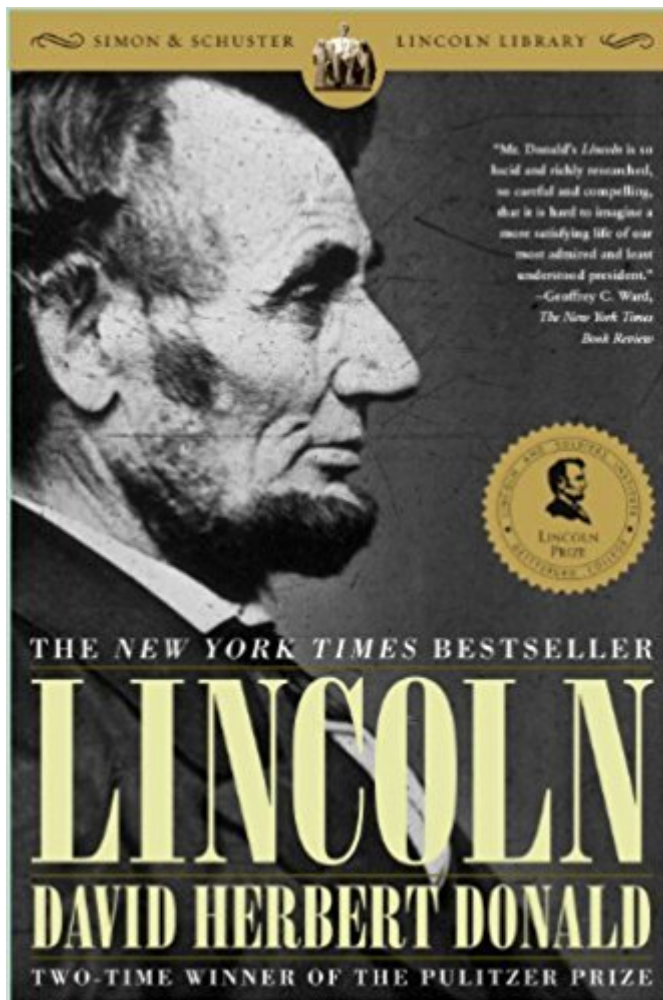


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Lincoln



Synopsis

A masterful work by Pulitzer Prize-winning author David Herbert Donald, *Lincoln* is a stunning portrait of Abraham Lincoln's life and presidency. Donald brilliantly depicts Lincoln's gradual ascent from humble beginnings in rural Kentucky to the ever-expanding political circles in Illinois, and finally to the presidency of a country divided by civil war. Donald goes beyond biography, illuminating the gradual development of Lincoln's character, chronicling his tremendous capacity for evolution and growth, thus illustrating what made it possible for a man so inexperienced and so unprepared for the presidency to become a great moral leader. In the most troubled of times, here was a man who led the country out of slavery and preserved a shattered Union—in short, one of the greatest presidents this country has ever seen.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Pulitzer prize winner Donald's biography was a PW bestseller for 11 weeks. Copyright 1996 Reed Business Information, Inc.

Winner of two Pulitzer Prizes, most recently for *Homeward: A Life of Thomas Wolfe* (LJ 12/86), Donald proves himself the superb biographer of Lincoln, though two recent biographies, Michael Burlingame's *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (LJ 4/1/94) and Merrill Peterson's *Lincoln in American Memory* (LJ 10/1/94), are both important studies. Donald's profile of the 16th president focuses entirely on Lincoln, seldom straying from the subject. It looks primarily at what Lincoln

