



Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln

Doris Kearns Goodwin

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Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln Doris Kearns Goodwin **Winner of the Lincoln Prize**

Acclaimed historian Doris Kearns Goodwin illuminates Lincoln's political genius in this highly original work, as the one-term congressman and prairie lawyer rises from obscurity to prevail over three gifted rivals of national reputation to become president.

On May 18, 1860, William H. Seward, Salmon P. Chase, Edward Bates, and Abraham Lincoln waited in their hometowns for the results from the Republican National Convention in Chicago. When Lincoln emerged as the victor, his rivals were dismayed and angry.

Throughout the turbulent 1850s, each had energetically sought the presidency as the conflict over slavery was leading inexorably to secession and civil war. That Lincoln succeeded, Goodwin demonstrates, was the result of a character that had been forged by experiences that raised him above his more privileged and accomplished rivals. He won because he possessed an extraordinary ability to put himself in the place of other men, to experience what they were feeling, to understand their motives and desires.

It was this capacity that enabled Lincoln as president to bring his disgruntled opponents together, create the most unusual cabinet in history, and marshal their talents to the task of preserving the Union and winning the war.

We view the long, horrifying struggle from the vantage of the White House as Lincoln copes with incompetent generals, hostile congressmen, and his raucous cabinet. He overcomes these obstacles by winning the respect of his former competitors, and in the case of Seward, finds a loyal and crucial friend to see him through.

This brilliant multiple biography is centered on Lincoln's mastery of men and how it shaped the most significant presidency in the nation's history.

Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln Details

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Betsy Robinson says

This is a wonderful nuanced book that resonates mightily with and informs what is going on today. Read it if you want to understand any kind of historical basis for what is now happening in the U.S. Read it if you love the minutia of history—every conversation ever recorded during the Lincoln period, every permutation and convolution of the Civil War, the complex emotional motivations behind the factions (a lot of people fought more for preservation of the union than out of any conviction about slavery)—or if you feel as if you need to learn U.S. history. This book has garnered enormous public attention as well as an award-winning movie based on it, so I am not going to write more commentary on what is in it. Instead, here are some opinions about the very important content that is missing.

At more than 900 pages, the book was so heavy, I broke down and bought a wretched Kindle version so that I could read without straining my tendons. But still, it was too short. Why?

In all the discussion about the virulent disagreement about the morality of slavery—whether it was constitutional for man to enslave man, whether the ever-expanding U.S. territories should be allowed to have legal slavery, whether people who had spent “blood and treasure” to settle the South and whose economy depended on slavery had any right to this abominable practice even though they had outlawed the slave trade as piracy—in all this, there was a complete absence of concern for, let alone awareness of, the existence of Native Americans who were being systematically killed and herded off their land in order for white people to create settlements, territories, and eventually states that would argue about the morality of person abuse and economy vs. morality and eventually erupt into civil war.

As I read through Goodwin’s flowing prose, I longed to go back in time and personally demand of Lincoln: “What about the Natives? Are you concerned about man killing man (women and children)? Are they not people also? What about our Declaration of Independence’s only reference to them as ‘savages’? Is that how you feel? What about George Washington’s famous letter of 1790 stating ‘the Government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance, requires only that they who live under its protection should demean themselves as good citizens, in giving it on all occasions their effectual support.’? You ethically opposed the Mexican American war, insisting that we had attacked peaceful Mexican settlements and thereby stole land. You are a wise and deeply good man who has known firsthand suffering and degradation and who consistently subsumed your substantial ambition and ego impulses, choosing what was just and most likely to result in the greater good. Tell me your thoughts.”

Here is a map of the inhabited American continent that is never in the history books:
See it full-size [here](#)

... native peoples are central to the nation’s history. As late as 1750—some 150 years after Britain established Jamestown and fully 250 years after Europeans first set foot in the continent—they constituted a majority of the population in North America, a fact not adequately reflected in textbooks. Even a century later, in 1850, they still retained formal possession of much of the western half of the continent.

—Claudio Saunt, associate director of the Institute of Native American Studies at the University of Georgia. From his book *West of the Revolution* (2014) [excerpted in the link]

Native Americans participated on both sides of the Civil War and, according to Wikipedia, “Historians claim they were hardest hit of all who participated in the War.”

I am ashamed that I didn’t know about this distortion of history until about sixteen years ago when I worked for a magazine that was involved with indigenous communities and issues. Until we are willing to look at the *whole* truth of our past and ongoing history, until it too is included in tomes about our Civil War, until it is fully acknowledged when somebody writes about spending “blood and treasure” to create new American settlements, we are doomed to repeat it by demonizing, ignoring, and/or erasing “inconvenient populations.”

That said, *Team of Rivals* stunningly makes you appreciate our country and our history, makes the past come alive and feel quite present, makes you cry with joy at the passage of the antislavery Thirteenth Amendment and sob at Lincoln’s death. (A million times I’ve looked at this statue of a Union soldier from New York in Central Park, but after reading this book, I *see* him!)

My wanting more truth is a testament to the healthy hunger for truth aroused by this book. I want truth about our hypocrisies through heartfelt stories that are hard to hear, but whose fullness makes us all feel what Lincoln called “the better angels of our nature” as well as our culpability. If white people can feel both these extremes, perhaps somewhere in the middle we can know we are all the same, that we are sorry, and that we will now commit to acknowledge and therefore be able to correct our present and past wrongs. If we can admit the wrongs of our ancestors, we will do better, slaying delusions of righteous superiority with the light of exposure.

