

ILLINOIS STATE BAR ASSOCIATION

The Unfinished Work

It all began with a tragic event. A black man in an adjoining state had been given his freedom – and within a few hours – an angry mob beat him severely and then they chained him to a tree – and then, while he was still alive, they set him on fire.

Men and women of good will across the nation were outraged. Including a young lawyer here in Springfield, Illinois. He was a tall, lanky 29-year-old man from New Salem. He had just been admitted to practice law two years earlier.

His name was Abraham Lincoln.

He had been invited to give a speech at an institution known as the Springfield Lyceum. He was outraged by what had just happened. Listen closely – can you hear his voice?

“There is no grievance for which mob law is either necessary, justifiable or excusable,” he said.

“Never violate in the least particular, the laws of the country and never tolerate their violation by others,” he said.

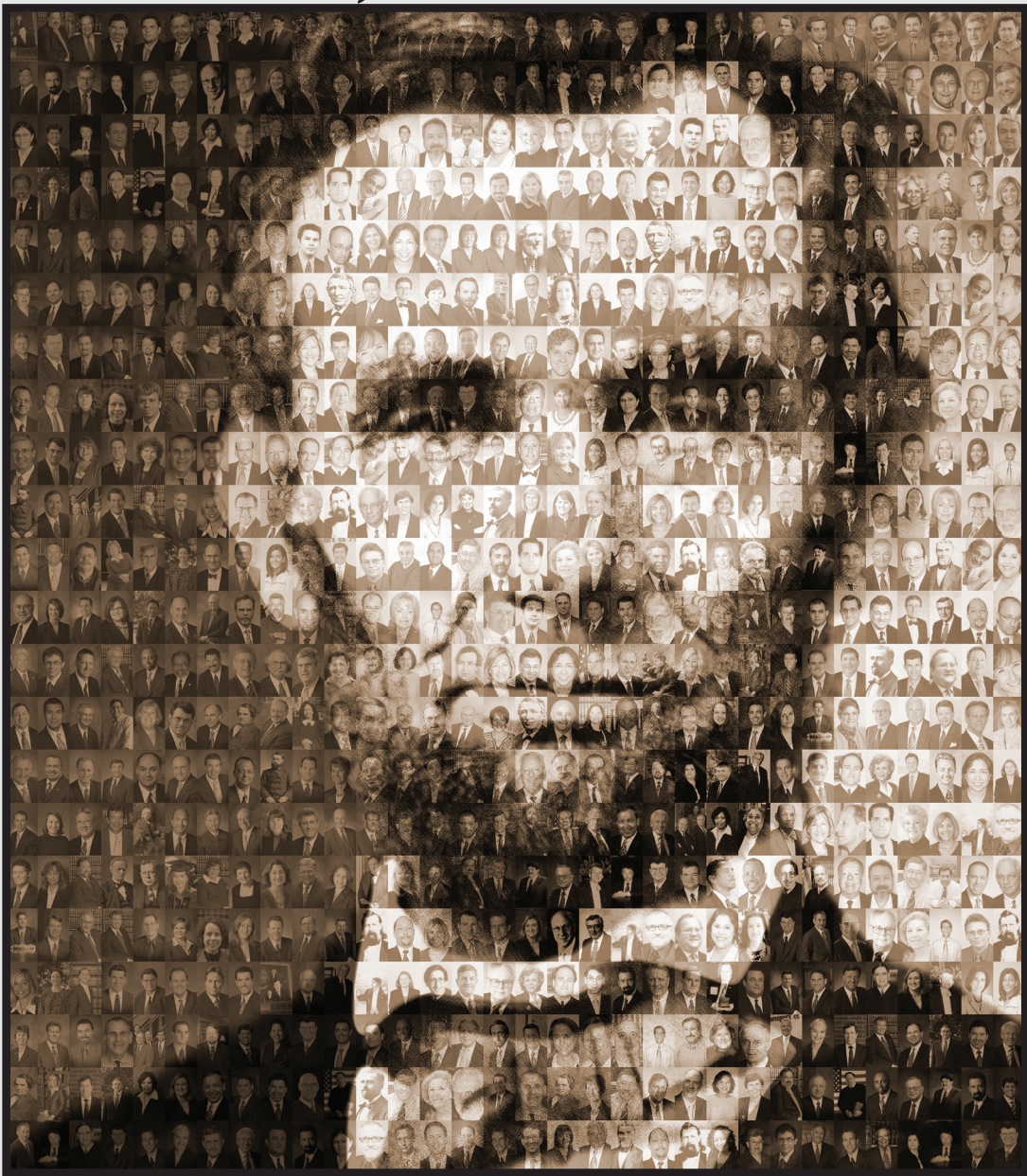
“Let reverence for the law . . . be taught in schools . . . and in colleges”.

“Let it be preached from the pulpit . . . and enforced in the courts of justice.”

“Let it become the political religion of the nation.”

Lincoln’s reverence for the law characterized his nearly 25 years as a member of the Illinois bar.

He represented both great corporations and ordinary people. He met the legal needs of his clients – without fear or favor.



As an advocate, he sometimes represented clients with whom he strongly disagreed. He sometimes won. He sometimes lost. He sometimes got paid. He sometimes did not.

But throughout it all, his reverence for the law was undiminished – and his pride in his profession continues to inspire those who follow after him.

In July of 1850, he prepared notes for a lecture on how to be a good lawyer. Listen closely – can you hear his words?

“Never stir up litigation,” he said. “There will still be business enough.”

“Resolve to be honest, and if in your own judgment you cannot be an honest lawyer, resolve to be honest without being a lawyer.”

For nearly 25 years, he rode the circuit – struggling to provide equal justice for all.

The lawyers of Illinois are the rightful heirs of those struggles – and we reaffirm our willingness to assume those burdens – part of what Lincoln called the unfinished work.

We do so as proud sons and daughters of the Land of Lincoln. We do so - because if we listen closely – we can hear his voice:

“It is for us the living . . . to be dedicated . . . to the unfinished work,” he said.

“With malice toward none and charity to all,” he said.

“Touched . . . by the better angels of our nature.”

2010 CALENDAR

JANUARY

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This calendar is a complimentary publication provided by the Illinois State Bar Association.

The Unfinished Work is an excerpt from Proceedings before the Illinois Supreme Court in Honor of Abraham Lincoln, delivered by the President of the Illinois State Bar Association upon the 200th Anniversary of the birth of Abraham Lincoln.