

Lincoln Study Guide

Lincoln by Gore Vidal

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Plot Summary

Lincoln is an historical novel by Gore Vidal, covering the time of Abraham Lincoln's troubled presidency, 1861-1864. It follows the course of political and military battles from his arrival in Washington, D.C., through his assassination. The ending, by his secretary, argues in hindsight that Lincoln is the greatest American president, who offers himself as atonement to the nation.

Marked for assassination as President-elect, Lincoln must sneak into Washington, DC, incognito, on 23 Feb. 1861. He assembles a diverse Cabinet including political rivals William H. Seward at the State Department and Salmon P. Chase at the Treasury Department. Also vying for power are the Cooke brothers and the Blairs, whose "Old Gentleman" father longs for a return to power as in the Age of Jackson. Chase and Seward are both preparing for White House runs for 1864. When Fort Sumter falls shortly after his inauguration, Lincoln calls up the militia and suspends the writ of habeas corpus to keep Maryland in the Union and avoid Washington being cut off. A young pharmacist, David Herold, joins the vast rebel spy ring watching the White House.

Chase talks to bankers to finance the war, but nothing goes right on the battlefield. To restore the White House's lost elegance, Mrs. Lincoln incurs enormous debt and is connected to the sale of Lincoln's secret message to Congress to the press. She marks completion of the renovation by a controversial party, soon after which she loses her son Willie, and with his death, she loses her mind.

A succession of generals try and fail; Congress authorizes a military draft that causes rioting in New York City, and Lincoln prepares to free Southern slaves as a military necessity. The 1862 elections reduce the Republican majority, and the party looks for an alternative candidate in 1864. A few appear. Kate Chase marries rich William Sprague to fund her father's campaign without knowing that Sprague is involved in smuggling. Chase's political chances dim, however, and Sherman's victory at Atlanta ensures Lincoln's reelection. Lincoln reluctantly names Chase as Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Lincoln meets politely with Confederate commissioners but concludes that the war must run its course. It does, shortly before Inauguration Day.

At the second inaugural, John Wilkes Booth fails to shoot Lincoln but is so upset by his speech that on 14 April 1865, he fires a fatal shot into Lincoln's skull at Ford's Theater. Recalling these events to a historian in Paris, Lincoln's secretary John Hay declares that Lincoln is America's finest president, who wants to die as atonement for the terrible things he does to the nation.



Part 1, Chapters 1-7

Part 1, Chapters 1-7 Summary

Ten days before his inauguration, Abraham Lincoln is forced to sneak into Washington, D.C., and is rushed by Congressman Elihu B. Washburne to Willard's Hotel, where he meets ex-rival William H. Seward, who agrees to be Secretary of State if the rest of the Cabinet is moderate. Meanwhile, Chapter 2 shows Mary Surratt, a staunch opponent of abolitionism, hoping there will be no inauguration. Her teenage daughter, Annie, entertains a poor ruffian, David Herold, who shares their views and is beginning a job near the White House.

In Chapter 3, Seward takes Lincoln to the White House, where Pres. Buchanan leaves a Cabinet meeting to give a tour, and then on to the War Department for Gen. Winfield Scott's assessment of the military situation. Seward is surprised that Lincoln arrives with set plans and sees Lincoln as hard and dangerous. They leave to meet Mrs. Lincoln's train. Chapter 4 introduces presidential secretaries John Hay and John George Nicolay, part of Mrs. Lincoln's vast entourage. In the crowd hoping to see the Lincolns are David and Annie, who note that the "archfiend" has grown whiskers; they avoid being seen by the National Volunteers. In the suite, Lincoln's younger sons are climbing on him while their mother attends to her luggage. When dedicated abolitionist and orator Charles Sumner visits, Hay slips out to the hotel bar where he joins young Robert Lincoln and Henry Adams. Adams believes these are exciting times.

In Chapter 5, the Peace Conference visits Lincoln, who assures the Southern states that he means them no harm, believes the law is being upheld, and sees no reason for anger or secession over slavery. He agrees with Thomas Jefferson that slavery is immoral and ignores the new rebel government. As the delegation leaves, Lincoln promises Chase to continue their earlier talk about the Cabinet. Climbing into bed with his wife, Lincoln talks about this but falls asleep as she talks about redecorating the White House. She wonders if his dreams are now as bad as her hidden ones. Chapter 6 shows Seward's Sunday morning visit to critique Lincoln's speech, a "finely argued case" with too harsh an ending. Herold is in the crowd as Seward and Lincoln cross to the church where it has been advertised he will attend services. Herold likes Lincoln's looks and regrets he must be shot. In Chapter 7, Chase, distracted by financial worries, is visited by Henry D. and Jay Cooke, who feel him out about Lincoln and rumors of Cabinet posts. Chase dreads the thought of a Blair brother getting a post. While the Cookes are there, Kate comes downstairs, assures her father of the future and takes running the household in hand. Kate is looking forward to her father being elected president in 1864.



Part 1, Chapters 1-7 Analysis

The first seven chapters of Part 1 focus on the ten days between Abraham Lincoln's arrival in Washington, DC, and his inauguration. It is a time of great change, overshadowed by prospects of war and a conspiracy against his life. Lincoln, his family, close staff members, political allies and enemies, and the key conspirators are brought to life, and the process by which he is elected president is sketched in enticing pieces.

Gore Vidal opens his novel on 23 Feb. 1861 at precisely 5:55 AM, as the chagrined President-elect sneaks into Washington, D.C., incognito, because of a plot on his life uncovered in Baltimore. Only Congressman Washburn, a fellow Illinoisan, comes to greet him. Washburn, destined to be at Lincoln's side throughout the novel, serves as a tour guide, and introduces him to New York Sen. William H. Seward, Lincoln's chief Republican rival in 1860. By this point, Vidal has made dozens of observations about Lincoln's physical appearance, strength, droll humor, fatalism, and utter exhaustion. A secret and ill-defined "Albany Plan" had called for Seward to run the government with Lincoln as a mere figurehead. The idea never really abandoned as the Lincoln White House is a hotbed of political machinations, rivalries, and deep divisions. Chapter 2 introduces in its embryonic form part of the conspiracy that ultimately assassinates Lincoln. It places scruffy David Herold in a job near the White House, and it will later be seen that he frequents the same whore house as John Hay, the President's randy secretary.

Chapter 3 provides an almost room-by-room tour of the White House by the lame duck Pres. Buchanan and introduces the elderly Gen. Winfield Scott, a hero of the Mexican War of 1847, who becomes part of Lincoln's problem finding an effective general. Chapter 4 introduces Lincoln's young secretaries Hay and Nicolay, Mary Todd Lincoln, and the three sons, Robert, Tad, and Willie. From the start, Mrs. Lincoln is an emotional and political lightning rod, particularly on the subject of slavery. Hay is frequently used as a means of contemplating situations. He sees Lincoln as politically cunning, consorts with members of his own younger generation, Robert Lincoln and Henry Adams, and with Washington's best prostitutes. Chapter 5 shows Southerners making good on their pre-election vow to secede, with Lincoln determined that it is a crime against all the people of the United States. Salmon P. Chase is established as giving to drifting off mentally during important and trivial discussions.

Until he takes the oath of office, Lincoln stays out of official matters. He sides with Thomas Jefferson on black men not being inferior to whites, but late in the novel, Lincoln insists blacks and whites must live apart. As Lincoln falls asleep that night, he misses his wife's talks about remodeling the White House, a project that brings contention and scandal to their door. Chapter 6 shows Seward closely critiquing Lincoln's inaugural address, allowing key paragraphs to be included in the novel without rote quotation. The differences in how the North and South view the Union is clarified and Lincoln's adamant commitment to his ideals is portrayed. Lincoln insists on stressing his Constitutional oath and surprises Seward by his religious and sentimental tone. This topic crops up often in the novel, often in conjunction with the pious Seward.



As the two men walk to church, Washington's lax security is shown. Herold appears to be stalking Lincoln. Throughout the novel he will find Lincoln pleasant-looking and regret that he must die.

Chapter 7 delves into Chase's situation and personality and introduces Kate, his perfect daughter, councilor, and soul mate. Chase is preoccupied with the rival Blair family when the Cooke brothers visit to discuss Cabinet posts. The "Old Gentleman" is a throwback to the age of Andrew Jackson. On moral grounds, Chase has been pushing to exclude anyone from a slave-holding state from the Cabinet, but Lincoln wants balance. Monty Blair is likely to get a seat. The Cookes and Blairs appear throughout the novel as financial and political forces. Kate is her father's manager, as devoted to his presidency as he is to her marrying well.



Part 1, Chapters 8-14

Part 1, Chapters 8-14 Summary

Inauguration Day sees many troops and unenthusiastic crowds. Lincoln is nervous at the inaugural rituals, and to Chase's mind, ruins the speech's ending. Chapter 9 shows Lincoln and his secretaries examining their offices and the Inaugural Ball, where Lincoln doggedly shakes hands and watches the dancing. Afterward, Hay visits Sal Austin's brothel. Chapter 10 depicts the next day as Hay delivers the President's decision. Chase is furious at not being asked to accept the appointment earlier. Mrs. Lincoln recalls the horrors of slavery. Chapter 11 shows Cabinet members and their wives at a special dinner in the White House. Old Gentleman Blair gives Lincoln some Jacksonian advise and analyzes how Lincoln undermines Southern Democrats in 1860. The Cabinet splits on what to do about Fort Sumter, but Lincoln issues orders to resupply it. Despite this forceful action, Chase and Seward agree between themselves that Lincoln must let them run the government as a consulate.

Chapter 12 jumps ahead to the aftermath of Fort Sumter's fall. Douglas endorses Lincoln's militia call-up and advises using the months before Congress gets involved to make the most of his power. Lincoln confronts Seward's memo calling for Cabinet leaders to take power, saying that he is doing all that a poor, under-armed government can. Chapter 13 continues the bad news as high-ranking military men defect; telegraph and railroad lines to the North are cut; rebel forces surround Washington, and Chase rejects banking advice to borrow money to fund a war. He wants an income tax and worries about his political future. Eliminating Southern sympathizers is Lincoln's priority, while Herold and John Surratt form a new spy team. Seward pushes Lincoln to free slaves as a war necessity. Chapter 14 shows Washington unusually quiet until the Rhode Island militia arrives.

Part 1, Chapters 8-14 Analysis

Lengthy Chapter 8 depicts Inauguration Day, 4 Mar. 1861, from various interwoven perspectives: the conspirators, the presidential secretaries, and Chase. Compared with Buchanan's inaugural parade, everything is frugal, but near the end of the novel, the second inaugural will be drabber still. Starting work at Thompson's Pharmacy, Herold is a frustrated emotional time bomb destined to explode. Seward and Chase emerge as the Cabinet's leading figures. The ceremonies of transition are described ending with Lincoln's speech, whose changes lead Chase to believe it means sacrificing slaves to restore the Union, which he sees as immoral. Fragile Chief Justice Roger B. Taney administers the oath, in which Lincoln emphasizes the word "defend" while facing the crowd. Taney and Lincoln will soon tangle over civil rights. Chapter 9 completes Inauguration Day, showing Buchanan happy to be leaving, Mary and the Todds finding nothing to their taste, and Lincoln satisfied with anything. He is so sure that Chase will serve as Secretary of the Treasury that he sends the nomination to the Senate without



consulting him. The Inaugural Ball shows Lincoln pumping hands absentmindedly and getting used to protocol. When he leaves the party, Hay visits Sal Austin's whore house, where he never suspects that the girl he selects, Marie-Jeanne, has serviced David Herold.

Chapter 10 depicts the day after Inauguration Day. Sumner visits Chase at home. With a lawyer's sharpness, Kate launches into a treatise on Lincoln's favoring the word of the Constitution over its spirit. Sumner criticizes Seward's infatuation with conquering the whole Western Hemisphere, a pet project that becomes a recurring, but subtly varying, theme. John Hay arrives, is overwhelmed by Kate's beauty, and delivers the President's news. He cannot understand Chase's fury at not being consulted first. At the White House, Hay believes Chase will relent and gushes about Kate. The Todd relatives blame Lincoln's folksy election propaganda for isolating them from Washington society. The arrival of a seamstress, Elizabeth Keckley, allows Mrs. Lincoln to talk about slavery and her hopes for justice when her husband is finished. Keckley becomes Mrs. Lincoln's constant and faithful companion.

Lengthy Chapter 11 depicts a lavish Cabinet dinner and a closed-door Cabinet meeting. Lincoln tells Old Gentleman Blair that he would happily turn the mess over to Andrew Jackson. Lincoln does not recognize any dissolution in the Union. Blair sees the signs of war and reminds Lincoln of his 1858 debate with Douglas, who gives an expedient answer that costs him the White House in 1860. Blair thinks Lincoln planned that. The machinations of Lincoln's political career are meted out gradually throughout the novel. In the Cabinet Room, Vidal introduces and characterizes the secretaries, most of whom remain obscure. The question on the table is whether to re-provision Fort Sumter and risk attack. After a split vote, as Seward is writing Lincoln off as a Hamlet figure, Lincoln issues decisive orders. At home, Seward and Chase talk about Lincoln's inadequacy and agree to ask him to step away from direct control while remaining President. They envision themselves as Roman consuls.

Chapter 12 jumps forward five weeks to examine the Union response to the capture of Fort Sumter. Thompson's is a center of gossip regularly fed by the White House doorkeeper whenever he drops in for prescriptions. Sen. Douglas, the defeated rival, visits Lincoln and supports a proclamation calling up 75,000 militiamen to hold Maryland by force and prevent losing Washington. Douglas sees an opportunity to "re-create the republic" and reminds Lincoln of a youthful speech about tyrants and the need to be lions and eagles. Lincoln next deals with Seward's memorandum of 1 April and refuses Seward's first of many resignations.

Chapter 13 looks from various viewpoints at the initial posturing of the North and South as Virginia and Maryland's fate are being decided. Carrying a message across the Potomac on his first mission as a rebel courier, Herold meets a supposedly bedridden John Surratt, smuggling Lincoln's secret proclamation to the rebel underground. Herold is told to concentrate on learning about Seward, the government's real boss. Chase, meanwhile, talks with Jay Cooke about funding a yearlong, \$100 million war. Cooke reminds Chase that he must be electable in 1864. If Lincoln is impeached, tyrannical Seward will seize power and 1864 will be moot. Meanwhile, a secret Cabinet meeting is



held in the Naval Department building to avoid spies. Lincoln has ordered U.S. marshals to raid telegraph offices to learn who their enemies are and tells Chase to withdraw \$2 million to supply the troops gathering to defend Washington. Lincoln refuses to wait for Congress and demands the Cabinet's unanimous support. Many "what-ifs" are discussed before Lincoln declares that the first priority is guarding against sympathizers in the government.

Back in the White House, Lincoln deals forcefully with Baltimore Mayor Brown, gets good news that Gen. Benjamin Butler has landed reinforcements, and Hay chats with Chevalier Wikoff, a new reporter for the New York Herald, who is destined to become the center of scandal. Lincoln asks Hay to research the President's wartime powers, since Sumner sees freeing the slaves as a military necessity. Chapter 14 begins with Washington unusually quiet and empty, waiting for the promised Union troops to arrive. They arrive and parade impressively to the White House, with Thompson and Herold watching. Gov. William Sprague of Rhode Island also arrives with troops and proceeds to a White House reception. He will eventually involve the Chases in intrigue and treason, but at present wants only preferment in promotion over Butler, and want "willing" female companionship.



Part 1, Chapters 15-20

Part 1, Chapters 15-20 Summary

Chapter 15 opens with the threat of invasion ended and troops and money flowing in nicely. Still, the Maryland crisis convinces Lincoln to suspend the writ of habeas corpus in the military zone. Seward begins thinking of how to respond when Lincoln is inevitably impeached. Vice President Hamlin will be easily lead. At a reception for the child-governor of Rhode Island, William Sprague, discussions include the loyalty of various Lincoln relatives. At the White House, visiting Kentucky relatives Ben and Emilie Helm face this question also and decide they must side with the South.

In Chapter 16, Herold is sent across the bridge with an urgent message but cannot find the Confederate contact to deliver it. The code warns of a Union invasion of Alexandria, which Herold sees carried out. He is shaken, seeing the heroic Col. Ellsworth shot dead. The officer is laid out in the White House, where the Lincoln children wonder about death. Mrs. Lincoln suffers one of her Headaches because of the stress. Herold does not yet realize that Surratt has contacts inside the War Department and thousands of couriers.

Chapter 17 shows Chase facing "wolfish" bankers to finance a military buildup that is expensive even without fighting. They laugh at the idea of collecting an income tax. Sprague lightens Chase's spirits with a visit and request to take Kate riding but also mentions habeas corpus and the battle brewing between the Chief Justice and President over the arrest of Taney's friend, John Merryman. At the White House, Lincoln and Attorney General Blair discuss the matter, with Blair approving of Lincoln's improvised plan to gain Congress' approval for the emergency measures he has taken during its recess. The Constitution allows suspension of habeas corpus during times of civil war or invasion. Taney will have to accept that.

Chapter 18 concentrates on plans for the first Union offensive of the Civil War. Planning is assigned to Irvin McDowell, a Chase protégé, who Scott has until recently relegated to obscurity. Meeting before going to the White House, they note the passing of Stephen Douglas while championing the Union border states and McClellan's success in separating Western Virginia from the Confederacy. Seward, meanwhile, takes his friend, John Bigelow to Lincoln to receive his post in Paris. The Cabinet then gathers to hear Cameron, Scott, and McDowell disagree on when the Union Army will be able to go on the attack. As Scott sleeps, Lincoln gives McDowell the go-ahead to attack Centerville. Lincoln hopes to reach Richmond in time to prevent the Confederate Congress from meeting for the first time. Seward and Chase eye one another as Seward wonders what the new, largely Republican and all-Northern Congress will do. Unrelated, Mrs. Lincoln's decorating bills are accumulating rapidly.

In Chapter 19, Mrs. Lincoln holds her regular levee, snubbing all those Washington society women who initially snub her. Former Vice-President Breckinridge, now a



Senator, jokes with her about Mrs. Davis appreciating the remodeling, while later assuring the President that he is pro-Union. A London Times correspondent discusses the South's higher devotion to winning this war and willingness to rejoin the British Empire. Lincoln absentmindedly misplaces the unique copy of his highly-secret Message to Congress. Wikoff tries to broker a deal to give the government a yacht in exchange for the donor's son receiving a naval commission.

Part 1 concludes with Herold meeting two well-established members of the Southern spy net and taking pride in carrying out a minor mission. The woman to whom he hands a coded message gets it to Confederate Gen. Beauregard in time to route the Union Army of the Potomac under Gen. McDowell after it appears that he has triumphed. McDowell is convinced before launching the attack that the army is unprepared but follows Lincoln's orders. As Lincoln sits with Gen. Scott as the early artillery barrages are fired, he learns that short-term enlistees are leaving the Army and decides that conscription will be needed. The Lincoln children are excited about the war, but their parents know people are dying. Hay feels himself getting sick but is determined to stay on his feet throughout the historic day that he is sure will end the rebellion. As good news arrives, Washington society takes picnic lunches across into Virginia to watch the battle. By dusk, the reversal is reported and Lincoln takes command, ordering the capital fully defended. He then summons Gen. McClellan to start over.

Part 1, Chapters 15-20 Analysis

Chapter 15 opens with Lincoln and Seward meeting with Scott as the situation swings dramatically, if briefly, in Lincoln's favor. If the Maryland legislators vote to secede, they will be jailed on vague charges with no right to a writ of habeas corpus. No American president has faced the predicament of civil war. Seward considers precedents for removing insane presidents, believes that Congress will impeach Lincoln, and considers Vice President Hamlin should be easily steered. A White House reception honoring Sprague puts him and Kate together, to her father's elation and Hay's dejection. People praise Chase's fund-raising and question Lincoln relatives' loyalty. The situation is illustrated by a test case: Mrs. Lincoln's half-sister Emilie and her husband Ben Helm. The family discusses which states will stay and which leave. When Mrs. Lincoln lets slip the word "rebel," the Helms declare their loyalty to the South, whose military commission Ben accepts.

