

REVIEW NOTICES

Abraham Lincoln

By James M. McPherson

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xi, 79. Illustration, notes, bibliography. \$12.95.)

In sixty-five pages of text, James McPherson offers a Lincoln biography that “captures the essential events and meaning of Lincoln’s life” (p. xi). The author devotes only seven pages to Lincoln’s youth and young adulthood, and by page twenty-three, the reader has arrived in the early months of 1860, but McPherson has a sure feel for essential information. His discussion of the Civil War years focuses on three topics: Lincoln as Commander in Chief, the history and significance of the Emancipation Proclamation, and Lincoln as master politician. Long-time Lincoln buffs who have read a stack of biographies may not need to read this volume, but they should still appreciate the skill that has created such brevity. The book will appeal to students who want “just the facts” about Lincoln, teachers who need to refresh their memory before writing a lecture, and general readers intimidated by many-hundred-paged or multi-volume biographies.

Lincoln

A Very Short Introduction

By Allen C. Guelzo

(New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. ix, 149. Illustrations, maps, references, further reading, index. Paperbound, \$11.95.)

Allen Guelzo has written a 128-page introduction to Lincoln that is “a biography of his ideas” (p. 8). Lincoln’s early days are discussed under the rubric of “Equality,” defined as a “baseline of opportunity” in the young republic. The young man’s desire for a career in both law and politics is discussed in “Advancement”; his growing concern with questions about slavery within a democracy appears in the section titled “Liberty.” The next three chapters on Lincoln’s campaign against Douglas and his years as president focus on “Debate,” “Emancipation,” and “Reunion.” In his epilogue, Guelzo agrees with the claim that Lincoln was, indeed, the “Great American Man,” who saved the Union and the ideal of liberal democracy; ensured that both political equality and social mobility would be defining elements of American society; and created a

vocabulary of politics that was necessarily linked to morality and “eternal principles of right and wrong” (p. 127). The small volume provides an impressive amount of historical and intellectual context, offers an expert summary of Lincoln’s thought, and includes several pages of suggestions for further reading.



The Portable Abraham Lincoln
Bicentennial Edition

Edited by Andrew Delbanco

(New York: Penguin Books, 2009. Pp. xxvii, 369. Index. Paperbound, \$18.00.)

Readers interested in the writings and speeches of Lincoln have an array of choices, from multi-volume documentary editions to small gift books with more illustrations than text. Andrew Delbanco offers a selection of eighty-seven letters and speeches from 1832 through April 1865. Each text is complete and has no deletions, and the collection “aims to make the man available through his own voice and expression” (p. xi). Many famous texts are included: the first Lincoln-Douglas debate, the 1860 Cooper Union speech, the 1st and 2nd inaugural addresses, the Emancipation Proclamation, and the Gettysburg Address. Letters range from 1840s missives to law partner William Herndon and to Mary Todd Lincoln, to 1862 messages from an exasperated Commander in Chief to General George McClellan.



In Lincoln’s Hand

His Original Manuscripts with Commentary by Distinguished Americans

Edited by Harold Holzer and Joshua Wolf Shenk

(New York: Bantam Books, 2009. Pp. xi, 196. Illustrations. \$35.00.)

Based on the bicentennial exhibit of the Library of Congress, this book reproduces a collection of original manuscripts of Lincoln’s letters and speeches. Each verso reproduces an original manuscript page; each recto contains two columns: one with a transcript of the document, one with commentary and illustrations. The book begins with a copybook page from Lincoln’s youth and concludes with the text of the president’s second inaugural address. Commentators include four past U.S. presidents and several other political figures, novelists and poets (including E. L. Doctorow and Toni Morrison), and media and arts figures.



The Lincoln-Douglas Debates

By Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas

(Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 2009. Pp. x, [355]. Paperbound, \$16.95.)

This volume, apart from its brief introduction, consists of original texts: one speech by each candidate from the early summer of 1858, and the text of all seven debates that took place from August through October

of that year. Many readers may prefer the recently published Knox College Lincoln Studies Center annotated edition of the debates; for classroom use and for general browsing, this affordable book is an alternative.



*Lincoln Legends
Myths, Hoaxes, and Confabulations
Associated with Our Greatest
President*

By Edward Steers Jr. Introduction
by Harold Holzer.

(Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007.
Pp. xvii, 264. Illustrations, notes, index.
\$24.95.)

As Harold Holzer notes in his introduction, even in Lincoln's lifetime there were people who chose "to add the patina of exaggeration" to his biography. Edward Steers examines fourteen different stories of Lincoln's life and death, sorting through the threads of each to distinguish what is verifiable from what is fiction. Seven chapters discuss aspects of Lincoln's personal life, including his relationships with Ann Rutledge and Mary Todd, his religious beliefs, and his sexual preference. Three chapters look at the provenance of Lincoln quotations and questions about the writing of the Gettysburg Address. The final four chapters examine details of Lincoln's assassination, including the guilt or innocence of one convicted conspirator and the identity of the man who held John Wilkes Booth's horse in the alley

behind Ford's Theater. Steers is meticulous but never boring, and readers will be fascinated by the variety of tales told about Lincoln's life and death.



An Abraham Lincoln Tribute

Edited by Bob Blaisdell

(Mineola, N.Y.: Dover Publications, Inc., 2009.
Pp. xxi, 135. Notes, illustrations. \$10.00.)

In 1933, artist Charles Turzek published *Abraham Lincoln: Biography in Woodcuts*, a textless volume filled with Turzek's striking woodcuts depicting dozens of episodes from Lincoln's life. In addition to reproducing the woodcuts, this small volume adds a preface on the artist and his work, a biographical sketch of Lincoln, short captions for each woodcut, and a modest selection of Lincoln's speeches and letters. The main interest for most readers, however, will still be Turzek's artwork.



*The Lincoln Assassination
The Evidence*

Edited by William C. Edwards and
Edward Steers Jr.

(Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2009. Pp.
xxxii, 1456. Notes, illustrations, tables, index.
\$125.00.)

So many scholars and amateur historians have written on the assassination of Lincoln, yet the editors of this volume say that "only a handful" used the massive collection of evidence

now available in this volume. The documents, originally collected in 1865 by Colonel Henry Burnett for the prosecution of Lincoln's accused killers, have been in the possession of the National Archives and Records Association (NARA) for decades. NARA microfilmed the original documents in the 1960s, but William Edwards and Edward Steers have undertaken the task of transcribing and organizing the huge file. The editors provide an informative introduction and explanatory notes, and they order the collection alphabetically by letter author. Those deeply invested in the topic will probably make their way through the entire

book; other interested readers can profit from browsing and looking up particular individuals in the index. Browsers will come across treasures such as the anonymous letter, dated April 15, 1865, from a New Yorker urging the government to "Offer a reward of one million dollars & have every one of those men caught & hung . . . I feel as bad as if was my own mother or father & will be one to volunteer to try & shoot every Southern man" (p. 15). Those interested in a specific individual, such as Mary Surratt, can find indexed entries on her arrest, the evidence given against her, and her sentencing.

