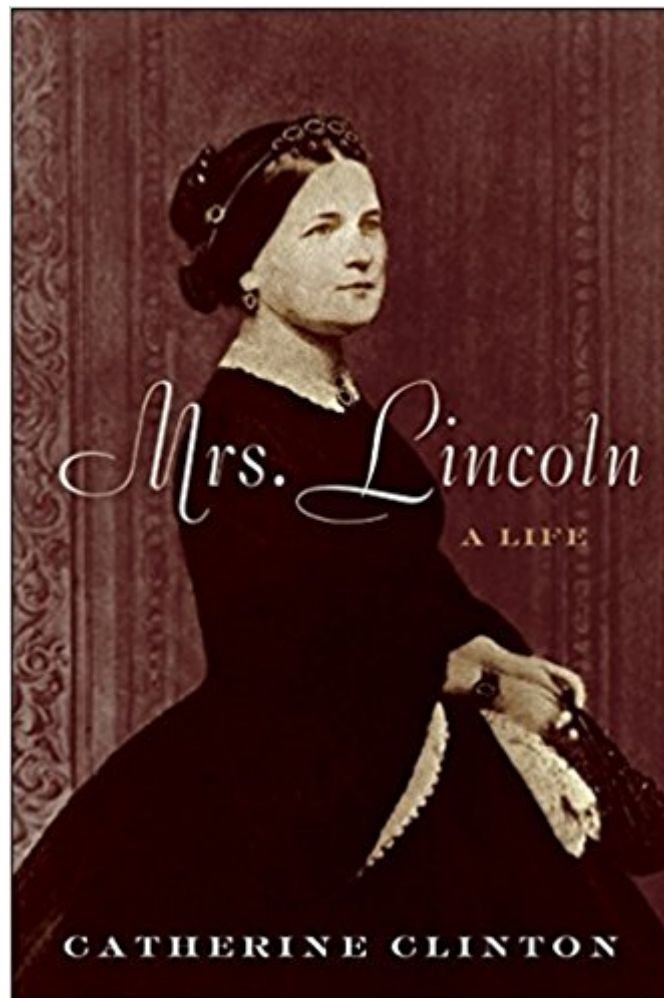


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Mrs. Lincoln: A Life



Synopsis

Abraham Lincoln is the most revered president in American history, but the woman at the center of his life, his wife, Mary, has remained a historical enigma. In this definitive, magisterial biography, Catherine Clinton draws on important new research to illuminate the remarkable life of Mary Lincoln, and at a time when the nation was being tested as never before. Mary Lincoln's story is inextricably tied with the story of America and with her husband's presidency, yet her life is an extraordinary chronicle on its own. Born into an aristocratic Kentucky family, she was an educated, well-connected Southern daughter, and when she married a Springfield lawyer she became a Northern wife—an experience mirrored by thousands of her countrywomen. The Lincolns endured many personal setbacks—including the death of a child and defeats in two U.S. Senate races—along the road to the White House. Mrs. Lincoln herself suffered scorching press attacks, but remained faithful to the Union and her wartime husband. She was also the first presidential wife known as the "First Lady," and it was in this role that she gained her lasting fame. The assassination of her husband haunted her for the rest of her life. Her disintegrating downward spiral resulted in a brief but traumatizing involuntary incarceration in an asylum and exile in Europe during her later years. One of the most tragic and mysterious of nineteenth-century figures, Mary Lincoln and her story symbolize the pain and loss of Civil War America. Authoritative and utterly engrossing, Mrs. Lincoln is the long-awaited portrait of the woman who so richly contributed to Lincoln's life and legacy. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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Customer Reviews

In the past two months, I have read many books about Abraham and Mary Lincoln. Many of them are newly published to coincide with the 200th anniversary of Lincoln's birth. If I read Catherine Clinton's "Mrs. Lincoln: A Life" first, I might have been more complimentary of this biography of our former first lady. Unfortunately, this is not the case, and there is nothing much new to be found in Mary Lincoln. In fact, what is evident is not what Clinton included in "Mrs. Lincoln", but what she omits. Most people know the details of Mary Lincoln's life. This pert, educated and sassy girl was born of privilege to a prominent Lexington family. She was more educated than even most men of this era. She was fluent in French, loved poetry and was especially engaged by national politics. A family friend was Henry Clay. In 1839, she moved to Springfield, Illinois to live with her older sister, Elizabeth Edwards. Here, she met the gangly, humble, poor and self-educated Abraham Lincoln. Theirs was a stormy courtship, but after breaking off their engagement once, they finally married on November 4, 1842. Apparently, she saw the promise in Lincoln when many (including her immediate family) did not. Mary did have a lot of talents and did many things well. She loved poetry and could recite long passages of her favorites from memory. She was politically astute and acted as an advisor to Lincoln as he navigated state, and then national politics. She was a gracious hostess and her parties and balls were well received. On the domestic scene, she sewed her own clothes and those of her children (until she became first lady). She also did most of the household cooking in Springfield.

I admit that I am only 40 pages into the book, but already I am so irritated by the jerky style and obvious lack of an editor that I am ready to give up on it. The author jumps back and forth in time and between Abraham Lincoln's life and Mary Todd's. This can be done, of course, and is not an unusual literary device. But this author handles it so poorly that I just feel jerked around in time and space, often left bewildered as to the time frame, sequence of events, and their relationship to one another. The author attributes to the young Mary Todd various thoughts, emotions, experiences and actions that Clinton cannot possibly know, and gives us no references to sources for these attributions. She also contradicts herself within the space of two or three pages, referring to Mary's mounting anxiety about "aging out of the marriage market," yet pronouncing Mary's subsequent move to Springfield Illinois as an attempt to "escape the stifling rut of the premarital merry-go-round." Then two paragraphs later, Clinton (again without attribution) states that "Mary Todd was absorbed with the trials and tribulations of courtship." Although she states that Mary Todd "migrated to expand her horizons, not just to find a husband," and quotes a descendant's

recollection that Mary "never at any time showed the least partiality for suitors but accepted their attention without enthusiasm," the very next paragraph refers to Mary as "one of the brightest stars in the constellation of belles who kept Springfield men enthralled." Another annoying aspect of Clinton's "scholarship" are the obvious mistakes that even a novice editor should have caught.

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