In Chapter 16, Herold carries across the river the urgent oral message, "Lucifer, the son of morning, and Satan." Each side has about 50,000 men ready to fight. At center span on the Long Bridge, Herold notices troop movements in the swamp. At the tavern, Herold learns that Mr. Mayberry is in Alexandria, where Herold seeks him out. Thus, Herold is an eyewitness to the 7th New York Regiment under Col. Ellsworth occupying Alexandria. Weeks earlier, Herold had admired Ellsworth's performance in the Inauguration parade. Ellsworth is laid out in the White House, where Lincoln takes the death hard. Soldiers crying confuses Willie and Tad, who talk about the unfairness of death, until one of their mother's headaches throws her to the floor, screaming. She



comes to, worrying about having been a spectacle and believing that one must experience hell before dying, not after.

Chapter 17 first shows Chase facing a dozen pessimistic bankers. Chase has collected \$23 million in voluntary contributions but maintaining 42,000 volunteers is costly. He talks about factors causing the last administration to leave an "empty larder" and is determined to hold the interest rate on bonds lower than the "wolfish" bankers want. They laugh at his proposal for a "nominal" income tax. With Sprague as a foil, Chase lectures about the history of habeas corpus. Lincoln has arrested Taney's friend, Merryman, and there is talk about the Chief Justice arresting Lincoln. Sprague wants to take Kate riding and talks about the shortage of cotton for New England mills. Meanwhile, in the White House Lincoln dismisses Taney's threat and refuses to talk "inherent powers." A third of the states are breaking laws that Lincoln is sworn to uphold and by disregarding—not violating—this one law, Lincoln is preserving the Union. The Constitution provides for suspending habeas corpus during rebellion or invasion, but the constitution is unclear on who may execute the power. In an emergency situation, Lincoln has acted swiftly. When Congress returns, he will request approval.

Chapter 18 shows the first battle plan for conquering Virginia. The quality of generals including McClellan and McDowell both are discussed. Scott is a relic. In England, textile manufacturers and imperialists are pushing to recognize the Confederacy. The Union has recruited 310,000 men, the largest army in the world, but it must be trained. Both sides are green. Lincoln decides to strike Richmond before the Confederate Congress can meet. Strategy is outlined by Gen. McDowell. Chase notices that Seward has grown less forward with Lincoln and has dropped the consulate plan. In fact, Seward is considering reuniting North and South by a joint foreign war. The new Congress will be all-Northern, largely Republican, and abolitionist, likely to side with Chase. Parallel with this planning, Mrs. Lincoln's spending spree is creating a storm of unpaid bills. Chapter 19 uses Mrs. Lincoln's levee to talk about loyalties, refurbishing, and invasion. William Howard Russell, a London Times correspondent, is introduced and provides an external view of the conflict. He sees the South as being more highly motivated. Lincoln enters the room and carelessly lays down his secret message to Congress. He is relieved when Wikoff hands it to him, setting up a major plot line as the text soon appears in the New York Herald. Chapter 20 shows McDowell viewing Lincoln as a "politician playing soldier," who he must nevertheless obey him as Commander-in-Chief. Sprague and Kate are growing closer, and frustrated Herold meets two links in the spy chain, one, Mrs. Greenhow, who obtains information from highly-placed Yankee friends but is being watched by the Secret Service. No one will suspect a prescription clerk visiting, so he runs a coded message to Bettie Duval, a Southern night rider.

The opening of the offensive is seen from both the domestic perspective of Mrs. Lincoln in the White House, using the boys for pathos and at the War Department, where Lincoln complains about McDowell's delays and the loss of 2,000 men whose three-month enlistments are up. They may need to conscript 300,000 men through a lottery. Lincoln favors letting the rich pay for substitutes, a situation that later hits home with son Robert and gives political opponents a weapon. Hay and Nicolay imagine preachers piously condemning fighting on the Sabbath. With Scott confident of victory and Lincoln

knowing inside information from the South, all are shocked to learn that McDowell has retreated and is urging a last-ditch defense of Washington. Ashen, Lincoln takes command and summons Gen. McClellan for a new start. Washington bar gossip is sampled.



Part 2, Chapters 1-6

Part 2, Chapters 1-6 Summary

Christmas Day 1861 is a work day for the Lincoln Cabinet, which must resolve the crisis with Britain over seizing one of its mail boats with Confederate officials aboard. Chase and his daughter discuss this over breakfast as well as the great cost of building the Army. The Swards' breakfast talk is about suspension of the First Amendment and habeas corpus and arrests of many publishers. Everyone wonders how The New York Herald obtains a copy of Lincoln's message to Congress, and Wikoff's and Mrs. Lincoln's mounting debt are deemed likely factors.

At the Cabinet meeting, Lincoln declares that one war at a time is enough and orders Cameron to return both ship and rebels. Lincoln is angry over recent events that have caused political trouble in Missouri and cost him Scott's services, when the old war horse resigns because Chase has important data that he is denied. Meanwhile, wanting help to travel South to gather material for a newspaper article, Wikoff visits Duvall, who has taken over spy duties from Greenhow, who is under house arrest. Duvall warns Herold that the Southern lady spies will be moved to the Old Capitol prison and Herold should be careful. The trio observes Lincoln walking without guards to Seward's to unwind but know that Davis will not allow him to be assassinated. Lincoln has been studying strategy and is uncomfortable with McClellan in command and wants to get rid of Cameron fast. The two men trade tales and toast to the Union with champagne.

Chapter 2 depicts Kate's Boxing Day party, during which guests discuss McClellan's new strategy, White House leaks, Joint Committee hearings, and Mrs. Lincoln's runaway spending. As the party ends, Hay sets out on a week-long debauch. On New Year's Eve, Herold attends a party at the Surratts, where the dying John, Sr., makes Herold promise to stay and help out, and introduces his successor, Henderson, who wants Herold to infiltrate the McLellans as he has Seward. At midnight, Herold kisses Annie. After the party, Herold watches the crowd queuing up to shake Lincoln's hand. Inside the White House, there is talk about Stanton succeeding Cameron as Minister of War, and Mrs. Lincoln is shocked to hear that the Joint Committee has obtained a copy of Wikoff's telegram to the Herald containing Lincoln's message word-for-word. Gen. Sickles, whom Chase years before gets cleared of murder charges, is asked to defend Wikoff and demands that he not divulge his source.

In Chapter 3 Seward and Sickles discuss Lincoln's unprecedented power to arrest, which Seward administers. The Joint Committee members cannot be arrested, nor can they compel Mrs. Lincoln to appear. Off the record, Sickles is sure that Mrs. Lincoln is Wikoff's source and her motive is to get out of debt. They need to find a scapegoat inside the White House. Wikoff has been arrested, and the Lincolns are discussing Mrs. Lincoln's debt when Lincoln's old law partner, William Herndon, arrives. He is seeking a Federal job for his would-be brother-in-law to convince his would-be father-in-law to let him to marry his daughter. Lincoln happily complies to his wife's disgust.



While Chase and Seward convince a wavering Cameron to go to Russia, Hay takes Herndon under his wing and hears stories about Lincoln's breakdowns, disbelief in Christianity, visiting a prostitute, and contracting syphilis in the old days. Hay realizes that Herndon must be returned quickly to Springfield, married and sober. Herndon's brother-in-law gets a job and Lincoln lends his friend \$25 and realizes that the new printed currency is not individually signed. Lincoln mentions his worry to Chase at the next generals' meeting, which McClellan surprisingly attends. McClellan refuses to reveal his secret battle plan to this group unless ordered, and Lincoln refuses to do so. After the awkward meeting, McDowell confides to Chase that McClellan is a fool, and Chase keeps to himself his lack of faith in Lincoln.

In Chapter 4, Herold delivers prescriptions to the White House and notices a flurry of activity as Mrs. Lincoln prepares to show off her achievement at a gathering many consider frivolous during wartime. Mrs. Lincoln is preoccupied with her sons' dangerous fever, Wikoff's imprisonment, and shortage of funds. Her only ally is the larcenous head groundsman Watt, who Seward decides is an adequate scapegoat for the Wikoff affair. News from the Western fronts is encouraging as word comes of Grant's impressive stand in Kentucky. Lincoln goes to Congress to confront Hickman and the Republican members of the Judiciary Committee arguing they must believe Watt's story as does he, not endanger their majority in the next election or give comfort to the rebels. It works. Meanwhile, Willie dies, plunging his mother to the brink of madness.

Chapter 5 opens aboard the Treasury Cutter Miami, taking Lincoln, Chase, Stanton, and Gen. Viele to Fort Monroe. Recent victories leave Lincoln anxious for a quick end to the war, so he goes to encourage McClellan in person. Richmond is reportedly in a panic, and the Confederate government is preparing to relocate. They watch the second clash of the ironclads, Merrimack and Monitor. Lincoln wants the Norfolk Navy Yard secured rapidly. Lincoln reviews the troops at Camp Hamilton and is spontaneously hailed. Chase leads an invasion likely to bolster his political chances in 1864, but wavers when he sees rebel forces unexpectedly dug in. The rebels evacuate before the fight, sacrificing their great guns to survive, and the mayor surrenders politely. Chase returns to receive congratulations from Lincoln who wants to return to Washington. At breakfast, word comes that the Merrimack has been destroyed. At home, Kate encourages her father to take all the credit and makes it obvious that she is willing to marry Sprague to enhance Chase's political chances.

Chapter 6 finds Congress adjourned, to Seward's relief. With the war stagnant, Lincoln has named Halleck general-in-chief and John Pope as commander of the new Army of Virginia. McClellan has denounced Lincoln and retreated to Harrison's Landing. When the South begins conscripting, Congress authorizes a military draft before adjourning. Seward visits Chase to talk about emancipation, which Lincoln springs on the Cabinet during their 22 July meeting. As he has often said, if it would preserve the Union, he would free no slaves or all slaves but as a military necessity has decided to publish a proclamation offering financial aid to slave-holding states in the Union that abolish slavery and absolute freedom to all slave in the rebellious states on 1 Jan. 1863. The men discuss colonizing a tropical place for the blacks and arming them for the conflict.



Chase suggests that individual generals be given discretion as to what to do. Lincoln agrees to put off the announcement until Halleck arrives and scores some victories.

Kate hosts a soirée. The first to arrive is young Gen. James A. Garfield of Ohio who, Chase laments is married and poor. Hay arrives, hoping to make another date. The three discuss Mrs. Lincoln's mourning at the Soldier's Home with Tad and the medium's report that Willie is happy on the other side. William Sanford arrives, followed by Gen. Pope, who immediately disappears into Chase's study to criticize Grant as a hopeless drunk, but an improvement over McClellan. Pope's vow to fight gives Chase confidence and Chase is tempted to tell him about the Emancipation Proclamation, since Pope will soon have to deal with thousands of freed blacks. Chase ends up only giving a personal opinion: free them and arm them as Pope chooses. Meanwhile, in the parlor, William Sanford proposes to Kate, but she must stay at her father's side. Hay moves close to her. Kate is sure that the enemy knows everything that is being planned.

Part 2, Chapters 1-6 Analysis

Part 2 opens on Christmas Day 1861, skipping from locale to locale, but everywhere showing chaos. There are international and financial crises; Congress has suspended the First Amendment and the writ of habeas corpus, backing Lincoln's shutting down newspapers and arresting editors. Everyone is talking about Lincoln's carelessness with secret documents and speculates whether Mrs. Lincoln's debt is connected to the speech appearing in print. Mrs. Lincoln justifies her spending obsession as benefiting future generations. All speculate about Wikoff's involvement. Wikoff meets the smugglers and they speculate on how easy it would be to kill Lincoln—were Confederate Pres. Davis not against assassination. Wikoff denies stealing the message to Congress and claims that envious people "at court" invent the story.

Chapter 2 shows Kate entertaining, frustrating Hay's romantic hopes and allowing McClellan and Chase to criticize Lincoln's leadership. Jumping to New Year's Eve, Herold celebrates with the Surratts, where he learns the rebels are feeding McClellan and Pinkerton disinformation about troop strength and movements disguising the fact that the Confederacy has half the men of the Union and no arms. Herold has been inside the White House a few times but cannot snoop while making deliveries. When the party breaks up, Herold watches the crowds queuing up to shake Lincoln's hand. At the reception, McClellan's typhus (real or politically feigned—that is debated going forward) and the cost of renovations are topics. Stanton begins emerging as a figure rivaling Chase and Seward. No one at the party yet knows that Wikoff is being subpoenaed after his telegram to the Herald catches him red-handed. Mrs. Lincoln wants to die, hearing this on top of her own financial woes.

Chapter 3 deals with Seward taking draconian measures, happily tearing up the Magna Charta, English common law, the U.S. Constitution, and the Bill of Rights in an unprecedented show of power but unable to keep scandal away from Mrs. Lincoln. With Wikoff's attorney, Sickles, he discusses how to manipulate evidence and prevent Mrs. Lincoln from being subpoenaed. Off the record, Sickles is sure Mrs. Lincoln is Wikoff's



source and her motive is to get out of debt. Meanwhile, Lincoln has spent three days reading war books in frustration over McClellan when Mrs. Lincoln burst out the Wikoff story and claims innocence. Lincoln claims the scandal cannot harm him but is concerned about her \$7,000 in over-spending. She cannot make up for 50 years of past neglect in one year or be so extravagant. Mrs. Lincoln swears she has stopped spending. She is defending her purchases as Lincoln's old law partner, William Herndon, shows up from Illinois. Mrs. Lincoln's long-time dislike of Billy is clear as he explains why he needs Lincoln to pull strings on getting his would-be brother-in-law a Federal job. Herndon ends up in Hay's hands. No jobs have been forthcoming, but after Herndon's tongue is loosened by alcohol, and he talks about nervous breakdowns and prostitutes in Lincoln's distant past, a job shows up quickly, out west. The chapter also shows how Cameron is psychologically manipulated out of the Cabinet to serve in Russia, how Chase's face shows up on the new \$1 bill (free campaigning), and what to do next militarily. In confidence, McDowell tells Chase that McClellan is a fool. Chase keeps to himself his lack of faith in Lincoln.

In Chapter 4, Herold delivers prescriptions to the White House, which he notices is in a flurry of activity as Mrs. Lincoln prepares to show off her achievement. Eighty of the 500 invitees refuse to attend a "frivolous" party during wartime. Mrs. Lincoln wishes she could call it off to tend to her sons' fevers, Wikoff's imprisonment, and shortage of funds. The head groundsman, Watt, emerges as her only ally, suggesting creative ways of finding money. On the Wikoff front, Lincoln says that either Wikoff must name someone or they must get the investigation dropped. Stealing the message is a crime even if publishing it is not. Silence suggests that Mrs. Lincoln is the giver. Lincoln wants to maintain what a later age calls "deniability." The ball takes center stage, but Wikoff remains the topic of conversation. The "tradition" of robbing the White House blind is discussed, and Seward considers framing Watt as the source of the message, using his perfect memory to memorize passages in a copy left laying about, which he recites to Wikoff. The novel jumps twelve days as news come from the West of Union victories. The tug-of-war between McClelland and Lincoln continues before Lincoln rushes to son Willie's bedside. Contemplating what will happen to his wife if Willie dies, Lincoln pictures her an aged, forlorn widow. Such premonitions of his premature death continue. Quickly back to business, Seward cannot keep Lincoln from confronting Speaker Hickman in person over matters of security that sound surprisingly modern. Lincoln demands to meet all available Republican members of the Judiciary Committee and as head of the Republican Party demands they not embarrass him further. Otherwise, they endanger their majority in the next election and give comfort to the rebels. It works. Meanwhile, Mrs. Lincoln comforts Watt as he resigns and then hurries back to her vigil. She dreams of living in Springfield, with this whole life but a nightmare. When Willie dies, Lincoln is fetched and the Mansion cleared. Lincoln weeps and talks to his dead son. They have to keep Mrs. Lincoln from going mad.

Chapter 5 jumps three months, past the most intense of the mourning for Willie, and brings Lincoln, Chase, Stanton, and Gen. Viele to Fort Monroe. Mrs. Lincoln is holding séances to talk with Willie. Gen. Grant, despite heavy losses in Tennessee and a reputation for gambling and drinking, is a rising star as Lincoln needs a top-rate general. Confederate success are summed up in creating a new weapon—an iron-clad warship.



The Union's answer, the Monitor, meets the Merrimack in an inconclusive battle that Lincoln's party witnesses. Unless McClellan takes Richmond soon, his career is ended. Lincoln allows Chase to go ashore with the invasion, allowing a close-hand account of the battle. Returning to Washington, Lincoln is optimistic of ultimate victory. At home, Kate urges her father to take credit for the victory and asks about Sprague, who will be useful as a senator in 1864. Chase realizes she will marry him for his political sake.

Chapter 6 finds Congress adjourned and Seward daydreaming about arresting all the members and explaining from the Speaker's chair how things must be done in wartime. Chase visits, allowing their conversation to examine the dim diplomatic, political, and military situations. Lincoln has named Halleck general-in-chief and John Pope as commander in Virginia. McClelland has denounced Lincoln. The North follows the South in authorizing a military draft. Chase worries that Lincoln is beginning to sound like an abolitionist, offering to buy slaves in border states. Chase believes they need a Cromwell to seize total control. This is a reference to the "Lord Protector of England" in the mid-17th century following the civil war that ends in the king's execution. Cromwell becomes a de facto military dictator. At the next Cabinet meeting, after reviewing the miserable situation, Lincoln announces that as a military necessity he intends to publish an emancipation proclamation. Talk turns to relocating the blacks to a distant colony, a common theme hereafter. Lincoln agrees not to issue the proclamation until a significant military victory is achieved, lest a Democratic Congress be elected in November. Meanwhile, Kate throws another party, allowing Hay to swoon over her beauty but not her cunning mind and to talk about Mrs. Lincoln's séances with Willie. Chase meets with the generals in private. They agree that McClellan is a coward and unwilling to harm the South. They also discuss the practical implications of the Emancipation Proclamation.



Part 2, Chapters 7-12

Part 2, Chapters 7-12 Summary

Chapter 7 finds Herold feeling underutilized as a spy, but Henderson assures him that every bit of information counts and encourages him to get near Stanton. Annie next tells Herold of her brother John's activities riding messages down South. Leaving, Herold wonders about why he can only get prostitutes while John Hay could have Kate Chase, according to the press.

Lincoln lies on the sofa and Halleck looks at the map of Maryland, where Pope and McClellan have both failed. Lee is invading the Union, and Antietam has cost a shocking 15,000 casualties. Still, on the basis of McClellan's optimistic reports, Lincoln decides to issue his proclamation. First, he meets with black leaders and is surprised that they are not delighted with the limited scope or the prospects of being deported. Lincoln insists that neither race is happy living side-by-side, and the passions will not go away in 1,000 years. Lincoln senses that the Cabinet disagrees with him and would gladly give up his burden if it were Constitutionally possible. Meanwhile, Chase lets Henry D. Cooke talk him out of resigning to return to the Senate, wishing only to distance himself from Lincoln and Seward. Sprague meets Harris Hoyt of Texas to arrange a traitorous exchange of guns and ammunition for cotton to supply the hurting New England mills.

Chapter 8 opens with Lincoln riding to a séance with Mrs. Lincoln and Mrs. Laury when an assassin fires a single shot that narrowly misses; thereafter, he rides nowhere without guards. Pinkerton has unearthed at least three plots. Lincoln is fatalistic about being shot but worries about being captured and held for ransom. He and Washburne visit Harper's Ferry to evaluate McClellan. Lincoln insists that everything is perfect to drive Lee back to Richmond. Riding on, they stop for Lincoln to talk to wounded prisoners of war, honoring their gallantry and hoping for friendship.

Mrs. Lincoln leaves for New York City after lecturing Hay on his position in the White House and her right to sufficient finances. Lincoln and Washburne spend Election Day in Stanton's office. Losing New York does not surprise Lincoln but angers Stanton, who has nevertheless positioned Republican New Yorkers in the army in the border states to assure electoral victories. In the end, Republicans retain both houses but more narrowly, which will cause difficulties. No longer worried about appearing to bow to the radicals, Lincoln orders McClellan fired and replaced by Ambrose E. Burnside, a "fighting general."

Chapter 9 shows radicals crying out for Seward's head, incited by Chase, who wants to be Premier. Wade is calling for a true Republican dictator to finish the war, and Chase would seem to be the likely candidate. Many object to Lincoln's call to buy up slaves and colonize them elsewhere. This assumes that the war is about compensation not the nature of the Union, and the South is fighting for independence. Burnside falls into a trap at Fredericksburg, and Lee is poised to seize Philadelphia and end the war. As a



military leader Lincoln is an asset to the South. He looks "fragile and distraught" hearing from Gov. Curtin of Pennsylvania about the butchery. Lincoln knows that he is a has-been and wants out but also knows that the North has so many more men to sacrifice than the South that victory is inevitable. Mrs. Lincoln has to put the President to bed because he is afraid to dream.

