



**Your on the  
Street Reporter**



**Uyless Black**

**Presidential Places**  
**Abraham Lincoln: Home, Museum, and Tomb**

## Presidential Places

George Washington	Birthplace
Andrew Jackson	Home and Grave
Abraham Lincoln	Home, Museum, and Tomb
Herbert Hoover	Childhood Home, Museum, and Grave
Harry Truman	Birthplace, Home, and Museum/Library
Dwight D. Eisenhower	Childhood Home and Museum
Ronald Reagan	Museum and Grave
Richard Nixon	Childhood Home, Museum, and Grave
George H.W. Bush	Museum/Library
William Clinton	Childhood Home
William Clinton	Museum/Library
George W. Bush	Museum/Library

Reflections on Visits to Presidential Places: Government Graft

Pending:

George Washington	Mount Vernon
Thomas Jefferson	Monticello
James Madison	Montpelier

And others as I travel America

## Presidential Places

Hundreds of books, movies, and television programs are available about the homes, libraries, museums, birth, and burial places of America's Presidents. I cannot hope to replicate these works, nor do I wish to. My hope is that the essays in the *Presidential Places* series offer different and humorous perspectives about several of America's revered historical places.

Many of the places we visit in this series are called *libraries*. They are unique places containing historical information about America in general and specifically about an American president during his time in office.

Here is one definition of such a library: "A repository of historical information, where many books are kept."

Here is an alternate and more accurate definition: "A repository of historical information, where many books are kept away from the public."

Here is another definition of a presidential library, "A library, whose contents are forbidden to be examined by people who paid admission to enter the library and examine its contents in the first place. Therefore, Disneyland-like exhibits are created to placate the crowd."

A fourth definition: "Thinly disguised attempt to bolster the public image of a former President."

These definitions are acceptable to those who flock to presidential places. After all, presidential places are crowded places. The visitors must be curious about White House dinner menus, presidential pins, catchy campaign slogans, first-ladies' gowns, and other artifacts of American politics. Because these places vary in how they are named, I use the words *museum* and *library* interchangeably. It appears most of the places have buildings and rooms that serve both as museums and libraries.

In each of these places I visited, I had my fill of political drivel. But of more importance, I witnessed a deep sense of pride the site creators have about these places. And time and again, I beheld the thankfulness and patriotism of American citizens who were aware, while knowing America's faults, that the country offered a better way of life than many other nations. Even with tongue in cheek, I carried away a sense of American citizens' reverence for America and for America's Presidents' contributions to this legacy.

It is my goal in *Presidential Places* to provide you with some lesser-known and humorous aspects of Americana as well as a sense of the pride and patriotism of the sites' creators and visitors.

Unless otherwise noted, the cover page depicting the face of a U.S. President is sourced from Google.

**Presidential Places**  
**Abraham Lincoln: Home, Museum, and Tomb**  
**Report One**

*Abraham Lincoln:*  
*"The greatest citizen, and the noblest and the best, after Washington,*  
*that this land or any other has yet produced."<sup>1</sup>*  
---Mark Twain

**October 5, 2006**

During one of the Traveling America ventures, I made my way to Springfield, Illinois, a city I have long wished to visit. It is the home of Abraham Lincoln. As you may recall, while visiting our Nation's Capital, I had attempted without success to tour a place where Lincoln slept. The Willard Hotel, edition 1 was once his sleeping place, but it had been replaced with Willard Hotel, edition 2. Today, I knew for certain I would not be disappointed in my quest to view his quarters of quiescence. I had conducted research on Lincoln's home and discovered the house in Springfield was the original structure.

The National Park Service manages the home. The Service has also purchased several acres of land and buildings around the area. The homes and surrounding landscapes have been restored to their 1860's condition. Each building serves as a miniature museum, some containing Lincoln memorabilia; others housing the artifacts of former dwellers. As one example, I toured the Harriet Lane home, located across the street from the Lincoln residence. As a niece to President James Buchanan, she served as a hostess for the bachelor President during his term in office, from 1857 to 1861, just before Abe took over.

**Swarms of Young Tourists**

In addition to these exhibitions of America's past, Springfield is also the location of the Lincoln Library, his tomb, and a new state-of-the-art museum. Today, Reporterette and I saw them all, although our sightings were often blocked by swarms of herding pre-teenagers. They were let-out on the town from a fleet of tour busses. Clutching their knapsacks, playing their iPods, and demonstrating the well-known axiom, *Adolescents Fill Vacant Spaces*, they managed to permeate all breathing spaces in their vicinity.

No one could get by these colonies of over-sized ants. They paid scant attention to the fact that Lincoln had slept in this or that bed, or that he had written some of his most famous speeches from this or that table. They fidgeted with each one another, themselves, and their iPods.

Anyway, we approached Lincoln's home (seen in Figure 1), where a Park Service guide explained this house was, "...the only house he ever owned...Until he was 28, all he lived in was a log cabin...He paid \$1,500.00<sup>2</sup> for the three-room house, with an attic, where they slept... With each newborn child, they added onto the house.

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<sup>1</sup> R. Kent Rasmussen, editor, *Mark Twain: His Words, Wit, and Wisdom* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1997), 164, also, Albert Bigelow, editor, *Mark Twain's Speeches* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1923), 231.

<sup>2</sup> Some references cite a figure of \$1,200.00.



**Figure 1. Lincoln's home.**

" Just a few rules. First, no chewing gum. Please deposit your gum in that container over there. Following the tour, you can reclaim it if you wish.....I'm a retired elementary school principal, and I can smell gum a mile away, so don't try any tricks on me."

The walk through Lincoln's home took us into the past. The wall paper, rugs, and furniture were out of the 1860s. How do I know these artifacts were authentic? First, Shirley McLaine told me so. Second, so did the tour guide.

Many of the furnishings in the house actually belonged to the Lincoln family. For many years, the house was kept by the family, and later taken over by individuals and groups who preserved its contents. In 1887, the Lincoln's son Robert Lincoln sold the house to the state of Illinois for one dollar, with the stipulation the house would always be open to the public for free.

For a while, Abe and wife Mary lived in the Globe Tavern in Springfield, paying rent of \$4 a week.<sup>3</sup> Just about the same fee one would pay for a *few minutes* in an upscale "tavern" today. For example, Abe and Mary paid 56 cents per night for a bed at the Globe. Your reportage team paid 526 times as much for a bed at the Ritz-Carlton. Of course, inflation takes its toll, plus I'll wager the Globe did not have room service for dogs. Anyway, when son Todd was born, the family bought the house located on 8th and Jackson Streets. Abe lived there from 1844 until he left for the White House in 1861. He never returned.

As we passed through the living room (I stitched three shots together, as seen in Figure 2), the guide told us it was a "no kid zone." The children were not allowed in this parlor, only adults. As the guide explained this rule, my eyes glanced over to the hovering adolescents in our group to gauge their reaction to this affront to their adolescent dignity. They remained undisturbed by the idea, as the room had no TV or Play Station.

We learned it was in this room where the Republican representatives offered Abe the party's candidacy for the presidency. The date was May 19, 1860. Little did these men know their

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<sup>3</sup> Nancy D. Myers Benbow and Christopher H. Benbow, *Cabins, Cottages, and Mansions: Homes of the Presidents of the United States* (Gettysburg, PA: Thomas Publications, 2005), 28.

selection, considered to be a country bumpkin by the Eastern Establishment, would become one of the most revered persons in America's history.



Figure 2. Lincoln's parlor.

As you likely know, Lincoln was a successful politician before he became president. He was elected to the Illinois legislature in 1834 through 1840, and also served in the U.S. Congress. According to some historians, his main achievement as a state legislator was spear-heading the vote to transfer the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield. Abe abhorred long commutes. But unlike us modern Americans, who move closer to our work place, Abe moved his work place closer to him.

### **Finally, the Place Where Lincoln Slept**

As you also know from past reports, I spent a fair amount of my time looking for Elvis in general and Lincoln's sleeping places specifically. Thus far, I'd had no luck with either pursuit. On this occasion, I was certain I was finally going to view the place where Lincoln slept. After all, accompanied by Reporterette and gaggle of pre-acne humans, I was entering the Lincoln's sleeping quarters. Here I saw several pieces of furniture (including his bed!), which according to the guide, had been in this room since the 1850s.

