Lincoln Study Guide

Lincoln by David Herbert Donald

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

"Lincoln" by Donald Herbert Davis is a biography of President Abraham Lincoln, who was born in February,1809 and assassinated in April, 1865. In his comprehensive look at Lincoln's life, Donald draws directly from Lincoln's own papers as well as from the written first-hand accounts of his contemporaries whenever possible. He carefully dispels some of the many myths that have arisen about Lincoln and provides evidence and examples of the ways in which Lincoln changed the role of President.

Donald tracks Lincoln from his poor roots in Kentucky to his young adulthood as a shopkeeper, surveyor, postmaster and finally lawyer in Illinois. He describes Lincoln's intense desire to escape the life of hard manual labor lived by his father, despite the later depiction by his political backers as a "rail-splitter" who did not shirk hard work. Lincoln's unremarkable early political career as a state legislator and then US Representative is described as well as his failed bid to be appointed senator for Illinois, which led to his famous debates with Stephen Douglas.

Lincoln is instrumental in the formation of the Republican Party, and Donald describes his exceeding ability in party politics, which leads eventually to his nomination as election as President. Donald carefully reconstructs the volatile political climate of Lincoln's day. Although he is widely accepted now as a national hero, Lincoln in his time faced considerable political opposition even from members of his own cabinet.

The major event of Lincoln's presidency is of course the American Civil War, and Donald depicts the emotional and physical strain the war has on Lincoln as he faces uncooperative generals, a bickering cabinet, a Congress that opposes him and a sometimes hostile public.

Throughout his book, Donald charts Lincoln's shifts of position on the issue of slavery and political equality for blacks, and to his change in the stated purpose of the war, which begins as as a fight to restore the Union and becomes in Lincoln's mind a fight for freedom and the end of slavery. These shifts cost Lincoln politically, but he manages to capitalize on a division among Democrats to win re-election.

In the final chapter, Donald brings the final threads of Lincoln's life together. The war is ended and Lincoln has set the country on the path toward reunification. The defeat of the South and his re-election are too much to take for some, such as the young John Wilkes Booth, who seeks to avenge the South by killing Lincoln. Donald chronicles Lincoln's last day, a day in which he seems in an unusually good mood, and a day which ends with his assassination at the hands of Booth.

Chapters 1-2

Chapters 1-2 Summary and Analysis

The opening chapter, "Annals of the Poor," summarizes Lincoln's childhood years from his birth in 1809. Little is known about his ancestry, and Donald suggests that Lincoln himself was not very interested in it, except to point out that his grandmother was quite probably illegitimate and that he believed he may have received a strain of independence from her.

While the Lincoln family was fairly prosperous, Lincoln's father, Thomas is left to make his own way after his brother inherits the family property. Thomas leads his family from Virginia to Kentucky to Indiana, always looking for a better opportunity. Young Abraham Lincoln receives very little schooling in his early childhood and is expected to share in the hard work of subsistence farming.

Lincoln grows restless as a teenager and begins to conflict with his father. In later years, Donald mentions, Lincoln would seldom have anything positive to say about his father. Lincoln's mother dies after the family settles in Indiana and his father re-marries a woman who has three children of her own. The two families blend harmoniously and Lincoln's stepmother is kind and supportive. Donald does not try to read too much into Lincoln's loss of his mother as far as it molds his character as a sometimes depressed and moody adult.

Lincoln has a desire to escape the life of hard labor lived by his father, Donald explains, and takes on jobs like transporting goods to market by river. As long as he is under 21, however, he is legally required to turn over his earnings to his father.

As the chapter ends, Lincoln is nearing the age of 21, when he will be legally free of his obligation to his father. He helps his father and family move to Illinois in 1830 where he shows his first hint of an interest in politics when he makes a public political speech.

Chapter 2 is entitled "A Piece of Floating Driftwood," a phrase of Lincoln's describing how he came to settle in New Salem, Illinois on the Sangamon River almost by accident. Donald also uses the phrase to invoke Lincoln's apparent aimlessness during his young adulthood. He first finds steady work managing a store, but when the unreliable owner of the store goes bankrupt, he is out of work. He enlists in the militia and is elected to lead his company of volunteers in the Black Hawk war, the first election he ever wins. After his brief and undistinguished military career, he opens a store of his own with a partner named Berry. This enterprise also fails. He decides to run for the state legislature and is defeated, despite strong support from his home county.

It is during this period in New Salem that Lincoln begins to develop his intellect through self study, Donald writes. He spends any free time reading books and newspapers, teaching himself the elements of grammar. After his defeat in the election for the

legislature, Lincoln is appointed postmaster for New Salem, which provides a small income. To supplement it, he teaches himself to survey by reading books. When he is elected to the legislature on his second attempt, he begins to study law.

Lincoln does not distinguish himself in his first session as a legislator, Donald writes, seeming to prefer to listen and learn at first. Lincoln becomes engaged to a New Salem woman named Ann Rutledge, but this ends when she dies of typhoid. After this, Donald suggests. Lincoln's attentions turn increasingly away from New Salem, which has started to decline, and toward his career as a politician. Lincoln begins to campaign strongly for two causes, a state-sponsored slate of expensive improvements to railways and rivers intended to connect more of Illinois with the trade of the Mississippi, and the relocation of the state capital from Vandalia to Springfield.

While the plan for improvements is halted when the state hits economic trouble, the plan to move the capital is successful. Donald ends the chapter as Lincoln is licensed to practice law and leaves New Salem to live in Springfield.

Chapters 3-4

Chapters 3-4 Summary and Analysis

Donald entitles the third chapter "Cold, Calculating, Unimpassioned Reason," a quote from Lincoln describing how he feels the decisions of leaders should be made. Donald points out that during this time in Lincoln's early political career he often seems to be ruled by his passions and sometimes lets his temper get the better of him in public exchanges with political opponents.

The chapter covers the time of Lincoln's life from his arrival in Springfield and his marriage. Lincoln finds lodging sharing a room with a storekeeper named Joshua Speed, with whom he becomes close friends. He becomes a partner with John Todd Stuart in a law firm that provides him with some income in addition to his salary as a legislator. Based in Sangamon County, Lincoln's practice also requires him to follow the district judge as he travels around the state, taking on clients in the local towns.

As a legislator and member of the Whig party, Lincoln continues to support the plans for internal improvements to Illinois' transportation routes and to strengthen the role of Springfield. Lincoln becomes a key organizer in Whig party politics, and his importance begins to rise within the party.

It is also during this time that he becomes engaged to a woman named Mary Owens, a relative of a family Lincoln knows from New Salem. Lincoln has second thoughts after committing to the engagement tries to tactfully convince Owens to break off their engagement. This she does, and he is surprised to find himself somewhat hurt by her rejection.

Lincoln meets Mary Todd, a charming young woman with many suitors. They become engaged, but again Lincoln calls it off, entering into a deep depression that frightens some of his friends, Donald writes. They eventually repair the rift and restore their engagement. The chapter ends as they are married.