Congress wants to get rid of Stanton and Seward and reorganize the Cabinet. Chase paints for the members a picture of too much influence on Lincoln, independent action, and doubts about the war. Thus, defeats are inevitable. Seward learns before the meeting that the senators demand his resignation with Lincoln and submits a terse resignation. Lincoln knows about the conspiracy and doubts he will run in 1864. He will support Horatio Seymour to prevent McClellan or Chase from being president.

Lincoln endures one three-hour haranguing and then sets a trap for Chase the next night, bringing the Cabinet into the meeting to demonstrate how it operates. After rejecting the idea that Congress has any right or business interfering in Cabinet appointments, Lincoln examines Chase about his inflammatory claims to Congress, making him appear a liar and traitor to his colleagues. Afterward, when Chase has tendered his resignation, Lincoln burns it and Seward's, claiming to need both men for balance.

Chapter 10 shows a defiant Burnside demanding Hooker's obedience or his own dismissal along with Stanton and Halleck. Lincoln is tired of people trying to resign. At a reception for the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln shakes so many hands that his signature looks nervous or hesitant. As Hays and Robert Lincoln make the rounds of New Year's parties, Robert talks about relations with his father, soured by the President's hatred of his past. Meanwhile, in the "Negro encampment," Herold and John Surratt, Jr., watch the celebration of freedom and talk about how deeply the Northerners hate all "niggers" that do not stay in their place. It makes the whole war seem crazy and prospects for whites in a majority-black South after the war are frightening.

Washburne talks to Lincoln about Washington also being a rebel and about the war being about attitudes towards life. Lincoln offers Hooker command and agrees to have him report directly to Lincoln to avoid falling victim to Halleck like McClellan and Burnside. Lincoln also hands him a list of occasions on which he has found Hooker unsatisfactory and some other ideas. Chase meets uncomfortably with the immoral poet Walt Whitman, who seeks on the recommendation of Ralph Waldo Emerson, a federal job. Chase is happy to gain Emerson's autograph but lies when he says Whitman will be considered for employment

Chapter 11 shows Mrs. Lincoln's second visit to the wounded Cpl. Stone of Lexington, KY, a rebel she had known as a boy. A hospital matron laments that they cannot keep up with the wounded and hopes that Lincoln ends the war while there are surviving young men. Lincoln resumes his search for a general as Hooker does not recover his gumption after being knocked unconscious in battle. Lincoln's view that no state can leave the union and, therefore, their representatives will be seated when rebellious



elements are defeated, is being challenged by radicals who want the South treated like conquered lands.

Kate accepts Sprague's marriage proposal, fails to remember the name of Harris Hoyt, his illicit partner in smuggling guns for cotton, overjoys her future father-in-law by intending to buy his house and let him live with them gratis. More good news comes to Chase as Jay Cooke tells about raising funds for his political campaign and reveals that Sprague is worth \$25 million. There is also talk of a secret cabal planning to impeach and remove Lincoln, but the 38th Congress is adjourned. At the door, Kate tells Hay that she is not supposed to be happy, but her father is. Heading home, Hay is angry that Chase is forcing his daughter into a loveless marriage to win the presidency through Sprague's money.

Chapter 12 shows Washington again in danger as Lee prepares an all-out invasion of Pennsylvania. Hooker resigns and is replaced by George Meade, who is ordered to shield Washington but is otherwise left to his own. The two great armies clash at Gettysburg and losses are heavy. Mrs. Lincoln falls victim to an assassination attempt aimed at her husband but recovers. Lincoln virtually moves into the War Department Telegraph Room, following the enormous, complex battle in Pennsylvania. His objective is to destroy Lee's army. The war must end. Lincoln is upset that Meade considers Pennsylvania "our soil," but not Virginia and the rest of the south. Few fathom Lincoln's passion for the Union. News comes that Vicksburg has fallen to Grant, who becomes an instant hero. Meade, however, holds a council of war against Lincoln's advice and lets Lee escape. Meanwhile, New York City explodes in turmoil as a well-organized Irish mob riots against the Conscription Act. Lincoln senses "bad faith somewhere." Robert Lincoln comes home, blaming the drunken Irish for the rioting but agreeing that this is "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight" because of the \$300 exemption. Lincoln receives a delegation from New York and refuses to postpone the local draft. To enforce the law, he proclaims martial law and dispatches 10,000 troops. Seward shudders, hearing Lincoln speak like a dictator. He sees the genius of getting to this position without anyone suspecting.

Part 2, Chapters 7-12 Analysis

Chapter 7 finds David Herold feeling underutilized as a spy but is assured that they are sending Lee and Jackson the information needed to save Richmond, and if Philadelphia falls, the South wins the war. The depth of the spy ring in Washington is depicted. Herold is also frustrated with Annie Stanton and wonders why he can only get prostitutes while John Hay could have Kate Chase, according to the press. Hay is in Stanton's office to make observations on the latest of Lincoln's failed generals, Halleck. Hay wonders if Lincoln has the temperament to lead in war and why the South has produced all the superior generals. Lincoln is shown reacting to the Union casualties at Antietam, the bloodiest engagement in modern warfare. Anticipating a victory in Virginia, Lincoln meets with black leaders to get their views on many subjects, including emancipation. He is surprised that they are cool towards his colonizing plans and talks frankly about neither race being happy about living side-by-side. Replying to a pastor's



question, Lincoln distinguishes blacks who can "think as white men" from the masses, quite a come-down from supporting Jefferson's views. Lincoln asks Hay why any black man would want to live where he is hated. The passions are too deep to go away in 1,000 years. Knowing that the Cabinet disagrees, Lincoln insists that he will issue the proclamation and wishes that it were Constitutionally possible for him to relinquish his burden.

Henry D. Cooke, brother of the major financier of the war, visits Chase to talk him out of resigning over Lincoln's military mistakes and the cynical Emancipation Proclamation. Chase does not really intend to resign but needs to distance himself from Lincoln and Seward. Kate's marrying Sprague seems inevitable, and Chase considers the widow Adèle Douglas. Sprague, meanwhile, is involved with Harris Hoyt of Texas in seeking to get cotton to New England mills past the blockade. Otherwise, unemployed New England workers will vote Democratic. The Cabinet has often examined this issue, but Welles had insisted on no exceptions. Talk generalizes to McClellan's latest retreat, Hooker's bravery, and the creation of breakaway West Virginia. This leads to a consideration of geographical names, architecture, and culture. Meanwhile, Sprague and Hoyt meet to discuss concrete plans. If Hoyt is caught, Sprague will disown him. That this will happen is inevitable, but the political complexity of the entanglements cannot be foreseen.

Chapter 8 opens with Mrs. Lincoln meeting her psychic, who talks not only about Willie, but also about a general who will not fight, a Cabinet member with a large nose who wants to be president, and danger to the president. A first shooting attempt is made on him, which he hushes up but agrees not to go out again unguarded. Lincoln is fatalistic about being shot but worries about being captured and held for ransom for prisoners of war. This turns out to be the conspirator's actual intent at the end of the novel. Meanwhile, Grant becomes Lincoln's favorite general, and Lincoln and Washburne ride out to meet McClellan in camp. Lincoln finds humor in the rumors that McClellan's aids want him to head a military coup, having never won a victor in battle. Lincoln's discomfort in giving speeches is described at length, in preparation for appreciating two of his most historic. Lincoln stops to talk with some wounded prisoners of war, honoring their gallantry and hoping for friendship. Prisoners come to shake his hand. Several scenes show White House machinations to get money to Mrs. Lincoln and the President dealing with court-martial documents; he tends to be merciful, while Stanton wants to execute everyone. Political chicanery in the 1862 congressional elections is discussed, and Election Day depicted. Lincoln discusses Macbeth, his favorite Shakespeare play, the transcontinental railroad that he hopes will be his legacy, and the Homestead Act. Lincoln orders Stanton to relieve McClellan, knowing that whatever he does will be misconstrued.

Chapter 9 introduces the Eameses, who conduct "Washington's only salon in the European sense." This allows an alternative to Kate's soirées as a means of disseminating gossip to the reader. Seward is greeted as "Monsieur le Premier," but Chase and the radicals want his head. He has grown estranged from his Senate colleagues. Thus far, Lincoln has ignored criticism of Seward's coolness towards abolition, but Wade is calling for a true Republican dictator to finish the war, and Chase



would seem to be the likely candidate. Seward is one of the few who knows that Hay writes anonymous articles about scandals that subtly favor Lincoln. It is part of a wider manipulation of the press. Many object to Lincoln's talk of buying slaves and colonizing them elsewhere because this assumes that the war is about compensation. In fact, the South is fighting for independence. This theme segues nicely into a meeting of the conspirators, who have convinced the Union Army that it is losing men faster than the South, that Lee's army is three times its actual size, and that there is a plot to kidnap Lincoln. There is anger at the wild boys who take a shot at Lincoln because as a military leader Lincoln is an asset to the South. Herold has often thought about poisoning Lincoln, like other "mistakes" (unexplained) that he and Thompson have buried. Lincoln is described as looking "fragile and distraught," staggered by the loss of life. He is burnt out and Congress is rising. McClellan is the likely Democratic candidate and is sure to make a quick, shameful peace with the South. Lincoln may support the Democrat Horatio Seymour in 1864 to preclude a disastrous McClellan presidency. Lincoln's plight deepens as nine senators harangue him, but the next night he rallies, challenging their contention that the President is beholden to his Cabinet and says that in normal times he would have thrown them out for daring to order him around. He talks about rumors that he is controlled by his "premier" and acknowledges that the senators want to have access to questioning the Cabinet as in the British system. He obliges by summoning the Cabinet, which knows what is coming. Lincoln precipitates a confrontation with Chase that reveals Chase's duplicity and humiliates him. Revealing that Seward has resigned but Lincoln has not accepted it, Lincoln firmly declines to set a precedent of consulting Congress about future appointments. Lincoln accepts Chase's resignation, which cuts the Gordian knot, and insists that Seward and Stanton both remain on the job.

Chapter 10 brings the novel into 1863, with Lincoln confronting a defiant Burnside, who demands an immediate offensive and Hooker's firing or obedience, along with Stanton and Halleck's departure, having lost the country's confidence. Lincoln is tired of people trying to resign. The scene shifts to the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. Lincoln emphasizes that freeing the slaves is a military act by exempting pro-Union areas of Louisiana and Virginia. The abolitionists hate the inconsistency and moderates fear turmoil among blacks. Seward is sure it does more good than harm and will influence the Europeans. Lincoln is sore from shaking hands before the ceremony so his signature looks nervous or hesitant, which worries him in the historical perspective. Lincoln has Hay pull out an entertaining newspaper clipping from the London Times calling him a monster, assassin, and butcher.

Hay and Robert Lincoln make the rounds of New Year's parties. Mrs. Lincoln comes back into focus, refusing to let her son leave Harvard and visiting hospitals. This makes life in the White House more peaceful. Lincoln's relations with his son are discussed along with the President's hating his lowly past, all of the myths that have arisen around him, and having to ingratiate himself to everyone. Another party turns melancholy as love lives and the military situation are discussed, and all argue about the scope of the proclamation. Meanwhile, in Washington's "Negro encampment," Herold and John Surratt, Jr., watch the celebration of freedom and discuss Union soldiers hating all "niggers" who do not stay in their place. It makes the whole war seem crazy. What will



happen when a black majority swarms out of the South. The rebel leaders are reconsidering poisoning Lincoln and Herold is excited at the prospect. Later that month, Lincoln talks about going mad, given the \$725 million debt and being called by Clement L. Valladigham a worse danger than the defecting Southerners. This leads to a discussion of George Washington's rebellion and philosophizing about how the war is about attitudes towards life, the prospects of New England allying with the South, Chase's presidential aspirations, and Chase's meeting with the immoral poet Walt Whitman. That scene is briefly recounted, ending with Chase's penchant for collecting autographs.

Chapter 11 shows Mrs. Lincoln reminiscing with the wounded Cpl. Stone of Lexington, KY, a rebel she had known as a boy. A nurse hopes that Lincoln ends the war while there are still some surviving young men. Lincoln resumes his search for a competent general. Lincoln sends Hay to Florida to begin running for Congress when East Florida returns to the Union. This introduces Lincoln's contention, fought by the radicals, that no state has actually left the Union, so representatives will be seated when rebellious elements are defeated. A major turning point is reached when Kate becomes engaged to Sprague. With her father openly running for president, Lincoln shows the patience of the biblical sufferer Job. The coming crisis is suggested as Sprague learns that Hoyt's ship bound for Galveston is intercepted by Yankee ships. Sprague announces that he will buy Chase's house and put him up gratis. As Hay leaves the engagement party, Kate confesses that she is not supposed to be happy, but her father is. Hay is angry that Chase is forcing his daughter into a loveless marriage to win the presidency through Sprague's \$25 million fortune.

Chapter 12, which concludes Part 2 shows Washington again being threatened by Southern forces. Lincoln is now "spectral thin" and sallow, with a hand tremor and half-shut left eye. He cannot sleep because of Lee's victories. Valladigham, whose part in preaching treason is never well-described, is exiled rather than shot. Old Gentleman Blair returns as a seer, worried about an all-out invasion of the North, at which point England and France will recognize the rebels, the Copperheads (Peace Democrats opposed to the Emancipation Proclamation and the draft) will take over Congress, and the war will have been for nothing. Lincoln is ready to shoot every Union general but appoints George Meade to replace Hooker, hoping a Pennsylvanian will fight well on his native soil, which has always been the Southerners' psychological edge. Tension builds as the two armies prepare to clash at Gettysburg with heavy losses. Mrs. Lincoln wonders what sustains her husband but also worries about money. Lincoln suspects nothing about her selling political favors. She becomes the focus when she is thrown from a runaway buggy and hospitalized. They learn that the coachman's seat had been sabotaged, hoping to kill the President. Lincoln takes to the War Department Telegraph Room to follow the enormous, complex battle in Pennsylvania. Lincoln's objective is to destroy Lee's army, which is outnumbered and far from home. Lincoln is upset that Meade considers Pennsylvania "our soil," but not Virginia and the rest of the south. Hay knows that few fathom Lincoln's passion for the Union.

On 4 July, the capital celebrates, but the next Cabinet meeting is gloomy because Lee has not been pursued. Word comes that Vicksburg has fallen, and Lincoln is amazed



that Grant has not personally bragged about the victory. By the next Cabinet meeting, euphoria over Vicksburg wears off as in New York City a well-organized Irish mob is rioting against the Conscription Act. Lincoln sees "bad faith somewhere" in letting Lee escape. Robert Lincoln finally arrives as summoned and reports personally on the rioting against the "rich man's war and a poor man's fight." The fairness of letting men buy their way out for \$300 is debated. Likening the New York situation to the French Revolution, Robert wants to sign up. More details arrive from New York and Lincoln refuses to placate the immigrants by postponing the local draft, lest other states demand the same. Like the Constitution, the Conscription Act is imperfect but has been passed and Lincoln must execute it. He proclaims martial law and dispatches 10,000 men but will avoid great wrongs. With the rebels conscripting every male, there is no time to wait for the Supreme Court to declare the draft legal. Seward shudders, hearing Lincoln speak like a dictator. He sees the genius of getting to this position without anyone suspecting. Lincoln jokes that having had the crown thrust on his head he is likely to lose both when the war is won, and he is sick of both.



Part 3, Chapters 1-6

Part 3, Chapters 1-6 Summary

Part 3 opens with Herold pretending to have smallpox so he can work backstage in the theaters. John Wilkes Booth, whom he envies, is introduced to him, proves to be a fellow low-level spy, and invites Herold to work with him at Ford's Theater. Since Willie's death, the Lincolns have become avid theatergoers. Herold is startled when Booth says he must poison Lincoln soon because the Yankees are winning in the West and if Lincoln is re-elected, the South will run out of men. If Lincoln does not run, McClellan will win and make peace on Southern terms.

Tad is delirious in bed, forcing Mrs. Lincoln to skip the Chase/Sprague wedding. After the small ceremony, 500 guests attend the reception, including the entire Cabinet minus Montgomery. At it, Henry D. Cooke asks Seward to pull strings for his partners, charged with embezzlement in Ohio. This shocks even the jaded Seward, but Cooke reminds him that his brother Jay is single-handedly financing the war. The President arrives looking elegant but unwell and greets the bride and groom. Sprague slips upstairs to learn that Hoyt has been arrested and is en route to New York. Chase and Wade are proposing that the other become Chief Justice when Lincoln invites them to the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery. Both decline and Wade makes a tasteless remark about the politically dead burying the dead—a sentiment most guests seem to share.

Chapter 2 opens with Lincoln's brief but moving Gettysburg Address, which follows Everett's long oration. By the time they reach the train for the return trip to Washington, Lincoln shows signs of malaria. The White House claims he is merely suffering scarlet fever, while in Richmond, it is believed that Herold has succeeded in poisoning Lincoln. Declaring Herold a treasure, Booth heads to Pennsylvania and on to Canada. If Lincoln dies, they will meet in Richmond. Hay works on the largely-assembled but incomplete presidential message to Congress in which Lincoln hints at his lenient approach to reconstituting the South. The radicals oppose this, insisting on punishment. Nicolay stands in as de facto president to free Lincoln from business. Stoddard keeps track of press clippings, which show people loath to "swap horses in midstream." When the doctor lets Lincoln move about, he begins editing the message while joking about his disease.

The widowed Emilie Helm returns to the White House, having refused the oath of allegiance that would have allowed her to go to Kentucky. Talk of Robert not yet serving in the army as an example and visions of Willie meeting relatives in the next world bring Mrs. Lincoln again to the brink of madness. Emilie proudly rejects Lincoln's pardon but accepts a pass home.

Chapter 3 introduces the new Congress and rumors that Grant will run for president, but he wants to keep fighting out West. The Blair brothers have been making racist



speeches but also claim to have proof that Chase is selling permits to trade with the enemy. A new "campaign-biography" has been published about Chase and a secret commission formed to gain him the nomination. Propaganda against Lincoln needs to give way to a dignified setting forth of Chase's ideas, including single-term presidents. Blair calls for an investigation of the Treasury Department and Chase, knowing he has been impeccable, vows to destroy all of the Blairs. Pomeroy wants to get the investigation quietly quashed. A dignified pamphlet is distributed arguing against Lincoln's renomination.

Learning about charges of Treasury misdeeds, Lincoln lets Chase "stew a bit" and offers to reinstate Blair's commission after the charges against Chase are proven. When Watt tries to blackmail Lincoln over three letters that show Mrs. Lincoln receiving or expecting money for political services rendered, Seward has him arrested and confined in horrible Fort Lafayette. Watt lowers his price and it is met. He dares not speak out while habeas corpus is suspended. When Blair renews his vague attacks, Chase resigns but Lincoln refuses to accept the resignation, knowing Chase is neutralized. Lincoln admits that his wife's "caprices" stem from partial insanity.

Washburne ushers Grant through his triumphant reception as he becomes the first lieutenant general since Washington. He claims no political interests. At an open weekly reception at the White House, Grant goes unrecognized and refuses to cut in line. Lincoln would help Grant get elected if he could beat Lee in four months, but Mrs. Lincoln is too far in debt to lose her position. After Lincoln presents the commission, Grant invokes "Providence," praising the armies, not their commanders, and agrees to go wherever Lee is. Lincoln is happy that Grant is not like the other generals.

Chapter 4 sees radical Republicans in Cleveland nominate Frémont, while a pro-Lincoln convention in Baltimore drops the word Republican to become the "National Union Party." Sumner wants to hold a convention after the Democrats meet in Chicago to run Chase. Lincoln is amused but concerned that news of Grant's loss at Cold Harbor, VA, might throw the election to McClellan. Lincoln is amazed that Seward still sees the conquest of the Western hemisphere by Grant and Lee as the key to ending the conflict. Winning renomination, Lincoln is pleased with Andrew Johnson but not with the platform. When Lincoln refuses to fight for Chase's nomination of his devoted assistant, Maunsell B. Field, for a position in New York, Chase again resigns and learns that it is accepted while visiting the Capitol. When Gov. Dave Tod declines the nomination, it goes to Finance Committee Chairman Fessenden. Leaving Washington for New Hampshire, Chase is torn over what to do politically. Abolitionism will be destroyed if he works against Lincoln, while Reconstruction will be replaced by pure amnesty if Lincoln wins.

Chapter 5 finds the rebels again cutting Washington off from the world. Lincoln refuses to evacuate and worries about the effects of Wade's vengeful Reconstruction bill, some of which he wants and therefore cannot veto. He will merely pocket the bill, which will inspire the radicals to put up Chase as a third Republican candidate and give McClellan victory. Lincoln looks like a one-term failure. When Union reinforcements arrive, the Lincolns visit Fort Stevens. Mrs. Lincoln wants madly to fight her Cousin John



(Breckinridge) personally, and Lincoln is speaking with two officers as sniper bullets drop them. Lincoln is a recognizable target. Lincoln insists to Welles and Wade that Southerners are fellow Americans. The rebels leave without being pursued, angering Lincoln and the press, and Greeley begins negotiating peace with the rebels in Canada. Lincoln is inclined to go through the motions, proposing liberal terms that nevertheless demand abolition. Stanton objects that prolonging the war over anything will cause rioting in New York and let the Democrats carry the North. Lincoln announces that as he has evolved into an abolitionist, so, too, must the party and the nation. He would allow "very intelligent" blacks and veterans to vote, although he favors colonization.

Chapter 6 opens in August 1864, as more Union defeats suggest that Lincoln will lose the election. The mysterious rebel Colonel wants Lincoln shot as soon as possible to ensure McClellan's victory. Herold suggests capturing Lincoln to force an exchange, but Seward is unlikely to deal and it could upset the English. Herold is to watch for an opportunity to shoot Lincoln and inform Sullivan. Grant narrowly avoids assassination during his recent visit.

Sumner meets Lincoln in private at Seward's house following the Niagara meeting, which is a "comedy of errors." Seward believes Greeley had only wanted to "smoke out" Lincoln as an abolitionist to cause trouble in New York. Lincoln agrees. On behalf of "certain Republican leaders," Sumner asks Lincoln to withdraw as a candidate and even personally to nominate Grant. Lincoln would if he thought Grant could unite the country but Lincoln fears that Grant would bring only greater confusion. Back at the White House, Stevens, Chandler, and Cameron insist that Blair be ousted before the election. Frémont will then withdraw. Lincoln has another hat shot off his head riding to the Soldiers' Home. Lincoln swears Nichols to silence and promises not to dismiss his escort before the gates.

Butler is ready to run for president with Wade, and Pennsylvania, New York, and Illinois appear hopeless. Without explanation, Lincoln requires cabinet members to sign the back of a document. When McClellan is nominated, Seward hopes that letting the traitor Vallandigham write the platform will hurt the Democrats. Spies say that Greeley has decided not to run another candidate. Herold, meanwhile, sees Lincoln walking openly and thinks what a lucky man he is to have twice avoided bullets. Lincoln holds word of Atlanta and Mobile Harbor's fall, meaning electoral victory for him.

Part 3, Chapters 1-6 Analysis

The novel's final part opens with David Herold getting involved in the theater scene, assisting stagehand Edward Spangler and meeting actor John Wilkes Booth. Hay is Kate's escort two weeks from her wedding, feeding her disinformation about the President. With Cameron, back from Russia, they discuss unprecedented preparations to let soldiers vote in November. Hay instantly dislikes Booth but Kate is charmed. His family's prominence in the theater is described along with his frustration at relatively minor success. Booth is romancing a senator's daughter, Bessie Hale, to obtain information. Since Willie's death, the Lincolns become avid theatergoers. A new political



debate, the "Blair Impasse," is discussed: whether Frank Jr. should serve in Congress or the army, but not both. Kate almost reveals that she has learned classified information about this. She declares her father a saint who forgives his enemies, while she lives for her enemies. Spangler and Herold meet Booth (who has a different girl friend for non-political purposes), and learn that Booth insists on Lincoln being poisoned so McClellan can win and make peace on Southern terms. Herold would like to be a hero in Richmond.

The focus shifts to the Chase/Sprague wedding, with young Tad delirious in bed. During the reception, the possibility that Henry D. Cooke and his partners may be indicted in Ohio for embezzlement as the papers claim is raised. Means of getting them out of the country are discussed. Sprague slips upstairs to meet Hiram Barney, collector of customs at the Port of New York and a friend of Hoyt, hoping to learn that nothing points to him. Booth is at the buffet. Hay admires Booth's agility in performing onstage, pointing to the slip-up during the coming assassination. Booth does not want to bother the President with an introduction and continues theater talk and the biases of the press. Chase is also talking about the press, denying that he encourages editors to back him for president. Wade has been distancing himself from Chase and would rather see him Chief Justice. Lincoln invites them to the dedication of the Gettysburg cemetery, but both decline, Wade making a tasteless remark about the politically dead burying the dead.

Chapter 2 examines Lincoln's most memorable speech. Lincoln is dizzy as he meticulously rewords his brief speech. Everett speaks endlessly before Lincoln rises, ghastly white, and plunges into his speech slowly and without reading. He is described as staring off dreamily, speaking with a choked voice, about unfinished work, but finishes strong about the nation under God not perishing from the earth. Again, Vidal gets most of the text in without mere quoting. Sitting down, Lincoln believes that his speech has been a wet blanket. He drifts through the rest of the day's agenda and appears failing as they board the train home. They fear malaria or scarlet fever. Attention shifts to Herold and Booth meeting to discuss sanitized health bulletins. People in Richmond believe that Herold has poisoned Lincoln, and he does not correct them. Before Gettysburg, he had tried but been foiled. Declaring Herold a treasure, Booth heads to Pennsylvania and on to Canada. At the White House, Hay works on completing the presidential message to Congress (Vidal again showing how meticulously Lincoln prepares documents), and Lincoln talks about his vision of reconstituting the South. People seem loath to "swap horses in midstream." Lincoln's liberality in requiring only an oath of allegiance is taken up through Emilie Helm, a widow. There is much bickering and questions about why Robert is not doing his duty as an example. Under family stress, Mrs. Lincoln's madness returns.

Chapter 3 deals primarily with partisan politics as dirty as those today. The Blairs are fanning race prejudice and claiming to have proof that Chase is selling permits to trade with the enemy. Chase, the subject of a "campaign-biography" whose exaggerations make him uneasy, wants to turn away from negative campaigning to a dignified setting forth of his ideas. When Blair demands a Congressional investigation of the Treasury Department, Chase vows to destroy all the Blairs and demands to be exonerated.



Meanwhile, Seward learns of three letters in which Mrs. Lincoln makes clear she is receiving or expects money for political services rendered. Rather than pay \$21,000 in blackmail, Seward issues an arrest warrant for Watt. While reactions to Blair's attacks reverberate, Lincoln learns about about Watt and the letters, which he buys for \$1,500 in personal funds and destroys, unread. He ascribes his wife's "caprices" to partial insanity. Kate drops all pretense of not involving herself in politics but Chase realizes he has been outwitted and Lincoln is unstoppable. As his political prospects fade, Chase wonders if Kate and Sprague are mismatched. Meanwhile, Grant becomes the first lieutenant general (three stars) since George Washington, refuses to make his headquarters in Washington, and insists he has no political interests. Nevertheless, Mrs. Lincoln fears leaving the White House \$30,000 in debt. After Lincoln presents the commission, Grant reads a scribbled text with difficulty, invoking "Providence," not "God" and praising the armies, not their commanders. Lincoln is happy that at least Grant is not like the other generals.

Chapter 4 finds Lincoln visiting Hay during his nightly late-night wandering, talking about the horror of his ten-day battle in the Virginia Wilderness, a fallen friend, and Shakespeare. Meanwhile, Chase contemplates fellow radicals holding a counter-convention to nominate him and the possibility of Lincoln's allies supporting Grant instead. Melodramatically, Chase can endure his fate only by contemplating Jesus' agony. With Kate and Sumner he talks about Grant's unknown position on abolition and readmitting the "conquered states." The Baltimore convention has dropped the word Republican to become the "National Union Party." Sumner wants to hold a true Republican convention after the Democrats meet in Chicago and have Chase replace Lincoln. Lincoln is amused by the Frémont convention of 400 men but confident of renomination. Lincoln stays neutral on a vice president. When Seward receives a dispatch reporting trouble in Mexico, Lincoln laughs at Seward's view of U.S. domination of the earth, but Seward doggedly insists the nation will reunite if Grant and Lee together drive all the colonialists out of the Americas. After the staid Baltimore Convention, Lincoln is pleased with Andrew Johnson as vice president, but not with the platform. When Chase resigns yet again, Lincoln immediately names a replacement, so fast that Chase learns about it on Capitol Hill, after helping Sprague write a belated defense. Chase is mollified to hear he will become Chief Justice if Taney ever dies. Chase prepares to go home to New Hampshire, torn over what to do politically. Abolitionism will be destroyed if he works against Lincoln, but Reconstruction will be replaced by pure amnesty if he helps Lincoln win.

Chapter 5 opens with rebel pickets reaching Georgetown and Stanton ordering Washington evacuated, which Lincoln furiously protests. The Southern logistics are described, and Robert Lincoln, still forbidden by his mother to enlist, thinks burning the capital would be beneficial. Lincoln is thinking beyond victory to Reconstruction rather than vengeance. Because he supports some of Wade's reconstruction bill, Lincoln can neither sign nor veto it. Hay sees a "pocket veto" inspiring the radicals to put up Chase as a third Republican candidate, which will give McClellan victory. Barring a great military victory, Hay doubts that Lincoln will get a second term. When he goes to see the reinforcement troops, they cheer Lincoln at Fort Stevens. Lincoln sees light gunfire for the first time and hordes of refugees. Mrs. Lincoln in a foul mood goes along for the trip,



ranting about Stanton conspiring with Chase against her husband and panicking about bankruptcy. Two officers with whom Lincoln converses are shot by snipers targeting the recognizable President. Lincoln reminds his companions that war is not sport and that indiscriminate punishment for the losers is wrong. Southerners are fellow Americans. The general asks them to leave. Learning that his journalistic nemesis, Greeley, is negotiating peace with the rebels, Lincoln goes along, to keep Greeley busy. For the first time, however, Lincoln makes abolition of slavery a condition for peace. Stanton objects that prolonging the war over anything will cause rioting in New York and the Democrats will carry the North. As Lincoln has evolved into an abolitionist, so, too, must the party and the nation.

Chapter 6 shows Lincoln forced to call up of 500,000 men and Grant proving incapable of over-all command. From Canada, orders come to the conspirators to shoot Lincoln as soon as possible to assure McClellan's victory. Herold is told to watch for another chance to poison Lincoln's medications. The White House groom who causes Mrs. Lincoln's accident is told to alert Herold to Lincoln's movements. Side-lights on the Southern night riders are provided and the Niagara "comedy of errors" is pushed aside. Seward believes that Greeley had only wanted to "smoke out" Lincoln as an abolitionist to cause trouble in New York. Lincoln agrees. With 100 days to the election, Lincoln is calmer than those around him. Lincoln may once have lusted for power, but that has burned away. He must finish what he has been placed here to do. After that awaits only his funeral. When Sumner leaves, Lincoln summarizes for Seward, saying he doubts Grant will run on his own unless he takes Richmond. Grant will not endorse Lincoln to avoid trouble with McClellan if he is elected. Lincoln is tired of factions trying to govern him. If the hodgepodge party cannot unite behind him, Lincoln is happy to decline the office. Riding from the White House to the Soldiers' Home, Lincoln dismisses his armed escort just before nearly being shot out of the saddle. He wonders why assassins do not aim for his body, an easier target. Later, Herold waits to deliver medicine to Seward when he sees Lincoln walking openly. Old Abe seems a lucky man. Herold does not know that Lincoln holds word of Atlanta's occupation, which means electoral victory as well.



Part 3, Chapters 7-12

Part 3, Chapters 7-12 Summary

In Chapter 7, Frémont withdraws from the race, Lincoln obtains Blair's resignation, and, thinking he might become Postmaster General, Greeley turns pro-Lincoln. When Taney dies, Lincoln intends to appoint Blair, who will not still aspire to be president. On Election Day, Lincoln figures the Electoral College 120-114 in his favor, but does better than expected. When correction comes that Lincoln has in fact won New York State, champagne flows. Lincoln cannot believe that the soldiers have voted for him and is sure that the dead would not.

In Chapter 8, Old Gentleman Blair wants to broker peace with Davis, but Lincoln wants first to tighten the noose and settle the slavery question. Herold is fired for absenteeism. Booth is sure that Johnson will be a worse tyrant than Lincoln. Sprague learns that Charles L. Prescott has been arrested and is ready to implicate Hoyt for double-crossing him and is also naming Sprague. Chase, meanwhile, is named Chief Justice, but the swearing-in cannot proceed until an Attorney General is confirmed to sign the papers. Sprague wonders if a senator can be arrested and writes a letter of explanation about severing his cotton interests when he enters politics. Officials must not embarrass the President or new Chief Justice. Kate demands to know what her husband has done and does not accept his plea of ignorance. Learning what the spouses are screaming about, Chase declares that he can no longer take the oath, but Kate pleads with him not to throw this away. An hour before the swearing-in, Stanton tells Hay about the arrests and they decide that Gen. Dix should do nothing against a senator without clear proof. They do not tell Lincoln, and Chase reads the oath.

In Chapter 9, Lincoln secretly meets the Confederates Alexander H. Stephens, John A. Campbell, and R.M.T. Hunter, to discuss peace but realizes that the war must be fought to the bitter end. He wants his Second Inaugural describing a reconstructed Union to be his political testament. Meanwhile, Booth has assembled a team to kidnap Lincoln, including Ned Spangler, Lewis Payne, George Atzerodt, John Surratt, and David Herold. A first attempt at Ford's Theater fails, but with Grant and Sherman grinding the South, they decide they must act. Lately Booth appears happy to die killing Lincoln, to make history. In the Senate gallery, the new Vice President Johnson delivers his speech blind-drunk. Booth waits 30 feet from where Lincoln makes his own short speech, aims and pulls the trigger, but neglects to release the safety. Chase administers the oath and the cannons boom.

Chapter 10 opens at Grant's headquarters. Mrs. Lincoln feels a headache coming on as Lincoln meets with Grant, Sherman, and Adm. Porter about the last bloody battle ahead. Then Lincoln will have to decide the future of the armies, generals, and politicians. He favors putting the Union back together quickly and painlessly despite the difficult Congress. From Grant's headquarters Lincoln telegraphs good news to Stanton, visits Richmond when it falls, is cheered by blacks and glared at by whites, watches the Union



flag hoisted over the state capitol, and sits in Davis' chair. He finds it hard to tell dreams from reality as the end nears. Fate and necessity guide everything.

Chapter 11 concludes Lincoln's life, as he insists on justice for the South and colonization for the blacks. Word of Lee's surrender inspires a wondrous, "Our work is done." An exuberant crowd is cooled by his speech emphasizing reconstruction, and Booth and Payne are horrified, with Booth vowing that it is Lincoln's last speech. Lincoln dreams about his own funeral and wakes drenched in sweat. The Cabinet meets on 14 April 1865 with Grant attending as the radicals seek to force a hard peace to the South. Lincoln muses about dreams in the Bible and his own vision of drifting on a raft. Impatient, Stanton presents his personal plan for reconstruction and Lincoln hopes in nine months "to give birth to a new Union" before Congress returns.

The Grants back out of dinner, as Lincoln wishes he could but arrives with Maj. Rathbone and his fiancée at Ford's Theater after the play begins. Herold and Payne head to Seward's house to assassinate him, while Booth climbs the stairs, finds the box unguarded, fires his derringer into Lincoln's head, and breaks his ankle while escaping. Lincoln is taken to a boardinghouse and laid on a bed too small for him. The wound is fatal. Stanton takes charge of and hysterical Mrs. Lincoln's and Johnson's swearing in. Hay realizes that the Ancient is now what others remember. Herold and Booth meet up in Virginia, a nervous doctor treats Booth's ankle, and Herold is proud they are immortal.

Chapter 12 concludes with Hay in Paris talking with an ex-patriot historian and his daughter about the fate of the fools who help Booth kill Lincoln and the unlikelihood of a Southern plot. Hay plans on writing the story with Nicolay and rates Lincoln first among U.S. presidents for facing the greatest responsibility and fighting the worst war to create a new country in his own image. Lincoln wills his own murder as an act of atonement.

Part 3, Chapters 7-12 Analysis

Chapter 7 opens with Lincoln looking in the mirror, trying to see himself and his ghost together as he had once four years ago and just the other day. Lincoln does not agree with his wife's beliefs but is interested in physical phenomena. He describes a dream that recurs before great events: he drifts helpless on a raft in mid-river. Opponents drop out of the race and Lincoln is optimistic. On 12 Oct., Taney dies and Chase believes that as Chief Justice he can purify the Constitution and save the Republic. Lincoln, however, fears naming to the bench someone who still want to be president. Election Day is shown in the telegraph room, with Hay keeping track of returns. The soldier vote is the key. Lincoln figures the Electoral College 120-114 in his favor, but good news from the telegraph builds. Chapter 8 shows the Cabinet learning that Lincoln has won by a majority. Seward is euphoric. Meanwhile, Thompson fires Herold for absenteeism. Herold finds Booth shattered by the election and sure that Andrew Johnson will be even worse a tyrant. Their plight is less dramatic than Sprague's, learning that a captured colleague will implicate him and Hoyt, and finding that Chase has been named Chief Justice. He hopes that his father-in-law is correct and senators can be arrested only for murder or treason. He writes a statement, explaining how he severs his cotton interests



when he enters politics and warns against embarrassing the President or new Chief Justice. Kate is at the center of the emotional storm, trying to keep her father from refusing the nomination. His battle of conscience is drawn out masterfully. Kate reveals that she has always hated Sprague and is currently pregnant. Until an attorney general is sworn in to sign his nomination papers, Chase is in agony trying to decide whether to withdraw or be sworn in. An hour before the swearing-in, Stanton and Hay quash the story and keep Lincoln ignorant.

Chapter 9 shows Lincoln secretly meeting Southern commissioners about peace. He is clear: if they accept U.S. law, including abolition, the war is over and slave-owners will be recompensed. The men clash over slavery and the value of being in the Union when the 13th Amendment is voted on. Some individuals deserve punishment for inciting to rebellion. Over champagne, they talk as old friends but Lincoln realizes that they will fight to the bitter end. Shuddering over the lives yet to be lost, Lincoln aims to have his Second Inaugural describe a reconstructed Union, as his political testament. Meanwhile, Booth assembles a team of conspirators to abduct Lincoln from Ford's Theater, but a change in plans thwarts them; with Grant and Sherman grinding the South, the conspirators must do something fast. Herold recognizes Booth's allusion to Brutus in Julius Caesar and deduces that Booth intends to kill Lincoln during the Inauguration. They agree that Lincoln is worth far more if taken alive and want nothing to do with murder. Bessie Hale gets Booth tickets near the platform. Herold remembers four years earlier and is amazed at how many more soldiers there are now, although the crowd is not as hostile. Seward daydreams through most of Lincoln's talk until Lincoln comes to making and accepting war, its unexpected magnitude and duration, and both sides invoking the same God rather than refraining from judgment. Chase considers that Lincoln might not be an infidel. As Lincoln reaches his conclusion, Booth aims and pulls the trigger. That Booth had forgotten to release the safety seems rather far-fetched, but Vidal asserts this.

Bizarrely, chapter 10 concentrates on Mrs. Lincoln's row with the wives of generals Ord and Grant before losing consciousness. Lincoln continues getting good news of Union victories and tours Richmond when it falls. He finds it hard to tell dreams from reality as the end nears. Fate and necessity guide everything. Chapter 11 opens with Washburne noticing unusual passivity in Lincoln, who has lost 30-40 pounds and is beginning to gray. He often complains of icy hands and feet but is happy. Seward has been injured and may resign and the radicals are eager to punish the rebels. Lincoln continues thinking about reimbursing slave-owners and colonizing Central America for the blacks, since he cannot imagine life for them in the South. Hearing of Lee's surrender, Lincoln proclaims, "Our work is done," and receives congratulations. Hay knows that Lincoln prepares the wrong speech for the exuberant crowd, but Lincoln wants quickly to make his intentions known, acknowledging radical objections, but insisting on simple justice. Booth and Payne are horrified, and Booth vows that it is Lincoln's last speech. That night, Lincoln dreams about his own funeral and awakens drenched in sweat. On 14 April 1865, Lincoln laughs off talk of plots and muses about dreams in the Bible and his own vision of drifting on a raft. Impatient, he looks forward to nine months in which "to give birth to a new Union" before Congress returns. Johnson agrees to showing leniency for Southerners. Mrs. Lincoln will not let her husband back out of an evening at



the theater, like the rude, ambitious Grants, who have bowed out. This by now is a theme with her. The Lincolns talk about a peaceful future. He wants to travel and practice law and feels as though released from prison. Again he wishes to stay home, but the action plunges forward. Booth enters the lobby, a familiar face and is allowed upstairs. With the police guard away from his post, Booth fires his derringer at close range and leaps athletically to the stage, landing off-balance, snapping an ankle bone. Booth says something unintelligible to the audience; the Brutus quotation at Caesar's assassination have been discussed earlier in the book literary theme. Rumors spread that Seward and the whole Cabinet have been murdered. The doctor offers no hope. When Mrs. Lincoln grows hysterical, Stanton orders her removed, and when Johnson arrives, Stanton orders him under constant guard. Johnson reels at the "mighty blow." At 7 AM Lincoln draws a last deep breath and dies. The story is told with minimal pathos and no melodrama. The "now he belongs to the ages" is put earlier in the story. Herold, meanwhile, flees Seward's house and catches up with Booth. As he has long wished, Herold feels heroic until word comes that Booth has killed Lincoln, with nothing being said about Seward.