I was particularly taken with a desk in the corner of the room, shown in Figure 3. We learned Lincoln worked on his early speeches at this desk. It is very small. I wondered where Lincoln's speechwriters sat as they helped him compose his speeches. Just a joke. Lincoln had no need for speechwriters. Earlier in life, Abe read the classics. He read all of Shakespeare, more than once. He studied Euclidean mathematics to hone his mental discipline. He actually thought about things. He was one of the most respected lawyers in Illinois, "The briefs he presented before the more formal state and federal courts were carefully documented and marked by unassailable logic."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> "Lincoln," Microsoft's Encarta.



**Figure 3. Lincoln's desk in his Springfield home.**

It is not my intent to demean our modern presidents, but I cannot imagine a Clinton or a Bush sitting down and writing his own speech from scratch. Before they even begin to compose a sentence, scores of policy experts and public relations gurus are consulted. Sometimes, polls are taken to predict the reaction to a speech, or even a passage in a speech. After all this activity, a horde of speech writers write the text....which the president reads from a teleprompter.

It is partially for this reason---Lincoln's writings and speeches---that I admire the man. I say partially. I revere him because of his humility and wisdom. I revere him because of his kindness. I read some time ago that a famous person was asked to give three principal ways to conduct oneself through life. He responded, "Be kind; then, be kind; then, be kind." I sense Lincoln unconsciously operated on those three principles. His kindness is evident in his speeches, in his policies, in his relationships with friend and foe, and in his relationships with his loved ones.

I make it a point to read about Lincoln. I make it a point to re-read his speeches. And when I do these re-reads, I am once again impressed by the extraordinary skill he demonstrated in writing beautiful, meaningful powerful prose---by himself. His text and oratory are simple, yet elegant and eloquent. Nonetheless, after writing or speaking momentous words and passages, he could sit down and engage in jokes and tales that would out-do any country pumpkin in the country. Abe was a Renaissance man of the 19th century.

### **A Place Where Lincoln May Have Slept**

In my reverie about Lincoln's desk, I forgot to take a picture of this bed. After all my toils and plans! How dumb could a reporter be? It's akin to the photographer of the World War II Iwo Jima flag raising event setting up the picture for the event....then....as the boys tote-up the flag, the photographer takes a picture of a nearby Japanese foxhole.

I didn't realize I had not snapped a shot of "Lincoln Slept Here" until I began writing this report. As I looked at my photos, I realized *not one* of the beds I captured had the wallpaper seen in Figure 3, the wallpaper in Lincoln's bedroom.

As they say today, "What a downer." Or as they would say in Lincoln's high-oratory days, "Such is the cause of a downer...whatever a downer may be." But I refuse to sign-off on this report until I have somewhat redeemed myself. I did snap some shots of the other beds in the house. They are shown in Figure 4.



**Figure 4. Beds in which Lincoln did not sleep.**

That's it for this report. In our next segment, we will wrap-up our visit in and around Lincoln's home and then move, along with swarms of children, to other Lincoln places in Springfield.

Your on the Street Reporter



**Presidential Places**  
**Abraham Lincoln: Home, Museum, and Tomb**  
**Report Two**

**October 5, 2006**

Your on the Street Reporter is still in Springfield, Illinois. I was reluctant to leave Lincoln's home, but the reportage team had other places to see. Within walking distance from Abe's residence are several remarkable sites: the old state house, Lincoln's law office, a Lincoln library, and a Lincoln museum. A short drive north is the Lincoln Tomb.

After leaving the Lincoln house, and picking up our chewing gum from the National Park Service garbage can, we headed for Abe's library and museum. Along the way, we passed by his law office (the left photo in Figure 5...stop lights came later.); the state house where he did his work as a congressman (the middle photo in Figure 5); and a new library of his works and works about him (the right photo in Figure 5).



**Figure 5. Lincoln landmarks.**

As I was walking around this part of the city, I thought about some of Lincoln's comments on America. I couldn't recall the exact words, but I did remember ideas from one of his speeches he made earlier in his career. Later, I looked it up and re-read this passage, "We find ourselves in the peaceful possession of the fairest portion of the earth, as regards extent of territory, fertility of soil, and salubrity of climate."<sup>5</sup>

He then spoke of America's unique political institutions that were, "...conducting more essentially to the ends of civil and religious liberty, than any of which the history of former times tells us."

