

TEAM OF RIVALS: THE POLITICAL GENIUS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN¹

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*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 as 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.*³

Filled with anecdotes, humorous quips, and heart wrenching accounts of loss of life, *Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln* is the illumination of Abraham Lincoln's emergence from a life of obscurity and relative disadvantage to achieve a legacy that has labeled him a "hero" and "incontestably the greatest man I ever knew."⁴ Today, when the leadership of our nation is being evaluated daily due to the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, *Team of Rivals* provides instructive insight into the leadership provided by Abraham Lincoln during our nation's most tumultuous period: the Civil War.⁵ Using unique references, including diaries and personal letters, the author provides a fresh look at the minds and emotions of Lincoln and many of the men who comforted, influenced and challenged him while he faced the difficult propositions of slavery and dissolution of the Union.⁶ The author's choice of format and use of private and personal correspondence, combine to bring into clear focus the greatness of Lincoln when compared to his peers. Additionally, the detail incorporated in the accounts of events contained in the book assist the reader in imagining the appearances, personalities, and mindsets of the characters involved. This insight provokes the reader to a near emotional attachment to many of the characters, as the heroes and villains are revealed. In the end, while the book is not without fault, it is an excellent summary of history and powerfully depicts the personality, ambition, and approach to leadership that set Lincoln apart from his peers.

Team of Rivals is excellent in many respects, beginning with its format. To tell her story of Lincoln, Pulitzer Prize winning author, Doris Kearns Goodwin,⁷ uses a comparative or multi-biographical account of the members of his cabinet, who also happened to be his rivals for the 1860 Republican presidential nomination.⁸ This comparative model, which along with Lincoln, includes Samuel Chase, the ambitious Ohio Governor; Edwin Bates, a content Missouri elder and statesman; William Seward, longtime New York Senator; and Edwin Stanton, a prominent lawyer; sets out to examine each of these men, using the characteristics of each as a mirror to reflect and compare the traits of the others. According to Goodwin, this comparison ultimately challenges the historical consensus that Lincoln's nomination in 1860 was a matter of "chance."⁹ She contends, rather, that the comparative perspective demonstrates that Lincoln's nomination was not the result of chance as suggested by many historians, but rather the result of Lincoln being the "shrewdest and canniest" of the contenders.¹⁰ While the reader may disagree with this ultimate conclusion, the author delivers an exceptionally informative historical narrative of the civil war and a behind the scenes look at the "extraordinary array of personal qualities" that made Lincoln great.¹¹ In the

¹ DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN, *TEAM OF RIVALS: THE POLITICAL GENIUS OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN* (2005).

² U.S. Army. Written while assigned as a student, 55th Judge Advocate Graduate Course, The Judge Advocate General's Legal Center and School, Charlottesville, Virginia.

³ GOODWIN, *supra* note 1, at 747 (quoting Leo Tolstoy, *THE WORLD*, N.Y., Feb. 7, 1908 (quoting the tribal chief of the North Caucasus)).

⁴ *Id.* (quoting Ulysses S. Grant) (citation omitted).

⁵ See President William J. Clinton, Remarks at Cooper Union Commencement (May 23, 2006) (transcript available at www.cooper.edu/commencement/wjc_keynote_05232006.pdf); see also Editorial, *Players: Jay Forest Hain*, WASH. POST, Aug. 25, 2006, at A15 (providing a biography of Jay Forest Hain, Director of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives, which includes *Team of Rivals* as the latest book he has read).

⁶ GOODWIN, *supra* note 1, at xviii (stating that her "story benefited from a treasure trove of primary sources" not generally used in Lincoln biographies).

⁷ See DORIS K. GOODWIN, *NO ORDINARY TIME: FRANKLIN AND ELEANOR ROOSEVELT: THE HOME FRONT IN WORLD WAR II* (1994). Kearns won the Pulitzer Prize for History in 1995 for this book. See The Pulitzer Board Presents The Pulitzer Prize Winners 1995, available at <http://www.pulitzer.org> (scroll across to the "1995" hyperlink on the upper timeline) (last visited 17 May 2007).

⁸ GOODWIN, *supra* note 1, at xvi.