Chapter 4 is entitled "Always a Whig" and covers the period of Lincoln's marriage in 1842 until he is elected to Congress in 1846. The Lincolns have a son, Edward, and move into a small house. Lincoln joins another law practice with Stephen Logan and then leaves it to start his own firm with a young lawyer named William Herndon.

Lincoln puts his organizational and political skills to good use within the Whig party and wins the nomination to run for Representative to the US Congress. He wins the election in 1846, and the chapter ends as he prepares to take his family to Washington.

Chapters 5-6

Chapters 5-6 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 5 is entitled "Lone Star of Illinois" and refers to Lincoln's term as the sole Whig in the Illinois delegation to Congress in 1847. While the Whigs have a slight majority in the House of Representatives, the President, James Polk, is a Democrat and so their power is limited. Lincoln works hard within his party and is instrumental in the campaign to elect Zachary Taylor as President.

As Representative, Lincoln speaks out against the origins of the Mexican War, criticizing Polk for what he suggested was an unlawful declaration of war. This position would come back to haunt him in the future, Donald writes. The choice of Taylor as a Whig candidate is made partly to undo the damage from the Whig position on the war, as Taylor is a celebrated veteran of that campaign.

In Illinois, as elsewhere, Lincoln finds the Whig party divided among itself. Slavery and abolition are two of the contentious issues dividing the party. At this point in his life, Lincoln is against slavery and the expansion of the practice into the new territories and states, but he finds the agitating methods of the abolitionists distasteful. He claims that if slavery is not allowed to expand, it will eventually die away.

The Whig candidate selected to succeed Lincoln loses to the Democrat candidate in 1848, and Lincoln prepares to return to Springfield with his family. He attempts to secure a position in the Federal Land Office, but is passed over by President Taylor. He is later offered the position of Governor of the Oregon Territory, but declines it. He returns to Springfield and takes up his law practice again.

Chapter 6 covers Lincoln's success as a hard-working lawyer in Springfield and the surrounding area. With his partner William Herndon, Lincoln expands his practice and begins to argue important cases that stem for the expansion of the railroad, sometimes representing the railroads, sometimes their opponents.

It is during this period that Lincoln's father dies. He does not attend the funeral. Lincoln's eldest child, Edward also dies. Mary Lincoln is soon expecting again, however, and two more children are born, Thomas and William, called "Tad" and "Willie." The expansion of the railroad means Lincoln can travel the court circuit and still be home weekends, and he uses the opportunity to spend more time with his family, Donald writes. Mary Lincoln is a loving wife and mother, he explains, but has a terrible temper that sometimes flares up violently. Lincoln takes it in stride, however.

Through the words of Lincoln's law partner, Herndon, the two younger Lincoln boys are described as unruly and never disciplined by Lincoln. Herndon also has unkind words for Mary Lincoln, who in turn does not like him much. Donald suggests that this tension may have spurred each to greater affection for Lincoln and worked to his advantage.

By the end of the period, Lincoln is described by one of his contemporaries as "at the head of his profession in his state," a quote used by Donald to title the chapter. His reputation as someone completely honest builds, and he gains the nickname "Honest Abe."

Chapters 7-8

Chapters 7-8 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 is called "There Are No Whigs" and continues to follow Lincoln in "retirement" from politics as he builds his successful legal practice. Lincoln is not absent from politics for long, however, and takes an active role in campaigning for Whig candidates, delivering speeches in favor of Winfield Scott, the Whig candidate for president in 1852. His support is lackluster, however, Donald writes.

The galvanizing issue that returns Lincoln to politics, Donald explains, is the introduction of the Kansas-Nebraska Act by Lincoln's longtime Illinois Democrat opponent Stephen Douglas, who is serving as a US Senator. The Kansas-Nebraska Act, also called simply the Nebraska Act, calls for "popular sovereignty" in the new territories of Kansas and Nebraska that would allow the people of those territories to decide for themselves whether slavery would be allowed.

The issue of slavery and its spread into the new territories of the United States brings together people of different parties who oppose the spread of slavery for different reasons. Lincoln becomes active in his opposition, giving several speeches alongside Stephen Douglas, who defends his idea of "popular sovereignty." The Whig party, already greatly divided on many issues, begins to decline in importance while a new party, called the Republican party, is founded centered on the slavery issue. Lincoln, once a staunch Whig, finds himself nominated by this new party as a candidate for the state legislature.

Lincoln wins the election, but he declines to serve because he has his eye on the vacant US Senator position that is to be filled by the Illinois legislature. The state seat goes to a Democrat and Lincoln eventually is not offered the Senate seat. He puts his energies into developing a platform for the new Republican party, and is considered for the Vice Presidential nomination in the election of 1856. He is not nominated, however, and returns to his legal practice.

Chapter 8 is entitled "A House Divided" in reference to a well-known biblical reference used by Lincoln which goes, "A house divided against itself cannot stand." It is during the period covered in this chapter that Lincoln makes one of the first uses of this phrase to refer to the increasingly contentious issue of the expansion of slavery in the U.S.

After his political failures, Lincoln is back working hard at his law practice while also laboring to strengthen the Republican party prior to the general election in 1858. The prime target is the U.S. Senate seat held by the Democrat Stephen Douglas. Lincoln makes it known early on that he wants to take the seat himself for the Republicans.

At this time in history, senators are not directly elected but are selected by the state legislators. Thus winning a senate seat requires the election and support of the state

legislators. With this goal in mind, Lincoln challenges Stephen Douglas to a series of debates to take place around the state.

Douglas agrees, and the two men undertake a grueling series of stops. The debates center mostly on the subject of slavery and its expansion, with Douglas holding to his ideal of popular sovereignty and Lincoln accusing him of wanting to preserve and spread slavery even to free states. In turn, Douglas accuses Lincoln of being allied with the abolitionists and advocating for political and social equality for blacks. Each denies the others' accusations, with Lincoln pointedly proclaiming that he does not consider blacks equal to whites in intelligence or morality. It is during these debates that Donald identifies a shift in Lincoln's public stance on slavery. For the first time he openly acknowledges that he feels slavery is wrong, and he frames the difference between his Republican platform and the Democratic platform as a difference between those who feel it is wrong and those who feel it is not wrong.

The general election does not indicate that the debates had any great effect on voting patterns from earlier elections. The Democrats remain strong in the southern counties while the Republicans do better in the more populated northern counties. The Democrats retain a majority of the legislature and choose Douglas for another term in the Senate.

Once again Lincoln is defeated, and Donald describes his depression and moodiness at the result. Lincoln does not give up on his political aspirations, however.

Chapters 9-10

Chapters 9-10 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9 is entitled "The Taste Is In My Mouth," and refers to a quote from Lincoln after he begins to explore the possibility of running for president on the Republican ticket. This chapter covers the time period between Lincoln's defeat in his bid for Douglas' senate seat in 1858 and his election to the presidency in 1860.

