



## The Lincoln Centennial in Kentucky

Kentucky was a major site of commemorative activities honoring the one-hundredth anniversary of Lincoln's birth. In 1909, Kentuckians and other visitors to the state joined President Theodore Roosevelt at the "Lincoln Memorial Farm" for a ceremony to lay the cornerstone of the new Birthplace Memorial in Hodgenville. The following May, Kentucky notables, including guest of honor Emilie Todd Helm, again gathered in Hodgenville to unveil one of the two Lincoln sculptures that Adolph A. Weinman would produce for the state. The other, a gift of the Speed family, would be placed in the rotunda of the new state capitol in Frankfort and dedicated in November 1911. And in February 1911, President William Howard Taft was on hand for the dedication of the Hodgenville memorial. At all of these events, images of Lincoln the Great Emancipator contrasted uneasily with the more dominant images of Lincoln the great statesman and frontier American—a

reflection of the difficult transition from slavery to freedom in Kentucky and the recent adoption of Jim Crow segregation.

The image of Lincoln the Emancipator was far from absent during the 1909 Lincoln Centennial in Kentucky. In the less-public commemorative events sponsored by members of the African American community, the Emancipator took center stage. On February 12, the *Winchester News* reported on an event "held by the colored people" at Clark's Chapel M.E. Church, which included a reading of the Emancipation Proclamation by Rev. J.W. Terry. The following evening in Frankfort, an audience of several hundred African Americans honored Lincoln at the Odd Fellows Hall. Dr. Edward E. Underwood, a member of the Negro Peoples' Centenary Committee, praised Lincoln's frontier origins and the effect of Kentucky soil and air on the would-be president, but then turned to the larger significance of Lincoln's actions for former slaves. The name of Abraham Lincoln, Underwood observed, "shines out with imperishable luster"; his memory among African Americans, he declared, was "holy ground."

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