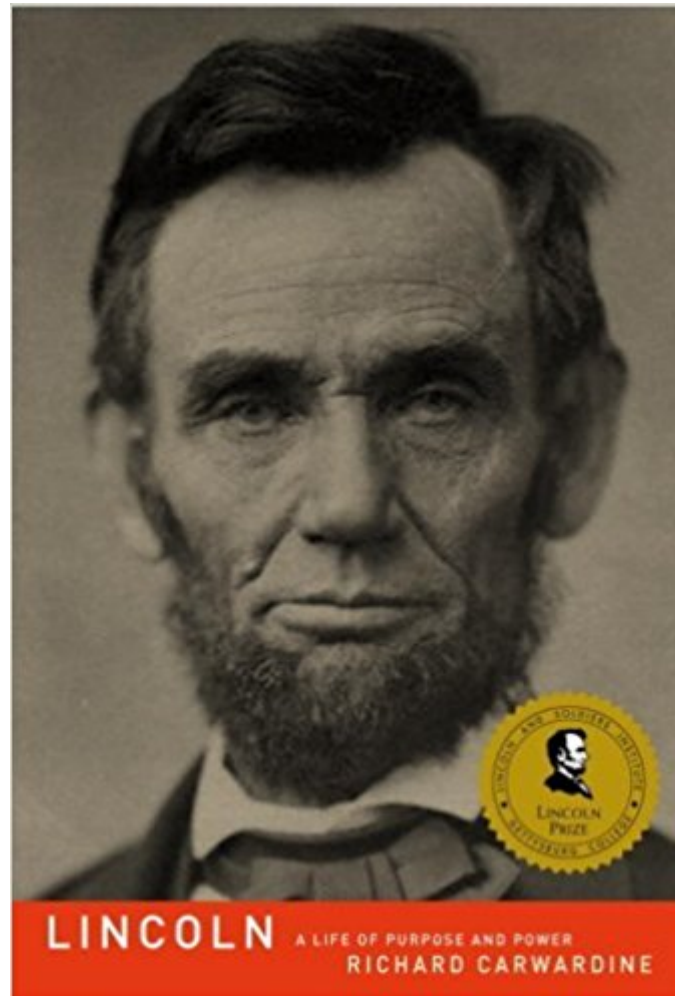


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Lincoln: A Life Of Purpose And Power



Synopsis

As a defender of national unity, a leader in war, and the emancipator of slaves, Abraham Lincoln lays ample claim to being the greatest of our presidents. But the story of his rise to greatness is as complex as it is compelling. In this superb, prize-winning biography, acclaimed historian Richard Carwardine examines Lincoln's dramatic political journey, from his early years in the Illinois legislature to his nation-shaping years in the White House. Here, Carwardine combines a new perspective with a compelling narrative to deliver a fresh look at one of the pillars of American politics. He probes the sources of Lincoln's moral and political philosophy and uses his groundbreaking research to cut through the myth and expose the man behind it. From the Trade Paperback edition.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

So much has been written about Lincoln that you have to ask, why read this one among all the others? The answer is: this book sets forth in very readable form the essence of Lincoln in a way that accounts for the conflicting portraits of Lincoln. Lincoln is shown to be the consummate political

consensus-builder, first in his state party, then in his national party, then as leader of all the north. Interestingly, Reagan and the first Bush followed the Lincoln way and succeeded; the second Bush demonstrated what happens when you push ahead of consensus. This book presents the core of Lincoln's political philosophy as a commitment to building the prospects of the common man. At times this put him beyond his own party, first with the Whigs (supporting big government projects like canals & railroads), then with the Republicans. By reading this book you will master... (a) why the Whig party disappeared and was succeeded by the Republican Party in the 1850's; (b) the forces that put Mr. Lincoln on the 1860 Republican ticket despite his having only served one term in Congress; (c) how it can be that Mr. Lincoln could be simultaneously assailed as a radical and a footdragger, revered as Emancipator by some and reviled as insincere about equal rights by others. (Reagan, in the same vein, did not push for abolition of abortion for the same reasons that Lincoln bided his time on Emancipation: he did not have a sustaining consensus among the people.) The scope of topics that this book touches is extensive: civil liberties and the suspension of habeus corpus; the various factions within the Republican coalition and how Lincoln kept them bound together; the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and the crucially supportive role Douglas played after the election; the Whig to Republican realignment; the challenge of keeping the border states with the North, as balanced against the abolitionists' call for emancipation, to name a few. And yet it doesn't get bogged down. By showing how Lincoln's purposes were realized in the different aspects of power (state party; national party; national government) the subject matter is unfolded in digestible components. I had always admired Lincoln vaguely; now I admire him all the more, and for a host of coherent reasons, thanks to this book. Sidenote: I first listened to the audio book courtesy of my public library, and then bought the soft copy for my own bookshelf. The audio book is very interesting. The reader uses various regional accents (including one for Lincoln) that particularly humanizes Lincoln and his contemporaries, and spares the reader from having to have direct quotations introduced in more clumsy fashion.

Lincoln: A life of purpose of power was written by Richard Carwardine. Carwardine's treatment of Lincoln won him the "Lincoln Prize." An annual prize given for the best book written about 19th Century American History. Carwardine is the first non-American to win the award. While history buffs and academicians might find Carwardine's treatment of Lincoln compelling, the general reader, just looking for a good book, should look elsewhere. The first fifty or so pages (it seemed like a lot more) concerned party politics of 1840s and 1850s. Lincoln was a Whig before he was a Republican, but how he became a Republican got lost in the telling of the story of the Know-Nothings, Anti-Nebraska

forces, and the numerous other political factions of the day. The storyline, obviously, gets more interesting with events leading to Lincoln's election as President and the Civil War. While the major events are familiar to most, the influence of Protestant churches on the course of history was unknown to this reviewer. Many will also find the political agenda and legal ambiguity of the Emancipation Proclamation much more complicated than the "Lincoln freed slaves" we learned in school. Lincoln, of course, had his detractors and his supporters. However, in Cawardine's treatment of Lincoln, we see a President busy at work, aware of the political milieu, but not -- unlike politicians today -- preoccupied how he was perceived in the press. Additionally, In Carwardine's Lincoln, the challenges of the President's personal life, while mentioned, are not discussed in detail. This is definitely a biography of the political Lincoln, not Lincoln the man. So to repeat, if you are particularly interested in 19th Century and want to learn more about our 16th President Cawardine's biography is for you. However, most readers will find there is too much analysis, too much party politics, and too little historical drama to be worth the effort.

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