Chapter 12 finds Hay in Paris, describing the fools who help Booth and their quick executions, including Mrs. Surratt, who is probably innocent. The scene allows various conspiracy theories to be disposed of, including Stanton's odd behavior. Hay believes that he and Nicolay will write this all up and rates Lincoln first among U.S. presidents. He is sure that Lincoln mysteriously wills his own murder as atonement for the terrible things he does for the nation.



Characters

Abraham Lincoln

The novel's protagonist, Abraham Lincoln, is introduced as tall, thin, awkward, with a prominent nose, high cheekbones, and tight yellow skin. A successful railroad lawyer and one-term Congressman twelve years earlier, his nomination and election as President are a political miracle. He garners just under 40% of the popular vote against three rivals. Before the election, Southern governors threaten to secede if he wins and are making good the threat as he arrives, incognito in Washington to avoid assassination. He has been portrayed during the election as a "cautious vacillator" and "Western Jesuit." He is regularly referred to as "Ancient" or "Tycoon" after being nicknamed by secretaries John George Nicolay and John Hay.

Lincoln is a teetotaler and averse to food in general. He suffers chronic constipation but looks healthy and is strong as an ox. His health disintegrates as the story moves along. Lincoln tells long, cumulative, funny stories at regular intervals as punctuation or evasion, offering ever-wilder details until people choke with laughter. The novel is salted with countless stories. Lincoln is uneasy in front of people except as a humorist. Lincoln has a gift for flattery. As the Civil War begins, Lincoln bans the use of the word "Confederacy," denying that it exists.

Born in the slave border-state of Kentucky, Lincoln has visited the Deep South (New Orleans) only once. Southerners taunt him for an attack on Pres. Polk's Mexican War, when he talks of the "right of revolution." He is said to have suffered severe depression before his wedding and after losing his Congressional seat and getting no worthwhile appointment from Zachary Taylor. Instead, Lincoln gets wealthy practicing railroad law with hard-drinking William Herndon. After losing an Illinois Senate seat to Stephen Douglas, Lincoln attracts the attention of Horace Greeley's Evening Post during a speech at the New York Cooper Institute. This brings him the Republican nomination in 1860. Lincoln understands how to use the press and photography and grows a beard to appear as "Father Abraham." The campaign myths about a log cabin are invented.

Lincoln has no cronies and cannot keep a secret. He has an "almost physical need for laughter," is "curiously unselfconscious," and secretive about his own plans but free with others' secrets. He is doctrinaire only about preserving the Union, not about slaves' fates. He frees them as a military necessity within the rebellious states. He favors creating colonies for blacks in Africa or the Caribbean and cannot believe the races could live together. He withholds publishing the Emancipation Proclamation until the Union achieves notable victories, but the North seems incapable of producing an effective fighting general. Lincoln serves as general-in-chief as well as commander-in-chief for a good part of the war and believes he has learned enough strategy to be effective. Finally, he finds tenacious Ulysses S. Grant, who fights to victory regardless of the cost. This assures Lincoln of a second term, which had looked impossible.



Lincoln endures several personal tragedies while President. Son Willie dies of the fever, which drives Mrs. Lincoln to the edge of madness. She already talks to herself and has vast mood swings. The death turns her to a medium for séances. Lincoln disbelieves in them but sees dreams as communicating truth. Before major events, Lincoln sees himself stranded on a raft in a great river. Lincoln also must endure his wife's chronic spending to refurbish the neglected White House and later simply on whim. Aides and Cabinet members do their best to shield him, but he learns the general outlines. Lincoln falls dangerously ill after delivering his Gettysburg Address and his weight continues to fall after he recovers. He is skin and bones when he is inaugurated a second time, barely avoiding assassination by John Wilkes Booth. Shortly afterwards, Booth fires a single bullet into Lincoln's skull in Ford's Theater. Lincoln had wanted to skip the performance. He dies the next morning in a bed too short for him. Hay thinks about all the stories Lincoln has told and realizes that Lincoln is now only what others remember about him.

Mary Todd Lincoln

Nicknamed "Madam" or "Hellcat" depending on her mood by secretaries John George Nicolay and John Hay, Mrs. Lincoln talks to herself aloud and can be charming. Lincoln calls her "Molly"; she calls him "Father." She grows up a Todd with her sister in the Springfield, IL, at the center of social life. She is courted by many lawyers and Judge Stephen Douglas. Earlier she had lived in Lexington, KY, where she knows Henry Clay. The Todds are slave holders and secessionists, and Mrs. Lincoln often contends that her husband is not in favor of abolishing slavery, merely preventing its spread to new territories, and that she alone know what slavery is like. Several of her girlhood horror stories are included in the text. Mrs. Lincoln fears more than death being struck by "The Headache." She can tell when they are coming.

From her arrival in Washington, DC, Mrs. Lincoln shows signs of being a "very royal First Lady." She calls the press "vampires" because she is Southern. She dislikes and distrusts William H. Seward talks constantly of Kate Chase's rudeness at Kate's first visit to the White House. Mrs. Lincoln is a "devastating mimic." Washington society spurns her and gossips about the many Kentucky relatives she brings to town. Having grown up on tales of Versailles, Mrs. Lincoln and is determined to make the White House magnificent and goes on sending sprees in New York City that create a storm of unpaid bills. Mrs. Lincoln understands the press going after her "spending disability" but cannot control herself. She is desperate for money but ashamed to mention it to her husband. It is rumored that she leaks her husband's secret message to Congress to the press for financial considerations, but this is denied and her friend Wikoff is made to appear solely responsible.

Mrs. Lincoln has to be drugged after son Willie dies, as no one can endure her cries and "eerie keening" addressed to the darkness. She is thrown to the brink of madness and is a Hellcat throughout her mourning. The White House gets some peace when she and her entourage visit hospitals. She continues talking with Willie and her half-brothers, one of whom dies at Shiloh and the other at Baton Rouge. When a New York



congressman demands that Robert enlist as an example, Mrs. Lincoln talks about Willie appearing to her every night, talking about relatives he is meeting, and her madness returns. She also cries hysterically as her husband lies dying in a boardinghouse across the street from Ford's Theater, where he is shot. Edwin M. Stanton has her removed as he takes charge of the transition. She is said to move to Chicago after leaving the White House and lives on her husband's insurance payout.

Salmon P. Chase

A powerful, anti-slavery Ohio Republican, Chase leaves the governorship to become a senator. Waiting to take the oath, he serves on the Peace Conference. Chase is stout, clean-shaven, and nearly bald, is self-conscious of his lisp and is troubled by myopia. Going blind is his greatest fear. Chase regularly tunes people out and annoyingly hums hymns, his education having been Episcopalian and his uncle being the noted Bishop Philander. Chase considers Lincoln an opportunist, cold and dense, and himself as an American Metternich. He believes that he should have been the Republican nominee, but is too moral and not expedient enough. He wants badly to be Secretary of the Treasury, an appointment over which Lincoln wavers. Chase fears William H. Seward and New York's Thurlow Weed. Throughout the novel, Chase is shown collecting celebrity autographs.

Thrice a widower at 53, Chase has two daughters, Kate and Nettie, but gives all of his attention to the former, who serves as his hostess in Ohio. Father and daughter are both concerned that she marry well. Receiving his Cabinet appointment, Chase pushes to provision Fort Sumter, no matter the risk. His office is far more luxurious than Lincoln's or any Cabinet officer. In it he exhibits considerable fund-raising abilities, bringing in close to \$20 million. He hates the central banking system, worships Andrew Jackson for breaking it, and opposes paper currency. When paper money is nevertheless introduced, Chase's face appears on the new \$1 paper bill, perhaps as an election reminder in 1864.

After going ashore at Norfolk with the invasion force, Chase considers resigning from the Cabinet to become a field commander and bolster his political chances. Chase takes full credit for the victory at Norfolk. Kate marries rich William Sprague, IV, to bolster her father's electoral chances and Chase positions himself to appear as the voice of conscience in the Cabinet. Chase is sorry when the radical Republicans take him at his word about pulling out of the 1864 presidential race and nominate Frémont. Chase plots with Seward to hold another convention after the Democrats meet and to emerge as the only possible candidate.

Chase submits resignations multiple times before Lincoln accepts one. With finances relatively good, Chase believes it is a good time to depart. Except for Stanton, the Cabinet members are glad he is gone. Chase plans to go home to New Hampshire, torn over what to do politically. Abolitionism will be destroyed if he works against Lincoln, but Reconstruction will be replaced by pure amnesty if he helps Lincoln win. Fate intervenes and the aged Chief Justice finally dies. Chase badly wants the office, but



Lincoln knows his eye will still be on the Presidency. In the end, Lincoln is convinced, but on the day he nominates Chase, Sprague's associates in New York are arrested for illicit trade with the South. Kate begs her father not to turn down the job over principle, and he is sworn in. Chase administers the oath to Lincoln and as the novel closes is being summoned to swear in Andrew Johnson after Lincoln's assassination.

William H. Seward

A Senator from New York and former Governor, Seward is short, white-haired, long-nosed, pale-eyed, and mysterious, and addicted to cigars and snuff. He is the leading Republican candidate for President in 1860, but Abraham Lincoln's managers outmaneuver him, quoting a speech he later calls stupid. Seward is fond of classical allusions, knows Tacitus and loves Cicero. He has a Jesuit nature, is called the "consummate politician of the age," is known as the "Sphinx of Albany" for his ability to keep secrets, and is always addressed and referred to as Governor. He is a good story teller in the Western New York tradition, had once been a strong abolitionist, but has grown conciliatory. Mrs. Seward is ill at home in Auburn.

In 1852, he manages Winfield Scott's disastrous campaign. By 1860, Seward favors letting the "cotton republics" leave the Union to deal with slavery on their own while the U.S. goes on to conquer the rest of the Western hemisphere. As the novel moves forward, Seward increasingly insists that forcing a war with colonialist Europe of the Monroe Doctrine would reunite all Americans.

Seward agrees to be Lincoln's first Secretary of State if the rest of the Cabinet is moderate. The "Albany Plan" proposes that Seward direct the government with Lincoln a mere figurehead, but it turns out that Lincoln arrives with a military plan. As Lincoln's presidency proves directionless, however, Seward confronts Lincoln with the danger and daydreams about arresting all members of Congress and explaining from the Speaker's chair how things must be done in wartime. Some he will free and others he will hang as traitors.

Seward favors issuing the Emancipation Proclamation only after some victories are scored, while chief Cabinet rival Salmon P. Chase believes Seward is pulling Lincoln's strings on the issue. Late in the novel, Seward publishes a volume of speeches and correspondence while Secretary of State, for which he is roundly criticized. Charles Sumner accuses him of "levity and cynicism and indifference to the abolitionist cause." Seward resigns ahead of calls from radical senators for his firing, but Lincoln maneuvers Chase into also resigning, restoring balance to the Cabinet, and both resignation letters are burned. When he finally sees that any hopes of running for president himself are gone, Seward becomes Lincoln's appendage. He wants to buy up the slaves and colonize them elsewhere and then have Grant and Lee sweep through the hemisphere driving out the colonialist. It will reunite the nation. Some Confederate circles are seriously discussing it.



At the end of the novel, Seward is in traction treating injuries suffered in a carriage accident when attacked by John Wilkes Booth's co-conspirators. The apparatus saves his life but his son Frederick, the Assistant Secretary of State, is badly wounded. The Confederates assume that Seward is really running the U.S. Government.

Edward Bates

Abraham Lincoln's Attorney General, Bates comes from the border-state of Missouri. He had also run for president and is bitter about losing to Lincoln. He is a "bearded Old Testament head" who gets caught between Chief Justice Taney and Lincoln over the Merryman arrest and writ of habeas corpus. Bates approves of the improvised logic that allows martial law and insists that printing "In God we Trust" on currency violates the Constitution.

The Blairs

Francis Preston Blair, known and addressed as the "Old Gentleman," is a rich and famous man who had been close to Pres. Andrew Jackson. His ambitious sons, Frank, Jr., and Montgomery (Monty) are determined to have as much influence on Abraham Lincoln. Blairs always find the darkest motives in men and loves to fight. Frank is a Missouri congressman and Monty a former mayor of St. Louis and currently a powerful Maryland lawyer. Both help swing border states for Lincoln at the 1860 convention, which establishes enmity with Lincoln's rival, Salmon P. Chase, who tries unsuccessfully to talk Lincoln out of naming members of slave-holding states to the Cabinet. Lincoln makes Monty Postmaster General.

Monty has a shrill voice and an inability to articulate protests. He wants to wait until victory to free and deport all blacks, for they should never have been brought over from Africa in the first place. Frank becomes an army general who fights in St. Louis, but wants also to keep his Congressional seat. The "Blair Impasse" as it is called comes down to seeing if Frank is elected Speaker of the House, in which case he quits the army; otherwise, he quits Congress and serves with Sherman and Grant. Frank's speech in Congress condemning the Treasury Department crimes helps end Chase's presidential hopes.

John Wilkes Booth

A popular stage actor, Booth is the son of an English actor, Junius Brutus Booth, who immigrates to Baltimore. Junius' son Edwin is more eminent in the theater than Wilkes, as he likes to be called. "Dark, curly hair, romantic like Lord Byron, pale, smooth skin, dark, silky mustache, lustrous honey-colored eyes, short, muscular as an acrobat, charming, Booth claims to have "the most ravished body since the Trojan War—or Byron's anyway." He is seeing a congressman's daughter, Bessie Hale, to glean information on naval affairs to pass south, but his lover is Ella Turner. Booth gathers associates to kidnap Abraham Lincoln and hold him hostage for the 17,000 Confederate



soldiers imprisoned in Washington. They rehearse carefully but fail in one attempt when the Lincolns skip a performance at Ford's Theater.

Booth disappears for a while to Canada but stays in touch with young David Herold, who adores him as an actor. Booth positions himself close to Lincoln during the second inaugural and pulls the trigger but forgets to remove the safety. Lincoln's speech so infuriates him that Booth vows it will be his last. Booth enters the Presidential Box, fires a single bullet into his skull and leaps to the stage, breaking his ankle. He joins Herold in Virginia. Presidential secretary John Hay relays briefly that Booth is shot dead escaping a burning barn.

John C. Breckenridge

Abraham Lincoln's Southern Democratic Party opponent in 1860, Breckinridge splits the party which helps Lincoln win. He is at that point James Buchanan's Vice President. Elected to the U.S. Senate after leaving office, he enjoys visiting "cousin" Mary Todd Lincoln in the White House while watching how events will develop. Breckinridge eventually goes South, fights at Shiloh, and becomes a general. Ben Helm serves under him.

James Buchanan

The departing President in 1861, Buchanan is deemed "a harmless old thing" by William H. Seward, but Elihu B. Washburne blames him for letting rebels have their way in Florida, South Carolina, Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas. "Old Buck" is a Democrat close to the Southern wing of his party, tall, white hair, twisted neck, and a squinty eye that makes him look sly. A lifelong bachelor, Buchanan uses niece, Harriet Lane, as his White House hostess. Buchanan considers his office Hades and the connecting corridor the Styx because of all the people assaulting him there. He builds a proper red-brick barn on the property while the Union falls apart. He accompanies Abraham Lincoln to the White House from the Capitol and after the swearing in, Buchanan declares that is happy to be leaving the decrepit building and an office "not fit for a gentleman to hold."

Ambrose E. Burnside

A Union general with ferocious, much imitated, mustaches and whiskers, Burnside is a partisan of William Sprague, IV. After distinguishing himself in North Carolina, Burnside is offered George McClellan's command but declines. Later he accepts it but is soon relieved of command and sent to Ohio after sacking high-ranking officers who complain about his "mud-march" that nearly wrecks the army.



Benjamin Butler

"Spoons" Butler, so nicknamed while looting New Orleans, is an outstanding trial lawyer, Butler commands the Massachusetts militia. An ugly, short man, Butler makes Abraham Lincoln look like Apollo by comparison. As the Civil War opens, Butler orders that the forces be referred to as "Union" rather than "Northern." In 1864, he is offered the vice presidency but refuses to waste four years listening to speeches but agrees to run for president with Ben Wade as vice president. This run does not materialize.

Simon Cameron

Slated to become Treasury Secretary, Cameron is moved to the War Department on William H. Seward's suggestion. Cameron is a natural organizer and the "Czar of Pennsylvania," tall, white-haired, slender, noble-faced but ignoble in character. Hopeless in administration, he leaves everything up to the senile Gen. Winfield Scott, and spending goes out of control. Cameron is happy to let Salmon P. Chase and Seward handle the War Department while he tours the North calling for freeing and arming the slaves. Lincoln and Seward decide to appoint him as Minister to Russia, to keep the Czar pro-Union and perhaps obtain military aid. Cameron goes but returns embittered and causes difficulties in the election of 1864.

The Cooke Brothers

Henry D. Cooke, editor of the Ohio State Journal, and his wealthy brother Jay, from Philadelphia, a pillar of the Episcopal Church, befriend Salmon P. Chase, Abraham Lincoln's Treasury and become keys both to the financing of the Civil War and advancing Chase's presidential aspirations.

Jefferson Davis

President of the newly-born Confederate States of America, Davis wants Washington as his capital. He is said to suffer a dreadful eye condition and refuses to sanction assassinations. Abraham Lincoln consistently refuses to use Davis' title, is happy to sit in Davis' chair when Richmond is evacuated and occupied, and would rather that Davis vanish somewhere than to be tried and hanged as the radicals want.

Stephen A. Douglas

The famous Illinois lawyer and politician who defeats Abraham Lincoln for a Senate seat in 1858 and then is defeated by Lincoln for the Presidency in 1860, Douglas dies in Chicago after wearing himself out rallying the border states for the Union. Flags fly at half-mast for the "Little Giant," who had once been Mrs. Lincoln's beau. Salmon P. Chase considers marrying his charming widow Adèle, who he believes would be a



splendid First Lady when he is finally elected President. Adèle's aunt, Mrs. Greenhow, is arrested as a spy but later exchanged.

Bettie Duval

A young, unattractive girl who serves as a runner of Rose Greenhow's intelligence ring to the South, Duval lives in Georgetown, from which her family has fled South. Receiving David Herold's coded message, she disguises herself as an innocent farm girl to cross the Long Bridge and then ride all night to deliver it. She coyly avoids sharing details. Duvall becomes more important as Greenhow sits under house arrest.

John C. Frémont

Frémont gains notoriety by declaring martial law in Missouri, which Abraham Lincoln then annuls. Frémont advocates declaring captured blacks to be Federal property, contraband to be seized, which can then be sold. When Lincoln replaces Frémont by Henry W. Halleck, Mrs. Frémont comes to plead her husband's cause and afterward claims that Lincoln threatens her. Frémont resigns rather than serve under John Pope. In 1864, Frémont is nominated by the radical Republicans instead of Lincoln, but he withdraws before the election.

Ulysses S. Grant

A West Point graduate who fails in the saddlery business rather than following his peers into railroads and politics, Grant is a grubby, hard-drinking, uncultured man, red-faced, pale-blue eyes, alert but bloodshot. After showing unusual fighting fervor in Tennessee and capturing Abraham Lincoln's imagination, Grant loses 13,000 men at Shiloh Church and is denounced by some at the Military Academy as a gambler and drunkard. Lincoln ignores this and names him the first lieutenant general (three stars) since George Washington. Grant refuses to make his headquarters in a city that he considers worse than Sodom and Gomorrah. He claims to have no political aspirations until after the war, if he survives, and then only in his hometown, Galena. He has no white hair at age 41 as he disappears into the Virginia Wilderness. Each side suffered 30,000 casualties, horrifying and thrilling the country. His loss at Cold Harbor, VA, threatens to throw the electorate to George McClellan. Grant eventually corners Gen. Robert E. Lee and receives his surrender. The Grants are scheduled to go to dinner and a play at Ford's Theater with the Lincolns, but the general is fed up with publicity and backs out. He is recalled to Washington when Lincoln is assassinated.

