

A LOOK AT LINCOLN: Providing an Abraham Lincoln Survey

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Feature Essay

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Williams, Frank J. *A LOOK AT LINCOLN: Providing an Abraham Lincoln Survey.*

The Party May Be Over but the Celebration Has Just Begun

February 12, 2009 marked the bicentennial of Abraham Lincoln's birth and while the festivities were grand, they marked only the beginning of the celebration of his life and legacy.

These past several years we celebrated the president who saved the Union and who insisted that the United States "is" rather than "are." We celebrated the leader who made unpopular decisions that were necessary to prevent our Founding Fathers' vision of democracy from crumbling. We celebrated the commander in chief who proclaimed civil war, called forth the militia, and took extraordinary steps – some by sheer assumption of presidential power – like suspending the writ of habeas corpus, increasing the size of the army and navy, and declaring a blockade of the southern coast. We celebrated the attorney in chief who sought a middle ground between adversaries. We celebrated the northerner who reached out to southerners, telling them at his first inaugural, "We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies." And, perhaps most of all, we celebrated the great emancipator who abhorred slavery and believed that everyone should have an equal chance in the race of life.

All of this is a testament to the lasting legacy of the sixteenth president and the impact he had on America. He exemplified the foundations of our society: character, leadership, justice, and a commitment to excellence in whatever one endeavored. He was clear and self-confident in his beliefs. He learned to trust his own judgment and, that while he made mistakes, they were not mistakes of self-doubt. He once said, "Always bear in mind that your own resolution to succeed, is more important than any other one thing." He set goals, preached a vision, and continually reaffirmed it. His vision was not only for America, but for the world. Lincoln's message was consistent – one nation, one people, one

law.

In 1893, Frederick Douglass declared “It is impossible for . . . anybody . . . to say anything new about Abraham Lincoln.” One hundred and seventeen years later, historians and authors continue to achieve the impossible. The past three years witnessed an outpouring of support for the sixteenth president. Hundreds of books carried his name recounting the man, the myth, and the legend.

In the 1960s, the Guinness Book of Records reported that more books had been written about Abraham Lincoln than any other public figure in the world, naming Napoleon as the runner-up. With the surge of Lincoln books that came with the bicentennial of his birth, over 500 since 2007, Lincoln surely has secured his lead in the pantheon of heroes. The titles that follow are among those that ensure his place in history. Only space prevents a more definitive listing.

Angels and Ages: A Short Book About Darwin, Lincoln and Modern Life by Adam Gopnik (Knopf, 2009). Abraham Lincoln’s birth in a log cabin on Nolin Creek in Kentucky is not all that happened on February 12, 1809. On the same day half a world away on an English country estate was born Charles Darwin, whose theory of evolution would transform scientific thought just as Lincoln’s presidency would transform all ideas about democracy. The parallels that Adam Gopnik draws brilliantly between the lives of the famously bearded giants born on February 12, 1809 who both became public figures and icons in their own way are eye opening. His title, “Angels and Ages” derives from the controversy over whether Lincoln’s secretary of war, Edwin Stanton, moaned over the president’s dead body, “Now he belongs to the ages” or “to the angels.”

The Lincoln Anthology: Great Writers on His Life and Legacy from 1860 to Now (Library of America, 2008), edited by Harold Holzer. This is one of the best books released in recent years and one of the best ever from the invaluable Library of America.

The near-1,000 page anthology, which includes 110 selections from 95 writers, is a treasure trove of words about Abraham Lincoln – not just from Americans like Emerson and E.L. Doctorow but from Karl Marx, Winston Churchill, Henrik Ibsen, Victor Hugo, Bram Stoker, Leo Tolstoy and H. G. Wells, too.

Count S. Staklberg's contribution to the anthology quotes Tolstoy as having said of Lincoln, "of all the great national heroes and statesmen of history, Lincoln is the only real giant. Alexander, Frederick the Great, Caesar, Napoleon, Gladstone and even Washington stand in greatness of character, in depth of feeling and in certain moral power far behind Lincoln."

In April 1865, soon after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, Ralph Waldo Emerson, another author included in the anthology, eulogized the recently slain President as "thoroughly American – a quite native, aboriginal man, as an acorn from an oak, no aping of foreigners, no frivolous accomplishments." Seventeen years later, Walt Whitman lauded Lincoln as the American among Americans, "his times, his death – great as any, any age – belong altogether to our own."

Most of the writers agree with Holzer that Lincoln, while complex and self-contradictory, "has remained nothing less than the ideal American hero: the self-made Everyman." He considers Lincoln's "legacy of extraordinary resonance and universality."

A leading Lincoln scholar, Holzer arranges the excerpts chronologically, from William Cullen Bryant's *Introduction of Abraham Lincoln at Cooper Union* (1860), to E. L. Doctorow's novel *The March* (Random House, 2005). The authors are varied from the famous and the obscure – newspapermen, humorists, biographers, essayists, novelists, memoirists, poets, playwrights, historians, clergymen and statesmen.

In a brief epilogue, Holzer features Barack Obama, whose identification with Lincoln brings the story up to February 2007. Announcing his presidential candidacy in Illinois, Obama invoked Lincoln's memory, reminding his audience that "the life of a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer tells us that a different future is possible."

The Portable Abraham Lincoln (Penguin, 2009) edited by Andrew Delbanco. It is no small feat to collect Lincoln's most noteworthy speeches, letters and addresses in a mere 369 pages. In addition to bringing us an appropriate selection of Lincoln's key works, Delbanco has included a chronology of Lincoln's life.

Similarly, short biographies like James M. McPherson's *Abraham Lincoln* (Oxford, 2009) can still be powerful. This one is 65 pages and complements the

more comprehensive biographies as does Allen C. Guelzo's 147-page *Lincoln: A Very Short Biography* (Oxford, 2009) also published by Oxford.

Lincoln was not the most educated President but he had mastered command of the English language. He was a prolific writer and his powerful and passionate orations inspired greatness. He was not only a great orator for a set occasion, but a man whose everyday remarks carried enormous verbal power. Without his remarkable ability to communicate with northerners and southerners alike, as a nation we may not have been reunited as one. His speeches and writings impart as important a message today as they did nearly two centuries ago. Lincoln's reading habits that helped him as an autodidact, Robert Bray's *Reading With Lincoln* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2010) and Daniel Wolff's *How Lincoln Learned to Read* (Bloomsbury, 2010). Both examine training, formal or otherwise, of Lincoln in an effort to identify what makes a good education.

Fred Kaplan's *Lincoln: The Biography of a Writer*, (HarperCollins, 2008), is a close study of how crucial Lincoln's vast reading and writing were to his political ascent. In Kaplan's words: If Mark Twain was the Lincoln of our literature, Lincoln was the Twain of our politics. Indeed, "[s]ince Lincoln, no president has written his own words and addressed his contemporary audience or posterity with equal and enduring effectiveness."

Still warm off the presses are books about Lincoln's struggles with race, with his marriage, and with his melancholia; about his law practice; and about his creation of the role of commander in chief.

Even the influence of the Scottish poet Robert Burns on the young Lincoln and the surprising parallels in their lives get an airing. *Abraham Lincoln and Robert Burns: Connected Lives and Legends* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2008) by Ferenc Szasz (who died within a year of its publication).

Lincoln, the Cabinet, and the Generals by Chester G. Hearn (Louisiana State university Press, 2010) provides a comprehensive analysis of Lincoln's complex relationship with both his cabinet and his generals in the field. Also fair and balanced is John C. Waugh's *Lincoln and McClellan: The Troubled Partnership Between a President and His General* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), a beautifully written narrative with the President on one side – universally acclaimed and highly respected, and on the other, a general who is a failure with an ego problem.

Although many of the new releases take us down well-beaten paths, they shed new light on the President's life and legacy. Take, for example, Lincoln's epochal 1858 debates about slavery with Senator Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois. In a new edition of the encounters, *The Lincoln-Douglas Debates* (University of Illinois Press, 2008), Rodney O. Davis and Douglas L. Wilson, directors of the Lincoln Studies Center at Knox College, in Galesburg, Ill., do more than any previous studies to reconcile conflicting accounts from rival newspapers. By placing the Lincoln-Douglas debates in historical context, their new work helps the reader understand the full import of the debates, as does Allen C. Guelzo's *Lincoln and Douglas: The Debates that Defined America* (Simon & Schuster, 2009).

Although Douglas kept his seat, Lincoln gained national prominence, leading to an invitation to speak in New York to the eastern Republican establishment. The effect of his speech at the Cooper Union in New York moved him to the forefront of candidates for the Republican nomination for the presidency. In his *Lincoln at Cooper Union*, Harold Holzer (Simon & Schuster, 2006) has written the definitive book on the events surrounding the address.

William Harris's *Lincoln's Rise to the Presidency* (University Press of Kansas, 2007) presents an excellent but conservative approach to Lincoln's overall rise in politics leading to his election as president. Harris details Lincoln's development as a politician and leader, demonstrating that although his rise to the presidency was not easy; his journey helped him evolve into a powerful statesman.

Other authors set out to unearth more about Lincoln and his adversaries than earlier scholarship had. In *The Radical and the Republican: Frederick Douglass, Abraham Lincoln, and the Triumph of Anti-slavery Politics* (W.W. Norton, 2008), James Oakes shows that the political foes, although initially ideologically apart on the issue of slavery, grew more similar in their beliefs. Oakes examines two little-noted speeches by Frederick Douglass, which reveal that he was more sympathetic than previously thought toward Lincoln's cautious inching toward support for some black suffrage. Perhaps it is for this reason that in the weeks after Lincoln's assassination, Mary Todd Lincoln wrote to Douglass, "My husband considered you a dear friend." John Stauffer's insightful *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Fredrick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln* (Twelve, 2008) is a historical essay about two great men and how their relationship grew as a result

of Lincoln's gradual acceptance of Douglass's abolitionist positions.

In recent years, many of Lincoln's biographers have taken on the challenge of dissecting Lincoln's mind. For its nuanced view of such key aspects of Lincoln's leadership, Ronald C. White Jr.'s new *A. Lincoln: A Biography* (Random House, 2010) has been praised expansively. White's work is lengthy at 797 pages, but his deft writing will appeal to academic and general readers. (It appeared on the March 1 and 8, 2009 *New York Times* bestseller list). Stephen B. Oates's classic *With Malice Toward None: A Life of Abraham Lincoln* (HarperCollins, 1974) will be reissued by HarperCollins in a revised edition.

Lincoln's long career as a lawyer has become more visible thanks to the enormous project, *The Papers of Abraham Lincoln*, undertaken by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency. The University of Illinois Press published the papers from Lincoln's legal practice on DVD in 2000, and the state agency has now put them into a searchable online database. In another documentation project, this press has published the evidence gathered for the Lincoln assassination trials, much of which the court never viewed.

The Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, in pursuing its documentation project, has dispatched a team of researchers to pore over every likely repository in the land. In about 2013, the agency will issue papers covering Lincoln's birth to his inauguration, and by about 2020 it will release his presidential papers – not just everything he wrote but also everything of any importance that was written to him.

Still, the record and scholarship on the 16th President are already so vast can we expect such delving to bring in major revisions of the Lincoln story?

Along with much documentary work has come a close examination of some of the more personal aspects of the president. In an effort to quench our insatiable interest about Lincoln's religion, his personal feelings toward slavery, his sexuality, and his relationship with his wife, many new releases examine these issues and more. Dr. John G. Sotos discusses every nuance of Lincoln's health in *The Physical Lincoln* (Mt. Vernon Book Systems, 2008).

