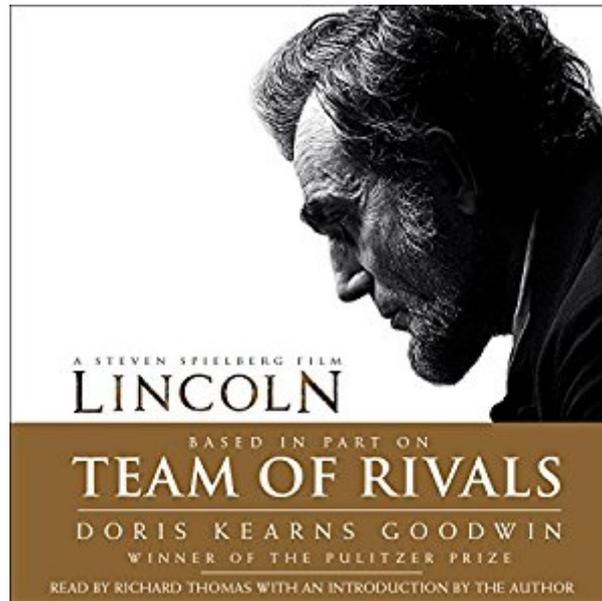


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# Team Of Rivals: The Political Genius Of Abraham Lincoln



## Synopsis

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 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. This capacity enabled President Lincoln to bring his disgruntled opponents together, create the most unusual cabinet in history, and marshal their talents to preserve the Union and win the war.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Ms. Goodwin has created a gem of a masterpiece with her most recent book on Lincoln. In the millions of pages already written on the subject, there are no books that I know of that do in essence, a character study on Lincoln and his cabinet members. The 754 page text is one of the best ever written regarding the true and underlying nature of those men who served with Lincoln in his cabinet. While events and persons such as Antietam, Jefferson Davis, Fort Sumter, Maryland's secession attempt and many other events receive short shrift from Ms. Goodwin, this treatment is as it should be for her book concentrates on the personality and character of Lincoln and his cabinet. While Lincoln never committed himself during the convention to any of his rivals in terms of

cabinet positions, to gain votes for his eventual nomination; he voluntarily chose most of his cabinet from men who were his greatest rivals for the Presidency. He did this with clear and present knowledge that they were the best men for the jobs and the country at the time. The incredibly impressive exposition of the character of these men and especially that of Abraham Lincoln and his political and personal acumen in holding them together is given new life in this book. Through careful reading and perusal of literally thousands of personal letters from cabinet members and from President Lincoln, Goodwin is able to put together a wonderfully clear and unique picture of the character of these men. In addition, she is able to paint a picture of each in words, and point out how their true character differed often from the public perception that abounded. Ms. Goodwin should be noted for her fine and excruciating work in creating this book which will remain as a must read classic for Lincoln scholars of the present and the future. All of us who track the Lincoln Presidency, 140 years after its termination are grateful for her assiduous work in creating this wonderful book.

Doris Kearns Goodwin delivers and delivers well with "Team of Rivals: The Political Genius of Abraham Lincoln". The scope of her work is Lincoln's inner circle of Seward, Stanton, Chase and Bates but, more broadly, his ability to handle people and politics. Goodwin vividly demonstrates Lincoln's uncanny timing regarding the implementation of emancipation and gives a fair assessment of his views regarding the "peculiar institution". This book is about Lincoln as a leader, a manager and a politician. It is also about his evolving vision about certain topics (i.e, how to handle slaves once freed) and his steadfast desire to hold the Union together, literally at all costs. His belief in the precepts of the Founding Fathers is at all times present. For those wishing an expansive biography on Lincoln, try Lincoln by David Herbert Donald. For those wishing a broader view on the period and the Civil War, Battle Cry of Freedom by James McPherson. For those who would like a good but accurate piece of historical fiction, Lincoln by Gore Vidal or Freedom by William Safire. This book is for those who want to see how Abe Lincoln led, managed, formulated strategy, handled very conflicting opinions, this is the book. A great read, if a bit choppy (perhaps a given with the nature of the subject matter).

Pulitzer winner Goodwin has long demonstrated a feel for biography as a gateway into the past. In Lincoln, one of our greatest presidents, she has found an ideal subject for her attention. He is the more interesting to study because, unlike most presidents, who have sought to surround themselves in their cabinets with safe men who think like they do on important matters, Lincoln

chose to build a cabinet out of men whose relationship to the president was problematic, if not downright risky. In 1861, Lincoln persuaded three of his rivals for the Republican nomination -Seward, Chase and Banks-to sit in his cabinet. They owed Lincoln nothing. As a rule, they saw Lincoln as a man of low ability and little promise, president by the accident of geography. Furthermore, some were enemies who would barely talk to each other. Yet, the cabinet did not dissolve in warfare and Lincoln established firm control over executive decisions, much to the surprise of Seward in particular, who had assumed that he, and not the president, would lead this group and be the true decisionmaker in Washington. In short while, Seward and Banks became firm allies of Lincoln; indeed, Seward became Lincoln's fastest friend in the Washington power ranks. When Stanton joined the cabinet as secretary of war, he too was converted to allegiance to Lincoln although he had publicly slighted him years before. The only cabinet member whose loyalty remained suspect was Chase, whose lust for the presidency in 1864 blinded him to his own duplicity as he sought to undermine Lincoln and gain support for his own candidacy. Chase was not above political blackmail: three times, he submitted his resignation to Lincoln and three times Lincoln, who valued Chase's substantial ability to get things done in a key office and who would rather have Chase inside his tent than outside, persuaded him to remain. Chase proffered his resignation for the fourth time in 1864. This time, he had overplayed his hand: Lincoln, who by then had secured renomination by the Republican party, no longer needed Chase and didn't need to fear him, so he accepted his resignation without further discussing it with Chase. When Chase heard, he was shocked, even though he'd asked for it. Lincoln tempered the blow by dismissing Chase's rival in the Cabinet at the same time, maintaining a balance of interests in the group, and when an opening on the Supreme Court became available, he appointed Chase, an act of magnanimity unimaginable in any of Lincoln's successors. Recently, I read a very interesting "moral biography" of Lincoln's early years (up to 1861), Lincoln's Virtues: An Ethical Biography, by William Lee Miller. Goodwin's fine biography made a good counterpoint to Miller's more limited and focused study. Both made the same point, that Lincoln succeeded as president, and excelled in the role, because he complemented his exceptional political talents and strong intellectual ability with a consistent ethical focus. There has never been another American president with such a strong moral compass as Lincoln and none who heeded it so consistently.

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