

## EDITORIAL: Lincoln, our greatest president, deserves his own day



James Getty, portraying President Abraham Lincoln, stands before a ceremony commemorating the 150th anniversary of the dedication of the Soldiers' National Cemetery and President Abraham Lincoln's Gettysburg Address, Tuesday Nov. 19, 2013, in Gettysburg, Pa.

MATT ROURKE — AP

You saved the country. You freed millions from enslavement. You set in motion the building of the railroads that linked America "from sea to shining sea." A law you signed created America's system of public higher education. You were one of the most quotable presidents ever.

What's it take to get a day set aside to honor your birthday?

Abraham Lincoln was our greatest president. You can debate the point, but according to the scholars over the past 85 years you'll lose. There have been 18 scholarly attempts to rate our presidents. Ten of those rank Lincoln No. 1; he was No. 2 in six and No. 3 on two. (George Washington and Franklin Delano Roosevelt were Nos. 2 and 3.)

The list of Lincoln's accomplishments is unparalleled. That he rose from such humble beginnings makes it all the more remarkable. He was born in a log cabin on Feb. 12, 1809, deep in the woods of Kentucky. When his father lost a land quarrel, he moved the family to Indiana and even deeper into the woods. His stepmother taught him to read by firelight; his father taught him to split rails.

Lincoln was a tough guy but not a bully. In fact, he whipped a town bully named Jack Armstrong shortly after arriving

in Illinois.

He was a true politician, sometimes writing scurrilous things about political opponents under assumed names in friendly newspapers. He was the first president ever to write a letter to the editor.

All this, and yet no national day to honor him. There are plenty of schools, libraries, parks, cities, counties and even ships named in his honor.

Some believe Presidents Day honors Lincoln and all four presidents born in February. That's incorrect. The U.S. government still considers the third Monday in February "Washington's Birthday," in honor of our first president. And we even messed up that. Washington's special day never falls on his birthday. He was born on Feb. 22, 1732. But the third Monday of February never arrives later than the 21st day, so we're really not even properly honoring Washington.

Now, our greatest president has become something of a caricature: the gangly, bearded guy in the stovepipe hat.

How is it that more states (Alabama, Virginia, Florida, Mississippi, Georgia) recognize Confederate General Robert E. Lee's birthday (Jan. 19) than honor Lincoln's (Connecticut, Illinois, Missouri, New York)? Three other states set aside the day after Thanksgiving to honor Lincoln, because Lincoln was the first to set aside a day of "giving thanks" in November.

Though many school districts still observe his birthday, the state of California doesn't. For the man who in 1864 set aside for preservation the land that became Yosemite National Park, we deleted his holiday in 2009 — the 200th anniversary of his birth — to save money.

John Wilkes Booth assassinated our 16th president on April 15, 1865. That date is probably the most hated day on America's calendar, but it has nothing to do with Lincoln's death. It's the day our taxes are due.

In a sad bit of irony, perhaps that's appropriate. Along with all the other firsts, it was under Lincoln that income taxes began.

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