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Historian Ronald White Opens Lincoln Exhibition at Lawrence University with Lecture on Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address

Posted on: January 12th, 2004 by Rick Peterson

Noted historian and author Ronald C. White, Jr. helps launch a six-week visit of a traveling exhibition on Abraham Lincoln's efforts to abolish slavery Thursday, Jan. 22 at Lawrence University.

Based on his 2002 best-selling book of the same name, White presents "Lincoln's Greatest Speech" at 4 p.m. in the Wriston Art Center auditorium. His address is the first of a three-part series in conjunction with the opening of the exhibition "Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln's Journey to Emancipation," which will be on display in Lawrence's Seeley G. Mudd Library from Jan. 21 – March 5.

A professor of American intellectual and religious history at the San Francisco Theological Seminary, White has drawn critical praise for his book, which carefully examines Lincoln's second inaugural address. Delivered on March 4, 1865, six weeks to the day before he died, the address was the last major speech of Lincoln's life and came to be regarded as his epitaph, according to White.

In his book, White places Lincoln's brief remarks in historical context, demonstrating how Lincoln attempted to shape public sentiment through the power of eloquent and carefully calculated rhetoric. The address was only 701 words long — 505 of which were monosyllabic — but it mentions God 14 times, includes four Scripture quotations and evokes prayer four times.

White, who earned his Ph.D. in religion and history at Princeton University, has written or edited five other books, including "Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social

Gospel.”

The “Forever Free” exhibition will be displayed on the second floor of the library on two 75-foot-long sectioned panels featuring reproductions of rare historical documents, period photographs and illustrative material, including engravings, lithographs, cartoons and miscellaneous political items.

The exhibition has been organized by the Huntington Library, San Marino, Calif., and the Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History, New York City, in cooperation with the American Library Association Public Programs Office. The exhibition was been made possible by a major grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities.