

Team of Rivals by Doris Kearns Goodwin

About the book

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 life 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.

About the Author

Doris Kearns Goodwin is an award-winning American author, historian, and political commentator. She won the Pulitzer Prize for History in 1995. She is the author of biographies of U.S. Presidents, including *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln*; *Lyndon Johnson and the American Dream*; *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga*; and her Pulitzer Prize winning book *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The American Homefront During World War II*.

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Goodwin actually grew up in Rockville Centre on Long Island. She attended Colby College in Maine where she was a member of Phi Beta Kappa; graduating magna cum laude in 1964 with a Bachelor of Arts degree. She was awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship in 1964 to pursue her doctoral studies. She earned her Ph.D. in government from Harvard University.

In 1967, Goodwin went to Washington, D.C., as a White House Fellow during the Lyndon B. Johnson (LBJ) administration, working as his assistant. After Johnson left office, she assisted Johnson in

drafting his memoirs. After LBJ's retirement in 1969, Goodwin taught government at Harvard for ten years, including a course on the American Presidency. In 1977, her first book, *Lyndon Johnson & the American Dream*, was published in which she drew on her conversations with the late president. The book became a *New York Times* bestseller and provided a launching pad for her literary career.

Goodwin won the Pulitzer Prize in 1995 for *No Ordinary Time: Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt: The American Homefront During World War II*. In 1998 she received an honorary L.H.D. from Bates College. In 2005, she won the 2005 Lincoln Prize (for best book about the American Civil War) for *Team of Rivals*.

In 1975, Kearns married Richard N. Goodwin, who had worked in the Johnson and Kennedy administration as an adviser and a speechwriter. They have three sons, Richard, Michael and Joseph. One of her sons is heading to Iraq for a second tour of duty. As of 2007, the Goodwins live in Concord, Massachusetts.

Goodwin was the first female journalist to enter the Boston Red Sox locker room. She consulted on and appeared in Ken Burns' 1994 award-winning documentary *Baseball* and is a life-long supporter of both the Dodgers and the Boston Red Sox.

Book Reviews

More books about Abraham Lincoln line the shelves of libraries than about any other American. Can there be anything new to say about our 16th president? Surprisingly, the answer is yes. Having previously offered fresh insights into Lyndon Johnson, the Kennedys and Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, Doris Kearns Goodwin has written an elegant, incisive study of Lincoln and leading members of his cabinet that will appeal to experts as well as to those whose knowledge of Lincoln is an amalgam of high school history and popular mythology.

James M. McPherson - New York Times Book Review

In an 1876 eulogy, Frederick Douglass famously—and foolishly-asserted that "no man can say anything that is new of Abraham Lincoln." Thirteen decades and hundreds of books later, that statement appears no closer to the truth than when Douglass uttered it. Although Lincoln may be the most studied figure in American history, there is no end to new interpretations of the man.... Goodwin's engaging new bookargues that Lincoln's success in winning the election and in building an exceptionally effective administration lay in his extraordinary ability to empathize with his rivals. Much more than a biography of Lincoln, historian Goodwin's book also closely examines the lives of Lincoln's chief opponents for the Republican nomination—Edward Bates, Salmon P. Chase, and William H. Seward—all of whom appeared better qualified to be President than he. After Lincoln persuaded the three men—as well as other strong figures—to join his cabinet, it was expected that his former rivals would dominate him. Instead, the exact opposite occurred. —R. Kent Rasmussen, *Thousand*