Next, he spoke about the perceived dangers to the country, "At what point then is the approach of danger to be expected? I answer, if it ever reach us, it must spring up amongst us. It cannot come from abroad."

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<sup>5</sup> "The Perpetuation of Our Political Institutions: Address before the Young Men's Lyceum of Springfield, Illinois, January 27, 1838" in John Grofton (who wrote the historical notes in the book), *Abraham Lincoln: Great Speeches*, New York: Dover Publications, 1991), 1-8. All quotes from Lincoln, unless otherwise noted, come from this speech.

In this speech, Lincoln spoke of the dangers facing the Republic. His concern was about the gradual dismantling of the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and the many laws that originated from these documents. Lincoln cited several instances of the violation of the law, and not just toward African Americans. He expressed concern about the hanging of people from one my favorite trades, gamblers. Let's listen-in on this part of his speech:

It would be tedious, as well as useless, to recount the horrors of all of them. Those happening in the state of Mississippi, and at St. Louis, are, perhaps, the most dangerous in example and revolting to humanity. In the Mississippi case, they first commenced by hanging the regular gamblers; a set of men, certainly not following for a livelihood, a very useful or very honest occupation; but one which, so far from being forbidden by the laws, was actually licensed by an act of the Legislature, passed but a single year before.

Times have changed. Now-a-days, gamblers are TV stars. Our governments offer lottery tickets at 7-11 stores. Entire cities exist because of gambling.

Recently, Congress passed a bill to outlaw gambling on the Internet. This act is as hypocritical as it gets. On one hand, our government encourages gambling, saying lotteries provide funds for schools and other noble institutions. On the other hand, we citizens cannot gamble on the Internet because, guess what? This revenue goes to the private sector. I'll bet my next social security check that Congress would vote for Internet gambling if the revenue went to their respective districts and states---reinforcing their chances for a successful re-election.

We Americans have a legacy of defying conventions and rules. We hit a bulls-eye with our defiance of King George and his arrogant Parliament. Lincoln did not talk about this aspect of America's strength. In this speech, he warns about its possible weakness. His antidote is:

Let every American, every lover of liberty, every well wisher to his prosperity, swear by the blood of the Revolution, never to violate in the least particular, the laws of the country; and never tolerate their violation by others.

In these times, his words sound a bit prudish. But I think he is not speaking about running a red light or visiting a red light district. I suspect he is speaking about high crimes, those that could undermine the Republic. I am sure he is speaking about mob law. And here he addresses what we Americans must try to learn to treasure more, what we should recognize as nonexistent in many parts of the world, "There is no grievance that is a fit object of redress of mob law."

My take is that Iraq is now operating under mob law. The mobs have divided themselves into so-called religious camps. Even within these camps, sub-camps have been formed to combat their brethren. From an outsider, I sense that the new Iraqi Constitution---which practically guarantees mob law---would come about because the Sunnis were largely disenfranchised from the oil booty. Brilliant law-making. But then, that part of the world has centuries of revenge cycles to keep them going. Can't let a little thing like democracy and representation for a huge part of the population get in the way.

Thank God, thank the stars, thank fate... whatever or whomever you like to thank...for America's short history. We were able to start off on a relatively clean slate. The imprint of ancient tribal customs, ancient hierarchies, and cycles of revenge are not part of our legacy. For that alone, we should be thankful.

And thank whatever or whomever for our legacy of respecting our laws and our elections. We take our internal peaceful ways for granted, but they are not so common (read nonexistent) in many parts of planet earth.

### **The New Museum**

I would like to spend more time writing about Abraham Lincoln. Perhaps someday I will. For now, let's take a tour of the new Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum. I recommend this place to all. It is fun to visit and it is educational. It's the perfect place to bring a person who has grown up obtaining his or her knowledge from TV. It has state-of-the-art sound bite shows; it has movies; it has holograms. They don't last very long, so they will not tax one's attention span. The perfect customer: an adolescent.