⁹ *Id.*; see also Carl Schurz, *Abraham Lincoln: An Essay* (Houghton Mifflin & Co., 1891) (explaining how the nomination fell into Lincoln's hands).

¹⁰ GOODWIN, *supra* note 1, at xvi; accord William H. Herndon, *A Letter from Herndon to Jesse Weik, February 24, 1887*, in *HERNDON-WEIK PAPERS*, group 4, reel 10, 2113-16 (stating Lincoln was not social but rather more inclined to attend events to simply "reap political advantage," if any was to be gained).

end, the format effectively illuminates Lincoln's character against the backdrop of his peers as Goodwin suggests. However, rather than concluding that Lincoln was shrewd or canny as Goodwin contends, most readers will be impressed by the manner in which Lincoln remained true to his character and unwavering in his devotion to the Union throughout his life of service, setting him apart from his peers.

Goodwin's chronological presentation of events allows her to logically describe events and then develop each participant's character using their personal correspondence from those time periods.¹² The book opens on May 18, 1860 with each main character awaiting the results of the Republican national convention.¹³ The convention is a cleverly chosen beginning because it represents the point where these future teammates would first meet as "rivals." Here, Goodwin first presents the convention and then turns to the rivals' attitudes and circumstances as they await the news of the decision. She holds up Lincoln's humility in stark contrast to Seward's confidence and flair for extravagance.¹⁴ Similarly, Chase's overconfidence, solitude, and meticulous attention to detail vividly set him apart from the often disheveled appearance and love for companionship that Lincoln embodied throughout his life.¹⁵ Finally, Bates's anticipation was markedly suppressed as he was essentially brought out of retirement by the politically prominent Blair family to be their candidate in hopes of solidifying the contentious Republican party.¹⁶ However, as Goodwin later illustrates, it was not Bates, but in fact Lincoln, that offered all that the Blairs had hoped for in their candidate—an "untainted" "conservative" "opposed to both the radical abolitionists in the North and the proslavery fanatics in the South."¹⁷ This introduction places each man on the brink of success with different expectations and very different attitudes, each ready to assume the responsibilities as President.

From there, Goodwin steps back to trace each man's path to national recognition, tying in their common experiences in loss of loved ones, their prior campaigns, and significant personal events that had shaped the battlefield for the 1860 nomination. Using this approach, Goodwin again develops the event, and then turns to the diaries or letters.¹⁸ She focuses extensively on their ambitions, motivations, and different backgrounds to bring the characters to life. Chase, the never satisfied;¹⁹ Seward, the privileged;²⁰ and Bates, the aristocrat;²¹ all suffered much less hardship and enjoyed much greater advantage than Lincoln.²² Later in the book, the author uses the correspondence of these men to gain insight into Lincoln's impact on each of them.²³ Her use of the diaries and other personal correspondence also provides powerful and often emotional insight into how these other men, and often the women in their lives, felt, thought, and influenced each other and the President while in the White House.²⁴

¹¹ GOODWIN, *supra* note 1, at xvii.

¹² See, e.g., *id.* at 297-99 (summarizing the conflict at Fort Sumter, then following up with personal correspondence to show the insights and thoughts of the participants).

¹³ *Id.* at 1-28.

¹⁴ See *id.* at 7-15.

¹⁵ *Id.* at 16-17.

¹⁶ *Id.* at 25.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 24-25.

¹⁸ See, e.g., *id.* at 172-73 (recording Lincoln's emotions in a letter written after he had given up his seat in the U.S. Senate to Democrat Lyman Trumbull in 1855 even though he had a majority of the votes) (citation omitted); *id.* at 25 (Bates recording his thoughts after being approached about the nomination) (citation omitted).

¹⁹ *Id.* at 34-43.

²⁰ *Id.* at 29-34.

²¹ *Id.* at 43-46.

²² *Id.* at 46.

²³ See, e.g., *id.* at 518 (citing a letter from Abraham Lincoln to Anson G. Henry where Lincoln recognized that Chase's threat to resign was because "Chase's feelings were hurt" and so Lincoln moved to console Chase and retain him in the cabinet) (citation omitted); but see William H. Herndon, *Analysis of the Character of Abraham Lincoln*, 1 ABRAHAM LINCOLN Q. 413, 419 (Dec. 1941) (stating Lincoln "was not a social man . . . he was . . . abstracted . . . and gloomy").

