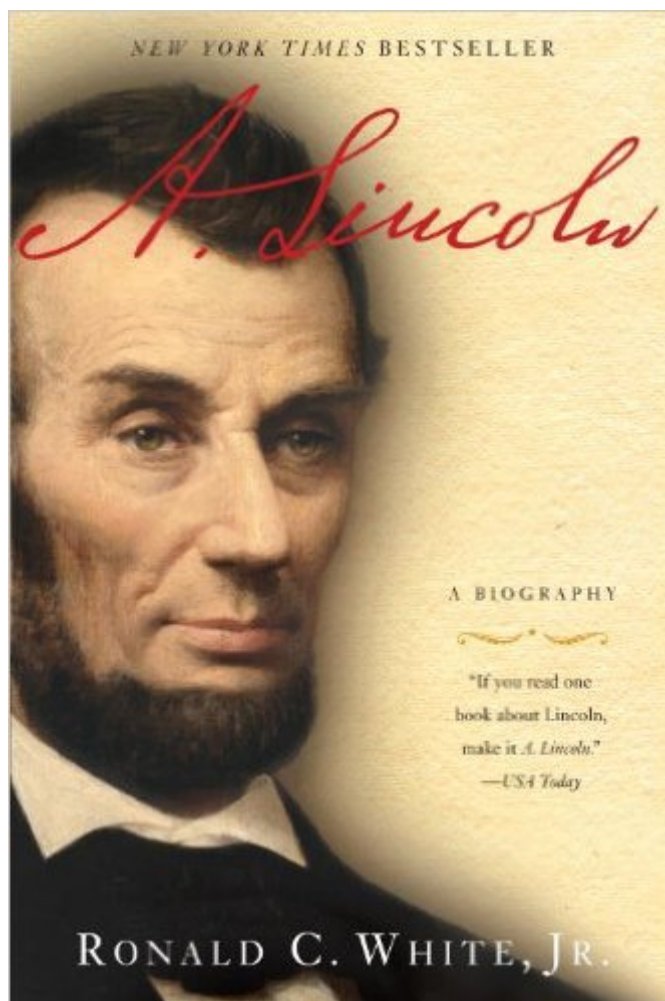


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A. Lincoln: A Biography



Synopsis

If you read one book about Lincoln, make it *A. Lincoln*. "USA Today NAMED ONE OF THE BEST BOOKS OF THE YEAR BY The Washington Post • The Philadelphia Inquirer • The Christian Science Monitor • St. Louis Post-Dispatch." NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER WINNER OF THE CHRISTOPHER AWARD Everyone wants to define the man who signed his name *A. Lincoln*. In his lifetime and ever since, friend and foe have taken it upon themselves to characterize Lincoln according to their own label or libel. In this magnificent book, Ronald C. White, Jr., offers a fresh and compelling definition of Lincoln as a man of integrity "what today's commentators would call authenticity" "whose moral compass holds the key to understanding his life. Through meticulous research of the newly completed Lincoln Legal Papers, as well as of recently discovered letters and photographs, White provides a portrait of Lincoln's personal, political, and moral evolution. White shows us Lincoln as a man who would leave a trail of thoughts in his wake, jotting ideas on scraps of paper and filing them in his top hat or the bottom drawer of his desk; a country lawyer who asked questions in order to figure out his own thinking on an issue, as much as to argue the case; a hands-on commander in chief who, as soldiers and sailors watched in amazement, commandeered a boat and ordered an attack on Confederate shore batteries at the tip of the Virginia peninsula; a man who struggled with the immorality of slavery and as president acted publicly and privately to outlaw it forever; and finally, a president involved in a religious odyssey who wrote, for his own eyes only, a profound meditation on the will of God in the Civil War that would become the basis of his finest address. Most enlightening, the Abraham Lincoln who comes into focus in this stellar narrative is a person of intellectual curiosity, comfortable with ambiguity, unafraid to think anew and act anew. A transcendent, sweeping, passionately written biography that greatly expands our knowledge and understanding of its subject, *A. Lincoln* will engage a whole new generation of Americans. It is poised to shed a profound light on our greatest president just as America commemorates the bicentennial of his birth. From the Hardcover edition.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In this excellent biography, veteran historian White emphasizes that Lincoln was our most likable major president, lacking Washington's aloofness and the deviousness of FDR and Jefferson. Many young men from the frontier overcame the handicaps of poverty and minimal education, but, White says, Lincoln did better than most, becoming floor leader in the Illinois legislature by age 30 and a prosperous lawyer. Contrary to the common view that Lincoln was a dark-horse for the 1860 presidential nomination after a single, undistinguished term in the House of Representatives, White stresses that Lincoln was an experienced politician, popular throughout Illinois, and known to national leaders. Few Republicans thought they had chosen badly. The author makes good use of Lincoln's voluminous private papers and those of his contemporaries to paint a vivid picture of Lincoln's thoughts as he matured and then guided the nation through the four worst years of its existence. White knows his subject cold and writes lucid prose, so readers choosing this as their Lincoln bicentennial reading will not go wrong. Illus., maps, photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Having already written two books on Abraham Lincoln, Ronald C. White, Jr., understands better than most the challenges in bringing a fresh perspective to the most scrutinized president in American history. With 16,000 books, and counting, on Lincoln (as well as several dozen more in the period before the bicentennial celebration of his birth), the ground that remains to be covered is disappearing before scholars' eyes. But White, who draws on his own thorough research of the recently available Lincoln Legal Papers and plenty of other new material, stakes his turf. His weighty, yet readable, tome compares favorably to the popular histories of Doris Kearns Goodwin (Team of Rivals) and David McCullough (John Adams, Truman, The Great Bridge), making A. Lincoln a fine and useful addition to the growing canon of Lincolniana. Copyright 2009 Bookmarks

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It has been estimated that over 11,000 books and other writings have been devoted to Lincoln. It is as if there is something elusive about him, which no book can satisfy. Indeed there is something mystical about him and profoundly unknowable. The trend today in writing about Lincoln is to write more and more about less and less. It is like tasting the apple but never finishing it. This book by Ronald White is a complete biography. We now get a chance to ingest the entire fruit. Although no event is treated in depth, that is not the point of the book. It is more than a repetition of the well-known events. It is an exploration of Lincoln's thoughts and ideas. For those who are frustrated by the mystery of Lincoln, this book represents an opportunity to get to know him more intimately and completely. The book consists of a chronologic account of Lincoln's life. But it is more than simply a listing of events. The events themselves are like the chords, which accompany the melody of his deepest thoughts. White allows Lincoln to speak to us through his speeches and writings. These works are not always repeated verbatim, but White summarizes them and expands upon them so as to give us an understanding of what Lincoln was actually thinking. In so doing, we hear Lincoln as he bears his soul to the reader. White begins his book before Lincoln is born. His family history in America dates back to the 17th century, even before the birth of the nation. His parents were religious Baptists and he was born into their Calvinist beliefs. However, he soon abandoned organized religion when he became repelled by the emotionalism of revival meetings, which were intrinsic to the Second Great Awakening. Turning his back on revealed religion he sought refuge in reason and became a lawyer. As Patrick Cleburne, a confederate general noted, the law provided a stepping-stone to distinction and civil importance. White, in his insightful way, draws attention to the fact that Lincoln learned to examine issues from every angle before settling on a conclusion. This ability would serve him well, not only in his career as a lawyer but as a legislator and then President of the United States. It was in the legal profession that he first encountered moral conflict, a condition that would plague him until nearly the end of his life. The law is adversarial and is thus based on conflict and confrontation, whereas Lincoln preferred mediation. He preferred to settle a case rather than argue it in court. He felt that after all is said and done, the adversaries would need to live together following their confrontation, a notion presaging his sentiments regarding reconstruction. At age 28 while running for re-election to the Illinois state legislature, he delivered a speech at the Young Men's Lyceum in Springfield, Illinois. The speech was ostensibly about the role of memory and our responsibility for preserving our political institutions. However, more importantly, it dealt with creating a secular

