

Subject: What Lincoln Foresaw Corporations Enthroned and Re-Writing the Laws Defining The
Date: 12/25/2003 9:27:04 PM Eastern Standard Time
From: freepres@bellsouth.net
To: EuniceRay@aol.com

[back to corporations](#) | [rat haus](#) | [Index](#) | [Search](#) | [tree](#)

([ASCII text format](#))

What Lincoln Foresaw: Corporations Being "Enthroned" After the Civil War and Re-Writing the Laws Defining Their Existence

by Rick Crawford, crawford@cs.ucdavis.edu

Here is a sobering quote by Abe Lincoln:

"I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. . . . corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed."

-- U.S. President Abraham Lincoln, Nov. 21, 1864
(letter to Col. William F. Elkins)

Ref: *The Lincoln Encyclopedia*, Archer H. Shaw (Macmillan, 1950, NY)

Some people expressed doubts about its authenticity, given Lincoln's work as an attorney for railroad corporations! It was an interesting job tracking it down and verifying its authenticity.

The first ref I heard for this quote was Jack London's 1908 *Iron Heel*. And although the quote indeed appears there (near p. 100), Jack London offered neither context nor source.

More recently, David Korten's book, *When Corporations Rule the World* (1995, Kumarian Press), sources the quote to Harvey Wasserman (*America Born and Reborn*, Macmillan, 1983, p. 89-90, 313), who in turn sources it to *Paha Sapa Reports*, the newspaper of the Black Hills Alliance, Rapid City, South Dakota, 4 March 1982. But given Wasserman's ties to Howard Zinn, and his status as co-founder (?) of the Liberation News Service, citing that kind of trail is like waving a red flag for the skeptics ;-)

Fortunately, after some burrowing in the univ. library, I was able to confirm its authenticity. Here it is, with more surrounding context:

"We may congratulate ourselves that this cruel war is nearing its end. It has cost a vast amount of treasure and blood. . . . It has indeed been a trying hour for the Republic; but I see in the near future a crisis approaching that unnerves me and causes me to tremble for the safety of my country. As a result of the war, corporations have been enthroned and an era of corruption in high places

Thursday, December 25, 2003 America Online: EuniceRay

will follow, and the money power of the country will endeavor to prolong its reign by working upon the prejudices of the people until all wealth is aggregated in a few hands and the Republic is destroyed. I feel at this moment more anxiety for the safety of my country than ever before, even in the midst of war. God grant that my suspicions may prove groundless."

The passage appears in a letter from Lincoln to (Col.) William F. Elkins, Nov. 21, 1864.

For a reliable pedigree, cite p. 40 of *The Lincoln Encyclopedia*, by Archer H. Shaw (Macmillan, 1950, NY). That traces the quote's lineage to p. 954 of *Abraham Lincoln: A New Portrait*, (Vol. 2) by Emanuel Hertz (Horace Liveright Inc, 1931, NY).

Based on about 3 hrs of research, it appears Lincoln has been extensively **SANITIZED FOR OUR PROTECTION**. *The Hidden Lincoln; from the Letters and Papers of William H. Herndon*, by Emanuel Hertz (Viking Press, 1938, NY), details how Herndon (Lincoln's lifelong law partner) collected an extensive oral history and aggregated much of Lincoln's writings into a collection that served as the basis for many "authoritative" books on Lincoln.

By all accounts, Herndon was scrupulously honest and plainspoken. Hertz quotes Herndon's characterization of the various "big-name" authors who relied on his collection for primary source materials:

"They are aiming, first, to do a superb piece of literary work; second, to make the story *WITH THE CLASSES AS AGAINST THE MASSES*. [my emphasis added] It will result in delineating the real Lincoln about as well as does a wax figure in the museum."

In several books, I found numerous places where Lincoln spoke about Capital and Labor ("Workingmen"). Lincoln re-used his own material frequently, and virtually identical passages appear in several places. Lincoln praises the moral rightness of *both* Capital and Labor, but this is *invariably* in the context of a nation where **NO MORE THAN ONE MAN IN EIGHT** is a Capitalist or a Laborer, ie, where 7/8 of the population are "self-employed" on their own farms and homesteads.

This social context of general self-sufficiency would explain how Lincoln could serve for years as a railroad corporation lawyer with (apparently) no qualms, yet pen the "corporations enthroned" passage to Elkins.

A final Lincoln tidbit, although it pertains to one very specific case:

"These capitalists generally act harmoniously and in concert to fleece the people, and now that they have got into a quarrel with themselves, we are called upon to appropriate the people's money to settle the quarrel."

speech to Illinois legislature, Jan. 1837.
See Vol. 1, p. 24 of *Lincoln's Complete Works*,
ed. by Nicolay and Hay, 1905)

-rick crawford@cs.ucdavis.edu

Thursday, December 25, 2003 America Online: EuniceRay

back to [corporations](#) | [rat haus](#) | [Index](#) | [Search](#) | [tree](#)