin'" rifle, I was pleased to find that it shoots pretty well. So far it seems to like flat-base bullets over boat tails. It is far too pretty to be taking on any rough hunts, but if the stars align, I will be using it to chase antelope this fall.

Drop us a line at shootingthebreezebme@gmail.com and tell us about your favorite "lookin'" rifle.

Rod Carpenter is a husband, father and hunting fool.



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