During this time Lincoln works hard to bring the Republican party together as a unified voice despite the frequent disagreements between its members. He continues to give variations on the speeches he offered during the debates with Douglas and starts to enjoy a reputation outside of Illinois. He is asked to deliver an address in New York City at the Cooper Union before several influential Republicans and other politically important people. The speech is a grand success, and he delivers similar talks while in the East that are also widely praised. He begins to feel he may be able to garner support among the important eastern states for a presidential bid.

Lincoln surrounds himself with several advisers, many of whom do not get along with one another but are individually devoted to Lincoln. With their help, Lincoln is able to gain the Republican nomination for president over the initial favorite, William Seward. Lincoln's running mate is Hannibal Hamlin, a former Democrat from Maine.

The tradition at the time, Donald explains, is not for the candidate to personally spend much time campaigning, leaving that to his supporters. Some of Lincoln's supporters, looking for a memorable way to refer to him, discover an old rail fence that he once helped build 30 years previously. They seize on the opportunity to define Lincoln as a self-made man who built himself up from humble beginnings through hard labor. While Lincoln did not play down the characterization, Donald explains, he had actually been very eager to escape manual labor like rail splitting.

As Lincoln's influence rises during this period, he is also rising in his success as a lawyer. Soon he is making a comfortable living and Mary expands and redecorates their small house in Springfield, making it more suitable for entertaining the increasingly steady stream of visitors. In 1860, Lincoln is elected president, confiding in his friends that he does not know if he is adequate to the job.

Chapter 10 is entitled "An Accidental Instrument," referring to Lincoln's attitude that his election was more a matter of circumstance than a referendum on his personal character.

As Lincoln prepares for his inauguration, he opens an office in Springfield, where he receives a long line of people wishing to be given appointments by the new president. He begins to formulate an inauguration address that will outline his policies regarding the increasingly tense question of slavery. Lincoln also starts to think about who he will

ask to serve in his cabinet. In the period prior to his inauguration, he is careful to make no public statements or speeches.

Lincoln draws up a list of potential appointees to his cabinet, deliberately including men from different political backgrounds and other parts of the country. After much maneuvering and advice from his friends Lincoln offers the office of Secretary of State to William Seward, who does not immediately accept. Seward is a political enemy of Salmon Chase, who Lincoln intends to offer the Secretary of the Treasury job.

At the end of 1860, before Lincoln takes office, several southern states, alarmed at his election, hold conventions and formally declare their secession from the Union. Federal arsenals and military installations in the south are seized by the seceding states, leaving only a few outposts still manned by federal troops.

One of these installations is Fort Sumter, off the coast of South Carolina, which is effectively besieged by South Carolina and unable to receive provisions.

Meanwhile, Lincoln and his family board a special train bound for Washington. Along the route Lincoln greets the crowds that come to see the train, but still avoids making any political statements. He draws criticism toward the end of the journey when he is warned of a possible plot to assassinate him in Baltimore. Wearing a disguise, he leaves the presidential train and travels the remainder of the trip by night. In his inauguration speech, he outlines his policy that the Union must be preserved, but is careful to qualify any suggestion that he is advocating military action against the South. He still believes that secession is a bargaining move by the South, Donald writes, and that it can be resolved.

But the crisis in the South continues to build, and Lincoln is forced to deal with it even before his cabinet has been confirmed by the Congress. At issue is whether to attempt to supply provisions to Fort Sumter, knowing that this might be considered by the South an aggressive act. Lincoln's cabinet is divided on the matter, and he asks them to provide their opinions to him in writing. Finally, he decides to authorize two missions to re-provision Fort Sumter and also Fort Pickens in Florida. As a concession to Seward, the Secretary of State, Lincoln gives advance warning to the Governor of South Carolina of the mission to send supplies to Fort Sumpter. In response, on April 12, 1861, the Confederate army began firing on Fort Sumter, marking the beginning of the Civil War.

Chapters 11-12

Chapters 11-12 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 11 is entitled "A People's Contest." With the outbreak of war, Lincoln's path is cleared. Initially, the public seems optimistic that the rebellious states will rapidly be brought to submission.

Building an army proves difficult for Lincoln. Volunteers from the free states are steady, but one of the first obstacles in bringing them to the capital is Maryland, which has a large number of of pro-South citizens who attempt to stop the movement of troops through the state. The other border stats hang in the balance, and keeping them loyal to the Union occupies much of Lincoln's time and drives his policies.

Union troops suffer an early defeat at Bull Run, indicating that the war may not be over as soon as many expect. Support for Lincoln, originally strong, begins to weaken as very little action seems to be taken by General George McClellan, who commands the Army of the Potomac. Lincoln faces further challenges in a poorly-run War Office, led by Simon Cameron, a political appointee with little experience. A risky political situation with Great Britain arises when two Confederate officers are seized from a British ship. As support for Lincoln and McClellan erodes, Congress begins a formal investigation into the administration.

Chapter 12 is called "The Bottom is Out of the Tub," taken from a pessimistic declaration by Lincoln regarding the prospects of mounting a successful military operation to end the rebellion.

Under pressure to take action, Lincoln is frustrated by the apparent inaction of McClellan, who, distrustful of the President and Congress, does not share his plans with them. Lincoln bolsters his support in the North by encouraging the border states to emancipate their slaves and supporting legislation that would compensate states that take this step. He is not yet ready to proclaim all slaves free, however, afraid that to do so would lose him the support of the border states and turn the war from one of preserving the Union to one of abolishing slavery.

Lincoln replaces Cameron with Edward Stanton and changes the command structure of the army. The Union begins to have some important military victories despite increasing tension between Congress, the President, his advisers and generals.

It is during these early months of the war that the Lincolns' son, Willie, dies of typhoid, sending Lincoln into one of his regular bouts of deep depression.

Chapters 13-14

Chapters 13-14 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 13 is called "An Instrument in God's Hands," referring to what Donald calls Lincoln's "fatalism" in his view of the prospects of ending the war with the Union intact.

The period covered by the chapter begins at the summer of 1862, when things are not going well for Lincoln and the Union army. Lincoln's generals, especially McClellan, remain obstinate and do not carry out Lincoln's plans. He shakes up the command structure by sending the aggressive John Pope to the field and appointing Henry Halleck general-in-chief.

Lincoln also privately begins working on what will become the Emancipation Proclamation. Publicly, he professes that his main purpose is to preserve the Union and that the abolition of slavery is not necessarily required to accomplish this. To the more radical abolitionist factions in the North, he signals his personal opposition to slavery, but by shrewdly separating it from the matter of preserving the Union, he calms the border states who fear he intends to free their slaves.

Donald writes that Lincoln does indeed intend to emancipate the slaves, but keeps his intentions private, waiting for a major victory by the Union before addressing the subject more openly, so as not to make the move look like an act of desperation. Unfortunately, the Union forces continue to struggle.

Facing increasing pressure from the public to act, Lincoln decides that he will seek " an indication of Divine will" (p. 374) on the question of emancipation. He looks to the upcoming battle between McClellan's and Lee's forces at Antietam, vowing that if the Union wins it, he will consider it a sign to move forward with emancipation. This he does, presenting his proclamation to his cabinet in September, 1862.

Chapter 14 is entitled "A Pumpkin in Each End of My Bag," and refers to Lincoln's description of balancing the often opposing members of his cabinet and close advisers.

At first, Donald writes, the reaction to the Emancipation Proclamation is enthusiastically positive among the anti-slavery factions and others in the North. Reaction in the South is predictably negative. As time goes by, however, criticism of the proclamation arises that it does not go far enough. It only applies to slaves in states rebellion, for example, and does not free slaves or prohibit slavery in other states. The proclamation is also mainly only symbolic, as there is no way to enforce it behind Confederate lines.

Lincoln faces the declining popularity of the Republican party in the 1862 elections. Distracted by the demands of the war, Lincoln does not participate in any campaigning for Republican candidates, leading to some animosity from some members of his party.

Lincoln also sees his standing with the army decline even further. Word that many officers are openly questioning his ability and authority to lead, Lincoln grows suspicious of General McClellan. After yet another refusal to advance, Lincoln finally removes McClellan, replacing him with Henry Halleck and appointing new generals who share his more aggressive strategy for waging the war.

In Minnesota, a band of Sioux Indians attack and kill a group of settlers. The US sends troops to attack the Sioux in retribution and to prevent future attacks. Hundreds of Sioux are captured and tried by the military, and over 300 are sentenced to be executed. Lincoln intercedes, personally reviewing the cases of each of the condemned Sioux. He reduces the number of death sentences to 38.

Lincoln's practice of surrounding himself with cabinet members of opposing viewpoints and different backgrounds creates difficulties for him when members of Congress begin to believe rumors circulated by Salmon Chase, the Secretary of the Treasury, that Lincoln generally ignores the advice of his cabinet and is unduly influenced by William Seward, who is the Secretary of State and a political enemy of Chase. An effort to replace Lincoln's entire cabinet is undertaken and both Seward and Chase offer their resignations to the President. Lincoln declines to accept and restores order to his cabinet by inviting the most vocal Congressional critics to meet with him and his cabinet and to ask each cabinet member whether these rumors were true.

The military campaign continues to struggle as General Burnside, now commanding the Army of the Potomac, suffers a major defeat at Fredericksberg.

Chapters 15-16

Chapters 15-16 Summary and Analysis

"What Will the Country Say!" is the title of Chapter 15, and is taken from the desperate pronouncement by Lincoln on receipt of the news that the Union had lost a major battle at Chancellorsville.

Donald writes that the first half of 1863 is a low point for Lincoln's administration. Although he has averted the crisis of the dissolution of his cabinet, he "still had much to learn about how to be President" (p. 408). In the field, the Union forces make little headway, hampered by generals who are sometimes more concerned in fighting over personal issues with other generals than in attacking Confederate troops. General Burnside loses the support of his subordinate generals, who will not agree to his plans for attack. Lincoln eventually replaces him with General Joseph Hooker.

With most of his attention directed toward the war, Lincoln leaves matters of foreign affairs mainly to Secretary Seward. The conflict threatens international relations mainly because of the Union blockade of Confederate ports that prevents raw goods from the South, primarily cotton, to reach the industrial mills of France and Great Britain. Some pressure is applied from these countries, as well as from within the US, to appoint a foreign arbiter to settle the conflict. Horace Greeley, the outspoken editor of the New York Tribune, goes so far as to try to set up negotiations on his own to force Lincoln to accept international mediation of the conflict. Meanwhile, Lincoln, with the direction of Charles Sumner, begins to cultivate support among the British people for preservation of the Union and the end of slavery.

Lincoln is embattled from all sides. The western states, cut off from regular trade routes by the Confederate control of the Mississippi, become increasingly discontented, and there is talk of their own separation from the Union. Perhaps the most controversial domestic issue is Lincoln's suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. This is a constitutional guarantee that citizens cannot be held without due process, including a charge. The constitution enables the President to suspend this right during time of war, which Lincoln does. As a result, many people are imprisoned for speaking out openly against the Union cause or the administration. When a sitting Democratic Representative from Ohio, Clement Vallandigham, gives a rousing speech opposing "King Lincoln" and ridiculing General Burnside, he is arrested and tried by a military tribunal and imprisoned. Democrats especially are openly critical of the President's actions in suppressing free speech and criticism of the administration. Lincoln responds that he, too, supports the Constitution, which grants him such powers, arguing that the conflict before the country warrants his actions.

From within his own party, dissension continues to grow and Republicans. Attacked from all sides, Donald writes that Lincoln becomes physically haggard. Mary Lincoln, who continues to mourn for the loss of their son, Willie, withdraws from all but the

essential public duties of entertaining at the White House. The distance between Lincoln and his wife increases, as her indiscretion prevents him from sharing many of the details of his day in fear that she might repeat them to her friends where they might make way to his political enemies.

Lincoln continues to face the problem of generals who will not take orders. Donald writes that Lincoln is learning a good deal about military strategy. He is optimistic that General Hooker shares his opinion that the whole Army of the Potomac should be mobilized in a major offensive, but when the time comes, Hooker pushes on with only two-thirds of his men and suffers a demoralizing defeat at Chancellorsville. Lincoln is nearly distraught, Donald writes, uttering the words that he takes for the title of the chapter.

The title of Chapter 16, "A New Birth of Freedom" is taken from Lincoln's most famous oration, the Gettysburg Address given at the dedication of the cemetery at the battlefield near Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. In this chapter, Donald examines the events surrounding the address and notes that it seems to indicate a shift in Lincoln's thinking about the cause for which the Union is fighting.

Lincoln still faces problems with the chain of command of the Union armies following the defeat at Chancellorsville. General Joseph Hooker, now in charge of the Army of the Potomac, does not seem to have learned from his mistakes and continues to make what Lincoln fears are unwise plans. Lincoln replaces him with General George Meade. Under Meade, the Union is able to repulse an attack by Lee's army at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

Donald writes that Lincoln begins to learn the importance of addressing public opinion during this period. Lincoln's attitude previously was that once elected, his days of addressing the public directly were over and that his job was to be President. Embattled from all sides, Lincoln decides to write an open letter explaining his stand on civil liberties and his suspension of the writ of habeas corpus. He is pleased to find that his letter is well-received and widely reprinted. He writes another in defense of the arrest and trial of Vallandigham.

When Lincoln is asked to provide some remarks at the dedication of a cemetery at the battlefield at Gettysburg, he welcomes the opportunity to provide a public pronouncement of his general thoughts on the war. Knowing he will speak after the main oration given by Edward Everett, Lincoln begins to draft a short speech. The importance of the speech, Donald argues, is not in its immediate impact, but in Lincoln's signaling that the war is not only about preserving the Union, but is also about equality and freedom.

The West continues to be a problem for Lincoln. Communications are hampered by the great distances, and for long stretches Lincoln is unaware of the location and activities of General Grant, who commands an army there. When Grant resurfaces with a string of important victories, Lincoln is pleased. It is rare good news for a man who is attacked from all sides.