²⁴ See, e.g., GOODWIN, *supra* note 1, at 213 (citing references to letters and diary entries by Frances and Fanny Seward) (citations omitted); *id.* at 446 (citing letters from Seward to his daughter Fanny, as well as, correspondence from Chase to his daughter Kate) (citation omitted); *id.* at 540 (citing telegrams between Lincoln and his wife, Mary) (citations omitted); *id.* at 546 (citing multiple letters between William Seward and Frances Seward) (citations omitted).

Once inside the White House, Goodwin broadens the lens of her focus, offering insight into other notable figures at the time, such as General George McClellan, Ulysses S. Grant, George Meade, and Frederick Douglas. Using personal letters from McClellan to his wife, Goodwin methodically reveals McClellan's arrogance, selfishness, eagerness for glory, and unwillingness to take responsibility for his own failures, much less his subordinates, something that Lincoln would do over and over again.²⁵ In presenting Meade, Goodwin offers a letter found in Lincoln's personal archives that was labeled "To Gen. Meade, never sent, or signed."²⁶ This letter, penned by Lincoln after the Battle of Gettysburg, was a scathing indictment of Meade.²⁷ However, for Goodwin it tied together Meade's failure with a much more important lesson, which was Lincoln's ability to exercise restraint and "hold back" when tempted to lash out at subordinates or opponents.²⁸ As Goodwin points out, Lincoln consistently supported his commanders and used levity to survive failed moments.²⁹ She repeatedly uses events, followed by Lincoln's response, to distinguish his character from the others.³⁰ For example, unlike Chase and Seward, Lincoln was slow to make personal attacks, but quick to use logic to expose flaws and persuade a crowd.³¹ The only recurring criticism of Lincoln, seemed best stated by Bates: "He lacks but one thing . . . the element of will."³² It was often times in his dealing with these other, non-rival characters, such as McClellan and Meade, that Goodwin most successfully developed this trait in Lincoln.

Along the way, Goodwin also adds new insight into some of the key characters, particularly Samuel Chase and William Seward, who are often remembered for other accomplishments. William Seward, most notable for "Seward's Folly" or "Seward's Icebox," also played a critical role in our country's survival of the slavery issue as he consoled and provided much needed mentoring and friendship to Lincoln during this time. While Seward initially only accepted the position as Secretary of State because he believed he might yet still be able to control the nation, believing that Lincoln would surely be his puppet, he eventually became Lincoln's closest friend and most trusted confidant.³³ This role, as confidant, friend and advisor to Lincoln during this critical time, arguably may have accomplished more for this nation than the purchase of Alaska, and certainly puts a different shine on William Seward as history recalls his name. However, Goodwin's most marked accomplishment in this area was her portrayal of Salmon Chase. Culminating in his efforts to undermine Lincoln and thereby secure his own nomination for President in 1864, in the midst of the Civil War, Chase's letters and diary entries will forever cast him as a villain. Goodwin presents this development in such a way that by the time Lincoln forgave Chase and begged him to stay on the cabinet, readers will be tempted to throw up their hands in frustration at Lincoln's graciousness. Later, after Lincoln finally accepts Chase's resignation (much to his surprise),³⁴ Goodwin returns to report to the reader that Lincoln was now going to offer him the position of Chief Justice of the Supreme Court!³⁵ Goodwin's incorporation of the letters from Chase to his daughter Kate and others during this time, which exposed his dishonesty and selfish ambition, casts Lincoln's commitment to his country in a new light. While Lincoln was clearly aware of Chase's activities, it is the incorporation and use of the personal letters and correspondence that adds the real insight into Lincoln's selection of Chase for the position of Chief Justice because he believed "the decision was right for the country."³⁶

²⁵ *Id.* at 378, 447, 481 (citations omitted).

²⁶ *Id.* at 536.

²⁷ *Id.*

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *Id.* (pointing out a time when Lincoln had begun to criticize the Union Generals for not moving against the enemy, but then quickly added that it was difficult to judge them when he himself had "not fully made up [his] mind how [he] should behave when minie-balls were whistling, and those great oblong shells shrieking in [his] ear. [He] might run away") (citations omitted).

