ABSTRACT

Abraham Lincoln's legacy has endured efforts by both southern apologists and those seeking to make him more myth than man. Periodically, it benefits us to revisit Lincoln's life and legacy and consider his importance as a symbol to the United States and world.

INTRODUCTION

Despite a cliche to the contrary, facts have never spoken for themselves. Knowing the facts from the past is important for understanding the present, but interpreting those facts is equally important. Scholars routinely rate the presidency of Abraham Lincoln as the most outstanding in American history; its symbolic significance is no less. Lincoln is "so much a part of what it means to be American that for us to know Abraham Lincoln is to know America at its core," one scholar could write as recently as the year 2000. (1)

Another remarked that "it is altogether fitting that every age has its own vision of Lincoln. But every age differs from every other." (2)

So it does, and a new century -- not to mention a new millennium -- with a most tumultuous selection of a president seems certainly to qualify as a new age. It therefore is appropriate -- however overworked the general subject of Lincoln might seem to be -- to take another look at Lincoln's importance not only as a symbol to the United States, but also to the world.

Numerous observers of American society almost from the time of Lincoln's death have recognized his importance as a political symbol. Nearly a half century ago Lincoln scholar, David Donald, noted that by studying Lincoln legends the historian can gain a "more balanced insight into the workings of the American mind." (3) He also remarked wryly that much comment about Lincoln reveals "more about their authors than about Lincoln." (4) Writing nearly four decades later, Donald added another, and especially cogent, observation. "Lincoln," he said," believed that there was more than personal satisfaction at stake in the 1864 election. He saw it as a test of the feasibility of democratic government." (5) Views of Lincoln have changed to reflect changing times and to reveal changing insights, but Lincoln's relationship to the viability of democratic government has never been clearer.

Merrill Peterson has provided thoughtful inferences as well as a vast amount of material in his exhaustive study, Lincoln in American Memory. (6) He has documented the development of the Lincoln image so carefully that a beginning student of the Lincoln myth can obtain a feel for Lincoln scholarship from this single volume.

Lincoln commentary does reveal much about the authors, about the American popular mind, and about American identity in general. No less important, it also reveals much about the culmination of international enthusiasm for popular government based on notions of political equality -- an enthusiasm that to a large extent received its greatest impetus from Lincoln's own words, and from the thought that those words inspired throughout the course of the next century and beyond.

SLAVERY: DIVIDING THE NATIONAL CULTURE

Despite identification...
President Abraham Lincoln. With his newly enhanced political profile, in 1860, political operatives in Illinois organized a campaign to support Lincoln for the presidency. On May 18, at the Republican National Convention in Chicago, Lincoln surpassed better-known candidates such as William Seward of New York and Salmon P. Chase of Ohio. Lincoln's nomination was due in part to his moderate views on slavery, his support for improving the national infrastructure, and the protective tariff. In the general election, Lincoln faced his friend and rival, Stephen Douglas, this time besting him in Abraham Lincoln is recognized as one of history's finest leaders, a great president when the United States was under tremendous strain. But suppose he were alive today? Given the profound ignorance of many of today's political leaders of our own history, and the parallels often derived between Lincoln's life and challenges versus today's, this book should be required reading for all politically motivated adults. ...more. flag Like · see review. Aug 09, 2020 Steven Herod rated it liked it · review of another edition. This was my first time reading about Abraham Lincoln and I will definitely be reading more about him in the future. Each chapter is split up into two halves. Pre-Presidential Political Timeline. At age 23, with no real qualifications and a very limited formal education, Abraham Lincoln ran for his first Illinois political office. He failed in that campaign for the state legislature, but two years later gained a seat as a member of the Whig Party. The following timeline provides a brief glimpse of his political career before the presidency. It consisted mainly of service in the Illinois General Assembly and one term in Congress. In 1856 he joined the newly formed Republican Party; two years later he ran for the U.S. Senate, making a name for himself.