Chapters 17-18

Chapters 17-18 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 17 is called "The Greatest Question Ever Presented to Practical Statesmanship," referring to the question of the practical matter of providing a way for the rebellious states to re-join the Union. Lincoln begins to think about this issue well before victory is assured.

The chapter begins in the fall of 1863, in the period following the Gettysburg Address. He is now in a "commanding political position," Donald writes (p. 467), owing partly to the success of his recent public letters. People begin to mention the possibility of Lincoln running for reelection. only one president prior to Lincoln, Andrew Jackson, had ever served two terms, and it is something of a tradition that a president not run for reelection.

It is also considered inappropriate for a sitting president to openly campaign or seek to be nominated. Lincoln lets it be known to his friends and advisers that he would welcome the nomination, however, and soon the effort is underway on his behalf.

Lincoln's chief rival for the nomination is Treasury Secretary Salmon Chase, a member of his own cabinet who was instrumental in the near dissolution of the cabinet earlier. Chase has his backers, but Lincoln and his supporters effectively shut down his candidacy, causing Chase to withdraw his name from consideration and clearing the way for Lincoln to receive the nomination of the Union party, which is the name under which the Republican party is now operating.

The reconstruction issue is widely discussed, especially as it is seen that it will be an important issue in the presidential election. Lincoln endorses a plan where a state can rejoin the Union after setting up a government that has been elected by men who have taken an oath of loyalty to the Union and sworn not to interfere with the emancipation of the slaves. For such an election to be valid, at least 10 percent of the eligible voters based on the 1860 elections must participate. For this reason it is called the "10 percent plan." Louisiana is the first state to form a government under the plan and elect representatives to Congress.

Impressed by General Grant's successes in the West, Lincoln places him in control of the Union forces and brings him east, but only after ascertaining that Grant does not intend to run against him for president. Donald suggests that much of Grant's success in the West is due to his distance from Lincoln and his advisers, insulating him from their constant efforts to shape military strategy.

Chapter 18 is entitled "It Was Not Best to Swap Horses," which is Lincoln's self-deprecating response to the news that he is almost certain to be nominated to run for

President in 1864. Lincoln and his advisers pull together a coalition of conservative and more radical Republicans to ensure him the position.

Chase continues to oppose the President's policies and his backers continue to suggest he may oppose Lincoln for the nomination. Lincoln comes under increasing pressure to remove Chase from his cabinet. When a dispute arises over a treasury appointment in new York, he has his chance. When Chase tries to intimidate the President by offering once again to resign, Lincoln astonishes him by accepting his resignation. Lincoln replaces him with William Pitt Fessenden.

Lincoln faces a challenge from Congress to his "10 percent plan" for allowing states to re-join the Union. Opponents want to raise the requirement to 50 percent and require a more stringent oath of loyalty stating that a man had never voluntarily fought against the Union. A bill with these provisions passes Congress and is given to Lincoln, but he does not sign it. Lincoln "pocket vetoes" the bill by leaving it unsigned until the congressional session ends, killing the bill.

The Union armies under Grant suffer enormous casualties and the strain of the bloodshed takes a toll on Lincoln, Donald writes. He frequently finds comfort in reading the Bible, although Donald notes he does not formally belong to a church. By early 1864, Lincoln is deeply depressed.

Chapters 19-20

Chapters 19-20 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 19 is entitled "I Am Pretty Sure-Footed," and is a quote from a story by Lincoln relating how, for being somewhat awkward, he is able to avoid falling.

As Lincoln's depression worsens, the fighting worsens in the summer of 1864 until Washington itself is threatened by Confederate troops. The threat is repulsed, but Lincoln's impatience grows with General Grant and he sends him a pointed message that he expects Grant to pursue and defeat the Confederate army, not merely defend against its attacks. Grant appoints Philip Sheridan to command the armies of the Shenandoah Valley.

Lincoln is put in a difficult position by the editor Horace Greeley, who informs the President that a party of Confederate representatives are in Canada, near the border, willing to speak to a Union representative about terms of a possible peace settlement. Lincoln, suspecting that the real purpose of the representatives being in Canada is to work against his re-election in the North, sends them a letter, by way of Greeley and his secretary John Hay, offering safe conduct to any representative who will offer peace on terms of the "integrity of the whole Union and the abandonment of slavery" (p. 522). Lincoln does not expect the Confederate representatives to accept his offer.

Lincoln's letter outlining his terms for peace is made public, and causes widespread comment. It is noteworthy because it seems to call for the end of slavery as a condition for the end of the war and suggests a shift in Lincoln's thinking that the war is no longer simply a fight to preserve the Union but also about freeing the slaves. Democrats as well as many Republicans are openly scornful of Lincoln's apparent suggestion. Radical Republicans begin to meet with the intention of rescinding Lincoln's nomination and putting forward someone like Chase or Grant. Chase declines and Grant assures Lincoln he has no desire to run, and the effort goes nowhere.

Lincoln's chances for re-election brighten, however, when the Democrats, themselves divided over the issue of the war and the conditions for peace, nominate a War Democrat, General George McClellan, to run against Lincoln but on a platform of peace. McClellan accepts the nomination but says he cannot support the peace plank, considering it an insult to the fighting men. McClellan's weak position is made more tenuous when the Union scores a major victory in Georgia and captures Atlanta.

Lincoln next turns to the reunification of the Republican Party. Always adept at political matters, Lincoln is able to rally support from the factions of the party that have opposed him. He does not openly campaign for re-election, letting his backers build up support while he sends key supporters to areas where Republican support might be shored up. On election night, Lincoln sits in the telegraph office of the War Department receiving returns by telegraph and learning that he has been re-elected.

Chapter 20, "With Charity for All," covers the period following Lincoln's re-election. He finds he is able to count on Congress for broader support of his policies. Congress finally pass the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, abolishing slavery, and refer it to the states for ratification. The Union armies have the Confederates on the run and the Confederacy begins to explore ways to end the war. For those still opposed to Lincoln and what they consider his abuses of power and support for abolition, his re-election is nearly unbearable. He begins to receive threats on his life.

Chapter 21

Chapter 21 Summary and Analysis

The final chapter is called "I Will Take Care of Myself," which is Lincoln's response to the Secretary of War who warns him against visiting the captured Confederate capital of Richmond. As soon as the route is secured, Lincoln makes his way to the former capital of the Confederate states, meeting with his generals to discuss the probable defeat of the South and the terms for peace.

When General Lee surrenders at Appomattox, the nation is jubilant. The necessity of how the former Confederate states will be let back into the Union is now a reality, and Lincoln balances several plans, including those that would temporarily recognize Confederate legislatures for the purpose of voting to re-join the Union. In a public speech given at the White House, Lincoln even broaches the subject of extending voting rights to free blacks. In the audience at this speech is John Wilkes Booth.

Booth is from Maryland, a northerner who supports the cause of the South. He and others scheme at first to kidnap the President, but the plan changes to an assassination plot extended to include Vice President Johnson and Secretary of State Seward. On the evening of April 14, 1865, Booth shoots Lincoln while he is watching a play at Ford's Theater in Washington. Lincoln is taken to a house nearby, where he clings to life for several hours, dying the next morning.

