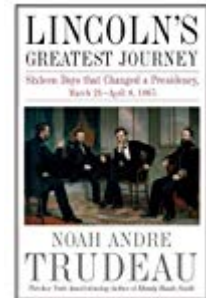


Noah Trudeau. *Lincoln's Greatest Journey: Sixteen Days that Changed a Presidency, March 24 - April 8, 1865.* El Dorado Hills: Savas Beatie, 2016. 336 pp. \$32.95, cloth, ISBN 978-1-61121-326-3.



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This well-researched and engaging study of an unusual episode in Lincoln's presidency provides yet more evidence that there is always more to know about our most familiar president. Lincoln's remarkable visit to Richmond just after Union forces entered the city is noted in every important study of the last days of the war, yet Noah Trudeau's work illuminates the story of Lincoln's entire journey into the expiring Confederacy, rendering the nearly three-week excursion in almost photographic detail. Larger political contexts are not the focus here, but for those wishing to follow in the footsteps of Lincoln at a crucial time in the war, this is the book.

Trudeau's strengths are well suited to this topic and approach, as he is the author of a half-dozen books that often focus in detail on particular battles or military events during the last years or months of the Civil War. Lincoln's journey to Richmond, while not a military campaign, was not unlike the contingent, fluid tides of battle traced elsewhere by Trudeau, as the line of movement also shifted with the news from the front and the

internecine squabbles among the higher-ups. In time with the pace of events, Lincoln repeatedly extended his stay at Grant's headquarters, so that a pleasure cruise down the Potomac to see the troops (and his son, serving with Grant) that was envisioned to last six days grew to three times that duration. Across the book, Trudeau interweaves brief updates on military events in the region as a counterpoint to the Lincoln party's own campaign by land and water as it followed behind the main front of battle until, somewhat imprudently, the president entered the enemy's capital with little escort and even less concern for safety.

After a brief preface, the book proceeds in orderly chronological fashion. The first chapter treats the immediate background to the trip and its two days. Sixteen chapters then follow, each devoted to a day of the journey and each titled simply by the date in question. This scheme provides structure and predictability but does not easily allow for discerning a shape or pattern to the journey. This relative lack of narrative arc is more than compensated by the rich, immersive

details and sheer volume of evidence presented by Trudeau, who has collected seemingly every jot and tittle ever written or recollected about the journey, from the stevedores shoveling coal for the presidential steamship to the startled Virginians who happened upon him on the streets of Petersburg. Ships logs, unit histories, official records, diaries, letters, and memoirs all yield their secrets, revealing innumerable moments and vignettes that gain from Trudeau's compact and effective style.

Trudeau's concern for completeness and accuracy extends to his evaluation of his sources, which are discussed in a "Sources Casebook" appended to the work. Here, mirroring the day-by-day organization of the chapters, Trudeau discusses the most important sources for that day's events, often explaining such matters as why one account was favored over another. He suggests, for example, that Mary Lincoln's alleged bad behavior was exaggerated by several key sources, though the evidence for Mary's cringe-worthy conduct given in the chapters might lead some to a different conclusion. These comments on sources might have been more useful if integrated into the chapter notes, but they demonstrate Trudeau's careful attention to problems of memory and bias in sources.

One disappointing aspect is that the scholarly apparatus is deficient. It might be pedantic to insist too much upon the forms, but this is a case in which faults of documentation often hinder the usefulness of a well-researched work. The "Sources Casebook" is seemingly not indexed, making it difficult to combine the information for sources used in different chapters. More seriously, all the notes are often-idiosyncratic "short citations" that do not contain full bibliographic information. This would not be such a great problem, except the bibliography is unnecessarily divided into many sections, making it difficult to find the sources cited in the notes. Would a source referred to as, "Pierpoint, Recollections" be found

under the heading of "Autobiographies, Biographies, Diaries, Letters, Memoirs, Speeches, and Personal Narratives"? Or perhaps under "Abraham Lincoln" or the "Miscellaneous Works"? It was in none of these but is an unpublished work that is listed in a subheading under the otherwise unidentified "West Virginia University Archives & Manuscripts" in the "Manuscripts" section. Now, alert readers with professional training might guess that the lack of italicization in "Recollections" would suggest an unpublished source, but the readership for this book will be wider than that. In any case, what is one to do with a citation that reads, "Barnes, 'With Lincoln,' 751."? (It turns out to be a reference to an article in *Appleton's Magazine*.) On a similar note, the subtitle is oddly inaccurate. Lincoln left Washington on March 23 (as described in the first chapter) and returned on April 9 (as noted in the title of chapter 17), consequently making this a journey of eighteen, and not sixteen, days. Savas Beatie should more effectively support their authors.

Possibly a reviewer who has written about Lincoln's trip to Gettysburg should not question whether Lincoln's visit to Richmond was indeed his "Greatest Journey," but we can all agree it was his longest. Trudeau's rapid preface and quick epilogue do state that the journey changed Lincoln, such that when he returned, he was no longer passive and "reactive" but was "looking ahead to the challenges of bringing the nation its 'new birth of freedom.' His point of view was forward, not backward" (p. xii). This may be a reasonable argument, but quoting the Gettysburg Address of 1863 may not be the best evidence for a sudden transformational change in 1865. More promising is Trudeau's assertion that Lincoln returned "increasingly anxious to accelerate the reconstruction process" (p. 253). He documents this vision of a Lincoln unleashed by briefly reviewing his "Last Speech," issued only two days after returning from Richmond, that for the first time

publicly advocated voting rights for some African American men.

Throughout *Lincoln's Greatest Journey* such matters receive little attention, however. Rather than giving us another look at Lincoln's politics, Trudeau's unique contribution is to give us Lincoln's experience. This valuable book shows us Lincoln taking a journey unlike any other in his presidency, one that we can all experience with him.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at <https://networks.h-net.org/h-fedhist>

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