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Student, professor explore portrayal in Lincoln exhibition

By Meka Al Taqi-Brown
Staff Reporter | @DEN_News

A presentation by an Eastern honors student and a 19th century American historian on Mary Todd Lincoln will be presented at 4:30 p.m. in Booth Library Room 4440.

The presentation is part of the "Lincoln: The Constitution And The Civil War" exhibition which began Sept. 4.

Cayla Wagner, a senior history major, and Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz, an assistant professor in the history department, are giving a presentation on Mary Todd Lincoln.

"I have always been fascinated with the 19th century, particularly with women from that time period."

Cayla Wagner,
senior history major

The presentation is meant to show how Mary Todd Lincoln is portrayed and treated by historians.

Wagner describes what inspired her in choosing this topic to include in the exhibit.

"I am currently writing my undergraduate honors thesis on Mary Lincoln in historical fiction memory," Wagner said. "I have always been fascinated with the 19th century, particularly women from that time period."

Wagner said she interned at the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum over the summer to help learn more about Mary Lincoln.

"It wasn't until I took HIS 3900: Women in American History here at Eastern, taught by Bonnie Laughlin-Schultz, that I began to really study Mary Lincoln," Wagner said.

During the program, there will be a discussion on Mary Lincoln and how she contributed to historical fiction, and how her relationship with Lincoln was treated over the times in his presidency.

Along with the presentation, there will be a discussion about how Mary Todd Lincoln was portrayed in two different historical sites: the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum and the Abraham Lincoln Home National Historic Site in Springfield.

"I chose this topic because Mary is easily traceable in both. People can think of historical fiction and museums as popular culture, and I find it fascinating to look at historical figures in popular culture," Wagner said.

Wagner chose this topic because she felt that it would be relatable to students.

"Historical fiction is slowly turning away from concentrating on the relationship Mary and Abraham had, and more on other aspects of Mary's life-like her friendships and social rivals," Wagner said.

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