Characters

Abraham Lincoln

The 16th President of the United States and the main subject of the biography. Lincoln is born February 12, 1809 and dies April 15, 1865 after being shot by John Wilkes Booth while watching a play at Ford's Theater in Washington. Born in Kentucky, Lincoln's family moves to Illinois while he is young. He becomes a lawyer in Springfield, Illinois and is instrumental in the founding of the Republican party, which nominates him to run for President in 1860. He is elected and is immediately faced with the secession of several southern states, precipitating the Civil War. Lincoln overcomes considerable opposition and many obstacles, but is eventually elected to a second term and oversees the surrender of the Confederacy to the Union. He is assassinated in 1865 at the hands of Booth, a northerner who sympathizes with the South and considers Lincoln a tyrant.

Mary Todd Lincoln

Lincoln's wife. Born and raised among a well-to-do family in Kentucky, Mary Lincoln social prospects diminish at first when she marries the self-taught Lincoln who comes from a poor farming background. As Lincoln rises in prominence as a lawyer and then politician, Mary is able to assume the role of entertainer and mother in increasingly better fashion. Once Lincoln assumes the presidency, Mary Lincoln takes it upon herself to lavishly decorate the White House and supply herself with expensive clothing, putting the family in debt. While she occupies one of the highest social positions in the country, she still feels she is looked down upon for coming from Kentucky.

Mary suffers a great deal emotionally at the loss of two of their four children. Donald describes episodes when she becomes distraught with uncontrolled emotion. She is sometimes jealous of others who demand her husband's attention and treats them with open scorn. Mary is present with Lincoln when he is shot and remains with him until he dies the next morning.

William Seward

A US Senator and former Governor of New York and Lincoln's appointed Secretary of State. Seward is a controversial figure for his outspoken opposition to slavery and his assumed influence on Lincoln. He is a political rival of Salmon Chase, Lincoln's Treasury Secretary, who schemes to have Seward removed from his office.

Salmon Chase

Lincoln's Treasury Secretary. Chase frequently opposes Lincoln's policies and seeks to run against him for the Republican nomination in 1864. Chase is eventually allowed to

resign his cabinet position after his division with Lincoln becomes too great. Lincoln later appoints him Chief Justice of the US Supreme Court, apparently in return for Chase's support during Lincoln's campaign for reelection.

George McClellan

Union general in charge of the Army of the Potomac. An ambitious young man, McClellan draws Lincoln's ire for not waging war as aggressively as Lincoln would wish. McClellan is eventually replaced and later nominated by the Democrats to run against Lincoln for president in 1864.

Ulysses Grant

An independent Union general who rises to command the Union armies and receives Lee's surrender at Appomattox. Lincoln brings Grant to the east after he proves an aggressive fighter in western Union battles.

Stephen Douglas

US Senator from Illinois and one of Lincoln's first political opponents. When each man is seeking the appointment to the Senate, they engage in a series of open debates centered on the role of slavery and its spread into the new territories and states of the US. Douglas eventually wins the Senate appointment.

Willie Lincoln

One of Lincoln's sons. Willie dies while Lincoln is President, probably from typhoid.

Tad Lincoln

Another of Lincolns sons, and his favorite. Tad is given the run of the White House and frequently entertains guests.

Robert Lincoln

The eldest son of the Lincoln's. Robert is a student at Harvard during Lincoln's presidency and later serves as an officer under General Grant.

Henry Clay

A Kentucky politician and Lincoln's early role model on he subject of slavery and statesmanship.

Frederick Douglass

A self-educated free black man who rises to prominence in the abolition movement in the North. Lincoln calls on Douglass occasionally for advice.

Horace Greeley

The editor of the New York Tribune and a frequent tormentor of Lincoln's. Greeley is often critical of Lincoln in his editorial pages and attempts to force Lincoln to negotiate with the Confederacy for peace. He also supports the effort to take back Lincoln's second nomination for President.

Henry Halleck

One time general-in-chief of the Union armies. Halleck is eventually replaced by General Grant.

Andrew Johnson

Lincoln's Vice President for his second term. Johnson is added to the ticket to broaden Lincoln's support among the divided Republican party.

Robert E. Lee

The commander of the Confederate armies. Lee gains many Confederate victories often with smaller forces than the Union armies. He negotiates the final surrender with General Grant.

Winfield Scott

A military hero of the Mexican War, the aged General Scott serves as an adviser to Lincoln during the early part of the war.

Edwin Stanton

Lincoln's Attorney general and then Secretary of War.

John Wilkes Booth

A successful actor for Maryland who sympathizes with the South and considers Lincoln a tyrant. Booth conspires with others first to kidnap Lincoln but the changes his plan to

assassinate him. After shooting Lincoln, Booth escapes and hides for several days before he is found. He is killed while being taken captive.

Clement Vallandigham

An outspoken politician from Ohio who is arrested for openly opposing Lincoln and the war on the South. Vallandigham becomes a symbol for many of the harsh tactics employed by Lincoln and his administration to suppress dissent.

Objects/Places

Civil War

The war between the Union states and the Confederate states, which seceded from the United States shortly after Lincoln's election as president.

The South

The southern US states where slavery is legal.

The North

The northern US states where slavery is illegal.

Washington

Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States, located between Maryland and Virginia.

Richmond

The capital of Virginia and the capital of the Confederate States.

Kentucky

One of the border states in the Civil War, and the birth state of Abraham Lincoln.

Springfield, Illinois

The capital of Illinois and the city where Lincoln makes his name as a lawyer.

Lincoln-Douglas Debates

A series of debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas that took place when each was seeking the appointment to the seat of US Senator from Illinois. The issue of the spread of slavery is a major subject of the debates.

Gettysburg Address

A brief, powerful message delivered by Lincoln at the dedication of the Union cemetery at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Perhaps Lincoln's most famous speech.

Battle of Bull Run

An important early battle in the Civil War in which the Union suffers a serious defeat.

Antietam

The location of an important Union victory in the Civil War.

Appomattox

The location of Lee's surrender to General Grant, ending the hostilities of the Civil War.

Kansas-Nebraska Act

A Congressional act that allowed legislatures of US territories to decide whether slavery will be allowed within the territories. Lincoln opposed the act, wishing to halt the spread of slavery into new states.

Emancipation Proclamation

A proclamation made by Lincoln pronouncing free all slaves in parts of the country that were in rebellion.

Thirteenth Amendment

The amendment to the US Constitution that finally prohibits slavery throughout the country.

Themes

Lincoln's Shifting Views on Slavery

Throughout his biography, Donald regularly assesses Lincoln's view on the issue of slavery and notes the way in which it changes over the years. While he is now often remembered for the Emancipation Proclamation and the freeing of the slaves, Donald shows his readers that his decision to free the slaves of the rebellious states came about after long deliberation, and reflected the political necessities of Lincoln's situation perhaps more than his personal feelings on slavery at that time.