Harold Holzer, co-chairman of the former U.S. Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Commission and now chair of its successor the Abraham Lincoln Bicentennial Foundation, is winning praise for a fresh take on Lincoln's

activities between his election and inauguration. Holzer makes a compelling case that the president-elect was no ditherer, but rather shrewd and principled as he waged war to prevent Southern secession and end slavery in *Lincoln President-Elect: Abraham Lincoln and the Great Secession Winter 1860-1861* (Simon & Schuster, 2009)

Of particular interest is *Lincoln's Men: The President and His Private Secretaries*, by Daniel Mark Epstein (HarperCollins, 2009), which gives us an up-close and personal look at the President through the men who knew him best.

Of the three secretaries to serve during Lincoln's presidency, the best-known is John Hay, who later became a successful diplomat and Cleveland businessman. In crisp and occasionally wry prose, Epstein shows how Lincoln was perceived by those closer to him than anyone outside his immediate family.

Robert J. O'Connor has edited, including about 1,800 footnotes, for publication by Infinity Publishing, *The Life of Abraham Lincoln as President*. Written in the 1880s by Lincoln's close friend and fellow lawyer Ward Hill Lamon, it had never been published before.

An unusual approach that also brings us up close and personal with the president is Stephen A. Wynalda's *366 Days in Abraham Lincoln's Presidency* (Skyhorse Publishing, 2010) where the author has constructed a day-by-day description of President Lincoln's personal and professional decisions in office, developing a comprehensive understanding of Lincoln's character, political courage and challenges. The author uses the events of specific days during Lincoln's presidency to humanize the man.

Lincoln's attitude toward African Americans is still a contested matter among authors – many believe the epithet of "Great Emancipator" is well-earned, but some consider him a racist. In a thoughtful introduction to *Lincoln on Race and Slavery* (Princeton, 2009), Henry Louis Gates Jr. details the steady evolution of Lincoln's thinking, from his early opposition to slavery on economic rather than humanitarian grounds to arguing, in the last speech of his life, that at the very least black men should have the right to vote.

Brian Lamb and Susan Swain's *Abraham Lincoln: Great American Historians on our Sixteenth President* (Public Affairs, 2010), a C-SPAN book containing fifty-five articles about Abraham Lincoln taken from original

C-SPAN interviews, gives us a virtual biography of America's greatest political leader through the eyes of leading Lincoln historians.

The legacy of Abraham Lincoln is measured not only in his deeds, but also his words. Lincoln's masterful speechwriting while in office forever changed the way politicians communicate with their constituents.

In Lincoln's Hand, edited by Joshua Wolf Shenk and Harold Holzer (Bantam, 2009), a panel of writers, artists and past presidents of the United States were each assigned one of Lincoln's original manuscripts and asked to write a commentary on it. An examination of the President's word choice and sentence structure demonstrates how Lincoln used common language – often one and two-syllable words, to reach a broader audience.

The Lincolns, Portrait of a Marriage (Ballantine Books, 2009) by Daniel Mark Epstein, examines a topic always of interest to Americans – Lincoln's relationship with his ambitious, sometimes neurotic wife. Epstein's focused work provides a fresh look at the Lincolns' marriage, portraying it as more loving than have other writers.

The story of Mary Todd Lincoln after the assassination is a tragic one. There has been no dearth of works on her eccentricities and her later commitment to an institution by her son Robert. A recent account is Jason Emerson's *The Madness of Mary Lincoln* (Southern Illinois University Press, 2007).

While in New Salem, Lincoln began to study law on his own. He passed the Illinois bar examination in 1836 and left to work as a lawyer in Springfield. Over the next 24 years, primarily through his work on the eighth Illinois judicial circuit, he became one of the most respected attorneys in central Illinois. Much of Lincoln's approach to his later actions as President of the United States was grounded in his hands-on experience with the law. *Lincoln the Lawyer* (University of Illinois Press, 2008), by Brian Dirck, gives a realistic view of what it was like to be a lawyer in Illinois at this time. And Mark Steiner, in *An Honest Calling: The Law Practice of Abraham Lincoln* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2009). Northern Illinois, tells us that Lincoln the lawyer was "busy, busy" and supported alternative dispute resolution – mediation – before that term was invented.

