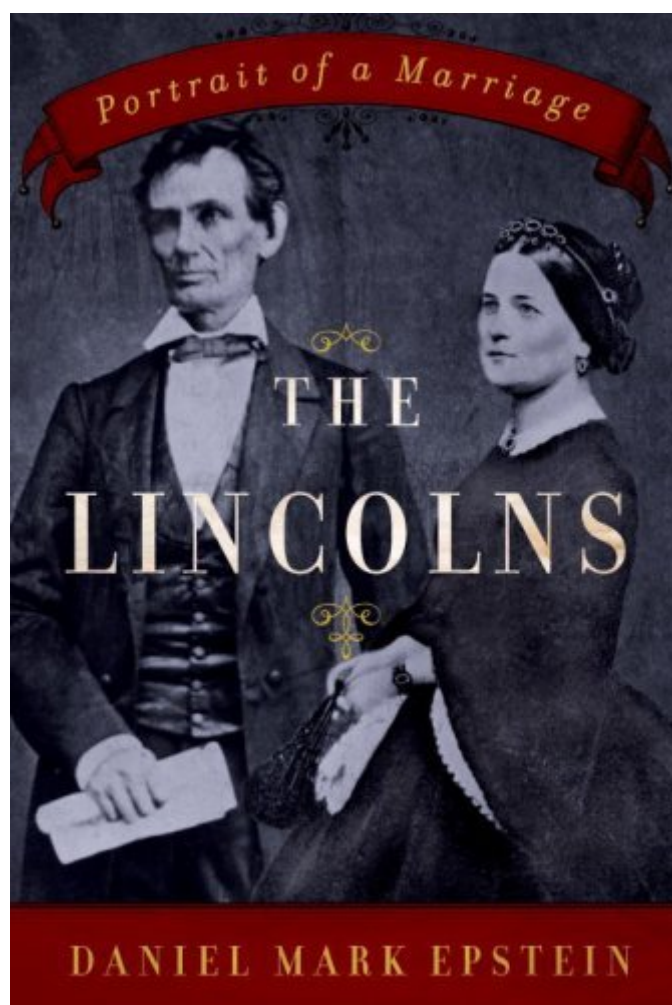


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# The Lincolns: Portrait Of A Marriage



## Synopsis

The first full-length portrait of the marriage of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln in more than fifty years, *The Lincolns* is a fascinating new work of American history by Daniel Mark Epstein, an award-winning biographer and poet known for his passionate understanding of the Civil War period. Although the private lives of political couples have in our era become front-page news, the true story of this extraordinary and tragic first family has never been fully told. *The Lincolns* eclipses earlier accounts with riveting new information that makes husband and wife, president and first lady, come alive in all their proud accomplishments and earthy humanity. Epstein gives a fresh close-up view of the couple's life in Springfield, Illinois (of their twenty-two years of marriage, all but six were spent there). We witness the troubled courtship of an aristocratic and bewitching Southern belle and a struggling young lawyer who concealed his great ambition with self-deprecating humor; the excitement and confusion of the newlyweds as they begin their marriage in a small room above a tavern, and the early signs of Mary's instability and Lincoln's moodiness; their joyful creation of a home on the edge of town as Lincoln builds his law practice and makes his first forays into politics. We discover their consuming ambition as Lincoln achieves celebrity status during his famed debates with Stephen A. Douglas, which lead to Lincoln's election to the presidency. The Lincolns' ascent to the White House brought both dazzling power and the slow, secret unraveling of the couple's unique bond. *The Lincolns* dramatizes certain well-known events with stunning new immediacy: Mary's shopping sprees, her defrauding of the public treasury to increase her budget, and her jealousy, which made enemies for her and problems for the president. Yet she was also a brilliant hostess who transformed the shabby White House into a social center crucial to the Union's success. After the death of their little boy, not a year after Lincoln took office, Mary turned for solace to spirit mediums, but her grief drove her to the edge of madness. In the end, there was little left of the Lincolns' relationship save their enduring devotion to each other and to their surviving children. Written with enormous sweep and striking imagery, *The Lincolns* is an unforgettable epic set at the center of a crucial American administration. It is also a heartbreaking story of how time and adversity can change people, and of how power corrupts not only morals but affections. Daniel Mark Epstein's *The Lincolns* makes two immortal American figures seem as real and human as the rest of us. From the Hardcover edition.

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## Customer Reviews

Mr. Epstein writes a very personal portrayal of the marriage of Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd. His book is easy reading for a historical book, and the author chooses not to burden the reader with voluminous footnotes in the text, but rather lists each quote and source in the appendix by chapter. The book is perhaps the finest and best researched exposition of the character of the Lincoln's marriage. Epstein does a wonderful job of illustrating how good the Lincoln's marriage really was, as far as their compatibility and closeness. They both loved poetry and they both loved politics. Almost all the strategy and speeches that Lincoln made prior to his run for the Presidency were at the very least, run by Mary before he made his presentation. Mary gave critical and helpful advice on the substance and tone of his speeches. In addition, the Lincoln's were very affectionate toward each other. Mr. Epstein actually points out that it was the practice of the Lincoln's to make love to each other every night. This active love life continued until the birth of Mary's last child, Tad, whose head which was very large at birth, seriously damaged her birth canal and made sex difficult and painful from that point onward. In addition, the author does an excellent job of illustrating the serious 'mood disorder' that seems to have afflicted Mary throughout her life, and which increased in severity as she grew older. There are numerous stories all through their life together of this erratic behavior which are mentioned in the literature of historians and well presented in this book. By the time Lincoln won the Whitehouse, Mary's moods were so erratic, that it led John Hay, one of two main

secretary/assistants that Lincoln had as President, to refer to Mary as "The Hellcat."

One of the biggest mysteries of all about Abraham Lincoln involves his marriage to Mary Todd Lincoln. Was it a love match? Was she really crazy? Did they have anything in common? What did they see in each other? How much did Mary Todd Lincoln help or hurt Lincoln's presidency? Daniel Mark Epstein attempts to answer these questions in his ambitious book, *The Lincolns: Portrait of a Marriage*. I believe that *The Lincolns* gets off to a shaky start, more resembling historic fiction (and romantic fiction at that). It isn't until the second half of the book that we get a more detailed and well-researched story about Lincoln and his wife. Most readers know the basics about Abraham Lincoln and Mary Todd Lincoln. The short, perky, plump and pretty Mary Todd came from a prominent, slave-holding family from Lexington, Kentucky. Tall, gangly, and self-educated, Abraham came from more humble beginnings and grew up in a log cabin. Many would say that this was a marriage of opposites. Yet, both had a love of poetry, politics and the theatre. Mary was also politically ambitious for her husband. But Mary also had a dark side. Today, she would probably be diagnosed as being Bipolar--maybe even flirting with schizophrenia toward the end of the White House years. Once married, Lincoln "began to see the depths of her emotions, how the intensity of her love was matched by a savage hatred or anger." At times, she even turned her anger against her husband, breaking his nose one time, throwing hot coffee at him another. In the first half of *The Lincolns*, there is much about Abraham and Mary that is fabricated. Early in their marriage, "The weekend before the convention, the Lincolns, holding each other for warmth, watched a comet on the western horizon."

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