

**Volume 3**

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**Presidential Humor – Abraham Lincoln**

**Lead: Of the weapons available to the politician, among the most powerful is humor. No one was better at wielding that weapon than Abraham Lincoln.**

**Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.**

**Content: Few politicians can survive if they become an object of laughter and ridicule. On the other hand, those seeking office who have the ability to use humor as a weapon against opponents or as a means of giving themselves a more sympathetic**

**and down-to-earth image, go a long way to winning the support and perhaps the affection of the electorate. A sense of humor is not required for election, but it helps, both to soften the blow of losing or, even better, to keep political success in correct perspective.**

**Abraham Lincoln's use of humor was brilliant. He was not a handsome man. With angular features and a tall, ungainly torso, Lincoln was often the butt of cruel and insulting remarks about his humble origins and rough appearance. Many times he used humor to diffuse the attacks of his enemies. After one of his periodic losses at the ballot box, Honest Abe said he felt like the man who had been tarred and feathered and run out of**

**town on rail. When asked how he was feeling, the victim said that if it weren't for the honor of the thing, he would just have soon passed it up.**

**Lincoln' sense of humor served him well during the dark days of the war, if nothing more than to keeps his own spirits high in the face of such terrible carnage. Lincoln's relations with General George B. McClellan, commander of Union forces in Virginia during the early months of the Civil War, were notoriously frosty. Lincoln felt that McClellan was a martinet who would rather march his troops around the parade ground than take Richmond. McClellan, whose timorous tactics in the field have since been acknowledged as a study in**

**strategic inertia, felt that Lincoln was a backwoods bumpkin, a crude politician who could be safely ignored. Once when Lincoln called on the General at his house to encourage him to commence operations with the Army. McClellan refused to see him. When someone inquired as the result of the visit, the President replied, "If General McClellan does not want to use the army for some days, I should like to borrow it and see if it cannot be made to do something." Another time Lincoln said: "General McClellan is a pleasant and scholarly gentleman. He is an admirable engineer, but he seems to have a special talent for the stationary engine."**

# **At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.**

## **Resources**

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