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REASON AND EMOTION, NOSES APART!

When Abraham Lincoln was only 28 years old, he delivered his Lyceum Speech, in Springfield, Illinois. When it was published, it was instrumental in establishing the reputation that led to his presidency decades later.

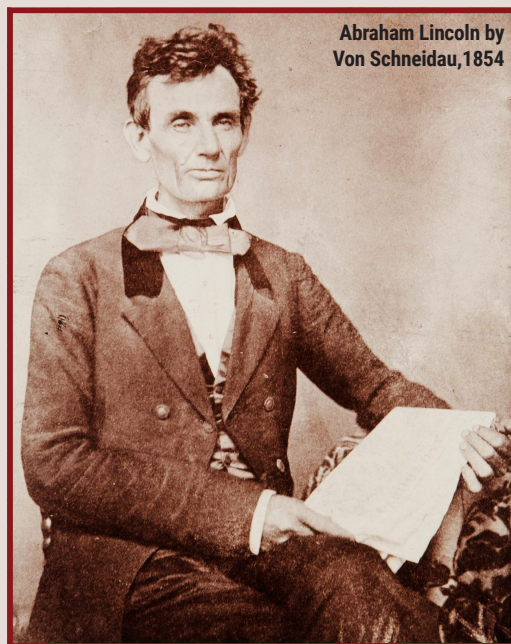
The remarkable intellect that ultimately saved the United States was already on full display. He decried “increasing disregard for law,” which he saw pervading the country, and a “growing disposition to substitute the wild and furious passions” of “savage mobs” for the “sober judgment of Courts.”

What can that possibly have to do with today’s racing?

Just this: In commenting on the November 1864 election, which returned him to office only a few months before his assassination, he famously remarked, “Human-nature will not change. In any future great national trial, compared with the men of this, we shall have as weak, and as strong; as silly and as wise; as bad and good.”

In short, since human nature won’t change, that’s why we need laws, and why we need the rule and process of law, and sober judgment of courts, instead of passion and emotion to define our decisions.

Over the last several years, emotion has threatened to overtake reason in the governance of racing, in several noteworthy incidents. It’s understandable, if not admirable. First, a calamity of national negative attention brought to racing by Santa Anita’s horrid and preventable spike in catastrophic injuries in 2019 brought forth a torrent of emotional reactions. Tempered, just enough, by reason? As did the international pandemic which added enormous economic and behavioral stress to everyone. Then, just as we were beginning to return to a semblance of



Abraham Lincoln by Von Schneidau, 1854

normalcy, or to hope for it, America’s highest profile professional trainer became—virtually overnight—the supposed symbol of everything cumulatively wrong about the sport.

Wild and furious passions have indeed been unleashed. Again. Will reason prevail?

Many in racing’s leadership, including some among its most elite, seem bent on stoking the fires of what Lincoln called a “mobocratic spirit,” rather than its opposite, “reason, cold, calculating, unimpassioned reason.” Passion, he had declared, is our enemy—the enemy of all free governments.

Rushing to judgment has perennially been among the preeminent weaknesses of human nature, and if Lincoln is to be believed, it will always be so. It’s why we have due process of law in this country, guaranteed (supposedly) as a constitutional right. Most of us are frustrated—always or at least occasionally—by how long it takes to decide the most critical questions, either legislatively or legally. But “due process” is there to wring as much passion of the moment as possible out of the ultimate decision. And I vividly remember a man decades ago who was finally vindicated in court, after a years-long process, who then said to the media, “Great. Now where do I go to get my reputation back?” So now, in the spirit of unimpassioned reason, let’s reflect on what’s right, valuable and praiseworthy about our last few years.

I remember one of our leaders complaining incessantly for a decade about how long it takes to enact rules in California, owing to the process required



by the Administrative Procedure Act. He failed to note that in the benchmark matter of severely curtailing the use of clenbuterol, several years back, a broad coalition of trainers, owners and regulators got that accomplished very quickly—entirely in accordance with the ponderous process required by the Act. And that was even before the more recent crises erupted.

California has also led the way in establishing many useful and productive reforms that

most of us thought weren’t necessary but have proven in practice to be effective and probably long overdue, inciting better horsemanship, a more level playing field and a more pleasing sport for the public.

Was every action taken entirely rational and mandatory? No overreaching? No emotion? Almost certainly not. But, on balance, they have presented a more defensible sport than we had before, without a doubt. More recently, as the State Legislature has seen it politically necessary to “do something,” several matters that are more logically suited for regulators or rules than for law, became statutory. Emotion nipping reason at the wire in that case?

One thing is certain: Even if we don’t think about it this way, as we should (or haven’t been taught it), our sport has proven again to be interdependent. It’s useless to debate whether that’s a strength or a weakness. It’s a fact. Every entity, every stakeholder group—whether government, breeder, owner, racing association, breed registry, trainer, veterinarian, blacksmith, vendor or participant, bettor or spectator—is dependent on every other one. We’re all necessary conditions for success. Not one is sufficient by itself. And not one is superior to the others. We each have to behave properly, in the best interest of the horse, or we have no sport.

This wisdom applies to each of us. From the lowliest to the highest. It’s human nature. When Lincoln decried mobocracy, he knew that we each share that same nature ... mobs can rise from the rabble, and all the way to Park Avenue. **T**