Jerrold M. Packard describes the dramatic effects of life in wartime Washington on the Lincoln family in *The Lincolns in the White House* (St. Martin's 2005). The President and his family spent much time at a cottage retreat at the Soldiers' Home on the outskirts of the city. In *Lincoln's Sanctuary: Abraham Lincoln and the Soldiers' Home* (Oxford, 2003), Matthew Pinsker describes his life there and his commute downtown to the White House.

For the Civil War there is no end. It is now upon us as November 6, 2010 – the 150th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's election as sixteenth president – marked the beginning of the sesquicentennial and commemoration of the war. Douglas R. Egerton's *Year of Meteors: Stephen Douglas, Abraham Lincoln, and the Election that Brought on the Civil War* (Bloomsbury Press, 2010) is a thorough analysis about the contest that featured four candidates – John C. Breckinridge of Kentucky, nominee of the Southern Democrats; Stephen A. Douglas of Illinois, candidate of the Northern Democrats; John Bell of Tennessee of the Constitutional Union Party; and Abraham Lincoln of the Republican Party.

Has any wartime leader ever spent so much time thinking about the sacrifices of the dead and their meaning? Two new books describing Lincoln's role as commander in chief are James M. McPherson's *Tried By War: Abraham Lincoln as Commander in Chief* (Oxford, 2008) and Craig B. Symonds's *Lincoln and His Admirals* (Oxford, 2008) – both of whom shared the 2009 Lincoln Prize from The Soldiers and Sailors Institute (now Civil War Institute) at Gettysburg College.

William Marvel's *A Great Task Remaining: The Third Year of Lincoln's War* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2010) is the third volume of four – each devoted to a separate year of the Civil War. Marvel's history tells the story of the Civil War from the Union point of view. Marvel presents the Civil War as a great tragedy where the principal actors remain increasingly reluctant to continue it. His second volume, *Lincoln's Darkest Year: The Civil War in 1862* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2008), describes the critical year of the war with no end in sight. Marvel shows Lincoln not at his best as he is learning the duties of president and commander in chief. The first year of the war is covered in Marvel's *Mr. Lincoln Goes to War* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2006) with a fresh look, based on primary sources, at the recurring question, "Was the war in all its devastation inevitable?"

The best description of the administrative acumen of the President is still Doris Kearns Goodwin's classic *Team of Rivals* (Simon & Schuster, 2005). This is a superb collective biography of Lincoln and his major cabinet members and their families. Most members of the Lincoln administration have biographies of their own as well.

Lincoln's dealings with the Supreme Court were important, especially because he needed the Court's approval to uphold many of the questionable actions he took to hold the nation together during the Civil War. Brian McGinty analyzes his relations with the Court in detail in *Lincoln and the Court* (Harvard, 2008).

The most important, controversial, and far-reaching document issued by President Lincoln was the *Emancipation Proclamation*. *The Emancipation Proclamation: Three Views – Social, Political and Iconographical* by Harold Holtzer, Edna Green Medford and Frank J. Williams (Louisiana State University Press, 2006), *Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation The End of Slavery in America* by Allen C. Guelzo (Simon & Schuster, 2004), Burrus Carnahan's *Act of Justice: Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation and the Law of War* (University Press of Kentucky, 2007) and Brian Dirck's edited collection *Lincoln Emancipated* (Northern Illinois University Press, 2007), give fair, up-to-date reviews of Lincoln's attitudes toward race and his act of emancipation demonstrating his great political courage.

