

## Illinois-Springfield professor will address Frederick Douglass' changing view of Lincoln during Pittsfield symposium

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PITTSFIELD, Ill. -- What turned out to be a mistaken assumption by a college professor back in 1984 led to revealing new information about Abraham Lincoln.

"I assumed everything that was important that Lincoln ever said or was said about him or his administration had long since been discovered by an army of Lincoln scholars and I could do my research by just consulting these published sources," said Michael Burlingame, who holds the Chancellor Naomi B. Lynn Distinguished Chair in Lincoln Studies at the University of Illinois at Springfield.

"I decided to take a look at unpublished sources and found tons of new information."

Burlingame found enough new information that he thought someone should write a new cradle-to-grave biography of the nation's 16th president, and with "nobody else foolish enough to do it," he took on the task himself.

Work on the well-received "Abraham Lincoln: A Life," published in 2008, began in 1997 as Burlingame scoured neglected and underused Lincoln resources housed across the United States.

Conclusions drawn from those resources, particularly about former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass and Lincoln, will be highlighted Monday in Pittsfield. Burlingame will be the featured speaker at a Lincoln symposium sponsored by the Abe Lincoln Project of Pike County and the Pittsfield Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission.

In a well-known speech given 11 years after Lincoln's death, Douglass referred to him as "pre-eminently a white man's president." But in Douglass' papers at the Library of Congress, Burlingame found a handwritten 1865 speech in which Douglass called Lincoln "emphatically" the black man's president.

In his talk, Burlingame will explore the 180-degree change in how Douglass viewed Lincoln.

Burlingame's interest in Lincoln began as a freshman at Princeton University, where he took the Civil War course taught by David Herbert Donald, a Lincoln scholar and biographer. Burlingame became Donald's research assistant, and 25 years ago, he focused on Lincoln as a research topic.

Research took Burlingame around the country, including visits to Pittsfield to seek information on John Nicolay, Lincoln's principal White House secretary, and John Hay.

"Compared to most people of that era, Lincoln's life is unusually well-documented, but we'll never know the full story. We don't know much firsthand about his growing up in Kentucky and Illinois," Burlingame said.

Next up for Burlingame is editing a series of books about Lincoln using more primary source materials. The most interesting may focus on Lincoln's anonymous journalism.

"As a young man and into middle age, Lincoln wrote a lot of articles for the Springfield paper," Burlingame said. "Everybody knows he did this, but nobody identified (the articles). I identified over 200 pieces Lincoln wrote."

Another project will focus on statements Lincoln made according to Civil War-era newspapers. Journalists of the time often would quote or paraphrase Lincoln based on interviews with people who had talked directly to the president.

"Most historians who write about Lincoln during his presidency use the New York papers, but you have to look at all other papers -- Boston, Philadelphia, Cincinnati, Chicago," Burlingame said. "If you go through all the newspapers, a somewhat tedious job, and keep looking at Washington dispatches, you find new evidence of what Lincoln said."

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