Explaining Lincoln’s worldwide legacy and the love he evoked in people, Goodwin quotes Tolstoy’s conclusion that “Lincoln was a humanitarian as broad as the world. He was bigger than his country—bigger than all the presidents together.” So I can’t help thinking he would agree with me and encourage the greatest truths we can tolerate.

10/12/17 Addendum:

Russell Brand posted this video, a postcard to America, where he makes the same point I make in this review about the importance of acknowledging our *true* history--we are a country founded via genocide (to acquire the land) and slavery (to enable our economy). It's not pretty. But if we can acknowledge this for the part it plays in the picture with all the magnificent things we have produced, including Lincoln, maybe we will stop having what we deny erupt from its inborn craving to be seen and reaction to the pressure of being denied.

Sue says

Put aside whatever you're reading now--yes, even those compelling vampire/romance books--and pick up this book. It's that good. Even though Goodwin is writing about Lincoln's cabinet, her work is eerily contemporary, given Obama's situation. Everyone but a handful of people thought Lincoln had risen too fast and was too untried to take charge of a desperate crises facing the country. Goodwin uses the main characters' diaries, letters, journals, and speeches to show how that opinion gradually changed. If Obama has half of Lincoln's greatness of heart, we are in good hands.

Matt says

As a history lover, I'm a bit of a snob. While everyone is rushing to purchase the newest warm-milk entry from David McCullough, I make a show of purchasing turgid, poorly edited treatises put out by university presses about some guy who did something long ago that doesn't really matter anymore. Of course, as every snob eventually learns, being snobbish is like slamming a hammer down on your thumb: you only hurt yourself; and everyone thinks you're an idiot.

When it was published, *Team of Rivals* became the "it" book of popular fiction, achieving something of the mass audience of McCullough's *John Adams*. That meant, of course, that I put on my beret, grew a pencil mustache, and turned up my nose at the very notion of reading it.

While I was ignoring *Team of Rivals*, however, it did something more than sell millions of copies: it added something to the cultural lexicon.

The phrase "team of rivals" is this year's "perfect storm." Used by Doris Kearns Goodwin to describe Abraham Lincoln and his Presidential sounding-board, it has been hijacked by cable newscasters as a quick way to add false insight into President Obama's selection of the Cabinet. To demonstrate my belief that the phrase was overused, I decided to play the "team of rivals" drinking game while watching Wolf Blitzer one afternoon. At some point, I blacked out. Before I did, however, my pillow came to life and told me that Stephen A. Douglas cheated during his debates with Lincoln by using a teleprompter. Then I threw up in the fireplace.

Anyway, my point is, I've forgotten what I was talking about, due to the short-term memory loss I have from playing the "team of rivals" drinking game.

Now I remember. I eventually got over myself and read *Team of Rivals*. And it appears that everyone reading it on the subway was right: it's super.

Team of Rivals is a Lincoln book that manages to find a fresh angle on a man written about as much as Jesus. Rather than placing Lincoln directly front-and-center, Goodwin focuses on Lincoln's cabinet, providing us with mini-biographies. of Salmon Chase (Secretary of the Treasury), Edward Bates (Attorney General), and William H. Seward (Secretary of State).

The book starts with the Republican National Convention of 1860, where Lincoln faced off with Chase, Bates, and Seward (the favorite). This is the best part of the book - learning about the lives of these three exceptional men. Goodwin does an amazing job making these characters come to thrilling life in just a few pages. She weaves them together while highlighting both their similarities and their differences. For instance, she introduces Lincoln's Treasury Secretary:

Salmon Portland Chase, in contrast to the ever buoyant Seward, possessed a restless soul incapable of finding satisfaction in his considerable achievements. He was forever brooding on a station in life not yet reached, recording at each turning point in his life regret at not capitalizing on the opportunities given to him.

Then there's my favorite character, Edwin Stanton, the beautifully-bearded Secretary of War:

Six years younger than Chase, Stanton was a brilliant young lawyer from Steubenville, Ohio. He had been active in Democratic politics from his earliest days. A short, stout man, with thick brows and intense black eyes hidden behind steel-rimmed glasses, Stanton had grown up in a Quaker family dedicated to abolition. He later told the story that 'when he was a boy his father had - like the father of Hannibal against Rome - made him swear eternal hostility to slavery.'

Stanton originally thought Lincoln an incompetent boob. Lincoln didn't take this personally, and replaced the actually-incompetent Simon Cameron with Stanton after the first year of the war. The two developed an incredible working relationship, and upon Lincoln's death, it was the distraught Stanton told the world he uttered the immortal phrase: "Now he belongs to the Ages." (Strikingly, no one around Lincoln's death bed remembers Stanton saying this. Maybe he just thought it, and wished he'd said it).

After giving us a quadruple bio of Lincoln, Seward, Chase and Bates, the rivals for the nomination, Goodwin takes us through the Civil War. Her focus is not on the ins-and-outs of the various battles, which have been well covered in several million books; rather, she views everything through the prism of Lincoln's cabinet. This is a well-told, lucid, propulsive story. Even someone who's never read a book on Lincoln or the Civil War will follow along just nicely (this is why Goodwin is such a marvelous popular historian, in the vein of McCullough).

I do have one major complaint, however, and it is fairly substantive. The book's title and its focus is its thesis: that Lincoln's "team of rivals," his disparate cabinet, was a good thing.

