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Abraham Lincoln: America's Augustus?

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Oral Presentation O9.2

ABRAHAM LINCOLN: AMERICA'S AUGUSTUS?

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Recently the American media has shown a remarkable interest in Classical culture. Whether it's through Frank Miller's graphic novel *300* or HBO's *Rome* series, the stories from these great civilizations of the past are finally taking their place in the spotlight again. But this isn't the first wave of "classicism" to hit America. Following the revolutionary war, architects and sculptors began to construct many of the most public and prominent buildings and statues, especially those in commemoration of our presidents, following Greco-Roman models. Through examination of coins and portraits of Augustus that were mass-produced during the Early Roman Imperial Period and of the coins and statues of Abraham Lincoln that were created shortly after his death, I will attempt to show how similar these two leaders were. How they each managed to domesticate their images, coming out of a civil war, so that they appeared as humble saviors of their people and homelands rather than victorious conquerors. I will also show how the propaganda technique invented by Augustus of placing self-portraits and symbolic, thematic images on public pieces of art to garner political support was also used by Lincoln's successors. The result of this propaganda is the memory of the periods of Augustus and Lincoln's leadership as "Golden Ages" of peace.