

Nixon Muses on Vilification of Lincoln

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By JOHN HERBERS

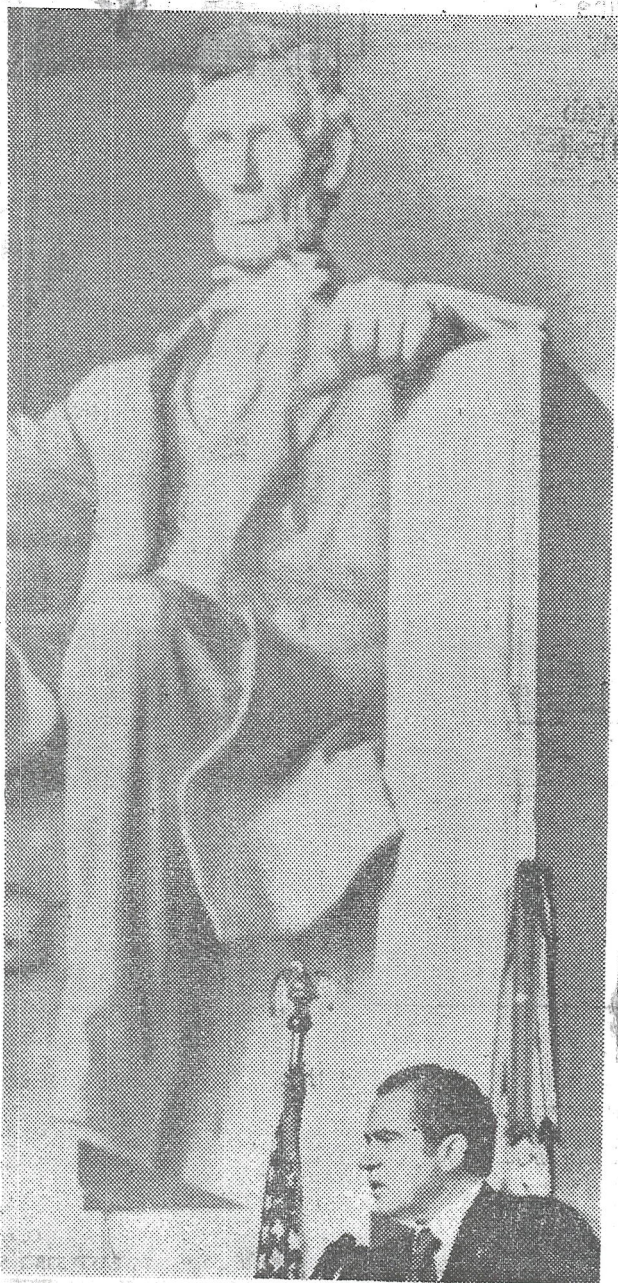
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WASHINGTON, Feb. 12—President Nixon placed a wreath at the Lincoln Memorial today and, in a speech that seemed to draw a comparison to himself, said that the Civil War President, despite vilification, had the character to "stand tall and strong and firm no matter how harsh or unfair the criticism might be."

Appearing unannounced at a small, quiet ceremony noting the 165th anniversary of Lincoln's birth, Mr. Nixon did not directly mention the torrent of criticism that had been heaped upon him and his Presidency, the impeachment inquiry under way in the House or his repeated assertions that he would not resign. But he said of Lincoln:

"No President in history has been more vilified or was more vilified during the time he was President than Lincoln. Those who knew him, his secretaries, have written that he was very deeply hurt by what was said about him and drawn about him, but on the other hand, Lincoln had the great strength of character never to display it, always to stand tall and strong and firm no matter how harsh or unfair the criticism might be. These elements of greatness, of course, inspire us all today."

The thrust of his brief address, however, pertained to what he saw as Lincoln's view of "America's role in the world," one that Mr. Nixon said would have approved of his own efforts to bring about



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a peaceful world order.

"Lincoln would have said, a great nation, a strong nation, a rich nation and a great people will use their strength and their wealth to build a world in which peace and freedom can survive for themselves and for others as well," he said. "This, I think, is the Lincoln heritage for today. It is the Lincoln admonition for tomorrow and I would trust for the next generation and perhaps for the next century."

Mr. Nixon's performance was reminiscent of one at the same spot six years ago by President Johnson, who, in a Lincoln Day address, drew a comparison between his ordeal in the Vietnam war and that of Lincoln in the Civil War.

Speech Is Memorized

Mr. Johnson, however, was

more direct, saying that, as Lincoln had "stuck it out," then "so will we." A few weeks later as criticism of his conduct of the war mounted, Mr. Johnson announced he would not seek re-election.

Mr. Nixon has been active recently, meeting with a wide range of people and attending various events. He decided over the last weekend to deliver an address at the monument, which has been a favorite tourist attraction and a gathering point for antiwar and civil rights demonstrations.

His speech writers turned out some prepared remarks, which Mr. Nixon rewrote and memorized. But his appearance was not announced in advance.

A few hundred people were

gathered for the annual Lincoln Day ceremony when the Presidential limousine and entourage pulled up to the memorial's steps shortly after noon. Mr. Nixon climbed to the top of the steps, without overcoat and smiling slightly in the gray chill, to take his place at the right of the enormous marble statue of Lincoln that looks out over the Reflecting Pool and the Washington Monument.

Last night, in a tough speech to representatives of the 13 powers at the international energy conference here, Mr. Nixon warned that European nations could not count on continued help from the United

States in defense matters if they went their own way on energy policies.

Today, Mr. Nixon seemed to be underscoring a forceful use of American power when he said that Lincoln would have hoped that America "would not turn away from greatness despite the fact that some other nations in the world turn inward, failing to assume their responsibilities for building a peaceful world."

In this regard, he paraphrased Lincoln, saying, "We could meanly lose what is mankind's last best hope for peace and freedom, but we could also nobly save it." Lincoln, in his second annual message to Congress in 1862, said, in connection with saving the Union and freeing the slaves, "We shall nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope of earth."

After the speech, Mr. Nixon placed a large wreath at the foot of the Lincoln statue and stood with his hand over his heart as taps was sounded. Then he descended the stairs, shaking hands with a small but friendly crowd that pressed around him.

Late today, Mr. and Mrs. Nixon attended the 90th birthday party for Alice Roosevelt Longworth, an occasion that attracted hundreds of influential persons of both political parties. Mr. Nixon remained there for almost an hour, shaking hands and chatting. The Nixons ended an unusual day away from the White House by having dinner at a downtown restaurant, Trader Vic's. Tomorrow he will fly to Key Biscayne, Fla., for a long weekend in the sun.