Oaks, CA
Library Journal

Well-practiced historian Goodwin, winner of the Pulitzer Prize in history for *No Ordinary Time* (1994), examines Abraham Lincoln as a practical politician, focusing on his conversion of rivals to allies. Was Lincoln gay? It doesn't matter, though the question has exercised plenty of biographers recently. Goodwin, an old-fashioned pop historian of the Ambrose-McCullough vein, quotes from his law partner, William Herndon: "Lincoln had terribly strong passions for women—could scarcely keep his hands off them." End of discussion. Lincoln was, if anything, melancholic—possibly as the result of abuse on the part of his father—and sometimes incapacitated by depression. Thus it was smart politicking to recruit erstwhile opponents Salmon Chase and William Seward, who had very different ideas on most things but who nonetheless served Lincoln loyally to the point of propping him up at times during the fraught Civil War years. Goodwin indicates that Lincoln knew that war was coming,

and he knew why: He'd been vigorously opposed to slavery for his entire public career, and even if "many Northerners...were relatively indifferent to the issue" of slavery and the westward expansion of the slave states, Lincoln was determined to settle it, even at catastrophic cost. Chase, Seward and his other lieutenants did not always fall immediately into step with Lincoln, and some pressed for compromise; when he declared the Emancipation Proclamation, writes Goodwin, he assembled the Cabinet and said that while he recognized their differences, he "had not called them together to ask their advice." They acceded, though by the end of the first term, enough divisions obtained within and without the White House that it looked as if Lincoln would not be reelected—whereupon he demanded that his secretaries sign a resolution "committing the administration to devote all its powers and energies to help bring the war to a successful conclusion," the idea being that only a Democrat would accept a negotiated peace. Illuminating and well-written, as are all of Goodwin's presidential studies; a welcome addition

**to Lincolniana.
*Kirkus Reviews***

Discussion Questions

From Litlovers.com

1. To what does Goodwin attribute Lincoln's success—both winning the presidency and occupying it? In other words, what were Lincoln's qualities as a leader?

2. Was it smart of Lincoln to invite his rivals to govern with him...or did it cause more problems than it was worth?

3. Of Lincoln's "team of rivals," whom did you admire most...and least?

4. Talk about what you think are the key moments of Lincoln's presidency—and how he arrived at them.

5. The Union (to say nothing of the secessionist South) was split by numerous factions, making it difficult to govern. Do you see parallels with today's political climate?

6. Does *Team of Rivals* change your attitude or understanding of Abraham Lincoln? Does it confirm, add to, or bust the nation's longheld myths about Lincoln. (Or is it a myth?)

Read Alikes

Revolutionary Spirits: The Enlightened Faith of America's Founding Fathers by Gary A. Kowalski

Bringing to life the complex creeds and personalities of America's Founding Fathers, this book confronts many of the myths about the religious views of some of the most notable figures in history. Offering clear and candid portraits of Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, Thomas Paine, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison as both religious reformers and political rebels, this analysis tells the illuminating story of these unorthodox men of faith and thought and reclaims their spiritual inheritance for all Americans. Providing a careful examination of how the Founders' nature-based spirituality was tied to their fascination with science, this record includes discussions on Washington's

aversion to using the word "God" in public pronouncements, Jefferson's mathematical calculations to show that the biblical great flood would have been impossible, and Paine's thoughts on the possibilities of alien life.

1776 by David McCullough

Based on extensive research in both American and British archives, 1776 is the story of Americans in the ranks, men of every shape, size, and color, farmers, schoolteachers, shoemakers, no-accounts, and mere boys turned soldiers. And it is the story of the British commander, William Howe, and his highly disciplined redcoats who looked on their rebel foes with contempt and fought with a valor too little known. But it is the American commander-in-chief who stands foremost -- Washington, who had never before led an army in battle.

American Sphinx: The Character of Thomas Jefferson by Joseph J. Ellis
For the historian Joseph J. Ellis, the experience of writing about Jefferson was "as if a pathologist, just about to begin an

autopsy, had discovered that the body on the operating table was still breathing." In 'American Sphinx,' Ellis sifts the facts shrewdly from the legends and the rumors, treading a path between vilification and hero worship in order to formulate a plausible portrait of the man who still today "hover[s] over the political scene like one of those dirigibles cruising above a crowded football stadium, flashing words of inspiration to both teams."