Lincoln's first major encounter with slavery came as a young man, when he traveled down the Mississippi River to New Orleans. On his journey, he sees a group of men being transported to the salve market and remarks on their apparent joviality, but leaves no other written account of his views on the institution. Later, as a lawyer in Illinois, Lincoln is called on to represent clients in cases involving slavery, Donald notes, but adheres to his duty to the law before any possible moral duty. Thus, while he successfully prosecutes a case preventing the sale of a black woman in Illinois, he also defends a slave owner from Kentucky who wants his slaves returned to him after they escape while working in Illinois.

It is when Lincoln first travels to Washington as a US Representative, Donald claims, that his views on slavery begin to mature. In Washington he is able to see slavery firsthand and talk with Congressmen from around the country about its effects, and his personal opposition to slavery grows. Lincoln's initial thinking on a practical solution to the matter is based on that of his political role model Henry Clay, who supports recolonization. Recolonization is a plan to free the slaves and return them to Africa, helping them establish a colony where they can rule themselves. Lincoln later realizes that this plan is not practical and abandons it.

Lincoln becomes an outspoken opponent of the Kansas-Nebraska Act, the Congressional act that allows the territorial governments of Kansas and Nebraska to decide for themselves whether slavery will be allowed. While not so radical to call for the abolishment of slavery, Lincoln and his colleagues in the new Republican party do wish to stop its spread into the new states. The matter is one of the central issues in Lincoln's famous debates with Stephen Douglas.

The Republicans campaign for Lincoln's election with the slavery issue as a major plank. When Lincoln is elected, states in the South take it as a sign that the federal government will soon try to abolish slavery, although this is not Lincoln's stated goal at the time. As southern states secede from the Union and the country descends into war, Lincoln steps around the issue carefully, wishing to avoid characterizing the war as one simply to end slavery. Lincoln instead states his main goal to be to restore the Union and suggests that it may be possible to do so without abolishing slavery.

His attempts to calm the border states on the issue only anger the more radical abolitionists in the North, however, and Lincoln finds himself pulled between the factions. Donald writes that while Lincoln wants to fight a war to restore the Union, he ties the slavery issue to it by waiting for the tide to turn in the Union's favor before making any official move on slavery.

His first significant move is the Emancipation Proclamation, which frees slaves in the states currently in rebellion. It does not free slaves in the border states, however, and is mainly symbolic since it cannot be enforced. While remembered today as one of his great achievements, it is widely criticized at the time.

As the war drags on, Lincoln finally signals a shift in his thinking in the Gettysburg Address, Donald argues. It is in this address that Lincoln first characterizes the struggle as one for freedom as well as reunification. Later, when Lincoln ties the abolition of slavery to the conditions under which he will consider readmission of the Confederate states to the Union, Lincoln fully transforms the Civil War into a fight to free the slaves.

The Changing Role of the President

Donald's description of presidential politics of the mid-1800s draws many contrasts with modern politics, and he appears to credit Lincoln with implementing some of these changes for the first time.

When Lincoln first enters politics, it is not traditional for a candidate to appear to be promoting himself too much. Campaigning is left to a candidates backers, who often engage in harsh tactics and make sometimes slanderous attacks on their candidates' opponents while the candidates themselves remain above the fray. Lincoln's debates with Stephen A. Douglas, which take place when they are both seeking to be appointed US Senator for Illinois, are unusual in that the two candidates undertake to appear publicly and state their own opinions. These debates are not exactly campaign events in that neither man was actually running for election but rather hoping to influence voters to support the legislators who in turn supported them, but they demonstrate the power of speaking directly to the people.

When Lincoln is elected President, Donald explains, he assumes that his need to make public appearances is over and that the country expects him to simply perform his duty to the office. His state of the Union addresses, required by the Constitution, are not even delivered in person but are written out and read to Congress by a clerk. This is quite different than today, where this annual address is one of the most important speeches given by the President.

Lincoln tries to maintain a common touch with the public by keeping open office hours during which any person might visit with him. While he is often beset by office-seekers or people looking for favors, he also enjoys visiting with citizens. He can only visit with a relatively small number of people, however.

As Lincoln becomes the target of more and more factions who are upset with his policies and his prosecution of the war, he grows frustrated with the frequent misrepresentations of his actions that appear in oppositional newspapers and in the public speeches of his political opponents. Some of these antagonistic writings are even dangerous to the cause of victory in the war, Lincoln believes, and he finds it necessary to try to shape public opinion, something he thought he was finished with after being elected. Lincoln discovers the power of the "open letter" and the well-crafted public speech. By responding openly to his critics and taking opportunities to address the public directly, Lincoln is able to provide support to his party and put his opposition on the defensive. He is also able to sound out new policies and signal shifts in policy by carefully choosing his words, as Donald describes in his composing of the Gettysburg Address.

Lincoln's Emotional State

At regular intervals in his biography, Donald takes stock of Lincoln's personal emotional condition, relying on accounts of his acquaintances and sometimes Lincoln's own words to try to gauge the man's mental state. Many of Lincoln's acquaintances describe his frequent episodes of extreme depression. Some even worry that he might be prone to suicide. Certainly Lincoln suffers some emotionally trying setbacks in his life, including the death of his first fiance and later the death of his two sons. Donald also describes Lincoln as being especially distant from his father, whose funeral he does not attend, and who Lincoln almost never mentions in his adulthood.

When Lincoln becomes President and his responsibilities increase, his depressive episodes do not decrease. Donald describes Lincoln as a kind of fatalist who sometimes imagines himself at the mercy of his circumstances, but who is also driven by ambition that borders on "grandiosity."

Lincoln seems to have very little concern over his own personal safety, usually dismissing the recommendations of his security advisers that he take more care when appearing in public. The recipient of frequent personal threats from the public, Lincoln becomes resigned to them as part of holding the office and does not let them worry him. He visits the front line of the fighting several times during the Civil War, even at one point standing openly on the parapet of a fort that is under fire in an incident where someone standing near him is wounded. Donald does not indicate whether he considers this great bravery on Lincoln's part, but seems to suggest that such behavior is perhaps the result of indifference related to his depression.

The two currents of Lincoln's emotional life seem to come together on the last day of his life as Donald describes it. With the country back on the path toward reunification and the war over, Lincoln is in an especially good mood on April 14, 1865, according to contemporary accounts. Yet he ignores the warnings of advisers that he ought not be so careless about appearing in public without protection. He attends a play at Ford's theater where John Wilkes Booth has very little trouble approaching him and shooting him.

Style

Perspective

The perspective in "Lincoln" is historical, with the author looking back in history and attempting to reconstruct what was done and said based on contemporaneous sources. Wherever possible, Donald uses primary sources to describe the people and events he covers in "Lincoln," providing a first-person perspective for much of the material.

As a historian, Donald must sometimes maintain a skeptical or critical perspective, as when accounts of an event differ between sources. In these cases, the author sometimes offers his own opinion of which account is more likely or is better supported by the evidence and leaves it to the reader to decide the importance. At other times, Donald expresses his own opinion, as when he dismisses the importance of the differing accounts of Lincoln's writing and delivery of the Gettysburg Address. These brief occasions of Donald's own personal perspective are not common in the book, however.