Horace Greeley

The Republican publisher of New York Tribune, Greeley makes Abraham Lincoln instantly famous by quoting his Cooper Institute speech. Greeley favors Lincoln in coverage of the Lincoln-Douglas Senate debate but personally prefers Douglas, and



supports Edward Bates at the 1860 Chicago Convention. He blasts Pres. Lincoln daily, influencing 1 million readers, mostly in the Midwest. As the election of 1864 nears, Greeley sets himself up as an independent peace negotiator with the South, operating out of Niagara, ON. Lincoln sends liberal terms that require abolition. After this fiasco and believing he might be named Postmaster General, Greeley turns gushingly pro-Lincoln.

Rose Greenhow

A dark, good-looking, slender Southern woman in her 40s, Greenhow is highly connected in Washington, DC, society as the widow of a State Department translator. She is the only secessionist lady to make an effort to get along with the Lincoln Administration. William H. Seward is among her visitors and some believe they are having an affair. She regularly gathers Union information without the owners realizing it and smuggles it to Richmond, VA, through John Surratt and, after Surratt becomes too sick to participate, through David Herold, a prescription clerk with a perfect excuse for coming and going. The Pinkerton detective puts her and other rebel ladies under house arrest and eventually consigns them to the Old Capitol Prison. They are later exchanged and Greenhow is said to be living in Paris and intriguing with the French.

Henry W. Halleck

Nicknamed "Old Brains" at West Point, Halleck is the author of *Elements of Military Art and Science*, which Lincoln reads. Paunchy, puffy, glassy-eyed, supposedly addicted to opium, with a domed forehead and receding gray hair, Halleck believes that Gen. George McClellan should be erased like "an incorrect theorem" and worries about the rebels being too close to Washington. While serving as general-in-chief of the Union armies, Halleck treats it as a desk job. Eastern generals come and go until Ulysses S. Grant succeeds as a great field general.

Hannibal Hamlin

Abraham Lincoln's vice president during his first term, Hamlin is a former Democratic senator from Maine who helps found the Republic Party. His predecessor, John C. Breckenridge of Kentucky, has suggested that Hamlin is a mulatto. Before the election, Lincoln and Hamlin never meet. Afterward, Hamlin concerns himself with Lincoln's health, introducing him to raw oysters. He also suggests Gideon Welles as Secretary of the Navy. Hamlin does not object to being set aside in the election of 1864 and plans to run again for the Senate.

John Hay

One of Abraham Lincoln's two presidential secretaries, Hay is a 22-year-old graduate of Brown University and an Illinois lawyer of two weeks' standing. His uncle is an old



Lincoln associate. Hay had wanted to be a poet or a preacher but is obliged to work in his uncle's office.

At Brown, Hay is a devotee of Sarah Helen Whitman and earns his now-embarrassing nickname is "Hasheesh" from smoking it in honor of her lover, Edgar Allan Poe. When Hay arrives in Washington, DC, a Theta Delta Chi fraternity brother gives him a list of local whore houses, and he becomes a regular at Sal Austin's. With a "Virgilian knowledge of Washington's circles of infernal pleasure," Hay accompanies a number of characters on late-night adventures. He quickly becomes enamored of beautiful Kate Chase, daughter of the Secretary of the Treasury and more quickly learns to hate young Willie and Tad Lincoln and feels like he has been hired to be their elder brother. Congress refuses to allow Lincoln two secretaries, so Hay is shifted to the Interior Department payroll, but the friends continue to share work, processing job applications.

Hay prepares a daily précis of the news, in which Lincoln shows little interest, and takes notes at Cabinet meetings. Author Gore Vidal thus uses Hay as a witness to major events in the Administration. Hay also writes anonymous articles for New York newspapers featuring inside information about the Administration. They tend to be "subtly favorable" to Lincoln, and the editor of the anti-Lincoln *World* does not realize he is being manipulated. Looking forward, Lincoln wants Hay to run for Congress when East Florida returns to the Union. Hay is commissioned as a major in the Adjutant-General's department, is defeated in his first election but is unfazed. He and Nicolay both intend to leave Washington when the first term ends, edit newspapers, enter politics, and together write about Lincoln.

Hay has the last word in the novel, as a junior diplomat in Paris, about to return to Washington. He summarizes what happens to the conspirators after Lincoln's death, doubts there is a wider conspiracy, and concludes that Lincoln wishes to be assassinated as a form of expiation for the evils of war that he has had to wage. Hay considers Lincoln greater even than George Washington.

Ben and Emilie Helm

Mrs. Lincoln's younger half-sister and her husband, the Helms live in Lexington, KY. Ben is a tall, lanky West Point graduate, a major, about to be appointed U.S. Army Paymaster. He has cold, gray hunter's eyes but a gentle voice with an edge of menace. They are visiting the White House as Kentucky decides which way to go politically, so Emilie can see Mary "one more time." Lincoln offers Ben a commission and hopes that he will, like his grandfather one day be governor. Instead, Ben accepts a Confederate commission and is killed. Emilie returns to the White House, ostensibly to comfort her sister, only through Lincoln's intervention, for she refuses to sign an oath of allegiance. She refuses Lincoln's pardon but returns home with his signed pass.



William (Billy) Herndon

Younger than Lincoln but the same age as his wife, tall, gray, and uncouth, Herndon is Lincoln's brilliant but eccentric, heavy-drinking, abolitionist law partner in Springfield, IL. Mary Lincoln detests him and wants to keep him and her husband apart. Herndon shows up at the White House to request a Federal job for a would-be in-law so he can marry young Anna Miles to replace the wife who has died, leaving him with six children. While drunk, Herndon tells presidential secretary John Hay shocking stories about Lincoln's youthful sexual adventures, bouts of craziness, and syphilis. The White House staff expedites the appointment to get Herndon back home and on with his pledge of sobriety.

David Herold

David Herold epitomizes rebellious Washingtonians throughout the novel. He is introduced as a 19-year-old oppressed by seven sisters. His mother is the widow of a government employee. They live near the Navy Yard, and he grows up with a wild pack of Southerners devoted to mischief. He reads "romantic stories" and has a crush on Mrs. Mary Surratt but visits her beautiful 18-year-old daughter Annie. Herold wonders why the Surratts have converted to Catholicism and is embarrassed by the outward signs of their religion. Short, thin, and finished growing, Herold is popular with girls, knows all about sex, but seldom bathes and is ashamed of his odor. He wants to be an actor, but is too short and buck-toothed. Instead, he takes a job as prescription clerk at Thompson's Drug Store near the White House. Since 14 he has worked as a handyman for Sal Austin, receiving her girls' sexual favors as payment. Although he declares himself ready to settle down and work hard at Thompson's, Herold still hopes for deliverance. His dead-end options are joining the Confederate Army, marrying Annie, or filling prescriptions.

Herold is a "quick and adroit liar" and the Confederate spy ring in Washington soon contacts him and makes use of his proximity to the White House to watch, listen, and perhaps poison top Union officials. He has unquestioned access while carrying prescriptions both to the White House and to cross the Long Bridge into Virginia. John Surratt, Sr., makes Herold his successor as a runner of information when John is no longer strong enough to continue. Herold yearns to become a "night rider" carrying messages deeper into the South but is happy to be praised for his contributions. He meets and quickly idolizes the actor/conspirator John Wilkes Booth, whom Herold flatters himself to resemble. Herold is willing to poison Abraham Lincoln but misses several opportunities. On the night of the President's assassination, Herold joins Lewis Payne in the attack on William H. Seward but does not enter the house. He rides fast to join Booth wrongly believing that Seward is dead. The summary at the end of the novel does not describe Herold's death on the gallows with Mrs. Surratt and others.



Joseph Hooker

A Union general, graduate of West Point and veteran of the Mexican War, Hooker had gone west to California, where he is reputedly a heavy drinker. He is close to Salmon P. Chase. "Fighting Joe" Hooker is reluctant to succeed Gen. Ambrose Burnside, who has illegally sacked and threatened to hang him, unless Henry W. Halleck is dismissed, refusing to be another victim like George McClellan and Burnside. Lincoln arranges for Hooker to report directly to him but does not like Hooker's intriguing. Hooker is outfought by Lee at Chancellorsville, VA and driven back across the Rappahannock. After a column falls on him, knocking him out, Hooker loses his fighting spirit and spends all his time with prostitutes who come to be known as hookers. Lincoln is unwilling to let him start another offensive. Hooker resigns when Halleck forbids him to withdraw from Harper's Ferry. Lincoln appoints Gen. George Meade to succeed him.

Andrew Johnson

Abraham Lincoln's vice president during his foreshortened second term, Johnson is a one-time tailor, square-jawed, sever-looking, clean shaven, affable but dim. As Governor of Tennessee, he stays loyal to the Union, agrees with Lincoln's policy on readmitting rebel states and is popular in the North. Lincoln is, however, concerned at Johnson's hatred of slave-owners. Johnson speaks "backwoods oratory" and disgusts people at the Inauguration by being rambling, dead-drunk. Lincoln orders that he not be allowed to speak in public. Hearing that Lincoln has been shot, Johnson hurries, awkwardly, to his deathbed and is told by Edwin M. Stanton to remain well-guarded in his hotel room until he is sworn in as president.

Elizabeth (Lizzie) Keckley

A mulatto ("high-yellow") seamstress with an aquiline nose, who has worked for and liked Jefferson Davis but cannot move South, Lizzie comes to the White House to expedite a dress for Mrs. Lincoln. After a long talk about slavery and justice, she is given the job and comes to be a regular at the White House, thick as thieves with Mrs. Lincoln, whom she helps through numerous crises.

Ward Hill Lamon

Abraham Lincoln's thickset guard, Lamon always carries a bottle, knives, slingshot, brass knuckles, and a derringer. He speaks with a Southern accent. After Lincoln's inauguration, Lamon is named Marshal of the District of Columbia. He is sent to Charleston and Fort Sumter and reports that the fort has two weeks of provisions and then must surrender or fight. After a first attempt on Lincoln's life, Lamon makes Lincoln promise never to go out unescorted again and often sleeps, armed, near Lincoln's side. In 1864, Lamon is thrown from his carriage and breaks several ribs but carries on like he is made of iron. Lamon is on a mission South when Lincoln is killed.



Robert E Lee

A Virginian colonel considered the best by Gen. Winfield Scott, Lee believes secession is wrong and slavery worse but will not invade his native state. He turns down command of the Union Army and accepts that of the Confederacy. Gen. Scott calls him the "soul of courtesy—and of honor" and predicts that he will fight well. Lee's home, Arlington House, is appropriated for a Union Army headquarters. Lee outfights Joseph Hooker at Chancellorsville. In 1864, running out of fighting men, Lee boldly invades Pennsylvania, looking to capture Philadelphia and end the conflict. At Gettysburg, he loses in fierce fighting and manages to escape back into Virginia, causing great consternation in Washington. Gen. Ulysses S. Grant is tasked with pursuing and destroying Lee's force. Cornered, Lee surrenders.

Robert, Tad, and Willie Lincoln

Mary and Abraham Lincoln's sons are mentioned through the novel. Eddie, who dies ten years before the action begins at age three, is often on Mrs. Lincoln's mind. She obsessively touches people's foreheads to check for fever like the one that takes Eddie. Robert is the eldest surviving son, age 17, in 1861, and a Harvard freshman, smooth-faced, shy, and solemn. He is first sent there unprepared and spends a year at the Phillips Exeter Academy in New Hampshire. Tad ("Tadpole") is ten, suffers a malformation of the palate, which makes him hard to understand. He is badly spoiled and self-pitying. Willie is seven, "ruthlessly eloquent and intelligent," and regards his father's secretary, John Hay, as his dull-witted playmate. Tad loves his father, "Poppa dear," best, while Willie favors his mother. Willie is organized and inventive, arranging circuses, drilling troops, and imitating his father. At New Year's 1862, Tad makes the crowds laugh by waving a Confederate flag before his father scoops him up.

Robert returns from Harvard on the night of his mother's unveiling the new White House. He is "self-contained, strong-willed and somewhat shy; more Todd than Lincoln." He wants to join the army but is forbidden until he has graduated and the war is nearing its end. He becomes an officer on Gen. Ulysses S. Grant's staff. Prior to that, the press regularly speculates on his military status and considers him a shirker. The greatest family crisis occurs when Willie dies, throwing his mother to the brink of madness. Mrs. Lincoln begins holding séances to talk to Willie and they become the rage in Washington.

Mrs. Laury

Mrs. Lincoln's plump, elderly, auburn-haired medium operating out of her home in Georgetown, Laury channels the Emperor Constantine to talk about the late Willie Lincoln. She drops her voice when the Emperor speaks. Assassins take their first shot at Lincoln as he rides to Mrs. Laury's house.



George Brinton McClellan

Referred to in the press as "Young Napoleon" even before winning a battle and affectionately by his troops as "Little Mac," McClellan is youthful, handsome, short and thick in stature, and filled with hubris. He has exquisite manners and is heir to a well-to-do Philadelphia family. He trains in Europe and gains fighting experience in the Crimea. A Democrat and former president of the Ohio & Mississippi Railroad before being called back to duty after Gen. Irvin McDowell's defeat at Bull Run, McClellan in months turns a frightened mass of men into a modern army. He despises the out-of-date strategy books from which Lincoln spouts.

McClellan lives in a small house on H. St., near William H. Seward rather than in camp and keeps busy politicking, as newspapers call for him to become dictator to save the Union. Salmon P. Chase is his sole confidant in the Administration, since Lincoln is "notoriously indiscreet" and Seward reckless. Over New Year's 1862, McClellan is said to be bedridden with typhus but recovers remarkably swiftly. He has designed a secret "Urbana Plan" to follow the water routes from the east to Richmond, VA, and grows angry when Lincoln, Chase, McDowell, and Hunter in his absence discuss a strategy that he has already rejected. Lincoln calls McClellan "the Great American Tortoise" and looks forward to replacing him with Henry W. Halleck after the election in order not to be seen kowtowing to the radicals who demand his removal.

Irvin McDowell

A brigadier general of volunteers and commander of the Army of the Potomac, 42-year-old McDowell is Paris- and West Point-educated. His army career stalls under Gen. Winfield Scott, who gives preference to Southerners, but reinvigorates as the Civil War begins. McDowell establishes his headquarters in Robert E. Lee's home, Arlington House, and develops a plan for the immediate conquest of Virginia. Scott resents McDowell's appointment and disagrees with his battle plan. Lincoln trusts McDowell but obliges him to go into battle with a green army, and despite his defeat at Manassas/Bull Run, McDowell is eager to reverse his record in the same location.

Edward McManus

The White House doorkeeper since Pres. Zachary Taylor, McManus has few teeth and dark gums, runs errands, and delivers prescriptions to Thomson's Drug Store, where he pretends to know the President's inner councils. He appears privy to some things that are not published, and these are sent South to Richmond by Confederate night riders. As Abraham Lincoln prepares to send his first message to Congress, Edward advises him on how Presidents have done this since Thomas Jefferson, a bad public speaker, sets the modern precedent.



George Meade

Meade is a Democrat opposed by the radical Republicans and Salmon P. Chase but a competent general and a Pennsylvanian, which Abraham Lincoln hopes (in vain) may inspire him to fight well in his native state as Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee invades. Meade is called "Snapping Turtle" because of his temper. He is a gentleman from one of Philadelphia's oldest families.

John George (Nico) Nicolay

One of Abraham Lincoln's two presidential secretaries, Nicolay is 29 as the novel starts, slender, with a long, pointed, youthful beard. He is a native of Bavaria, Germany, who retains a slight German accent, particularly when excited. He is engaged to be married. Before being appointed, Nico edits a Pittsfield, IL, newspaper and serves as Lincoln's campaign secretary. Nico succeeds in getting the President-elect to take along his schoolmate, John Hay. They work on most projects together and sleep in the same bed, except when Hay's malaria periodically returns. They agree to leave in 1865, even if Lincoln is re-elected, planning to write a book about Lincoln and later enter politics. Both are appointed to the U.S. legation in France after Lincoln's assassination, but only Nico is happy there.

Lewis Payne

One of John Wilkes Booth's associates, Payne is starving in Baltimore, MD, after being wounded at Gettysburg and taking the oath. Booth brings him into the conspiracy along with two other Confederates from Baltimore. Payne looks like a classical statue, walks like a lion, speaks with a soft Florida accent, and is ready to kill anyone except Booth, whom he worships. He is a watchful, muscular loner. He had gained fame as a Mosby Raider. Payne is assigned to assassinate Secretary of State William H. Seward, but fails because the medical apparatus he wears after an accident thwarts Payne's knife thrusts.

Allen Pinkerton

The detective who accompanying President-elect Abraham Lincoln incognito from Baltimore, MD, to Washington, DC, Pinkerton is a forceful man. His Secret Service gathers data from spies, observer balloons, and deduction.

John Pope

Appointed to head the new Army of Virginia, the black-bearded Pope is a serious man who sees Ulysses S. Grant as useless but better than Gorge McClellan. Abraham Lincoln accepts Pope at Pope's own high evaluation of himself and also because Pope



pleases Salmon P. Chase and the radical Republicans. He does not last long or do better than the other Northern generals in the East.

William Howard Russell

A stout, florid, hard-drinking, plain-speaking London Times correspondent who has covered wars in Asia, Russell attends Mrs. Lincoln's levee and receives flowers from her, despite his pro-Confederate views. He believes the South is fighting for self-preservation, while the Northern forces are alien mercenaries. Russell claims that the rebels are ready to rejoin the British Empire.

Winfield Scott

Early in the novel, Scott is portrayed as the 74-year old General-in-Chief of the Union armies, taller than Lincoln, and weighing close to 300 lbs. He is ancient, mottled, and eggplant-faced, cannot climb stairs, suffers gout, but loves food, glory, and himself. He wears an elaborate, glittering uniform of his own design. Scott is still revered as the hero of the War of 1812 and conqueror of Mexico in 1847. His deep voice quavers when emotional. In 1852, Scott runs for president as a Whig in a disastrous campaign against Franklin Pierce. Had he won, he would have strengthened Federal forts in the South. Scott condemns the departing Buchanan Administration as nearly traitorous and the new President, Abraham Lincoln, agrees.

Scott needs six months to rebuild the officer corps, since most West Pointers are Southerners and makes preliminary plans to relocate the government to Pennsylvania. He insists that the Union must control the Mississippi River and split the South. Learning of a plot against the President-elect, Scott insists on Lincoln sneaking into Washington. He has a partiality for war presidents, having known Jefferson, Madison, and Jackson. Scott surrounds himself with artwork of his youthful battles. Scott resigns as general-in-chief when it becomes clear that Salmon P. Chase has critical military data that he is denied by superiors and subordinates. Before sailing to Europe, Scott recommends that Lincoln name Henry W. Halleck general-in-chief, but the President gives it to George McClellan, who wants the post.

Dan Sickles

Handsome and dashing, Sickles is, as the novel begins, living down having killed Francis Scott Key's son in a duel, pleaded temporary insanity, and had to resign his seat in Congress. At 42, the New Yorker is a member of "Mary's Coterie," the First Lady's weekly levee. During the war he becomes a major general. When Henry Wikoff is charged with stealing Abraham Lincoln's secret message to Congress, he asks Sickles, a general and former congressman, to represent him, but the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War considers charging Sickles with contempt for honoring his client's claim of privilege. Later, Sickles loses a leg at Gettysburg and is reconciled with his



wife, Teresa. In 1864, Sickles is sent South to vet Andrew Johnson before Johnson is nominated for the vice presidency.

Kate Chase Sprague

A beautiful, gifted 20-year old as the novel opens, Kate is her father's whole life. Salmon P. Chase is Secretary of the Treasury, and Kate is determined that he must be President in 1864. Kate runs their elegant mansion on 6th and E in Washington, DC, and is the perfect daughter, councilor, and soul mate. With dark gold hair, glittering hazel eyes with long, lashes, an upturned nose, and a perfect figure, she attracts many men including John Hay, Abraham Lincoln's secretary. Kate plays chess and gambles, which is interpreted as masculine. Chase himself wonders what she might have done had she been a boy. She combines the best qualities of both sexes. Mrs. Lincoln takes an instant dislike to Kate and often talks about her rudeness.

