

Lincoln: Original News Coverage From the New York Times

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Review

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Donald, David Herbert and Holzer, Harold (Introductions). *Lincoln: Original News Coverage from The New York Times*. The New York Times, \$27.95

Contemporary coverage

News from Lincoln's lifetime

As James M. McPherson pointed out, News stories are the first draft of history. Like all first drafts, they are subject to correction and revision as fuller information and longer perspectives become available. Many initial reports from the *New York Times* contained errors and exaggerations that subsequent accounts had to correct. But then, why read them now if this first draft of history was often wrong? Because they are the first impressions of the war to reach northern readers and swayed public opinion. While reading these first accounts, one feels present and appreciative reactions from the 1860s. One experiences first hand the news of Lincoln's election as President, the Emancipation Proclamation and Gettysburg Address, and the appointment of Ulysses S. Grant as commander of all the Union armies.

This ninety-six page reproduction of the *New York Times* traces Lincoln's rise to political prominence, his election and the major events during his presidency--including his wartime leadership and principal domestic events--his assassination, the nation's grief, and the trial and punishment of the conspirators. More than just a reprint, each section provides useful background notes by Pulitzer Prize-winning author and historian, David Herbert Donald, and historian and co-chairman of the U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission, Harold Holzer. Included among the original source material are reports on the Lincoln-Douglas debates, Lincoln's Cooper Union speech, the attack on Fort Sumter, the death of the Lincoln's son, the firing of General George B. McClellan, the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, the Gettysburg Address, the appointment of Ulysses S. Grant as Commanding General of the

Union Army, the surrender at Appomattox, and the hunt for John Wilkes Booth. There are also 20th century retrospectives on Lincoln, including 100 Years Ago Today: Lincoln Assassinated at Ford's Theater in the Capital from the April 14, 1965 issue of the *Times*.*

Lincoln: Original News Coverage from The New York Times uses the same format as reprints of *The New York Times* issues relating to the Civil War that were boxed and published as *Civil War Extra: Original News Coverage From The New York Times* with introduction and notes by James M. McPherson. This newspaper portfolio has recently been released in book form by St. Martin's Press as *The Most Fearful Ordeal: Original Coverage of the Civil War by Writers and Reporters of the New York Times*. **Lincoln: Original News Coverage from The New York Times** richly deserves similar treatment.

New York City was home to the Civil War's big three northern newspapers: *The Times*, *The Tribune* and *The Herald*. *The Tribune*, edited by the irascible Horace Greeley, represented the radical anti-slavery wing of the Republican Party. *The Herald*, owned and edited by the curmudgeonly James Gordon Bennett, took the opposite point of view. *The Times* adopted a more moderate Republican position. In 1851 Henry J. Raymond founded *The Times* and edited it until his death in 1869. It truly represented Abraham Lincoln's brand of Republicanism. Raymond insured that *The Times* was an avid supporter of the Union in the 1861 secession crisis, as well as accepting emancipation as a war aim in 1862-63. While remaining in charge of *The Times*, Raymond, in 1864, became chairman of the Republican National Committee.

Initially, Raymond went into the field himself and reported the first battle of Bull Run. Thereafter, his paper, like other newspapers, sent special correspondents into the field to report military affairs. Despite resistance from Army commanders who feared publication of intelligence that might help the enemy, correspondents turned up at battles during or shortly after the fighting and then filed their stories by telegraph, if possible, or by courier or personal delivery. *The Times* employed some of the best war correspondents--Samuel Wilkeson, George H.S. Salter (Jasper), L.P. Crouse, G.F. Williams, and William Conant Church (Pierrepoint). These reporters and others are represented in this portfolio. But their first-hand accounts in *The Times* are not the only form of war news included here.

Initial reports of important events--especially battles--came in the form of official telegrams from generals or from the War Department that were then printed verbatim in the newspapers. There were also Associated Press dispatches and reprinted excerpts of summaries from other newspapers which was a common practice at the time.

The articles by Donald and Holzer are priceless and amount to a mini-biography of Abraham Lincoln, especially *The 16th President Wrote His Own Book on Leadership and Lincoln and the Press: A Wary, Sometimes Testy, Relationship*. Other equally descriptive accounts cover the Lincoln-Douglas debates, Lincoln's nomination at the Wigwam in Chicago, the President-elect's fear of assassination on his inaugural trip, the fall of Fort Sumter, the blockade, the first income tax, the President's first message to Congress on December 3, 1861, the *Trent Affair*, Lincoln's suppression of General Fremont's Emancipation Proclamation in 1861, the President's feud with McClellan, Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief, civil liberties, the assassination on April 14, 1865, the capture of John Wilkes Booth and other conspirators, their trial and execution, and preparations for the centennial of Lincoln's birth in 1909.

A fitting conclusion to this most vivid resource of first-hand Civil War experiences are the retrospectives on Abraham Lincoln published in 1909. Every library deserves this portfolio.

*[A reprint of the February 9, 1930 *The New York Times Pictorial Lincoln History* which told Lincoln's life through 195 pictures is also available from *The New York Times Photo Archives*. A new introduction to this reprint by Harold Holzer provides an illustrated history of Lincoln, from log cabin where he was born to the White House, and from the Civil War to his assassination.]

Frank J. Williams is Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Rhode Island and Founding Chair of the Lincoln Forum. His latest book, Judging Lincoln, was published by Southern Illinois University Press.