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### Team of Rivals

When Doris Kearns Goodwin set out to write Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln, she knew that she had to capture a characteristic of Lincoln that the multitudinous other volumes had merely glossed over. With her focus on Lincoln's brilliance in leading other fascinating men and the nation through the Civil War, Goodwin succeeded in offering a very fresh look at an over-examined man.

Goodwin begins her 750 page book with 250 pages of intense biographical studies of the motivations and personalities of the four main candidates for the Republican presidential nomination in 1860: William Henry Seward, Salmon P. Chase, Edward Bates, and of course, Lincoln. Goodwin piles on the evidence of how these men were exceptionally talented, successful, ambitious, and rightfully deserving of the nomination, which was being decided in Chicago. The least successful of the four, up to that point, was Lincoln, who pulls off the political upset of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. After his victory, Goodwin focuses on Lincoln's assembly of his cabinet, which includes his three other rivals for the Republican nomination, along with former Whigs and Democrats who had recently joined the Republican Party in a united stance against the spread of slavery into the territories out west. Part II of Goodwin's book is entitled: Master Among Men. In the second half of the book, Goodwin abundantly highlights proof for her thesis that Abraham Lincoln is a political genius.

Throughout every interaction that Lincoln has in Team of Rivals, one cannot fail to appreciate his humor, kindness, and incredible understanding of human nature. Though

Lincoln creates a cabinet of men who were not his friends or supporters and actually felt that he was the wrong man for the job, he spoke to everyone as if they were his friend, he held no grudges, and remarkably, he gained the respect if not the outright love and admiration of every one of them during his four years as president. Goodwin describes one of the major turning points of Lincoln's presidency when Secretary of State Seward opposes the selection of Chase for Secretary of the Treasury. Seward thinks of himself as one of the most reputable statesmen in the country and that he will be pulling the strings or at least acting as co-president with Lincoln. Lincoln, un-phased by Seward's objections, proceeds to create a cabinet of the most able men and puts Seward in his place. Slowly Seward comes to see Lincoln's intelligent strategies and becomes his most loyal cabinet member and one of his favorite companions.

Chase does not develop the same relationship with Lincoln as Seward did. Chase's ambition for the presidency leads him to become Lincoln's antagonist in many of the episodes throughout the book. Chase constantly allows his opposing views to become public, organizes opposition towards other cabinet members, and even runs his own presidential campaign against Lincoln while still Secretary of the Treasury. Despite all of these actions and repeated calls for the removal of Chase, Lincoln kept him on to keep his talents in the treasury department and to avoid a major break with Radical Republicans. Chase, in an effort to show his disapproval with the Lincoln administration and set himself up for the 1864 nomination, had offered his resignation to Lincoln on two different occasions. Both times Lincoln adeptly soothed the secretary's ego by asking him to stay on at his important post, making it difficult for him to quit. But after four years of disloyalty, Chase offered to resign a third time and Lincoln accepted. Chase hoped to assert his authority in a controversial appointment and he thought Lincoln would keep him on as he had before. Lincoln had

skillfully found a chance to get rid of Chase over a minor issue, instigated by Chase, and without angering the Radical Republicans.

Every political conversation Lincoln has in Team of Rivals seems to follow these same themes. Lincoln appoints politicians and military officials to high posts from opposing backgrounds. Then he hears what all parties concerned have to say. Then he does what he intended to do anyway and somehow uses his charm and intellect to leave both opposing sides feeling somewhat satisfied and respected. But beyond just respecting everyone and letting everyone speak their mind, Lincoln was forgiving. When a cabinet member would get caught writing an embarrassing letter that insulted the president, Lincoln would forgive them, forget it happened, and enlist them to work even harder to help him save the country. When Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton (who had previously treated Lincoln very rudely as co-counsel on a big case in Cincinnati) was being faulted for every mistake during the early years of the Civil War, Lincoln spoke publicly in support of him and put the matter to rest. Lincoln, as many presidents have done, could have easily let his War Secretary take the blame for the problems with the war, but Lincoln instead took the blame for every charge against Stanton, leading one observer to note, “He is one of the best men God ever created.”

Even in Lincoln’s weaknesses, Goodwin seems to show his ability for genius. The Democrat, General George B. McClellan was incredibly popular with his soldiers. Lincoln was constantly disrespected and maligned by the slow-to-act General. Lincoln held on to McClellan too long and the war was prolonged. Yet when McClellan ran against Lincoln in 1864, the popular General hoped to gain the majority of the soldiers vote to either win the election or to discredit Lincoln’s war policies. But Lincoln had spent the past four years visiting troops, telling them stories, supporting their efforts, and believing in the cause. When the election came Lincoln won their votes.

The strongest impression that this book leaves on its reader is the realness of Abraham Lincoln. One who has studied Lincoln knows his great deeds, his changing views on slavery and emancipation, and the facts that make up his life. But Goodwin seems to know Lincoln more intimately. And he is an amazing man. Goodwin takes the reader through his plucky upbringing in which you root for him to succeed. She causes the reader to grimace as Lincoln tries to find love and deals with depression. She brings readers to his side as he is pushed aside by members of his own party and treated poorly by people he cannot help but to forgive. As has been said, Goodwin amazes the reader with proof of his brilliance and his ability to gain the respect of all who doubted him as president. And then she breaks your heart with the reality of a lost son that he weeps uncontrollably for, a depressed wife whose insecurity causes more problems than he can solve, and ultimately, his own death. When the war has been won and the relief is tangible, the reader will smile at Mary Lincoln wanting to travel the world with her husband and flirting with him at Ford's Theater. But the relief is short. Lincoln's death is more than the death of a president. It is the death of a friend, the death of a husband, the death of a father, and the death of the Great Emancipator. Goodwin's book excellently supports her thesis of Lincoln's political genius and gives an incredibly detailed look at most of the major events of the life of the 16<sup>th</sup> president, but you should read this book because the character of Abraham Lincoln creates an impression in the reader that will not easily be forgotten.

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