

THE DIGITAL LINCOLN

A PROPOSAL REGARDING THE FUTURE OF THE ALBC WEB SITE

I. VISION STATEMENT

Abraham Lincoln embraced new technology: railroads, the telegraph, advanced weaponry. As the only president to hold a patent for his own invention, he believed technology could save and improve our nation. The power of today's Internet to distribute information and to provoke and facilitate discussion – the lifeblood of modern democracy – would have appealed to our 16th president. Lincoln, who spent countless hours in the telegraph office, certainly would have embraced the Internet.

Talking together is a fundamental political act. But what good does conversation really do in a democracy? It helps us work out differences based upon shared ground. Conversation can build relationships and encourage political movement. It also makes it possible for people to change their minds. In the public forum of the Internet, it leaves traces by which those with opposing views can understand one another better.

With more Americans turning to the Internet for information, a new era of citizen involvement has blossomed. The wealth of information available, together with a diverse variety of opinion to interpret and frame that information, creates a rich and fertile learning environment. The power of social networks to bring people together, paired with the Internet, can create a modern political state that invites civic participation.

Civic engagement, grounded in an appreciation of Lincoln's ideals, has been a primary objective of the Bicentennial Commission. It follows logically, therefore, that the ALBC envisions its Web site becoming an important online gathering place where we can tap into the vast collective creativity of the American people to propose innovative solutions to the challenges facing America.

How will we get there? And equally important, how will we ensure that the online dialogue is guided by Lincoln's wisdom?

We will begin by expanding the site's resources for studying Lincoln's life and legacy. Content available directly on the site, and links to rich material at other sites, will build a "digital Lincoln" that will help visitors understand him better. We are working with tech savvy Lincoln scholars including Matt Pinsker of Dickinson College and Vernon Burton of the University of Illinois to help us imagine this new digital age in Lincoln studies. We are reaching out to other scholars in the vanguard of this new age to create a blue-ribbon advisory group to help us dream big.

Should we collaborate with the leaders of the emerging "e-Democracy" movement? For example, Newt Gingrich's "American Solutions" is in the forefront of thinking about how technology can help transform public participation in American governance in the 21st century. His statement that "... we should harness existing technologies to further strengthen our democracy and ensure that it will endure," sounds vaguely like Lincoln's own words at Gettysburg that "government of the people, by the people, for the people

shall not perish from the earth.” The Obama campaign and presidency has shown us how the Web can be used to provoke discussion, and that previously neglected groups can be inspired to act when reached.

Are there others interested in civic engagement with whom we should collaborate? We envision our Web site as a place where the public at large and the Lincoln community are drawn together, where diverse groups can build and maintain meaningful dialogue about completing Lincoln’s “unfinished work.” We seek to foster unique collaborations, to ensure access to Lincoln resources, and to provide an avenue for people to continue their education.

II. NEW AND EXPANDED CONTENT

5 Large-scale ideas for new Web site content:

1. THE FIRST DIGITAL LINCOLN BIOGRAPHY AND VIRTUAL TOUR

Utilizing the Internet’s potential for collaboration, the ALBC could publish the first comprehensive digital Lincoln biography. Users could access photographs, three-dimensional objects (i.e. interactive panoramic photographs, maps, etc), video, audio and footnotes interconnecting multiple sources and creating not only a start to finish text biography, but also a Virtual Tour of Lincoln’s life.

Advances in satellite imaging would enhance this virtual biography. Now it’s possible to create custom layers on satellite map interfaces, such as Google Earth. Developers could create a highly detailed and accessible virtual world of Lincoln’s life. Historic maps from Lincoln’s lifetime could feature images, text bubbles, audio clips, video, statistical data, and “street level” views of historic places/structures allowing visitors to experience Lincoln’s America.

For example, virtual tourists could begin with a satellite image of the United States in 1860, zoom into a street map of Springfield, tour homes and buildings across the small town (including a trip inside the reconstructed interior of Lincoln’s home at Eighth and Jackson), and pause to listen and learn about sites along the virtual tour. Additionally, visitors could:

- Follow Lincoln’s pre-Inaugural journey, listening to his speeches and asking questions
- Access stories of people following his election
- See a three-dimensional reconstruction of Washington, D.C. on the eve of the Civil War and in subsequent years
- Tour the Lincoln White House
- Visit Gettysburg
- Return to Springfield for Lincoln’s final resting place and hear the voices of mourners en route

Would you be interested in reviewing results from the 1860 election and use interactive maps to consider how variables such as population demographics or economic conditions affected the vote?

The House Divided Project at Dickinson College has created such tours on various topics including, the Lincoln-Douglas Debates and the Underground Railroad. Harold Holzer and Douglas Wilson might provide additional insight to this virtual biography.

2. VIRTUAL TOWN HALLS

Our national Town Hall series, *Race, Freedom and Equality of Opportunity*, has connected audiences in 11 cities. From our first Town Hall in Gettysburg, which brought together such notables as Jack Kemp, Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., and Alan Guelzo, to our most recent meeting in Chicago featuring Professor Henry Louis Gates, new advances in digital technology can enlarge these discussions from the cities and imagine a national conversation.

Could the ALBC transform the Town Hall series into an online format, expanding civic engagement and contributing to the e-Democracy movement? The discussion might connect audiences with some of the nation's leading public intellectuals, such as Michael Eric Dyson, Henry Louis Gates, Doris Kearns Goodwin, Orlando Patterson, and William Julius Wilson, for an on-going series of real-time, interactive online discussions. What discussion topics would appeal to you for a Virtual Town Hall? How could the ALBC facilitate a two-way conversation with these scholars? Would an online question submission forum serve this purpose? Interactive polling for questions?