Yep, gaggles of small *Homo sapiens* followed the reportage team to the museum. They seemed to stalk us, tracing our steps from Abe's home to Abe's museum. But here I noticed they stopped groping each other and themselves. They turned-off their iPods. They took-in the exhibits and learned about America.

The main room of this museum directs the visitor to various exhibits. I snapped the photo in Figure 6, which shows, in the top picture, the entrance to the "log cabin" days of Lincoln, and in the bottom picture, the entrance to the "White House" years.



**Figure 6. Scenes from the museum.**

I've read reviews on this museum. One critic did not like the use of holograms. He said the technique was not in keeping with the purpose of a museum: To display artifacts of the past.

Point taken, but I think one purpose of a museum is to display old documents and give the viewer a sense of the past that the display represents.

It is one thing to see the original manuscript of the Gettysburg Address. It's another to see a movie or a hologram rendition of how Mr. Lincoln came to write it. I watched a bevy of youngsters take in a movie showing the events of the Civil War, a show lasting 4 minutes. The narrator informed us *one second* in the movie represented *one week* of the War. The rendition was brilliantly rendered, and it held the attention of the children and me.

Next, various prides of children and I entered a theater to watch a movie named "Lincoln's Eyes." Here we saw three separate screens of images, accentuated with a hologram that played the role of a host as we watched, smelled, and heard: Smoke! Slavery. Noise! A black man's scars. Booms! Hangings. Vibrating seats! Burning houses.

The children were mesmerized...but by what? As we exited the theater, I overhead the children talk about the show: *My seat moved!...Smoke!...That man looked real!* Of course, what else should a twelve-year-old child think about? Still, I'll bet the black man's scars made an impression on one or two of the youngsters. I hope so.

### **No Dogs Allowed**

The Lincoln family kept a dog, named Fido, at their home. Nonetheless, our dog Milli (and our chewing gum) were to be left outside Springfield's Lincoln sites. While Holly toured the museum, Milli and I took a walk around the old legislature building square (Shown earlier, the middle photo in Figure 5).

As I've reported, there is no better way to meet people than to have a miniature Poodle in your possession. The critter is an instant people magnet. I've advised two of my older, single male buddies to take a small dog along when they go shopping for groceries. What's wrong with a little dual processing? Shop for food in parallel with shopping for that other vital staple in life for a man: a woman. I've even offered to lend Milli to them for an afternoon, or if needed, an evening of bar hopping. So far, they've declined my offer. Poor men; they don't recognize an opportunity when they see one.

Anyway, Milli and I watched and listened to the goings-on around this historic part of America. We came across several statues of Lincoln, some shown in Figure 6. Milli was curious about Abe's boots, probably because someone had dropped some food on them. We also passed by a musician who was playing an electric piano and singing folk music. Personally, I prefer folk music rendered on an acoustic guitar or banjo, but this man liked singing and playing folk music using the keyboard.



**Figure 6. Scenes around the square in Springfield.**

Have you come across a street musician who was so untalented you just could not put a coin in his or her jar? This man was pathetic. I was afraid if I gave him a tip it might encourage him. I suspect someone in the past told him he could sing well and was a whiz on the electric piano. Maybe one of those coddling moms:

- "Oh Horace, how lovely! When you grow up, you're going to be a great musician. You'll make a lot of money."
- "Ma, I'm fifty-five."
- "No matter. Keep practicing. Here's your allowance for the week."

I returned to the museum where Holly took over Milli. I toured other parts of the museum and encountered the cafeteria, where I had lunch. The most enjoyable part of my dining was an item on the menu: The General McClellan Chicken Sandwich. Ha! The chef had a sense of humor. "Chicken," as in, "One who does not like to fight."

Early in the Civil War, George McClellan commanded the Army of the Potomac, and in November 1861, he was appointed commander in chief of the Union army. Lincoln became increasingly dissatisfied with McClellan because Abe came to believe George spent too much time politikin' and not enough time fightin'. He also spent a lot of his time criticizing Lincoln and most of the Union Generals, while "crediting himself with every success."<sup>6</sup> He was not a very attractive man.

<sup>6</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*, text accompanying illustration (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 64.

McClellan was relieved of his command. A succession of Generals proved to be a disappointment until General Grant took over and started the Union Army doing what armies are supposed to do: Attack the enemy.<sup>7</sup> For Abe's second term, McClellan was nominated by the Democratic Party as its candidate for president on a *peace* platform.

