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## Historian: Lincoln ahead of his time

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By **LeeAnn Maton Imaton@suntimes.com**

In his day, there was no TV, radio, Internet or 24-hour news cycle -- and shawls and stovepipe hats were more popular than power ties and custom suits.

But if Abraham Lincoln were alive today, he would fit right in.

That's the assessment of Pulitzer Prize-winning historian Doris Kearns Goodwin.

"First of all, he would kill anybody in debates. He was so good at debates," she said, adding that he had a keen -- and often crude -- sense of humor.

"He could stand on par with Jon Stewart, Steven Colbert [and] Jay Leno without missing a beat, and people would feel a sense of his person as a result of that."

A special joint session of the United States Congress will convene today to celebrate the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth, and more than 4,000 schools will participate in a live Web cast from the National Archives about Lincoln's life and legacy in a National Teach-in.

Goodwin, along with President Obama, will speak today at the joint session of Congress before participating in the National Teach-in.

But even two centuries after Lincoln's birth, Goodwin said the same traits that made the 16th president successful would still resonate with the American public.

Goodwin also sees Obama, who referenced her Lincoln biography *Team of Rivals* on the campaign trail and even chose to be sworn in on Lincoln's old Bible, as learning much from Lincoln.

"I think the fact that [President Obama] has embraced Lincoln is only a good thing. It means he's got a mentor," Goodwin said in Chicago Wednesday at a lecture at Loyola University Chicago.

"Whenever a president looks back on history, it means they don't have to start all over again."

After spending 10 years researching Lincoln's life and presidency for her book, Goodwin said she has an idea of what advice Lincoln would give to the current president in light of today's economic challenges and wars abroad.

"I think the main thing that [Lincoln] would do would be to assure Obama that he had been through difficult times before and that somehow this country has the strength to get through these difficult moments," said Goodwin. "He would probably tell him that he has to keep a continuing conversation with the American people. That's what Lincoln did so well during his

presidency."

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