³⁰ *See, e.g., id.* at 190 (pointing out that unlike the others Lincoln never resorted to personal attacks, but stayed focused on the issues and allowed his opponents to retain their honor and dignity) (citations omitted).

³¹ *Id.*

³² *Id.* at 675 (citation omitted). Goodwin also uses Bates's recordings in his diary that he believed that Lincoln was too slow to remove many of his cabinet members and military leaders, and too weak when exercising his power of pardon, to illuminate the differing leadership styles of the two men. *Id.* (citations omitted).

³³ *Id.* at 668-69 (citations omitted).

³⁴ *Id.* at 633-34 (citations omitted).

³⁵ *Id.* at 676-81.

³⁶ *Id.* (citations omitted); *see also id.* at 635 (relaying Chittenden's comment that Lincoln "must move upon a higher plane") (citation omitted).

At other times, Goodwin's use of detail and first-hand accounts of the personal aspects of these events adds incredible insight into the passion that surrounds them. For example, her description of the caning of Senator Charles Sumner on the Senate floor by South Carolina's Preston Brooks,³⁷ just one week prior to the Republican National Convention in 1856, is skillfully placed to highlight the hatred and vilification of the opposing factions that was developing between the slavery and anti-slavery factions within that party at the time.³⁸

The personal writings also provide insight into the cultural differences in those days, particularly the intimacy shared by men. The author uses letters between Stanton and Chase,³⁹ Lincoln and Speed, and the detailed accounts of Lincoln's friendship with Seward,⁴⁰ to demonstrate the degree to which these powerful men shared love and drew support from each other. She also includes several juicy letters between Chase and Stanton containing passages which would today cause most men to blush.⁴¹ This intimacy is not quite the image one would have of President Bush and his cabinet today, but is instructive for understanding the events of that period as such relationships among men were apparently common during that time.

While the book does much to illuminate the characters, as well as to elicit emotional attachment on the part of the reader, it is not without fault. It appears that Goodwin cannot resist the urge to include every interesting fact that she has discovered. At times, she chases the tail of the stories too far exchanging humorous quips for the course of the main characters.⁴² She also seems unable to resist the urge to incorporate anything that might hook the reader. For instance, at one point she pulls in a quote from Walt Whitman to describe the President's appearance and travel habits.⁴³ While the name is surely to ring a bell with most readers, it seems included for solely that value.

Additionally, despite all of her previous success and notoriety, the author's incidents involving plagiarism in 2002 cannot be ignored when reviewing this work.⁴⁴ Ironically, even with her prior rub with plagiarism, it still difficult at times to ascertain in *Team of Rivals* what she has taken from other sources and what she is providing as her own editorial.⁴⁵ A great example is the portrayal of the previously mentioned attack on Sumner by Preston Brooks. The author spends over two pages describing this event and cites many references.⁴⁶ Yet, as is common throughout the book, it is difficult to ascertain whether the intervening editorial comments are her own or pulled from the other sources. In this instance, she even omits support for the claim that Sumner spent three years out of the Senate as a result of this attack.⁴⁷ One can only presume that she read or learned this from some historical source but her citation clearly stops before and continues after this proclamation.⁴⁸ Although relatively minor, these ambiguities seem irresponsible given her history.

³⁷ *Id.* at 184. Sumner's attacker was the young Congressman Preston Brooks, cousin of South Carolina Senator Andrew Butler. *Id.* Andrew Butler had been the target of vilifying anti-slavery remarks by Sumner on the Senate floor just two days earlier. *Id.* "You have libelled South Carolina and my relative, and I have come to punish you," and he did with several blows to Sumner's head with a cane. *Id.* (quoting BOSTON PILOT, May 31, 1856).

³⁸ *Id.* at 185. The author also includes the presentation of a silver goblet and walking stick by the Governor of South Carolina to Preston Brooks "in honor of his good work" to further tug at the emotions of the reader. *Id.* (citing CHARLESTON DAILY COURIER, May 28, 1856).

³⁹ *See id.* at 43 (citations omitted).

⁴⁰ *See id.* at 724 (describing how, as Seward laid in bed recovering from an attack on his life, Lincoln laid "side by side" with him as "they had done at the time of their first meeting in Massachusetts many years before") (citations omitted).