Our February 12, 2009, National Teach-in effectively demonstrated the success of such a program. With live audio and video streaming on the website, audiences from over 5,000 schools and eight nations listened to Doris Kearns Goodwin, Harold Holzer and Matt Pinsker answer student questions on Lincoln's life and legacy. Duplicating the success of this program would perpetuate Lincoln's legacy of learning. We welcome your thoughts.

3. THE COLLECTED RECOLLECTIONS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN

Although numerous printed and digital editions of Lincoln's collected works and selected papers exist, they are scattered throughout the World Wide Web. Google Books includes many Lincoln era memoirs. The Library of Congress features digitized letters from Lincoln's presidency. And most recently, University of Nebraska Press and Southern Illinois University Press have reissued various memoirs with new scholarly introductions, but more Civil War era memoirs are available, Matt Pinsker has said.

To date, the most centralized online edition incorporating most of Lincoln's correspondence is in the planning stages at the Papers of Abraham Lincoln, based in Springfield, IL. However, there is no single repository for all printed recollections and key texts from Lincoln's intimates (i.e. Joshua Speed and William Herndon), which presents them in a searchable or annotated format on the Web.

Should the ALBC Web site foster collaborations to create a comprehensive collection? Hyperlinks could effectively connect a wealth of information from:

- The Library of Congress
- National Archives
- Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum
- Abraham Lincoln Online.org
- The Kunhardt photograph collection

4. THE CIVIL WAR CLASSROOM THROUGH LIFELONG LEARNING

From 2011 through 2015 and beyond, classrooms around the nation will honor the Civil War Sesquicentennial. Matt Pinsker has noted that by utilizing the Bicentennial's resources, the ALBC could enliven the discussion and ensure that Lincoln's legacy and the commemoration of the Civil War continue inspiring.

The ALBC could help focus the forthcoming discussions around the meaning and legacy of the Civil War, as they occur in the nation's K-12 classrooms and adult learning centers. Some of this could be done via now familiar technology such as YouTube (or its less restrictive video streaming equivalents), but there are also a number of new online presentation tools that can enhance this virtual experience and make visitors feel as if they are actually in the classroom with these scholars.

- Study military history, perhaps in collaboration with a film maker or game developer
- Academic lectures on diplomatic, military, and social history
- Expand the National Teach-In model to include seminars on critical topics like economics, presidential war powers, military justice, emancipation, and democracy
- Simulating the ALPLM's video *The Civil War in Four Minutes*, i.e. Gettysburg, Vicksburg, New Orleans
- Explore the travels of a cotton bale and the effect the embargo had on people's lives
- Develop a "sister-schools" program, where classrooms throughout the North and South might correspond about the references of their community in the war

Should we expand programs such as Yale University's free online video of David Blight's Civil War & Reconstruction class? Please see <http://oyc.yale.edu/history/civil-war-and-reconstruction> and www.academicearth.com for examples.

These "social media classrooms" and interactive teach-ins would provide students the opportunity to experience free taped lectures and live discussions.

5. THE LINCOLN IMAGE ARCHIVE

Could we create a multi-media archive that shows how Lincoln's image has evolved since 1865 in print, politics, film, television and other media?

- Video of presidents from Wilson to Obama speaking about Lincoln
- Brief clips of Lincoln on film
- Collection and presentation of newspaper stories / editorials

Should the ALBC host a Web-based feature that would post privately held Lincoln-era and Civil War-era letters, documents and other miscellaneous materials? Maybe this would attempt to inspire people across the country to share whatever material of archival value from the Civil War era.

Lincoln can speak to all ethnic and racial groups in every age. But race, gender, origin, and socio-economic condition affect one's perspective of Lincoln. Generational differences may matter too.

- Multi-media online library of the memoirs, corridos, photographs, etc. of the early 20th century Mexican laborers in the Southwest who knew Lincoln's story through his image on the penny
- Slave narratives – both textual and audio – collected by the Depression-era Federal Writers Project
- Follow-up interviews with the slaves' descendants
- Audio, video and photographs of civil rights leaders reflecting on Lincoln

Smaller-scale ideas for new Web site content:

- Podcasts of various ALBC roundtables and other discussions of equality, opportunity, and race; of interviews with individuals about their "relationships" with Lincoln; of ALBC and other concerts, poetry recitals, etc. related to Lincoln; major actors, sports figures, political leaders, etc. reading their favorite Lincoln speeches
- Book reviews, essays and discussions on new releases
- An expanded ALBC blog and/or link to ALBC Twitter feed
- Digitized books - The University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign is digitizing its collection of more than 200 Lincoln books and pamphlets in the public domain
- Lincoln on currency, coinage, and stamps - Collection of all the stamps and currency from around the world bearing Lincoln's image. This would be a very Web-friendly feature because of its visual nature
- How was Lincoln represented in the journals of his day? Many newspaper archives are now available online for free
- Lincoln in the states. The Lincoln Institute (a joint project of the Lincoln Institute and the Lehrman Institute) has done this already. The ALBC site could highlight their work. Would people find it fascinating to learn more about Lincoln's ties to their states? Please see <http://www.abrahamlincolnsclassroom.org/Library>
- Religion and Morals. Lincoln was not a churchman, but he continually referenced "the Almighty." Are there good online resources available that take up this important aspect of Lincoln's life? Is this an area the ALBC could fill?

The Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission seeks to bridge two worlds: Lincoln scholarship/Lincoln studies and the world of Web 2.0 (and future) technologies. In building and designing the Web site of the future, we seek the advice of all Lincoln stakeholders, and we welcome your questions, suggestions, and criticisms. We thank you in advance for your consideration.