Kate marries the rich William Sprague, IV, to bolster her father's chances in 1864, having turned down a proposal from William Sanford. Sprague buys her father's home and lets him move in with them gratis. Kate confides to Hay that she is not expected to be happy. Kate becomes her father's full-time political manager, earning the hated title "Kate the Shrew." Kate hears things from her father that she is not supposed to know and has to watch her mouth. Learning that her husband has been illegally trading arms for cotton, Kate collapses. This hits the newspapers on the same day that Lincoln names Chase Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. On top of it all, Kate is pregnant. She begs her father not to withdraw his name and proudly watches his swearing in. Chase's career has reached a different pinnacle for which she had hoped and accepted a loveless marriage.

William Sprague, IV

The young, wealthy (\$25 million), patriotic Governor of Rhode Island, Sprague raises a regiment with his own funds (\$100,000), which he brings to the besieged Washington, D.C., early in the Civil War. A college drop-out, Sprague jumps from subject-to-subject in conversation but possesses a businessman's quick mind. He arrives knowing presidential secretary John Hay from Brown University, while his adjutant, Col. Ambrose Burnside, has dealt with Lincoln in Illinois. Without success, Sprague demands that the President name him major-general of all New England volunteers. Treasury Secretary Salmon P. Chase gives Sprague permission to invite his beautiful daughter Kate for a ride and eventually they marry. Sprague buys Chase's home and invites Chase to live with them gratis. Sprague's mother, the formidable Fanny, thinks Kate is too good for him.

A. & W. Sprague & Company owns nine cotton mills and is quickly hurt by the Union embargo on Southern cotton. Sprague laments that his father-in-law will not get him a Treasury permit to import cotton legally before entering into a deal to ship arms to Texas in exchange for cotton using Harris Hoyt as the intermediary. Sprague is a U.S. Senator



when the traitorous conspiracy is revealed, the day Chase is nominated Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. Hay helps prevent embarrassing Chase or Sprague until all the facts are determined.

Edwin M. Stanton

A large, bald, asthmatic man, bearded like a Pharaoh, with steel-rimmed spectacles, unfashionable wardrobe, and a perpetual, unpleasant sneer, Stanton serves as Attorney General under Pres. James Buchanan. Earlier, he and Lincoln opposed one another in court over McCormick's reaper patent. He is the best lawyer in the country, pro-Douglas, but firm against secession. Stanton dresses unfashionably and perpetually sneers. As the story starts, Stanton is Charles Seward's special legal council, but in 1862, he agrees to head the War Department rather than return to private practice in New York. In the Cabinet, Stanton is critical of Lincoln's caution. Author Gore Vidal likens Stanton to the treacherous Iago in Shakespeare's Othello and to the two-faced Janus, the Roman god of war. He is mercurial, vain, and duplicitous but incorruptible about money and a passionate worker. Lincoln nicknames him "Mars." After Stanton's baby son dies, Stanton moans constantly to God. When Lincoln is assassinated, Stanton takes charge of the transition and finding and swiftly punishing those responsible. There are rumors that Stanton is part of the conspiracy, but Lincoln's secretary, John Hay, doubts it.

Thaddeus Stevens

A witty, learned, lifelong bachelor, the 69-year-old Pennsylvanian is the powerful chairman of the Ways and Means Committee and a member of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. A teetotaler since losing a drinking crony, he is not judgmental of others imbibing. He has a club foot, classic wig, droll, self-deprecating humor, and a hard, Roman face. A freethinker, he lived for 20 years with a mulatto woman whom all call Mrs. Stevens. Stevens pressures Lincoln into putting war necessities above the Constitution and favors punishing the rebel states. He is responsible for printing paper currency, termed "greenbacks," to help fund the war and in 1864 sides unsuccessfully with the radicals wanting to remove Lincoln from the Republican ticket.

Charles Sumner

A U.S. Senator from Massachusetts, Sumner is a great, long-winded, fiery orator and heir to Daniel Webster, who is dedicated to a single purpose: freeing the slaves and punishing their masters. He is clean shaven, which is unusual among statesmen of the time, handsome, and speaks like a Boston Brahman with a beautiful voice. Sumner supports Abraham Lincoln in the election of 1860, but fears that William H. Seward has too much power over him. After being physically attacked in Congress, Sumner recovers for three years and returns, declaring that he is "in morals, not politics." Sumner knows many famous people on both sides of the Atlantic, has no sense of humor, which means that his smiles cannot be interpreted, lacks tact but has manners,



and is a dedicated misogynist. Oddly, for a while he is taken by the beautiful young Kate Chase.

The Surratts

A prosperous Maryland truck farm family living at 541 H. St., Washington, DC, the Surratts are strong supporters of the Confederate cause. They own a farm near Surrattsville and have recently as a family converted to Roman Catholicism. The father, John is introduced as bedridden in terminal condition from what sounds like tuberculosis but it is claimed to be something else. Later in the novel he is shown to be running information from the rebel spy ring into Virginia. The mother, Mary, is handsome with auburn hair and a "Junoesque" figure. Beautiful daughter Annie, 18 as the story begins, plays piano and attends Catholic seminary. She wants to be a music teacher. The youngest son, John, Jr., is studying to be a priest. Fingering her rosary, Mary prays that Abraham Lincoln will not be inaugurated anywhere and wishes Northern soldiers would leave them in peace.

David Herold, who has romantic feelings for Annie, succeeds John as a messenger when he gets too sick to continue, and John, Jr., returns to Washington to help out when his father dies. Deep-voiced with piercing eyes, he resembles Jefferson Davis minus the beard. He undertakes a number of night rider assignments for the rebels and for a while serves as postmaster in Surrattsville, but when that ends, the family moves to another house in Washington and rents the other two properties. Presidential secretary John Hay believes that Mary Surratt is wrongly hanged for taking part in Lincoln's assassination. John, Jr. and Annie's fates are not revealed.

Roger B. Taney

The 5th Chief Justice of the United States, Taney is a Marylander nominated in 1836, by Andrew Jackson. Before that he gains infamy by ruling against Dred Scott. When he swears in Abraham Lincoln as President in 1861, Taney makes no eye contact and shows no enthusiasm. When his writ of habeas corpus issued for John Merryman is disobeyed, Taney wants to arrest Lincoln for contempt, but Lincoln declares that his presidential oath is to the whole country, not to Taney personally. His death long hoped for, Taney dies in 1864, and Lincoln under great pressure replaces him by his former Secretary of the Treasury, Salmon P. Chase.

Clement L. Vallandigham

A "Copperhead" (antiwar Democrat) demagogue whose antiwar speeches get him arrested for treason by Gen. Ambrose Burnside, Vallandigham is deported by Abraham Lincoln rather than hanged. He goes from the Confederacy to Canada but returns in time to write the 1864 radical platform for the Democrats. Lincoln's partisans hope this will help him defeat McClellan.



Benjamin F. Wade

A clean shaven, hard-eyed Senator from Ohio, Wade is the Senate's leading Republican radical who finds Lincoln weak in the holy war against slavery. He chairs the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. Observing the fighting at Bull Run, Wade and Sen. Chandler draw pistols and fight as the rout begins. Wade is willing to run against Lincoln in 1864 after other Republican opponents withdraw.

Elihu B. Washburne

A hot-tempered Congressman from Illinois, a militant teetotaler, bearded, and stout, Washburne alone meets President-elect Abraham Lincoln at the Washington train station and feels like a city guide answering his questions about the city en route to his hotel. He remains throughout the novel Lincoln's trusted emissary, getting the 36th Congress to adjourn before voting on the Force Bill, traveling to Memphis to evaluate Grant's condition and to Canada to see if peace initiatives with the South are valid.

Watt

The White House head groundsman, Watt gets rich managing the grounds as though it were his private plantation, selling produce to restaurants and hotels. William H. Seward decides to set Watt up as a scapegoat and convinces him and his wife to resign. Watt stays on the job after quitting and is indoctrinating Mrs. Lincoln in the traditions of graft in the White House. He takes ownership of a greenhouse in New York City and performs mysterious errands for Mrs. Lincoln as she goes ever deeper into debt.

Gideon Welles

Abraham Lincoln's Secretary of the Navy (nicknamed "Neptune"), Welles has a vast gray beard and elaborate curled wig. He is a newspaper publisher who knows little about naval affairs. He remains in the Administration to the end.

Henry Wikoff

A devotee of Napoleonic France and British secret agent in Paris in 1848, Wikoff is reporting for the New York Herald when first introduced to the novel, bringing Mrs. Lincoln a copy of his book, *The Adventures of a Roving Diplomatist*. Wikoff is responsible for nicknaming her the "Republican Queen," which the press adopts. Claiming neutrality in American politics but wanting to avoid bloodshed he wants to visit the South to portray it favorably in the press. Four days before Lincoln's secret message goes to Congress, Wikoff sends the contents in a telegram to the Herald and is arrested. Gen. Daniel Sickles defends him before the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, demanding that he not divulge his source, who is feared to be Mrs. Lincoln.

William H. Seward considers framing White House grounds keeper Watt as the source of the message, using his perfect memory to memorize passages in a copy left laying about, which he recites to Wikoff. Mrs. Lincoln feels betrayed by Wikoff but wonders about his well-being after he disappears.



Objects/Places

The Albany Plan

Advocated by Thurlow Weed, proprietor of the Albany Evening Journal, the secret plan calls for excluding people like Salmon P. Chase from the Cabinet and turning Lincoln into a figurehead for Charles Seward. Lincoln hears about it and refuses to be bullied.

The Executive Mansion

Known unofficially as the President's House or the White House, the Executive Mansion is in poor physical condition and badly guarded when Abraham Lincoln first visits as President-elect. The Red Room is shabby and vandalized for souvenirs. Servants are a mixture of black and white. Departing Pres. Buchanan offers his successor a tour, saying that the mansion is smaller than it looks, that its corridor connecting the private rooms and the offices is like the River Styx, and that nothing works upstairs in the ominous, dark living quarters. The oval sitting room above the Blue Room is bleakly furnished and dirty. The office suite consists of a gatekeeper's desk, a waiting room, the secretary's office, and the president's office, which connects through the clerk's office to the Cabinet Room.

As the Civil War begins, Kentuckians occupy the East Room as the White House's defenders, and Mrs. Lincoln begins a massively expensive program of renovation, which allows her to resume presidential levees. Watt, the White House head groundsman, gets rich managing the grounds as though it were his private plantation, selling produce to restaurants and hotels and helps Mrs. Lincoln with her financial difficulties. When Mrs. Lincoln invites 500 special guests to show off her achievement, some invitees and the press find it inappropriate during wartime. The cost of the project is a major headache for the First Lady and a constant theme throughout the novel.

Ford's Theater

Owned by John T. Ford, and run by his son, Ford's Theater along with Grover's Theater are popular with Abraham Lincoln. Each has a Presidential Box, shielded from the audience, and arrangements to admit him secretly from the side street. John Wilkes Booth acts and directs in both theaters and collects a group of conspirators to abduct Lincoln and hold him hostage to obtain the release of thousands of Southern prisoners of war. One well-rehearsed attempt fails when the Lincolns do not show up as announced. After Gen. Robert E. Lee's surrender, Booth sneaks up the stairs behind Lincoln, fires one bullet into Lincoln's head, fights off a defender, and leaps to the stage, breaking his ankle but escaping. Vidal has Booth yelling something incomprehensible to the audience.



Fort Sumter

Union fort in Charleston, VA, harbor, Fort Sumter is commanded by Maj. Robert Anderson. After he is inaugurated, Abraham Lincoln determines that the fort has two weeks of provisions, and South Carolina's governor threatens war if the U.S. Government tries to reinforce it. The first shots of the American Civil War are fired at Fort Sumter, which surrenders and the men are sent North.

Gettysburg, PA

The site of the first great clash of Union Gen. Ulysses S. Grant and Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee, Gettysburg is a great bloodbath. It is also the first invasion of the North and Confederate victory there could have led to the seizure of Philadelphia and a Southern-imposed peace. Abraham Lincoln travels to Gettysburg to dedicate the battlefield cemetery and there delivers his brief but poignant speech.

The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War

A body of Congress created at the start of the American Civil War, the Joint Committee looks into initial Union defeats. Sen. Benjamin F. Wade of Ohio is chairman. A major focus of attention is illicit trade with the rebels, emancipation, and evaluating incompetent generals. The novel pays particular attention to investigating Henry Wikoff's leaking to the press of Lincoln's secret report to Congress and threatening to jail his lawyer, Daniel Sickles. Sickles later accuses Gen. George G. Meade of failing to destroy Gen. Robert E. Lee's army after Gettysburg.

The Monitor and the Merrimack

The world's first iron clad warships, the Merrimack is a Union frigate sunk by the Confederates, iron-plated, renamed, and used to sink Union ships. Stanton is demoralized by the new weapon, and not encouraged that an equally radical ship, the Monitor, has met the Merrimack in an inconclusive battle. Their second meeting is watched by Lincoln, Chase, and Stanton.

The Republican Party

Six years old as the novel opens, the Republican Party had been divided at its Chicago Convention between William H. Seward of New York and Abraham Lincoln of Illinois, heading the rabid abolitionists and moderate Westerners. Four years later, with the Civil War dragging on, the Republicans threaten to splinter. In Cleveland, 800 radicals nominate not Salmon P. Chase but Frémont. In Baltimore, there is talk of drafting Gen. Ulysses S. Grant, but the Blairs control that convention for Lincoln, who is re-nominated unanimously after Grant's name is introduced. That convention drops the word



Republican to become the "National Union Party." Charles Sumner wants to hold a true Republican convention after the Democrats meet in Chicago and have Chase replace Lincoln. Having lost ground in the congressional elections of 1862, the Republicans win in 1864 as Grant finally wins significant battles and soldiers' voting is facilitated.

Richmond, VA

The capital of the Confederate States of America, Richmond is abandoned as Union forces draw a noose around it, and Abraham Lincoln comes to visit. He is cheered on the wharf by blacks but glared at by sullen whites in town. He watches the Union flag hoisted over the state capitol and sits in Jefferson Davis' chair in the Executive Mansion. Lincoln finds it hard to tell dreams from reality by this point, as fate and necessity guide everything.

Sal Austin's

An upscale, discrete Washington, D.C., whorehouse with varied offerings, Sal Austin's is recommended by those in the know in Willard's Hotel. Mrs. Austin, who dresses like a widow, has the Wolf's Den as her main competition, but its madam is too talkative. Presidential secretary John Hay visits both. He is impressed by Mrs. Austin, who greets him, knows who he is, explains how the business operates, and declares herself pro-Union but some girls are not. Sal Austin's has the air of New Orleans earlier in the 19th century. When Hay takes Lincoln's old law partner, William Herndon, to Sal's, he reveals to Hay, rather too loudly, the President's youthful sexual dalliances.

Thompson's Drug Store

An establishment at 15th and Pennsylvania near the White House run by William S. Thompson, Thompson's has for many years employed young David Herold on a part-time basis filling prescriptions. Herold would rather be an actor and considers full-time work a prison sentence but finds it makes him an important part of the Confederate spy wring operating in the city. Thompson forbids Confederate rhetoric and is proud to be the unofficial pharmacist to the President. Thompson's is also a center of gossip. Twice Herold attempts to poison Lincoln's medications but fails and is finally fired for absenteeism.

Washington, D.C.

"An anomalous ten-mile-square parallelogram carved out of Maryland and bounded by the Potomac River and Virginia," Washington is a distinctly Southern city with a volatile population like Maryland and unlike staid Virginia. If its neighbors secede from the Union, Washington will be isolated in enemy territory. Confederate President Jefferson Davis wants it for his capital. As the novel opens, nothing is complete: paving, street lamps. The stench rising from the river is a recurring theme. The tropical summers are



stifling. Near the White House on 17th St. is the new War Department, to which Abraham Lincoln is shown often retiring, while the old red-brick headquarters has been given to the Navy. As the novel opens, security on government buildings is lax or non-existent. After the first battle just across the river in Virginia, however, the city swells with Union soldiers, who camp out in public buildings. Twice the Confederate Army cuts the city off from the rest of the world and the Confederate Navy embarrasses and economically cripples the city by blockading the Potomac River. When word of Lee's surrender arrives, the people surround the White House waiting to hear Lincoln's response. They cheer him wildly before the speech but little after and the conspirators listening to him vow that it will be his last.

Willard's Hotel

A frequent meeting place and rumor mill in Washington, D.C., Willard's Hotel is located on 14th St. and Pennsylvania Ave., near the Treasury Building. President-elect Abraham Lincoln is hidden there for ten days before his inauguration after plots against his life are uncovered. The very white assistant manager contrasts sharply with the black porters.



Themes

Expediency

Gore Vidal's novel about Abraham Lincoln's trouble presidency is filled with instances of expediency and debate over when and how absolute norms can and must be voided. The central issue is, of course, Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus within the Baltimore, MD, military zone. This allows troublesome individuals to be arrested and locked up indefinitely without any right to appear before a judge and jury. Newspapers and their editors are often the victims along with rival politicians.

It falls primarily to William H. Seward as Secretary of State to make the arrests, and he first serves as the devil's advocate for centuries of Western legal tradition, citing the Magna Charta, English common law, the U.S. Constitution, and Bill of Rights. Lincoln counters that the Constitution itself makes provision for this suspension in times of invasion and civil war. He notes that no American president has faced the situation he does, so no precedent can guide him. Congress is in recess leaving only him to act. If Maryland leaves the Union, Washington, D.C., is cut off. Therefore, it is expedient that all be done to prevent Maryland's secession. At Lincoln's request, Congress suspends the First Amendment and habeas corpus when it reconvenes.

While this is the biggest question of expediency, another fiery one involves the Emancipation Proclamation. Only a Constitutional amendment can eradicate slavery in the United States, but Lincoln finds it expedient to end it in the territories that are in rebellion as a war measure. Freed blacks can serve in the army as laborers and/or soldiers. As commander-in-chief of the army, Lincoln believes he has the right to order this and good reason for doing so. It creates a situation from which slave owners will have a hard time reclaiming freed property. At the same time, Lincoln proposes compensating them for their loss, something that many Northerners object to on moral grounds.

A lesser but dramatic example shows William Sprague IV unable to get his father-in-law, Chase, to authorize special permits to buy Southern cotton to supply his Rhode Island textile mills. If the mills stay idle much longer, unemployed workers will vote him out as governor, and he will be financially ruined. Sprague therefore agrees to a shady deal that sends guns and ammunition to Texas via Cuba and cotton to New York, where an official is bribed to hand it over. Sprague sees it as an economic expediency while the Army sees it as treason.

The Psyche

Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln provide rich material for examining the human psyche. The President dreams about drifting aimlessly on a river aboard a raft before some great event occurs. He does not believe in ghosts but believes that the self talks to the



self in dreams. Just before his assassination, he awakens in a cold sweat, having seen himself laid out on a catafalque in the White House East Room. There is surprisingly little speculation about the two times that Lincoln suffers a mental breakdown prior to running for the presidency. The first time is two weeks before their wedding, forcing a postponement, and the second follows the loss of his congressional seat.

Mrs. Lincoln suffers psychic episodes on a regular basis. Since losing a son a decade earlier, she has been interested in communication with the dead. This intensifies when son Willie dies in the White House. She has to be sedated at first but as she recovers, she begins visiting a psychic who claims to channel the Roman Emperor Constantine. Constantine assures Mrs. Lincoln that Willie is happy and has found his lost brother. This sounds quite convenient, but in a panic Mrs. Laury warns that the President is in grave danger. Moments later he rides up, playing down someone having shot his hat off his head. His horse had sensed something and stopped, and Lincoln had leaned forward just in time in order calm the animal.

As the rolls of war dead lengthen, including Mrs. Lincoln's own close relatives, Willie appears at his mother's bedside to report meeting them and passing comforting messages. Through most of her time as First Lady, Mrs. Lincoln is under psychological pressure, first from uppity Washington society ladies who look down on her, then from bill collectors who want to collect on the enormous expenditures she has made to restore the White House. Mrs. Lincoln has always been subject to a fiery Headache much worse than a normal one, which can incapacitate her for days.