Abraham Lincoln is a person about whom much has been written before, and around whom many legends and myths have been created. Donald's maintains a perspective that acknowledges these previous histories and the large amount of information already known about Lincoln as he attempts to differentiate his own account from those that came before.

Tone

Donald's tone is detached and objective throughout the biography. He treats the subjects of his history with respect and avoids making extreme judgments even when it is apparent that the contemporaries he describes had very strong opinions of one another. While Donald is respectful in his tone toward Lincoln, he is not reverential. Lincoln is a figure around whom many myths and legends have been created, however Donald treats him as a real person with ambitions, strengths and faults just as any other person.

Lincoln's life is full of setbacks and trials, and the tone of Donald's biography is often one of adversity. Lincoln does not succeed in his first efforts at shopkeeping or as a politician, but with hard work he is able to establish a suitable career as a lawyer and become a key player in the Republican party. Setbacks only increase once Lincoln becomes President, and Donald characterizes these years of his life as being beset constantly by political enemies, uncooperative generals and hostile citizens. Donald frequently includes descriptions of Lincoln's change in appearance over his years as President, as all these strains take their toll, as well as his frequent descents into sometimes debilitating depression. Donald describes Lincoln's increasing distance from his wife, who suffers from emotional issues herself stemming from the deaths of two of

their children. By focusing on the difficulties that Lincoln faces, Donald's biography often seems dark and pessimistic in its tone.

Structure

"Lincoln" is divided into 21 chapters, each covering a period of Abraham Lincoln's life in chronological order. The chapters are each titled with a quote from Lincoln, usually taken from the time period covered in the chapter. The first nine chapters follow Lincoln's rise as a talented lawyer in Illinois to his eventual election as President. The second half of the book is dedicated to Lincoln's two terms as President during the Civil War.

Lincoln's early childhood is treated in the first chapter, and is largely reconstructed from later accounts of Lincoln and others. The second chapter begins when Lincoln leaves home to make his own way and describes his early work as a shopkeeper and surveyor and his election to the state legislature. Chapter 3 begins with Lincoln's move to Springfield, Illinois to practice law, which is to become his career prior to politics. In Chapter 4, Lincoln is married and working hard at his profession as he stays active in the Whig Party. Chapter 5 describes Lincoln's term as a US Representative in Washington and Chapter 6 his return to Springfield after his term to take up his law practice once more. Chapters 7 and 8 show Lincoln's failed attempt to return to Washington as a US Senator, campaigning against Stephen Douglas on the issue of slavery. Chapter 9 describes Lincoln's adept maneuvering at party politics that lead to his nomination and election as President.

Chapters 10 through 17 describe Lincoln's first term in office as he faces the challenges of waging war with the South. Chapters 18 through 20 cover Lincoln's re-election and the beginning of his second term up to the end of the fighting with the South. The final chapter, Chapter 21, covers Lincoln's efforts to set the country on the path toward reunification and ends with his assassination and death.

Quotes

"Abraham Lincoln was not interested in his ancestry. In his mind he was a self-made man, who had no need to care about his family tree." Chapter 1, p. 19

"The years after Abraham Lincoln left his father's household were of critical importance in shaping his future. In 1831 he was essentially unformed." Chapter 2, p. 38

"On April 15, 1837, Lincoln rode into Springfield on a borrowed horse, with all his worldly possessions crammed into the two saddlebags." Chapter 3, p. 66

"After 1842 his turbulent mood swings, which alternated between grandiosity and depression, were greatly moderated." Chapter 4, p. 94

"Lincoln saw his two years in Congress as an opportunity to help the Whig party to find fresh leadership and to adopt a program relevant to the times." Chapter 5, p. 119

"His years in Washington did nothing to undermine his supreme self-confidence, but he could not help observing that he had less education and professional training than most of his fellow congressmen." Chapter 6, p. 142

"A former congressman and a man of influence, Lincoln was repeatedly asked to endorse applications for jobs or candidates for office. Though he firmly declined to run for another term in Congress in 1850, he remained active in party management." Chapter 7, p. 162

"After the 1856 elections Lincoln tried to maintain a low political profile." Chapter 8, p. 196

"As the leading republican in Illinois, he felt a great responsibility in planning for his party's victory in the upcoming presidential election of 1860." Chapter 9, p. 230

"Formidable problems faced the President-elect. At the news of his election, disunion erupted in the South." Chapter 10, p. 257

"The attack on Fort Sumter cleared the air. The news revived the Lincoln administration,

which had appeared indecisive and almost comatose, and gave it a clear objective: preserving the Union by putting down the rebellion." Chapter 11, p. 295

"So desperate did things look in early January that Lincoln for the first time thought that the Confederates might be successful, and he spoke 'of the bare possibility of our being two nations.'" Chapter 12, p. 328

"By the summer of 1862, Lincoln felt especially in need of divine help. Everything, it seemed, was going wrong, and his hope for bringing a speedy end to the war was dashed." Chapter 13, p. 354

"During the hundred days after he issued the preliminary proclamation, Lincoln's leadership was more seriously threatened than at any other time, and it was not clear that his administration could survive the repeated crises that it faced. " Chapter 14, p. 377

"Whatever self-assurance Lincoln had gained from the cabinet crisis of December 1862 was sorely tested during the first six months of 1863, for he found that the shrewdness, tact, and forbearance that had served him so well in face-to-face disagreements were not easily applied to large groups in conflict. In short, Lincoln still had much to learn about how to be President." Chapter 15, p.408

"The weeks after the battle of Chancellorsville were among the most depressing of Lincoln's presidency." Chapter 16, p. 437

"If the armies continued to be victorious and if the President could secure the united backing of his party, the prospects for his reelection and for his program of reconstruction were good." Chapter 17, p. 467

"During the weeks before the Republican National Convention, Lincoln tried to maintain a cautious neutrality between the rival wings of his party and to build bridges to the War Democrats." Chapter 18, p. 493

"The Republicans were badly divided, and Lincoln was whipsawed between those who thought he was too lenient toward the South and those who thought him too severe." Chapter 19, p. 517

"Facing certain defeat unless some drastic measures could be taken, Confederates in the final months of 1864 began to explore their options." Chapter 20, p. 547

"Lincoln had every right to be pleased with himself. After four exhausting years he was now fully master of the almost impossible job to which he had been elected." Chapter 21, p. 575

Topics for Discussion

How does the role of the President of the United States today differ from Lincoln's day?

How does Donald address the various myths and legends concerning Lincoln?

What importance does Donald give to Lincoln's childhood and early adulthood?

Discuss Lincoln's personal life with his wife and children as Donald describes them. Are they important to Lincoln? Are they important to Donald's biography?

How do Lincoln's initial political defeats affect his later political career?

How does Lincoln's view of slavery change over time?

How does Lincoln's view of the Civil War change over time?

In what ways does Lincoln change as a leader?