⁴¹ *Id.* at 117 (responding to Chase, Stanton wrote it "filled my heart with joy; to be loved by you, and be told that you value my love is a gratification beyond my power to express") (citation omitted). This letter followed earlier correspondence where Stanton informed Chase, "Since our pleasant intercourse together last summer . . . no living person has been oftener in my mind,—waking or sleeping,—for, more than once, I have dreamed of being with you." *Id.* at 116 (citation omitted).

⁴² *See, e.g., id.* at 697 (including a random reference from Noah Brooks at the 1864 Inauguration to an ambassador that "was so stiff with gold lace that he could not sit down except with great difficulty and had to unbutton before he could get his feet on the floor") (citation omitted).

⁴³ *Id.* at 546 (quoting WALT WHITMAN, SPECIMEN DAYS 26 (1971)).

⁴⁴ *See* George Mason University's History News Network, Editor's Note, *How the Goodwin Story Developed*, Oct. 6, 2005, <http://hnn.us/articles/590.html>. In 2002, Doris Kearns Goodwin was exposed for having plagiarized extensively in her book *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*. DORIS KEARNS GOODWIN, *THE FITZGERALDS AND THE KENNEDYS* (1987).

⁴⁵ *See* GOODWIN, *supra* note 1, at 759-880.

⁴⁶ *See id.* at 789 (containing the citations for page 184-85).

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 184.

⁴⁸ *Compare id.* at 184 (claiming Sumner was out of Senate for three years), *with id.* at 789 (endnotes for this passage).

Aside from these distractions, the book is valuable to leaders and Judge Advocates alike. For the Judge Advocate, there are several references to international law, law of nations, and other legal issues inherent in the President's decision cycle.⁴⁹ These issues, confronted by Lincoln—a self trained lawyer—are not unlike some of the issues faced by Judge Advocates and commanders on today's battlefield. Additionally, Justice Taney's decision in *Dred Scott*⁵⁰ and the decision to suspend habeas corpus by Lincoln are also presented in a thought provoking manner.⁵¹ The legal impact and response at the time is eerily reminiscent of the arguments being made by the President today and reviewed by many civil liberty groups, Congress, and potentially the courts.⁵² As such, this book could serve as a catalyst for discussions on legal aspects of operations between commanders and judge advocates.

In conclusion, Doris Kearns Goodwin's "mirror" approach to examining Abraham Lincoln successfully magnifies his personality traits and leadership style. It also provides unique perspective and insight to the events during that time. The book does not assume too much on the part of the reader, thus making it a great teacher of history. Most compelling is the emotional investment that it requires of the reader as the story, with its heroes and villains, unfolds. Readers will finish the book inspired and refreshed, but also avowed to be more careful in their "Letters from War." If George McClellan had known that someday his letters to his wife would be in the hands of Doris Kearns Goodwin, he might have decided to fight the war, rather than write about it to his wife.

⁴⁹ See, e.g., *id.* at 550-51 (examining the Union Order of Retaliation, issued on July 30 1863, stating "that for every soldier of the United States killed in violation of the laws of war, a rebel soldier shall be executed; and for every one enslaved by the enemy or sold into slavery, a rebel soldier shall be placed at hard labor") (citations omitted); *id.* at 396-99 & 710-11 (describing the Trent Affair wherein Lincoln and his cabinet, primarily Seward, were forced to deal with delicate international legal questions created when a Union naval vessel forcibly removed Confederate emissaries from a British merchant ship, the *Trent*, bound for England) (citations omitted).

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 188-92, 204, 223.

⁵¹ See *id.* at 354-55 (citations omitted). Bates penned a twenty-six page opinion supporting the President's decision. *Id.* at 355 (citations omitted).

⁵² Compare *id.* at 355 (citing Lincoln's and Bates's justification for the actions of the President in times of urgency) (citations omitted), with Remarks, Richard Ben-Veniste, 9-11 Commissioner, Sept. 7, 2005, *Local Voices: Citizen Conversations on Civil Liberties and Communities Report Release*, <http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Home&CONTENTID=3458&TEMPLATE=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm> (citing both Justice Thurgood Marshall in 1989 and Sandra Day O'Connor in 1995 to state that the challenge facing the 9/11 Commission is its the need to balance civil liberties with the need to protect America from terrorist attacks).