An offshoot of Lincoln's moral approach to slavery has been an upsurge in interest in Lincoln's overall approach to religion, resulting in several recent books, including Michael Burkheimer's *Lincoln's Christianity*, (Westholme Publishing, 2007). George Rables *God's Almost Chosen People: A Religious History of the American Civil War* (University of North Carolina Press, 2010), and Grant N. Havers, *Lincoln and the Politics of Christian Love* (University of Missouri Press, 2009).

Shortly after the surrender of General Lee ended the Civil War, President Lincoln was tragically assassinated. New books have appeared and will continue to appear covering the events and implications of the murder. An excellent overall view of the deed may be found in Edward Steers Jr.'s *Blood on the Moon* (University Press of Kentucky, 2001) while his *The Lincoln Assassination Encyclopedia* (Harper Perennial, 2010) is a most definitive resource. Michael W. Kaufman's *American Brutus: John Wilkes Booth and the Lincoln Conspiracies*

(Random House, 2004) is replete with information about the United States government's withholding exculpatory evidence at the military trial of the accused assassins. Most books on the assassination deal with John Wilkes Booth and his co-conspirators, their pursuit and capture as is the case in James L. Swanson's terrific read, *Manhunt* (HarperCollins, 2006).

In *Stealing Lincoln's Body* (Harvard, 2007), Thomas Craughwell tells how, before Lincoln finally came to rest in a steel-and-concrete-reinforced vault in Springfield, the President's body was repeatedly exhumed and moved, his coffin frequently opened. In 1876, 11 years after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, a band of Chicago counterfeiterers plotted to steal Lincoln's body and hold it for ransom. Their plan was to demand \$200,000 and the release of the gang's master engraver, who was in prison in Illinois. The Secret Service infiltrated the gang with an informer. It also set in motion a cringe-inducing chain of events in which a group of self-appointed guardians took it upon themselves to protect Lincoln's remains by any means necessary. This strange story of Lincoln at unrest reveals how important this man was to so many, and perhaps our reluctance to let such a beloved and visionary leader go. Craughwell is at work on the plot to assassinate the President-elect Lincoln as he traveled to Washington through Baltimore – ground already plowed by Michael J. Kline in *Baltimore Plot: The First Conspiracy to Assassinate Abraham Lincoln* (Westholme Publishing, 2008) with a different conclusion questioning whether the plot even existed.

Several scholars have recently compiled books on Lincoln's writings and unique way of expressing his thoughts. Examples include Douglas L. Wilson's, *Lincoln's Sword: The Presidency and the Power of Words* (Knopf, 2006), and Ronald C. White, Jr.'s *The Eloquent President: A Portrait of Lincoln through His Words* (Random House, 2005).

Lincoln's Gettysburg Address and his second inaugural address have also received particular attention in recent years. Gabor Borrit's *The Gettysburg Gospel: The Lincoln Speech That Nobody Knows* (Simon & Schuster, 2006) is a definitive appraisal of the speech and its impact. Ron White does the same for Lincoln's second inaugural address in his *Lincoln's Greatest Speech* (Simon & Schuster, 2006) as did James Tackach in *Lincoln's Moral Vision: The Second Inaugural Address* (University Press of Mississippi, 2002).

Librarians should also be aware of the recent availability of Lincoln's speeches and letters in electronic format. The Library of Congress has long had

the largest collection of Lincoln's writings, and has published fragments from them over the years. The Library of Congress National Digital Library Program and the Manuscript Division has released their Abraham Lincoln Papers in digital format at *Abraham Lincoln: A Resource Guide* (www.loc.gov/rr/program/bib/presidents/lincoln/external.html). All of the works contained in this database are searchable by keyword, lending tremendous aid to researchers and authors alike.

When asked to write about himself, Lincoln penned only a thin two-page autobiography. "There is not much of it, for the reason, I suppose, that there is not much of me," said Lincoln, a picture of unsurpassed modesty. Authors today see it differently. Over 16,000 books and pamphlets, including about 2,000 for children, have been written about Abraham Lincoln yet writers are not deterred from adding to the collection of information about our 16th and greatest president.