"knew, when he knew it, and why he made his decisions." Donald's Lincoln emerges as ambitious, often defeated, tormented by his married life, but with a remarkable capacity for growth?and the nation's greatest president. What really stands out in a lively narrative are Lincoln's abilities to hold together a nation of vastly diverse regional interests during the turmoil and tragedy of the Civil War. Donald's biography will appeal to all readers and will undoubtedly corral its share of book awards. Highly recommended for all libraries.?Boyd Childress, Auburn Univ. Lib., Ala.Copyright 1995 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This book captures the essence of this beloved American and one of history's giants. How fortunate America was to be graced by his guidance and leadership. After reading Ronald C. White's "The Eloquent President" and Gabor Barritt's "The Gettysburg Gospel" and Shelby Foote's encyclopedic 3 volume history (The Civil War) I found this book to be a beautifully rendered view of Lincoln's life through a wide lens and would be a great read for anyone who is looking to read one work that encompasses the key elements of this great American's life. This Lincoln biography gives a masterful sweep of Lincoln's life, describing how early in his life he demonstrated an enormous capacity for work and an intellectual superiority. These character attributes were key to his life as he rose from a poor family who eked out a living clearing virgin forest to establish a homestead, to a man who established himself as a successful lawyer, married the daughter of a successful Kentucky businessman, went on to serve in the Illinois legislature and made a national name for himself as he debated Stephen Douglas while campaigning for the U.S. Senate. Donald describes how Lincoln's political prowess led him to guide the fledgling Republican party in Illinois and how this catapulted him to the Presidency - the first Western man and Republican elected to that office. As Donald describes Lincoln's career up to the point of achieving the Presidency, he paints of a picture of a man who is confident of his intellectual abilities, is a leading citizen in the state of Illinois and has built a strong political organization. When elected to the presidency, Donald describes how Lincoln, who held no previous government executive office, grew into the role of the Presidency. He managed his talented and more educated but contentious cabinet with skill. He wrestled with the continual failings of the Union military leadership in the early battles of the Civil War, desperately looking for competent generals who could win battles as the Confederate armies won victory after victory while citizens of the North grew impatient with what everyone thought would be a short war. Lincoln also tested the Constitutional limits of the Executive branch when he suspended the writ of habeas corpus and instituted a military draft when not enough volunteered for the army. Donald describes the tremendous burden and toll on Lincoln as he steered the country through uncharted

waters of rebellion while dealing with the the loss of a son (Willie) and the subsequent unraveling of Mary Todd Lincoln in her grief over Wilie's death. Lincoln endured this and more to save the Union, but the toll it took show starkly in the last photo of him taken in April of 1865, shortly before his assassination.

A great book about Lincoln the real man, not the myth we've created today. Donald goes to great lengths to show Lincoln's humanity and humanness, and how he overcame his lack of political experience to become the greatest president of the US. Donald doesn't worship his subject but approaches him with a detached eye so you see Lincoln for the man he was. A very impressive book.

After reading much on the Civil War and President Lincoln, I wondered why Lincoln had not attended his father's funeral. The introductory paragraph of Donald's Lincoln suggested I'd find the answer in this book. Indeed, I learned why Lincoln had not gone to the funeral, and I learned much more. Donald says his biography "highlights a basic trait of character evident throughout Lincoln's life: the essential passivity of his nature: Lincoln himself recognized it" Lincoln's Calvinist background gave him a sense that he was not in control but that "his destiny was controlled by some larger force, some Higher Power." Donald backs these insight with examples, but the story he tells also includes many instances when Lincoln actively drove events and strove to fulfill personal ambitions, for example, in securing his nominations to run for the presidency, at Fort Sumter, in refusing Confederate overtures for peace, in seeking generals who would embrace total war. Most striking in my opinion was Lincoln's explicit recognition that he was in the "butchering business" (said during Grant's siege of Petersburg; Mrs. Lincoln believed Grant to be a "butcher") and Donald's statement that Lincoln "could not erase the knowledge that in the final analysis he was responsible for all this suffering." It's in this context that Donald describes Lincoln's reading the Bible to reinforce his belief in the doctrine of necessity ("the idea that the actions of any individual were predetermined and shaped by the unknowable wishes of some Higher Power"), "a belief that admirably fitted the needs of his essentially passive personality." Says Donald: "This comforting doctrine allowed the President to live with himself by shifting some of the responsibility for all of the suffering." Put differently, Lincoln may have not have been so passive but instead seeking ways to quiet a guilty conscience.

Very well-written and easy for a non-academic like me to read. The author makes Lincoln a real

person not just the great emancipator. So much more went into his decisions than people generally realize. He was an interesting man who, I believe, made some questionable decisions and had some heretofore unknown to me opinions. I recommend this book to every American.

Awesome account of Lincoln's life and values. How his opinions developed over his life and subsequently shaped history and the country. I would highly recommend this book to anyone with an interest on Lincoln, who in my opinion is our country's greatest President, or the Civil War.

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