Information

Information plays a remarkably central role in Gore Vidal's novel, *Lincoln*. The mid-nineteenth century boasts a vigorous press and rudimentary photography, and Abraham Lincoln is a master of using these for political purposes. His handlers develop an attractive myth of Old Abe that has little relation to reality. Before the White House he lives in a comfortable mansion not a log cabin. At times he wishes he could escape what has been made of him but, significantly, he grows a beard so he will fit the role of "Father Abraham."

The elections of 1862 and 1864 show candidates and their staffs watching the telegraph machine for the latest results. When New York State is declared lost to the Democrat McClellan, Lincoln's entourage knows that there is fraud at hand because they have been buying votes outside the City. A correction comes and they celebrate. Military commanders are happy to beam their few victories to Washington to earn adulation. Ulysses S. Grant is different: not wanting to be bothered with foolish advice and orders, he cuts the wires before campaigns. Information about his victories trickle in by roundabout sources.

Both sides actively spy on the other. Spying consists both of collecting and verifying information for reputable sources—such as the U.S. War Department, which the rebels successfully infiltrate, and feeding disinformation to the enemy. In early battles, the



Confederates know where the enemy intends to be and what it wants to do, and vanishes unscathed. This has a rattling effect on commanders and cries go out to plug the information leaks. The rebels also regularly slow the action of Union commanders by convincing them that their forces are double their actual size. The trick works less well as time goes on and the statistically known number of surviving males on each side shows the exaggeration. The female rebel spies in Washington befriend officials and memorize items that they find lying around, hide people to eavesdrop on conversations, and even let the White House doorman show off his knowledge by describing maps and battle plans he has seen. The job of running messages across the bridge into Virginia is unglamorous, but higher ups regularly convince David Herold that he is performing a vital task and keep him watching the White House for anything out of the ordinary that might happen.



Style

Point of View

Gore Vidal tells his fictional story of Abraham Lincoln in the third person, past tense without any intermediary narrator. Rarely, however, does he lay out facts anonymously, even about something as trivial as the weather or scenery. Instead, he bounces from character to character to borrow their point of view. Smooth segues facilitate multiple perspectives. Young, inexperienced Presidential secretary John Hay is a particular favorite for describing events in the Cabinet room and the living quarters of the White House. He calls Mrs. Lincoln "Hellcat" and the President "The Ancient." Throughout the novel, Hay becomes more perceptive about Lincoln's complex personality, which helps deepen the reader's understanding as well.

Vidal also favors a rebel sympathizer, David Herold, who is Hay's age and, coincidentally, favors the same whore at Sal Austin's. Hay wants to be an actor but is too homely and would like to be a heroic "night rider" for the Confederacy, but settles for watching the White House from Thompson's Drug Store and running occasional messages into Virginia. Through him, the opposition's view of Lincoln and his Administration is continually presented. Herold surprises himself to find Lincoln up close a sympathetic character and has to remind himself that Lincoln is a dangerous enemy that must be eliminated.

Otherwise, Vidal most often adopts the point of view of Salmon P. Chase and his daughter Kate, who view everything through the glass of his bid for presidency in 1864, and of William H. Seward, another presidential want-to-be, who is believed to pull Lincoln's strings. Other characters are more portrayed than used for perspective. Only occasionally does the point of view grow muddy and confused.

Setting

Gore Vidal's Lincoln is set during the period of the American Civil War, primarily in Washington, D.C. It opens with President-elect Abraham Lincoln arriving incognito from Baltimore, MD, ten days before his inauguration. Already he is the target of assassination plots and already states are seceding from the Union. Washington is the most secessionist city in America and a minor plotter, David Herold, keeps track of the White House from Thompson's Drug Store across Pennsylvania Ave. Carrying prescriptions, Herold has access anywhere. Through him, the poor life in neighborhoods around the Navy Yard is seen as well as the more affluent trappings of the Surratt family. Georgetown is also portrayed in terms of the conspiracy.

The decrepit White House is seen in the first half of the novel being transformed into a national treasure by Mrs. Lincoln. Vidal never lets the reader forget that the White House sits beside a stinking, polluted canal, and animals are butchered in plain view at



the foot of the unfinished Washington Memorial. The Lincolns escape some of the summer heat in the nearby Soldier's Home, and Lincoln often retires to the telegraph office in the new War Department.

Events outside of Washington are always handled as second-hand memories, requiring minimal setting up of time and place. Even as important a battle as Gettysburg is but a few geographical and personal names and horrendous casualty figures. Lincoln's speech there is set out far more carefully: the weather, the sight and smell of still-unburied animal carcasses, and even the passing breeze. Lincoln's walk through conquered Richmond, VA, is sharply sketched, culminating him sitting in Jefferson Davis' chair and pondering fate.

Language and Meaning

Gore Vidal is a master storyteller who produces Lincoln as part of a series of historical novels. That he will not condescend to non-literary tastes is shown in the opening pages as Abraham Lincoln rides through the streets of a city he has not seen in a dozen years. Where he will live after the inauguration is the "Executive Mansion," not the "President's House" or the "White House" as simpletons call it. Vidal uses no personal narrator in vividly picturing the sights, sounds, and above all smells of wartime Washington, DC, in the early 1860s. His characters include a backwoods President who is nowhere near as simple as his political image suggests but who tells hokey stories as a reflex, without awareness. After long agonizing, he is also capable of profound rhetoric, long samples of which are woven into the text.

Vidal normally prefers to show the action through his major characters, reflecting their points of view. Thus, the reader is subjected to classical allusions, bible verses and popular hymns, and references to British and American literature. The chaotic politics of 19th-century America pervades the novel, tossing the reader between personalities, issues, and strategies. Disinformation and dirty tricks are shown to be commonplace in this milieu.

Notably, Lincoln's most famous speeches are all presented through someone's perspective, so commentary is interwoven with text. The literary William H. Seward, who helps edit the First Inaugural Speech, cringes at every word that Lincoln has changed and hopes that a disastrous ending will be omitted. At Gettysburg, Hay worries about the wind and is amazed that Lincoln speaks without his written notes, having had no time to memorize the words. At the Second Inaugural, politicians worry about the impact of Lincoln wanting to get his political testament on the record, and John Wilkes Booth waits to fire his derringer.

Vidal also reveals the world of the rebel and in fact shows Washington, D.C., as being the most secessionist city in America. The people who eventually take Lincoln's life are never demonized. They, too, have a just cause and are doing their best to bring it to fruition. Young David Herold, through whom this group is most often seen, has to remind



himself that Lincoln is the enemy whenever he seems him up close. He finds the awkward man friendly and attractive.

Structure

Gore Vidal's *Lincoln: A Biography* is, despite its title, a fictional novel about the sixteenth president of the United States. It examines the brief but crucial slice of his life that begins ten days before his second inauguration and ends with his assassination. What he does before the presidency—and the political miracle of him reaching that office—is told in reminiscences by himself, his wife, his political allies and enemies, his eldest son, and his former law partner. These are spread throughout the novel.

The book is divided into three untitled parts. Part 1, consists of twenty untitled chapters of varying lengths. These cover events from Lincoln's furtive arrival in Washington, D.C., ten days before his inauguration, through the disastrous first invasion of Virginia. In Part 1, the personalities of the major and many minor characters are depicted, the points of view in the contentious Cabinet are established, and Lincoln begins to accept that dictatorial measures must be taken. The mood of Part 1 is pessimistic if not fatalistic.

Part 2 consists of twelve untitled chapters that move the action forward to the Union victory at Gettysburg, which nevertheless falls short of a total rout of the Confederate forces. The Conscription Act is causing rioting in New York City; Lincoln's health declines dramatically, and his renomination by the Republic Party—much less his re-election as President—are in danger. Lincoln is content to lose the responsibility but does not want to see all the sacrifice too be in vain. The mood continues pessimistic.

Part 3, also consisting of twelve untitled chapters, brings the story forward to both military and political victory for Lincoln. Although he is skin and bones by the end and has a vision of his own funeral, things are finally going right. He wishes to skip the theater on the last evening of his life, but obliges his wife. The final chapter has Lincoln's secretary, John Hay, in Paris talking to an historian about the aftermath of the assassination and telling why he rates Lincoln above George Washington as the greatest American President.



Quotes

"To Washburne's relief, no one recognized Lincoln. But then he himself had been in a moment's doubt when Lincoln had pushed down his collar, to reveal a short, glossy black beard that entirely changed the shape—and expression of his face.

'Is it false?' Washburn stared hard. They were now standing beneath a huge poster of 'Abraham Lincoln, the President-elect. Welcome to Washington City.' The cleanshaven face of the poster was hard, even harsh-looking, while the bearded face looked weary, but amiable. To Washburne, the President-elect resembled a prosperous, down-state Illinois farmer come to market.

'No, it's real. What you might call an adornment. I had to do something useful on the train from Springfield.' Lincoln leapt to one side as two huge black women carrying a tub of pork sausage meat hurried toward the cars. Then Pinkerton motioned that they were to follow him outside." Part 1, Chapter 1, pg. 12.

"Lincoln stopped; took off his glasses; put the speech into his pocket. As Seward applauded politely, he could not help but think how odd it was that some men have a natural gift for elevated language while others have none at all. Lincoln had made a perfect hash of Seward's most splendid peroration. Since any one of Seward's speeches was apt to sell nearly one million copies, he had, suddenly, the sense of being jilted—worse, of being a great beauty abandoned at the altar by a plain and unworthy man. But Seward would prevail in time. The Albany Plan may have misfired but since the principle of it was still very much in his mind, he had taken back his letter of withdrawal. He would be Secretary of State; and prime minister yet.

Chase turned to Sumner. 'What does he mean?'

Sumner was bemused. 'He will take the South back—slaves and all. Anything to preserve the Union.'" Part 1, Chapter 8, pgs. 105-106.

"Lincoln rose and paced the room. 'I had hoped, Ben,' he said, 'that you and I could reason together. Because the matter is now sorting itself out back home, and that Kentucky will stay in the Union is now about as certain as anything on this earth.'

'I guess you have seen to that, Brother Lincoln.' In the gentle voice there was an edge of menace that made Mary recoil; made Emilie hold her all the tighter.

'I see to nothing. Events see to me. I am acted upon, no more. You have a great career ahead of you. You'll be governor of Kentucky like your grandfather; and maybe more.

Who knows? Who would've dreamt that I'd be here, for all my sins, as it is now proving?'

'Oh, Ben!' said Mary. 'We are so isolated in this place. Father needs you. I need Little Sister. We are without friends; and we are possessed of altogether too many enemies in this rebel city...' Mary stopped; she had said the forbidden word; she could not recall it.

'They are not rebels to us, Sister Mary,' said Emilie. 'They only want to be let go in peace, like us.'" Part 1, Chapter 15, pg. 249.

"No sir. That is not the way things are done. The President told General Scott that the



country could not wait. So General Scott told me to make a plan for an invasion of Virginia, while training thirty thousand men, so that they could then take the field in eight weeks' time.'

'Has he the right?' Kate was sharp.

'Has who the right?' Chase waves his handkerchief at a wasp.

'Mr. Lincoln. After all, he is not a military man, to say the least...'

'He is Commander-in-Chief,' said Chase, glumly.

'He has every right,' said McDowell. 'He also has every responsibility. I don't envy him. He will learn, of course. But then, I suspect, that we will all learn many things that we never knew before. At the moment, he is a politician playing soldier—with real men who are also playing soldier but know nothing of this kind of warfare.'

'But you studied in Paris...' Kate began.

'I studied strategy, Miss Kate. I did not study war.'" Part 1, Chapter 20, pgs. 310-311.

"'I thought you were general-in-chief now.' Washburne carefully stacked the slices of pork to one side of his plate so as to diminish the effect of what otherwise might have looked to be uncontrolled greed.

'Oh, I am that.' Lincoln sighed. 'I also think that I could probably set the army in successful motion. But then I remember that I am only a politician, and must listen to generals, who are never ready to move. The people are impatient. Chase has no money. McClellan has typhoid fever. In the West, Buell and Halleck seem unable to move in concert.' At length, Lincoln complained of the dilatoriness of his expensive generals, and Washburne listened; and helped himself to the last course, apple pie.

'You have other ... maybe cheaper generals,' said Washburne, his mouth full. Lincoln nodded. 'I've been meeting the past two nights with McDowell and Franklin, trying to decide what to do if the rebels happened to attack the Army of the Potomac; trying to decide who should command.'

'What does Mr. Stanton advise?'

'He's not yet part of our councils. He's too busy examining the War Department's expenditures.' Lincoln grimaced. The waiter removed the last plates.

'The Augean stables?'

'Exactly. Unfortunately, our new Hercules is asthmatic...'" Part 2, Chapter 3, pg. 428.

"Lincoln glanced at the papers in his hand. Hay could not for the life of him guess what the Ancient was up to. But Seward knew; had indeed discussed the matter with the President. Chase suspected; and was not most uneasy. In a sense, he himself could—with a stroke of Lincoln's pen—lose his moral superiority to Lincoln. 'As you know, I have said, more than once, if I could preserve the Union by freeing all of the slaves everywhere, I would do so. If I could preserve the Union by freeing some of the slaves but not others, I would do so. Well, I have not the political power to do the first. I have not the inclination nor the need to do the second. So I shall now do the third, as a military necessity.'" Part 2, Chapter 6, pg. 498.

"Hay looked at Lincoln, aware that the President had now spent months talking to



generals, communicating secretly with Winfield Scott at West Point, asking Halleck pointed questions. With Lincoln's eerie bad luck in military matters, Old Brains was now no more than a head clerk. After Pope's debacle at Bull Run, Halleck had simply given up. Once again Lincoln was his own General-in-Chief, supported vigorously by Stanton, the only good thing to have happened to the Tycoon since the war began. But as Hay had said to Nico, two sly lawyers do not an Alexander make; and both agreed that Lincoln's political skill and strength of character were of no use to him when dealing with generals. He simply did not have the experience to know which commander was capable and which was not. He had endured McClellan because Little Mac was good at drill; and a born engineer. Also, there were urgent political reasons for keeping him on; reasons that had now vanished beneath the stack of telegrams on Hay's desk. Lincoln had trusted McDowell; but then obliged him to go into battle with a green army. Lincoln had accepted Pope at Pope's own high evaluation of himself; also, Pope was pleasing to Chase and the radicals. Now the Ancient was faced with a choice between Ambrose E. Burnside and Joseph Hooker. Neither general liked or trusted the other. It was all too reminiscent, thought Hay, of the McClellan-Pope rivalry, which had led to the Union's worst disaster." Part 2, Chapter 8, pgs. 562-563.

"But you do realize, sir, that the city will explode again if you try to impose conscription.' Tilden watched Lincoln's face intently: one lawyer testing another. 'I do not impose conscription, Mr. Tilden. Congress does. The Conscription Act was much debated and thought out. It is not perfect. The Constitution is not perfect either. But at least the Conscription Act was passed almost unanimously. It is the law; and I must execute it.' Seward thought that Lincoln must, presently and characteristically, soften his life. But, to Seward's surprise, Lincoln grew even more hard and legalistic. 'To that end, ten thousand infantrymen are on their way to the city. Also, several artillery batteries.'" Part 2, Chapter 12, pg. 670.

"Lincoln rose, paper in hand; glasses perched on his nose. He was, Hay noted, a ghastly color but the hand that held the paper did not tremble, always the orator's fear. There was a moment of warm—if slightly exhausted by Everett—applause. Then the trumpet-voice sounded across the field of Gettysburg, and thirty thousand people fell silent. While Everett's voice had been like some deep rich cello, Lincoln's voice was like the sound that accompanies the sudden crack of summer lightning. 'Fourscore and seven years ago,' he plunged straight into his subject, 'our fathers brought forth upon this continent a new nation, conceived in liberty and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal.' That will please the radicals, thought Hay. Then he noticed two odd things. First, the Tycoon did not consult the paper in his hand. He seemed, impossibly, to have memorized the text that had been put into final form only an hour or so earlier. Second, the Tycoon was speaking with unusual slowness. He seemed to be firing each word across the battlefield—a rifle salute to the dead? 'Now we are engaged in a great civil war, testing whether that nation—or any nation, so conceived and so dedicated—can long endure.' Seated just to the right of Lincoln, Seward began actually to listen. He had heard so



many thousands of speeches in his life and he had himself given so many thousands that he could seldom actually listen to any speech, including his own. It was as if the President was now trying to justify to the nation and to history and, thought Seward, to God, what he had done." Part 3, Chapter 2, pgs. 712-713.

"But Chase was torn. As the true Republican candidate for president, he could destroy Lincoln. But then would McClellan not destroy him and all the work that the abolitionists had accomplished? Of course if he did nothing he would probably be chief justice. But was it right to do nothing to prevent the reelection of a president whose idiotic notion to colonize the Negroes outside North America was not only immoral but would wreck the national economy? Was it right not to oppose a pro-Southern President who had only that week refused to sign Congress's Reconstruction Bill, which was an outright attack on his own amnesty for the rebels' program? Was it right to permit Lincoln to allow the rebel states, defeated in battle, to return to the Union as if nothing had happened and with slavery, in some way, continued or even briefly condoned?

Chase appealed, silently, to the Lord of Hosts to show him a sign; but all that he got was an historical analogy from Senator Sumner. 'Of all the rulers of recent times that I can recall Lincoln is most like Louis XVI. The storm is all about him, but he does nothing.' 'I had not thought of him as Louis XVI, but it is quite true that when he likes to say "my policy is to have no policy" or "I do not control events, events control me," he certainly resembles that ... headless monarch.'" Part 3, Chapter 4, pg. 791.

"The old man returned with water for the President and whiskey for the general and the admiral. As they toasted victory, Weitzel reported that seven hundred buildings had been destroyed in the city; and that many whites as well as blacks had been left homeless. 'What are your instructions to me, sir, on how I am to treat the local population?'

'Well, I am not ready to give you my final views on the subject but if I were you I'd let 'em up easy.' Lincoln needed; and repeated, 'Let 'em up easy.'

Suddenly, Lincoln looked about the room, as if aware for the first time of the magnitude of what had happened. 'It is so much like a dream,' he said at last, 'but then I dream so much these days that it is hard for me to tell sometimes what is real and what is not.'

'This is real, sir,' said Admiral Porter. 'You are seated in the chair of Jefferson Davis, and he is all but a fugitive from your justice.'

'Lincoln smiled. 'If that is all he has to fear, he would be safe enough. I have no justice, or anything else now. It is fate that guides us all—and necessity. You see, I must be here, just as he must be in flight; just as the war must end.' Lincoln ran one hand across the smooth table top. 'And the Union be so restored that no one will ever be able to see the slightest scar from all this great trouble, that will pass now the way a dream does when you wake at last, from a long night's sleep.'" Part 3, Chapter 10, Pgs. 925-926.

"At that moment, from a distance of five feet, Booth fired a single shot into the back of the President's head. Without a sound, Lincoln leaned back in the chair; and his head slumped to the left until it was stopped by the wooden partition. Mary turned not to



Booth but to her husband, while in the wings, an actor stared, wide-eyed, at the box. He had seen everything.

Major Rathbone threw himself upon Booth, who promptly drove his dagger straight at the young man's heart. But Rathbone's arm deflected the blade. Miss Harris shrieked, as Booth shoved past her and jumped onto the railing of the box. Then, with the sort of athletic gesture that had so delighted his admirers in the same theater, he leapt the twelve feet from box to stage. But, as on several other occasions when Booth's effects proved to be more athletic and improvised than dramatic and calculated, he had not taken into account the silken bunting that decorated the front of the box. The spur of one boot got entangled in the silk, causing him to fall, off-balance, to the stage, where a bone in his ankle snapped.

Rathbone shouted from the box, 'Stop that man!' Booth shouted something unintelligible at the audience; and hurried off the stage." Part 3, Chapter 11, pgs. 946-947.

Topics for Discussion

How are Mary Todd Lincoln's various suitors handled in the novel? Might she have been better off, choosing another?

How are Kate Chase's various suitors handled in the novel? To what extent is she responsible for her own unhappiness and to what extent manipulated by her father and husband?

Lincoln claims that events act on him. Do you accept this? To what extent is Lincoln passive and to what extent active?

How does the election of 1862 depict political corruption? What is the Army's part in it? What is Lincoln's?

Lincoln dreams about seeing himself laid out dead in the White House and Hay believes that he wills his death as atonement for the war. How do you view the mystical elements in this novel?

How do political "dirty tricks" in the 1860s compare with those in modern times? Pick one of the tricks that Vidal describes and analyze its potential for good and evil.

To what uses is Tad Lincoln put throughout the novel?

How would you describe Lincoln's religious faith from this novel. Does it differ from what you have been taught elsewhere?