

NEWSLETTER

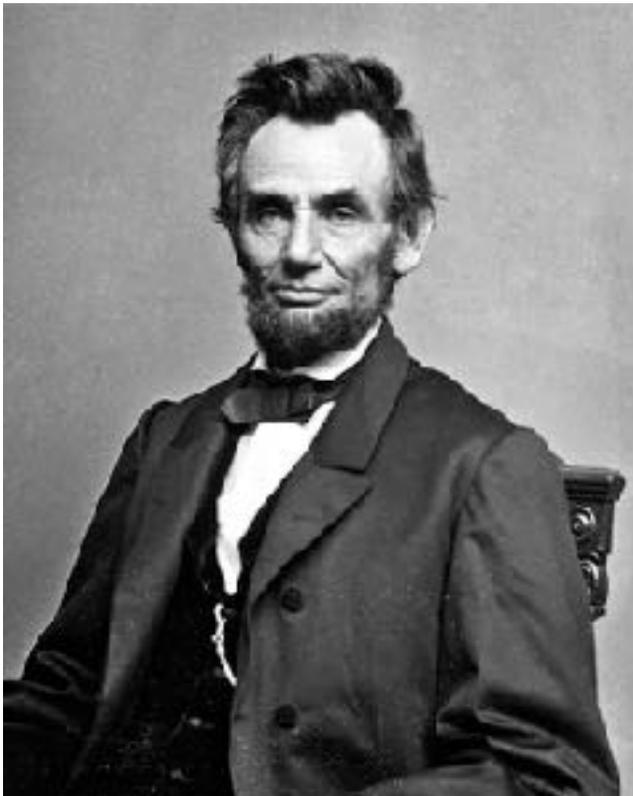
Friends of Civil War Alcatraz

January 2021

Steve Johnson, Editor

Lincoln's Name to be Removed?

Usually this newsletter is devoted to detailing the history of Fort Alcatraz — its construction, armaments, significant events, etc. It also reports on the notices and happenings of the Park Service regarding volunteers and the ranger staff. But from time to time issues arise that should be reported to the readers, and a current one is the proposal to remove Lincoln's name from a high school in San Francisco. The re-naming committee of the S.F. School Board has recommended removing the current names of 44 schools, including Lincoln's, because those persons did not “show that black lives matter” or showed evidence of racism in their lives.



In the case of President Lincoln, the committee listed these reasons for removing his name: 1) he signed the “Homestead Act”, which gave land away to settlers, including Indian land; 2) he allowed the hanging of 38 men of the Dakota tribe for their insurrection against settlers; 3) he permitted the government to deport hundreds of Navajo from their native lands; 4) he didn't really demonstrate that black lives mattered to him.

The head of the committee, Jeremiah Jeffries, is a first grade teacher, not a historian. If he was a historian, he would have known that from early adulthood Lincoln spoke out against the evils of slavery, and when Lincoln said in 1862 “if I could save the Union without freeing any slaves I would do it” he had already privately decided to issue the Emancipation Proclamation.

Dates to Remember

Saturday, Jan. 23, 2021
FOCWA Virtual Board Meeting 10 a.m.

All members are invited. Contact Steve Johnson if you wish to attend and you will be sent the link to the Zoom meeting.

If Jeffries had done any research he would have realized that Lincoln, especially after talks with Frederick Douglass, grew to understand that blacks should eventually be able to vote and become full citizens. And while Jeffries blamed Lincoln for allowing those Dakota men to be hung, it's not the full story. Lincoln commuted the death sentence of 264 other Dakota men. And he had been advised that unless some Indians were hung, the state militia would exact their own punishments against all the Dakota tribes. As in all history, one should examine the whole story and know all the facts before drawing conclusions. Lincoln lived in a very racist society and should be commended for doing what he did despite the pressures put on him.

Harold Holzer, a noted Lincoln scholar and author of several books on Lincoln, has stated that measuring historical figures by modern standards is problematic. "Nobody is going to pass 21st century mores if you are looking at the 18th and 19th centuries," he said.

It seems to me that the whole of a person's life should be taken into account when evaluating his/her accomplishments, and their general contribution to humanity. When done in that way, certainly Lincoln should be honored for his effort to end slavery, to keep the Union together, and to heal the nation's wounds - which sadly he did not live long enough to attempt. I believe it is a dishonor to take away his name, and it dishonors the thousands of soldiers who fought for the Union specifically because he asked them to. And it dishonors the freed black men and women who called him "Father Abraham" and kept pictures of him in their homes. If you disagree with this committee's recommendations, you can write or call the San Francisco School Board, who will be taking up this issue at their meeting in early January. Here are the members of the S.F. Board of Education: <https://www.sfusd.edu/about/board-of-education>

Volunteers on Hold

The Park Service has suspended any volunteer activity at their sites because of the spike in infections of the virus. It probably won't be until late summer or fall that volunteers will be once again join the rangers on the island.

Board Meeting on Saturday, January 23rd

The FOCWA Board of Directors will meet online via Zoom on January 23. All members are invited to attend; send an email to Steve Johnson. And you will be sent the link to the meeting. Items on the agenda include the video project for schools, making an Alcatraz presentation for the NPS, discussion on finances, and memberships.

Resources

The Daily Mail online article, "San Francisco to rename Abraham Lincoln High School"
<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-9055391/San-Francisco-rename-Lincoln-High-School-didnt-black-lives-mattered-him.html>

Digital History "Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley"
https://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/disp_textbook.cfm?smtID=3&psid=393

Wikipedia "Dakota War of 1862" https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakota_War_of_1862