One reason for this phenomenon is that his personal story – the rise from poverty to power – is so quintessentially American that he is perceived as embodying the national myth of the self-made man. We look to him for proof that anyone, however humble their beginnings, can ultimately attain the highest office in the land, what historian Gabor Boritt has called, "the right to rise."

Another reason is that his political story – his opposition to the Mexican War, his famous debates with Stephen A. Douglas, his election to the presidency, and his leadership during the Civil War – revolves around an issue ever close to the surface of national life: race. Eric Foner's belief that "The hallmark of Lincoln's greatness was his capacity for growth," fills out *The Fiery Trial: Abraham Lincoln and American Slavery* (Norton, 2010).

Add to these the recent election of a president who consciously evokes Lincoln's image and example, and the timing seems auspicious.

In 1922 Robert R. Moton, Booker T. Washington's successor at Tuskegee Institute, drafted a speech on behalf of blacks for the dedication of Washington's Lincoln Memorial, warning that the memorial would remain "but a hollow mockery, a symbol of hypocrisy, unless we together can make real the principles for which Lincoln died." Though the Memorial Commission ultimately forced Moton to excise his sharp words, his speech nevertheless ended with a cry for "equal justice and equal opportunity for all." The election of President Barack

Obama and his words at the Capitol arguably bring this quest to fruition.

Lincoln hagiography – always a high American art – also rose to new levels during the last three years. Whether it is through art, books or iconography, Americans can't get enough of Lincoln. They can't stop arguing about what made Lincoln great, what he would have done if he had not been assassinated six weeks into his second term, what he would do if he were alive today. Each year, millions of visitors mount the steps of The Lincoln Memorial, gaze at the statue of this American Zeus and read his immortal words, carved into the walls.

Lincoln, he of the scraggly beard, skinny build, wrinkled brow and rhetorical radiance, surely has inspired more artists than any other American president. He has been immortalized in every medium, from copper to cardboard. He shows up in song lyrics ("With the thoughts I'd be thinkin', I could be another Lincoln, if I only had a brain," warbles the film "The Wizard of Oz"). He's the subject of powerful novels and incisive biographies. In the 1994 *Lincoln in American Memory* (Oxford, 1994), the late Merrill D. Peterson traced the way Lincoln's image – that craggy profile with its tousled hair and heavy brow – has graced everything from car dealerships to mattress ads.

David Acord's *What Would Lincoln Do?* (Sourcebooks, 2009) is a primer on how Lincoln was able to handle difficult situations that are relevant to today – a lazy relative, lack of civility and work ethic. How should a person respond to such a situation?

James A. Percoco gives us wonderful insights into President Abraham Lincoln by taking us around the nation to see and understand the statues erected in Lincoln's memory. *Summers With Lincoln: Looking for the Monuments* (Fordham, 2008).

Yet, as we celebrated his 200th birthday, the monolithic, mythic Lincoln – the barefoot boy who studied by candlelight and became "honest Abe," "the rail splitter" – is fragmented into an array of competing and contrasting Lincolns. Some are verifiable, others are theoretical, and a few are wholly compatible with the Lincoln of sainted memory. Revisionists have gathered evidence to describe Lincoln the racist, Lincoln the tyrant, Lincoln the crybaby. There are scholars who argue that Lincoln probably was gay, or an atheist, or depressed, or henpecked. To Catherine Clinton, author of *Mrs. Lincoln* (HarperCollins, 2010) a new biography of Lincoln's wife, Mary, this evolution is inevitable, given the

interest in his life. "How can we not learn new things about Lincoln?" she asks. "We're all going to find new Lincolns."

Indeed, not all books favor our 16th President. Larry Tagg's *The Unpopular Mr. Lincoln: The Story of America's Most Reviled President* (Savas Beatie, 2009) overwhelms us with over 473 pages that emphasize the most negative aspects of political rhetoric in American history and does so in a very organized chronological manner. It demonstrates how Lincoln had to have tough skin with a