This just isn't borne out in the story she tells. Bates, after a big rollout, nearly disappears. Salmon Chase is a wrong fit from the start, and Lincoln eventually has to appoint him to the Supreme Court to get rid of him. Lincoln had to sack Cameron and install Stanton, who eventually turned out to be a good choice. In the end, Lincoln took on a great deal of responsibility himself. Long before Truman, the buck stopped with him. Some of his big moments, such as the Emancipation Proclamation, came as a surprise to his Cabinet. Indeed, the Emancipation Proclamation shows how bad the "team of rivals" idea can be. It sharply divided the cabinet, with Lincoln receiving advice of varying degrees. (Bates and Stanton for it immediately; Chase and Caleb Smith against it). Then there was Seward, a smart man who wasn't as smart as Lincoln:

William Henry Seward's mode of intricate analysis produced a characteristically complex reaction to the proclamation. After the others had spoken, he expressed his worry that the proclamation might provoke a racial war in the South so disruptive to cotton that the ruling classes in England and France would intervene to protect their economic interests. As secretary of state, Seward was particularly sensitive to the threat of European intervention. Curiously, despite his greater access to intelligence from abroad, Seward failed to grasp what Lincoln intuitively understood: that once the Union truly committed itself to emancipation, the masses in Europe, who regarded slavery as an evil demanding eradication, would not be easily maneuvered into supporting the South.

Here, Goodwin is telling a great story. This is a powerful narrative that takes something we all sorta know about - the Emancipation Proclamation - and gives us all the nitty-gritty details in a fascinating manner. This is what great history writing is all about. However, this scene also helps also demolishes her thesis. This was a bickering, troublesome, quarreling cabinet. Lincoln was left to make his own decisions (though in fairness

to Seward, he did have the clever idea of waiting until a victory in battle to announce the Proclamation).

I also don't agree with the foundation of Goodwin's thesis: that Lincoln was a dark horse candidate and felt he needed to nominate Seward, Chase, Bates, et al. in order to shore up his Presidency. Lincoln was not the unknown, backwoods rustic portrayed by Goodwin. Rather, he was an extremely talented and successful lawyer; was backed by a coterie of powerful ex-Whigs and Republicans; and had become nationally famous during and after the Lincoln-Douglas Debates. Heck, the convention was held in Chicago, Illinois!

Coincidence? Hardly.

Team of Rivals continues beyond the Civil War and Lincoln's assassination, following the lives of the Cabinet members beyond the Administration. Seward, of course, had the most impact post-Lincoln. His purchase of Alaska ensured our great nation decade-after-decade of iconoclastic, individualistic citizens who hate the intrusion of the Federal Government but love the hundreds of millions of dollars they get from the Federal Government. (Thanks, Seward! Ya big dumb jerk!)

The end of the book is touching, powerful, and melancholy. I admit I got chills when Goodwin related a story told by Tolstoy: Tolstoy was visiting a tribal chief in the Caucuses and he was regaling the tribe with stories of Alexander, Frederick the Great and Caesar. When Tolstoy stood to leave, the tribal chief stopped him:

"But you have not told us a syllable about the greatest general and greatest ruler of the world. We want to know something about him. He was a hero. He spoke with a voice of thunder; he laughed like the sunrise and his deeds were strong as the rock...His name was Lincoln and the country in which he lived is called America, which is so far away that if a youth should journey to reach it he would be an old man when he arrived. Tell us of that man."

If you want to learn about that man, and the great thing he achieved, or even if you think you know the story front to back, this is a readable, genuinely enjoyable addition to the Lincoln canon.

James Thane says

In 1860, the fledgling Republican Party nominated its second candidate for the Presidency of the United States. Four men competed for the honor: William Seward, a U.S. Senator, former governor of New York and one of the most honored and experienced politicians of his day; Edward Bates, a former congressman from Missouri; Salmon P. Chase, a former U.S. Senator and former governor of Ohio who had played a significant role in founding the party; and Abraham Lincoln, until very recently a little-known lawyer from Illinois who had served one term in the U.S. House of Representatives in the late 1840s.

As the convention neared, Seward was the presumptive favorite and considered himself the best of the possible candidates while Chase assumed that the convention owed him the nomination because of his early service to the party. But Chase ran an inept campaign and was unable even to win the consolidated support of his own home state.

Several of the candidates had been dismissive of Lincoln. Seward clearly assumed that he was superior to the Illinoisan both intellectually and in terms of his political experience. In the end, though, Lincoln ran a

brilliant campaign, cleverly positioning himself as the first choice of a few delegates to the Chicago convention but as the second choice of a good many others. And when none of the other candidates could garner enough votes to win the nomination, Lincoln emerged with the prize on the fourth ballot.

His rivals, Seward in particular, were stunned by the outcome. But then, perhaps even more surprisingly, Lincoln invited all of his fractious rivals into his cabinet and when some initially demurred, Lincoln effectively maneuvered them into joining the administration. Seward became Secretary of State; Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, and Bates, Attorney General.

As Secretary of War, Lincoln initially selected Simon Cameron. But it early became apparent that Cameron was not up to the demands of the job and so Lincoln turned to another "rival," Edwin M. Stanton, a celebrated lawyer. Stanton had been briefly associated with Lincoln in an important court case in 1855, but he had contemptuously dismissed Lincoln and at one point referred to the future president at a "long armed ape."

Many assumed that Lincoln had made an horrendous mistake in forming the administration. Seward, for example, took the position as Secretary of State assuming that he would be the power behind the throne and that Lincoln would be a mere figurehead, taking his directions from the New Yorker. But The new President was determined to put into place the most talented men he could find, especially at such a critical moment in the nation's history, and he was perfectly willing to put behind him any slights or disagreements he might once have had with them.

Lincoln quickly proved all of the critics wrong, Seward included.

In fairly short order, he demonstrated that he would clearly be the master of his own political household and that he was easily the most talented member of the administration. He would spend the next four years mediating among these opinionated and often disagreeable men while at the same time demanding that each give his best effort in the enormous task of saving the Union and, ultimately, freeing the slaves.

Seward would ultimately become Lincoln's closest friend in Washington, readily admitting that he had vastly underestimated the President and that no one could have done a better job. In time, all of the other men were won over as well and together, this team of rivals, under Lincoln's direction, made perhaps the most significant contribution to the future of the nation of any presidential administration.

Doris Kearns Goodwin has, in effect, written the political biographies of these five distinguished men and demonstrated how Lincoln brilliantly brought them together and made the best use of their talents. She also clearly demonstrates how Lincoln was clearly the best choice for the Republican nomination in 1860, and how lucky we are as a nation that he was there to answer the call. Though much of this story is familiar, Goodwin brings a new perspective to it and provides a valuable contribution to our understanding of the Lincoln administration. The book is well researched and beautifully written. Certainly it will be of great importance to anyone interested in the topic of Abraham Lincoln and the Civil War.

Steve says

When Rod Blagojevich was impeached and hauled off to prison, that made four of the previous seven Illinois governors to have done time. Countless representatives and aldermen have been locked up, too. Then there was my wife's favorite: a former Secretary of State found after his death to have \$800,000 stuffed in shoe boxes. Our reputation for corrupt politicians is, I dare say, unsurpassed. Fortunately, we here in the Land of

Lincoln (as we call it on our license plates) have one historical figure capable of tipping the scales back towards respectability.

I've taken a real interest in Abe and his legacy in recent months (more on why in a minute). Of the books I've read, this one and David Herbert Donald's *Lincoln* are my favorites. They both deserve credit for finding unique space within what is arguably the most densely populated expanse of American history. Goodwin focused on Lincoln's clever leadership in bringing together a group of his former opponents, thinking them to be the most capable cabinet members at a very challenging time. We get thoroughly researched sketches of:

Edwin Stanton – a bitter rival contemptuous of Lincoln when they were both involved in a famous court case. He called Lincoln a long armed ape, but was subsequently recruited by a magnanimous Lincoln to be Secretary of War and grew to love the President.

Salmon Chase – one of the founders of the new Republican Party who felt he was owed the nomination that Lincoln ultimately won, later did laudable work as Lincoln's Treasury Secretary.

William Seward – a senator and later governor of New York, was certain he was going to win the nomination in 1860. After Lincoln offered him the Secretary of State post, Seward figured on seizing power by essentially running his own government within the cabinet only to discover Lincoln's skill at bringing different factions together. In Seward's capacity as the anti-yes man, he became Lincoln's best ally and friend.

Edward Bates – a senior presence within the party who was coaxed into running against Lincoln in the primaries. After losing that battle he reluctantly took the job as Attorney General for the good of the troubled nation. He initially thought of Lincoln as an incompetent bureaucrat, but ultimately concluded that he was "very near being a 'perfect man.'"

Naturally, most of the spotlight fell on Lincoln himself. Goodwin showed us the tricky waters that led to the Emancipation Proclamation on 4/1/1863 – a Good Friday in every way – as well as other less famous but still important milestones that required a masterful helmsman. I give her ample credit for underscoring his sound judgment, his political savvy, his wry sense of humor, and his superabundant humanity.

So why my sudden interest in Lincoln? I thought you'd never ask. Aside from the fact that he is probably the most analyzed and lionized figure in American history, it looks like I have a personal connection as well. I was revisiting some genealogical research I'd started years ago, knowing that the internet now reveals more ties than those dusty tomes I used to find in libraries and court houses ever did. One of my ancestors, Joseph Hanks, had a sister named Lucy who I'd never bothered following up on before. Anyway, according to ancestry.com, she was the mother of an illegitimate daughter named Nancy who was, by all known accounts, Abe's mother. It was one of those can-this-really-be-true moments. But I triple-checked every link and am as sure as anyone can be given existing records that Abe is my second cousin six times removed. I'd originally thought to look into a DNA test like the one they did to explain all those red-haired, brown-skinned kids running around Monticello, but then decided against it. I wouldn't know who to contact, it would likely be expensive, and I'd rather just *assume* that it's true.

Of course I realize this is a watered down relationship, and for all I know hundreds if not thousands of other people can make this same claim. I have to confess, though, that for a while I thought of myself differently. My gaunt face and hollow cheeks were no longer flaws, but indicative family traits. And though I haven't

tried to grow a beard in years, I'm certain if I did, it would be scraggly. I even looked for examples where I could count myself as a cut above in probity, eloquence and fair-mindedness.

Before I got to the point of imagining Daniel Day-Lewis playing me in a biopic of my soon-to-be famous life, I realized that I was still just me – a guy who needs to remember that humility is one of his few attractive traits. Besides, (this is the really weird part) I did more digging into my family roots and discovered that my great-great-grandmother, Cora Claudine Flickinger from Byhalia, Ohio had a sister named Lula Dell Flickinger who the internet shows was the grandmother of one Barbara Pierce Bush. That makes me a somewhat less diluted third cousin once removed of George W. Bush. Suffice it to say I now think of these genealogical ties as less meaningful. I lack the power and initiative to unshackle an oppressed segment of society, but then I don't feel any compulsion to invade Iraq either.

So please understand I'm not obsessed by my connections, but today of all days, after reviewing this wonderful book, I feel enough of a kinship to quote my famous cousins. As Lincoln said, "You can fool all the people some of the time, and some of the people all the time, but you cannot fool all the people all the time." Cousin Dubya modified the quote (for real) observing that, "You can fool some of the people all the time, and those are the ones you want to concentrate on."

Are any of you picturing Pinocchio in a jester's hat right now, perhaps in place of a white Rubik's cube? Any theories on why I feel compelled to do this? I'm curious myself. Am I dissatisfied with reality and need the artifice to spice things up? (No, I'm luckier than most and I know it.) Am I simply attempting to entertain? (Hmm... sounds a little too noble and generous – probably not.) Am I trying to switch the focus away from anything relevant to shine the light on me, myself and I? (That's probably closest to the mark. Either that or I've got a genetic predisposition for *dis* honesty.) If there's any good that's come of this, it's that I'm now truly eager to read *Team of Rivals*.

Otis Chandler says

I loved this book. Although it was a beast of a book, and could probably have been a lot shorter. I had not read a Lincoln biography before, so was firstly blown away by how he rose up from nothing, self-taught himself a college degree, and then somehow rode the middle line and got himself elected President. Nobody seemed to have expected that, nor expected much from him, and he continued to surprise them all.

I am always curious about the motivations of successful people. In Lincolns case, he just literally seemed to want to have the respect of his peers, and of the American people. "Every man is said to have his peculiar ambition," he wrote. "I have no other so great as that of being truly esteemed of my fellow men, by rendering myself worthy of their esteem."

Lincoln's tactic to make his enemies his cabinet was also interesting and ultimately brilliant. Especially because he was so unknown, but also because they were the strongest options, and would be hard for him to manage. The confidence he had was impressive. Lincoln constantly showed this higher level of trust in people that many wouldn't have given because it didn't make themselves look good. Hiring people who are smarter than you, and giving them credit when things go right, is very hard to do.

But Lincoln could afford to trust his people and even hire people like Chase, who was on his staff yet coveted his job, because he was a masterful tactician. He seemed to have a knack for how to position things

to the public at the right times to achieve the right outcomes. The main example of this is of course holding back the proclamation of emancipation so the border states didn't slip into the war on the side of south - but there were many more examples.

One thing that surprised me was how lax access to the white house and president were back then. You could literally just walk into the White House and get in line to see the President. And he seemed to only have one security guard - who happened to be "off-duty" the night he was killed.

I think Lincolns main strength was his empathy. He spent a lot of time trying to understand the people of different states, and putting himself in their shoes and imagining how they felt given what they knew about the situation. A tough, tough thing to do as his whole presidency was during a civil war during which over 600,000 soldiers died. I can't imagine having that on your conscience and trying to internalize that. But a very valuable skill to have as a leader.

"Lincoln had internalized the pain of those around him—the wounded soldiers, the captured prisoners, the defeated Southerners. Little wonder that he was overwhelmed at times by a profound sadness that even his own resilient temperament could not dispel."

Jan-Maat says

Although there are two books squeezed between the covers this remains readable.

The first book is an account of the competition for the Republican candidacy and the beginning of the Lincoln administration. Here is a slightly different story about the developing USA, the changing, growing country and the kinds of political careers and ambitions available to men in it. There is a very serious heavyweight argument I felt lurking in the prose that never comes to the forefront and possible never developed in the author's mind about how one could become a political figure in early nineteenth-century America. Still we're told an entertaining tale about the backgrounds, rivalries and capers that led to Lincoln clinching the candidacy and then going on to win the presidency.

The story that we are then told of Lincoln eventually asserting his authority over his one time political rivalries is ok, but could have been extended to look at his dealing with his generals. The dynamic between Seward or McClellan and Lincoln strikes me as similar. The self-conscious expert looking to assert their authority relative to the titular Chief.

This issue of how a newcomer to a position manages to assert themselves and deals with competing authorities is a fairly basic problem, one which many readers will themselves have had experience of. Certainly a similar book could be written about most political administrations, but the concept of seeing Lincoln's first administration as a team of rivals is still interesting, although underdeveloped. The sources might not allow a thorough understanding of what happened but there has been a lot of work on teams, team building and leadership. I don't mean that I expected to see an analysis in terms of storming, norming and performing, but there are theoretical frameworks which Goodwin chose to ignore in favour of the cosier narrative format. Nor does she put Lincoln's experience of making himself into the president and asserting his authority in context - all the more surprising since the author has written about other US presidents. While this was the first republican administration the need to accommodate different groupings, power bases or ambitious personalities was hardly unique to Lincoln.

The idea however rather runs out of steam once his leadership is established during his first year in office. The author anyway continues the narrative to Lincoln's death. This is where the second book kicks in - it's just a biography of Lincoln with no particular new argument to make. It was no less entertaining to read, but wasn't relevant to the notion of a team of rivals.

This was my first and so far only Lincoln biography, despite it's bulk as a whole it is a nice, moderately fresh political account, cosy, lacking in ambition, unchallenging but thoroughly readable and entertaining. There's probably an essay already written on the subject of President Obama's references to wanting his cabinet to be a team of rivals (view spoiler), perhaps the best that can be said is that there is a charisma to high political office which the successful holder, if sufficiently capable, can use to their advantage to outmanoeuvre or win over potential rivals - irrespective of their presumed or actual power bases.

Dana Stabenow says

I heard Goodwin talk about this book on NPR, and she sounded like she'd been an eyewitness to the events. Sold me the book.

On June 17th--I've been a hundred pages from the end for ten days. I don't want Abe to die.

July 17th -- Okay, I finally made myself finish. Abe's dead and I'm a wreck.

In this book Goodwin puts Abraham Lincoln in the context of his peers, many of whom ran against him for the first Republican nomination for president (remember they'd just invented that party) and one of whom, Stanton, had treated him with outright contempt in a law case years before. Seward accepted the job of Secretary of State thinking Lincoln would be his puppet, and Chase literally ran his second campaign for president out of the Department of the Treasury. Lincoln understood them all, tolerated them all, put them all to work for the nation that needed them so badly, and jollied, coaxed, cajoled and reasoned them all to victory. A reporter asked him how he could take all these vipers to his bosom and Lincoln replied that these were the best and most able men available and their country needed them, and that he wouldn't be doing his job if he didn't put them to work for it. There can't be anyone who has ever occupied the Oval Office more selfless than Abe.

This book is wonderfully written, accessible even to the most casual reader, full of humor and choler and kindness and vitriol, and wisdom. Goodwin has that ability known only to the best historians (David McCullough does, too) to pluck the exact quote necessary from the record to illuminate the scene she is describing, and make the transition from past to present seamless. Listen to Goodwin on Lincoln in his 1862 state of the union address (pp. 406-7):

...he closed his message with a graceful and irrefutable argument against the continuation of slavery in a democratic society, the very essence of which opened "the way to all," granted "hope to all," and advanced the "condition of all." In this "just, and generous, and prosperous system," he reasoned, "labor is prior to, and independent of, capital." Then, reflecting upon the vicissitudes of his own experience, Lincoln added: "The prudent, penniless beginner in the world, labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land for himself; then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him." Clearly this upward mobility, the possibility of self-realization so central to the idea of America, was closed to the slave unless and until he became a free man.

The American Dream, articulated, in words guaranteed to be understood by everyone. You close this book knowing not just about these people, you actually feel like you know them, especially Abe.

Impossible, after reading this book, not to wonder what our nation would look like had Lincoln survived his second term. Impossible not to grieve his loss.

David Baldacci says

This is the book that the film “Lincoln” is somewhat based on. President Obama has said that he looks to Lincoln as a model leader. He should. In TEAM OF RIVALS Lincoln brings genius to the adage “friends close, enemies closer.”

Perry says

A True Leader and Genius of High Moral Character

If I were to try to read, much less answer, all the attacks made on me, this shop might as well be closed for other business.... If the end brings me out all right, what's said against me won't amount to anything. If the end brings me out wrong, ten angels swearing I was right would make no difference. Pres. Abraham Lincoln, quoted in F. B. Carpenter, The Inner Life of Abraham Lincoln: Six Months at the White House (1869).

Truly, I didn't start out reading this book to compare President Donald J. Trump to Abraham Lincoln. Yet, the differences are so Radical, one would have to be marooned on a desert isle for the past year not to notice them. I am so glad I read it now.

One anecdote was most powerful and revealing in illustrating what most would agree is paradigmatic for any LEADER: taking responsibility and loyalty. In early 1862, Congress made findings of financial mismanagement in the early months of the Civil War by the Secretary of War Simon Cameron, which it followed with a censure of Cameron by which time Lincoln had already replaced him. Instead of letting that be the end of the story and of Cameron's career, Lincoln sent a letter to Congress saying, "*not only the President, but all the other heads of departments, were at least equally responsible with him for whatever error, wrong, or fault was committed....*"

Now, whether you are a Trump supporter or hater, Republican or Democrat, can you imagine President Donald J. Trump writing such a letter or, Lord help us, "tweet," acknowledging fault, *no matter the circumstances*?

Ever?!

Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln is an absolutely outstanding and incisive biographical narrative showing Lincoln's road to becoming U.S. President and his Presidency as well as the lives of the most significant among his cabinet members, three of whom ran against him in 1860: William Seward, Secretary of State; Edward Bates, Attorney General; and, Salmon P. Chase, Secretary of the Treasury. Hence, the name Team of Rivals; no doubt was there ever who was the Captain, my Captain.

Doris Kearns Goodwin is amazing (a term I almost never use) at showing how President Lincoln resolved the numerous conflicts among the egotistical cult of personality and among the radical and conservative factions among his Republican party. A hint: we are all human, all make mistakes and even the President must maintain a sense of humility and (this really should go without saying [see Twitter, 2017]) dignity.

Perhaps it's unfair to compare our MODERN DAY PRESIDENT to Lincoln. Maybe I should offer this as a plea and a hope that Lincoln should serve as the Standard Bearer for ALL PRESIDENTS for demonstrating the meaning of **Leadership**. If not, I am assured that "[a]ny people anywhere, being inclined and having the power, have the *right* to rise up, and shake off the existing government..." Lincoln, Speech in House of Representatives, 1848.

I claim not to have controlled events, but confess plainly that events have controlled me. President Abraham Lincoln, Letter to Albert G. Hodges, 4 Apr. 1864.

No one can rationally argue that Lincoln was not the greatest leader of the United States and will go down as one of the greatest in history. I love the quote from Tolstoy in the book, a quote I had not before seen:

"why was Lincoln so great that he overshadows all other national heroes? He really was not a great general like Napoleon or Washington; he was not such a skillful statesman as Gladstone or Frederick the Great; but his supremacy expresses itself altogether in his peculiar moral power and in the greatness of his character.

Washington was a typical American. Napoleon was a typical Frenchmen, but Lincoln was a humanitarian as broad as the world. He was bigger than his country--- bigger than all the Presidents together. We are still too near to his greatness ... but after a few centuries more our posterity will find him considerably bigger than we do. His genius is still too strong and too powerful for the common understanding, just as the sun is too hot when it's light beams directly on us."

Additional Telling Quotes of President Lincoln

You can fool all of the people some of the time; you can fool some of the people all of the time, but you can't fool all the people all the time. Attributed in N.Y. Times, 27 Aug. 1887

Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak out and remove all doubt. Attributed in Golden Book, Nov. 1931.

That [man] can compress the most words in the fewest ideas of any man I ever knew. Quoted in Henry Clay Whitney, Life on the Circuit with Lincoln (1892).

Kemper says

(Please forgive me resorting to a tired trick and leading off with a definition from the dictionary, but there is a point to it.)

pol-i-ti-cian

1: a person experienced in the art or science of government; especially : one actively engaged in conducting the business of a government

2A : a person engaged in party politics as a profession

2B: a person primarily interested in political office for selfish or other narrow usually short-sighted reasons

Americans these days seem to think that 2B is the only definition for the word, and even the first meaning is considered an insult because if you actually know how the government works, then you're guilty by association. Hell, politicians now deny being politicians as they try to get reelected to political office while screaming about how all politicians suck. (Or the Tea Party just finds the angriest moron around to run.)

It's weird that it's become such a dirty word because one of the greatest Americans by almost any sane person's standard was Abraham Lincoln. While the myth may be that he was just this humble log splitter and backwoods lawyer who bumbled into the White House during one of the country's darkest hours and fortunately turned out to be the perfect leader for the time, the truth is that Abe was one super bad-ass politician in the sense of definitions #1 and #2A, but luckily 2B didn't apply at all.

All American kids hear about Abe in school. We learn about the Civil War and the Emancipation Proclamation and the Gettysburg Address and the 13th Amendment, but they never really tell you how Abe managed to win a war that should have permanently split the country and end an evil institution that even the Founding Fathers had just left as some future generation's problem.

Reading *Team of Rivals* gives you an understanding of how Lincoln accomplished this, and the simple answer is that he was a politician of uncanny skill. He had a great sense of timing as well as being empathetic enough to see the other side of any argument while never swaying once he had fully committed himself to a course of action he thought right or necessary. The thing that made him unique was the almost inhuman way he could put his own ego and anger aside to find ways to work with people he had every reason to distrust or even hate.

As this book details, Lincoln's selection and handling of his own cabinet highlight what made him such a great president. He managed to convince some of the biggest power brokers and politicians of his day, many of whom he had beaten out for the presidency, to work for the common good as members of his administration. Even though this meant dealing with constant bickering and political intrigue, Lincoln still got outstanding achievements from all of them, and most of the men who once saw him as an overmatched fool eventually came to regard him as one of the smartest and most honorable men of the age.

Well researched and written in an entertaining style, this book also shows how little has changed in American politics. The tactics of the kind of people who would defend slavery and smear Lincoln seem familiar in many ways. They just used newspapers instead of a cable news channel and talk radio.

One odd thing: I started this after seeing the Spielberg movie, and I knew that only a small part of the book was actually about the passage of the 13th Amendment that the movie centers on. However, there's not nearly as much as I thought there would be. It seems like only a few pages are spent on it, so it's a little weird that the movie would cite it so heavily. On the other hand, the details of Lincoln's personality in here are all over Daniel Day-Lewis's great performance.

megs_bookrack says

Yesssss! I did it y'all! This is an accomplishment. This book is dense but incredible and worth it. If you set one goal for yourself, in your life, it should be to read this book. The writing, Lincoln's life, the goings on of the cabinet and the country ... wow, wow, wow. Full review to come...stay tuned! ??????????????

Ellis says

I would have given this book more stars if I could have. I think I loved this book so much because Abraham Lincoln was such an absolutely amazing person. We are all taught that Lincoln was one of America's great presidents, and we know that he issued the Emancipation Proclamation, but he is so much greater of a man than I ever knew. Lincoln was super smart, wise, and incredibly compassionate and empathetic. While unsure of his own faith, Lincoln, through his own care for others, was so much more of a Christ-like person than the overtly pious self-righteous Salmon Chase (Lincoln's former rival and Secretary of the Treasury who, while disparaging of others characters, allowed himself to be uncritical of his own unethical actions [much like our current president - in my opinion]).

This book showed Mary Lincoln in a better light than I had expected. I had always had the impression that Mary was a real stinker, and while she definitely had her faults that must have been caused real difficulties for the president, she also had many good qualities. One thing that impressed me is how she personally gave service to soldiers while not allowing any of her kind actions to be made known to the Washington social elite. While Mary may not have always been easy to live with, I felt kind of bad for her since she suffered from such severe migraines and depression. Who's to say for sure, but this book left me with the impression that Mary probably really tried to be a good gal despite her mental/physical problems.

I did like the point of view of this book. Telling the history of Lincoln's political and personal life inclusive with the lives of his opponents-turned-collaborators not only gave a more complete view of the times and happenings of the mid 1800s, but it demonstrated in a few cases what Lincoln did so widely, humbly, and deftly; turn those against him into believers and supporters of his work.

One interesting thing that Lincoln did that I loved about him, and can't stand about George W. Bush, is that Lincoln, while not being dishonest, again unlike our current president, used much political slide-of-hand to get things done. I guess the biggest difference between Lincoln and some of our modern politicians is that while this technique is used today to cover up wrongdoings or cheating, Lincoln used it to help bring unity back to the nation and freedom to all people.

Sydney says

Biographies aren't always boring tomes. Doris Kearns Goodwin does a magnificent job of detailing how Abraham Lincoln, a lesser known and ill-positioned candidate captures the Republican party's nomination, goes on to get elected President, and leads America through the tumult of the Civil War.