religion with its morality based on reason. It became one of the most notable speeches ever delivered. Reason, cold calculating, unimpassioned reason, must furnish all the materials for our future support and defense. Let those materials be molded into general intelligence, sound morality and in particular, a reverence for the constitution and laws. The collision of politics, morality and divine will occurred most acutely over the issue of slavery. Lincoln was always concerned about slavery, but the issue came to a head as the Civil War approached. The Lincoln Douglas debates were mostly about the moral issue of slavery. Although both Lincoln and Douglas were practical men and recognized the role of necessity in dealing with slavery, it was Lincoln's insistence on recognizing the immorality of slavery that distinguished him from Douglas. For Lincoln, the issue became one of intolerable moral conflict. Only elimination of slavery would resolve the conflict and the attendant cognitive dissonance. With the end of the Civil War the conflict between morality and necessity came to an end. The slaves were at last freed and the country was saved. An important subtext of the book is how Lincoln's devotion to reason was eventually tempered by his surrender to God. In a letter to Albert Hodges in 1864 Lincoln described the evolution of his thinking evoking the role of God in directing man's actions. Here he came full circle from the religion of his parents to an embrace of reason as a reaction to those teachings and finally to submission to God's will. He described his beliefs in a private communication uncovered after his death, termed *The Meditation on God's Will*. Lincoln counseled that one must defer to God, in all of his mystery and lack of transparency, a mystical notion divorced from reason: The will of God prevails. In great contests, each party claims to act in accordance with God's will. Both may be and one must be wrong. In the present Civil War, it is quite possible that God's purpose is something different from the purpose of either party. The journey for Lincoln was a long one. The word God is rarely mentioned in Lincoln's earlier writings and in fact is absent in the First Inaugural Address. It appears once in the Gettysburg Address, but then 14 times in the Second Inaugural Address. One of the pleasures of this book is that one discovers for oneself what God meant to Lincoln. In the Second Inaugural address, Lincoln submitted to God who is totally opaque and unknowing. This notion is more Islamic than Christian. If one understands how Lincoln came to understand God, then one comes closer to understanding Lincoln. His journey was intensely personal. Hence, the book is voyeurism at its titillating best. It took real courage for White to write another book about Lincoln, much less a complete biography. Those who complete the book of over 750 pages hear beyond the background noise an entire Lincoln symphony. It is a real treat.

This is, at least in my opinion, one of the best Lincoln biographies around. And there are some fine

volumes already available, such as Donald's "Lincoln." There are some strong features in this book--the character sketch of Lincoln is pretty compelling; his family background is laid out in more detail than in some other works on him that I have read; his development in Illinois is portrayed nicely; his tour as President is, finally, well detailed; the book covers his major speeches and letters in good depth, allowing his words to speak for themselves. Of course, many of the stories are already well known from other biographies. The book begins with Lincoln's early life and his understanding of his family history (which did not go back very far). It is ironic that he was somewhat dismissive of his heritage, when--if he had known of more distant relatives in history--he had some forebears who had achieved some repute. The somewhat strained relationship with his father comes through, as well as his affection for his mother and stepmother. The story of the family's move from Kentucky to Indiana and, finally, to Illinois unfolds smoothly. In Illinois, we see his growth and development from his years in New Salem to his move to Springfield. We see his passion for politics, his efforts to better himself, his development as an attorney. Some of the high points. . . . His rise from a defeated candidate for the Senate in a campaign against Stephen Douglass to his ascent as a national politician (even though losing the election against Douglass, he gained wider visibility). His speaking tour of the East marked him as a player in the early Republican Party. The way he placed himself as the fallback candidate in the Republican Convention of 1860 is well told. Then, the war years and all that went with that. His relations with political figures, private citizens such as Frederick Douglass, his generals, and so on. The book moves along crisply and is a good read. People who are interested in Lincoln, I think, will find this a good volume to take a look at.

An excellent biography with careful attention to facts and details. It was enjoyable to learn so much about this amazing leader and the America he lived in - the author did an excellent job of painting a very realistic picture of the USA and its troubles and its heroes. I don't usually read biographies but this was spectacular!

One of the best biographies I've ever read. Love all the details and additional information about Abraham Lincoln that I never realized or you wouldn't get in a history book. A great read and worth it. A bit tedious in parts, but you get more in the strategy of Lincoln here than anywhere else. The only complaint, which really shouldn't matter in a biography, was the lack of information that might be found after Lincoln's death if anything was to be found in records, the papers, and so on. I feel a good legacy chapter would have been a great compliment. Otherwise, I enjoyed reading this book

quite a bit.

I concur with the cover quote - if you read one book about Abraham Lincoln, let it be A. Lincoln. I've read numerous books on Abraham Lincoln and this is by far my favorite. It covers a lot of good ground on his childhood and early life which many biographies gloss over but which directly impact his values and decisions in adulthood.

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