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Of Lincoln and Nixon

To the Editor:

President Richard Nixon has been known to draw parallels between himself and Abraham Lincoln. There is one parallel, however, that would be difficult to muster, and that is their attitudes toward opponents.

In a Watergate tape-transcript conversation of Sept. 15, 1972, President Nixon said:

"I want the most comprehensive notes on all those who tried to do us in. They didn't have to do it. If we had had a very close election and they were playing the other side I would understand this. No—they were doing this quite deliberately and they are asking for it and they are going to get it. We have not used the power in the first four years as you know. We have never used it. We have not used the Bureau and we have not used the Justice Department but things are going to change now."

Contrast this with the conclusion of Lincoln's response to a serenade given by some District of Columbia Republican clubs two days after his re-election of Nov. 8, 1864:

"So long as I have been here I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom. While I am deeply sensible to the high compliment of a re-election, and duly grateful, as I trust, to Almighty God, for having directed my countrymen to a right conclusion, as I think for their own good, it adds nothing to my satisfaction that any other man may be disappointed or pained by the result. May I ask those who have not differed with me to join with me in this same spirit toward those who have?"

As in the period after the Civil War, what our nation needs today in facing questions of domestic healing and reconciliation is a President with a spirit of magnanimity. Instead we have one who seems to be lacking not only in magnanimity but also in conscience.

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