It was time to visit Lincoln's tomb. On my way out of the museum, I stopped by the Information Desk.

- Desk Person, "May I help you, sir."
- Reporter, "I just saw 'Lincoln's Eyes.' One of the clips in the show is incorrect."
- The Desk Person looked me over, probably thinking, *Great, another wannabe Carl Sandburg*. "What might that be, sir?"
- "The Ford's Theatre picture. It shows Lincoln's opera box to the right of the balcony seats, when it was actually to the left."
- "I'll pass that on to the curator. Thanks for your help." ...*Don't these folks have anything better to do?*
- "You're welcome. By the way, do you happen to have adult-only hours...no children only grown ups?"
- "Of course not. Why do you ask?"
- "Never mind."

Your on the Street Reporter

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<sup>7</sup> If you have an opportunity, read Grant's autobiography. Many consider it to be one of the best books written on how to conduct a war and how to manage the battlefield. If nothing else, the read will give you an appreciation of the fine character of Grant.

**Presidential Places**  
**Abraham Lincoln: Home, Museum, and Tomb**  
**Report Three**

**October 5, 2006**

Hello from Your on the Street Reporter, once again I am in Lincoln's Springfield, Illinois. After leaving the Lincoln museum, the reportage team headed for Lincoln's tomb, a short drive north of Springfield's downtown area. Reporterette was at the wheel, while your Reporter went over his notes, trying to make sense of today's observations.

As I analyzed my markings, I discovered, once again, I had hurriedly written-down an observation I could not read. *Why had I not taken short hand in high school?* Mark Twain warned about this shortcoming with his admonition, *Short hand hasn't been invented yet. So, I don't use it. In lieu of not recording or knowing my subject's thoughts, I employ exaggeration.* I'm making fun of Mr. Twain, but he himself made the point of not being accurate in his writings, an interesting subject for another report. For now, let's take a tour of Abe's burial site, shown in Figure 7.



**Figure 7. Lincoln's Tomb.**

This tomb is located inside the Oak Ridge Cemetery and is maintained by the state of Illinois. The place is a lovely four acres of grass, oaks, and elms. You can see a stature of Lincoln, located at the center of this picture. The surrounding sculptures depict scenes from the Civil War, which I stitched together in Figure 8.

The inside of the tomb contains Abe and his family (with the exception of Robert). A tour guide explained the tomb was redone in 1931 to create a beautiful, almost haunting crypt, located below

the structure in these figures. Inscribed on one wall of this chamber are the words spoken by Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton just after Lincoln died: "Now he belongs to the ages."<sup>8</sup>



**Figure 8. Surrounding statues.**

As mentioned, I was reluctant to leave Springfield. I've wanted to come here for many years. Chances are I may not get back for another visit. It was a special day for me. I don't know if the other two members of the reportage team shared my emotions, but they were supporting partners to my meanderings.

As I was leaving Lincoln's tomb, I reflected back on this day. I thought about America. About its shopping strip malls, congested highways, and talking heads. ...And our freedom to talk. I thought about America's problems with too many taxes, too much pollution and too many laws. ...And our freedom to make laws. I thought about Abraham Lincoln's hard times as our president and how he set our Republic on course to try at least to realize the vision that all American citizens are created equal.

I left this day, headed for another interstate highway motel, thinking about the Emancipation Proclamation, the speech that led to the Thirteenth Amendment. I recalled the only passage from Mark Twain that this aging, addled mind still held intact, "Lincoln's proclamation...not only set the black slaves free, but set the white man free also."<sup>9</sup>

Finally, as I settled into the car, I read a quote I came across in the Lincoln Museum I had jotted-down in my notebook, "The past is the cause of the present. The present will be the cause of the

<sup>8</sup> "Lincoln's Tomb." Microsoft's Encarta.

<sup>9</sup> Kent Rasmussen, editor, *Mark Twain: His Words, Wit, and Wisdom* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1997),164, and in Albert Bigelow Paine, editor, *Mark Twain's Speeches* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1923), 349-350.



future." I don't know who spoke this, but it surely rings true for what Abraham Lincoln's presence in our past did for our future.

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