While most of us know Lincoln as "honest Abe" and the President who emancipated slaves, Kearns-Goodwin offers a portrait of a man who took many of the men who'd beaten him out as the republican nominee into his Presidential Cabinet. His offering them positions of significance in his Administration--positions that had the power to ruin his presidency--seemed, at least initially, to many as the act of a political neophyte or backwater bumpkin. As the Civil War is being prosecuted, readers get to see how strategic Lincoln's use of man's personal ambitions and commitments to country made them effective members of the Cabinet.

Kearns-Goodwin's narrative offers timely reminders how a nation at war undergoes philosophical and political tensions that will take years to heal. In reading the book, there were times when the circumstances or politicians involved in the civil war could just as easily have been the circumstances and politicians involved in the war in Iraq.

The book does an admirable job of showing the nuances of the internal conflicts that Lincoln faced about social and political issues of the times. While he believed slaves should be free, he was slow to adapt that they should be granted suffrage. At the same time he welcomed Frederick Douglass into the White House, argued the merits of equal pay for black and white soldiers, and offered the first African American attorney the opportunity to argue before the Supreme Court.

Great history lesson that was also surprisingly readable.

Asif Kazi says

According to Oxford Dictionary: Team=Two or more people working together and Rival=A person or thing competing with another for the same objective or for superiority in the same field of activity.

So this oxymoron title caught my attention when I was in the final semester of my college. I bought this book out of whim with slight consideration what is written inside because I am one of those people who are crazy in love with Great Honest Abe.

Having said that let me come to the commentary on the book what can I say about a book written on the as vast a subject as civil war, slavery, abolition and quest for integrity of greatest nation on Earth!

The book "Team of Rivals" as the title suggests is the story of uneasy alliance of brilliant minds of era forged by the greatest leader of the time. Story begins with the earlier struggles of abolitionists and pro slavery legislators to maintain their position at that time Seward was the apple of eye for the abolitionists and his fiery speeches roused the spirits of the camp, at that time lawyers like Stanton and Lincoln were not that significant in politics and could not imagine at the time their subsequent rise in the ranks of government. A western backwoodsman and rail splitter and prairie lawyer who seemed to enjoy his country side stories more than intricacies of the politics of capital was abruptly convinced and nominated as candidate for presidency; at that time the ambitions of then to-be president Seward were destroyed when he came to know that an obscure Prairie Lawyer has been nominated as the candidate for presidency by newly formed republican party instead of him(most likely). Also another ambitious man Salmon Chase could not find support to be candidate from his own state Ohio which if am not mistaken is considered the state which decides president for every election.

When Lincoln assumed presidency country plunged into war with seceding southern Confederacy, this entire book is dedicated to the saga of managing country during the testing times some historians think that Lincoln was the god sent man for American union I also hold the opinion as in my view there was no any man as

astute in running the affairs as Lincoln and as magnanimous as him to allow his crucial cabinet position to his bitter rivals like, Chase and Stanton. In the end chase was to be the one lasting villain with his never ending ambition for presidency and i am equally startled to know he never got much respect outside the sphere of Lincoln by himself as he was regularly snubbed for the candidacy long after the death of Lincoln. This book is definitely worth reading not only for the purpose of understanding history, politics and government of the era but also for the sake of a lesson in management. I think modern leaders belonging to any region can get valuable lessons reading this book and gaining immense insight on what it means to be statesman and how to manage in crisis situations.

Coming towards some characters in the book, throughout the book Kate Chase appears to be the most charming and sought after lady in the book in her peak years she was the center of attention but when I am finishing the book I have found that her last years were pure testing times as she cheated her husband and due to alleged affair she ultimately divorced her husband and lived her last years in abject poverty Alas! this reminds me Bob Dylan song Like a Rolling Stone. Secretary Seward(Abraham Lincoln lovingly called him Governor) was one of the most faithful member of cabinet and he was intellectually most towering personality among cabinet members due to his unfortunate accident during the last days of Lincoln which made him bedridden for many days he could not celebrate the success of Union victory or could see and mourn his best friend death this made me cry! this whole drama perhaps has shadowed the greatness of a lady who inspired me in the book was Frances Seward a lady of love of Great Seward she was the architect behind her husband's firm views against slavery and she served as ideological guide to cement the support for the cause today African Americans should pay tribute to this great lady for her unwavering support for the cause of their liberty. Her demise and immediate death of daughter Fanny was perhaps most tragic events following the death of his beloved leader, Seward has another feather in his crown he purchase Alaska for US too as mentioned in book. In my opinion after Lincoln, the true heir and ablest man in US at that time was Seward he should have been the US president but fate gave Johnson to American people. Stanton as always was to be the most stiff of the persons in the cabinet he could not get along with Johnson. Welles continued to be loyal to next president. At the conclusion of my review i would like to mention the most important person in the life of Honest Abe, his love and wife Marry, It strikes me she was a bit out of mind always, my this proposition is supported by argument that his own son admitted her in mental hospital. Mary was westerner and not suitable for high life of Washington but she managed nonetheless good time at capital,Finally i would say Lincoln was a center of gravity of government who held many distinct elements like capricious, ambitious and intriguing Chase, always skeptical and gruff Stanton, suspicious and indecisive Welles and intellectual and gregarious Seward all of them were in one way or other rivals but this great man turned them into team and rallied their strength for the cause of Union. If history do not exhaust to count the great achievements of Honest Abe in Managing country, Abolition of slavery,Emancipation Proclamation, Magnanimous behavior to enemies one last thing to credit Lincoln is his befriending his enemies and thus destroying them.
