

little, and cared less, about economics. Once he understood the effect of the economic crisis, he asked the new British ambassador, Lord Cromer, a former chairman of the Bank of England, for some private tutorials on the topic.

If in the early 1970s Kissinger did not fully understand how economic weakness would affect the United States' strategic role, he and the rest of America soon learned better. The nation's abandonment of the gold standard devalued the dollar against other currencies, which meant that oil-exporting countries received less real money for their oil, traditionally priced in dollars. The OPEC countries immediately agreed to confer about steps they might take to restore their income, and their opportunity came in 1973 with the Yom Kippur War, when U.S. support for Israel triggered an oil embargo. The price of oil subsequently tripled, sharply exacerbating the inflation that had been gathering speed since Johnson's presidency. The Great Inflation of the 1970s, which has emerged as one of the gravest legacies of the Nixon years, roared into being. It was the weakness of the dollar, far more than the Vietnam War, that colored the presidencies of Nixon's successors, Gerald Ford and Jimmy Carter. Indeed, the United States was not to recover its economic self-confidence until the Reagan years.

It may soon be considered peculiar to write books like *Nixon and Kissinger* that give so little prominence to the economic forces that underpin

the diplomacy and strategy of political leaders. The United States was uniquely powerful in the decades after World War II because it was uniquely rich, and in the end it was the ability to pay for both guns and butter that allowed America to prevail in the Cold War against a much poorer antagonist. The heirs of Kissinger and Nixon, however skillful they may be in diplomacy, must engage a world in which Europe already operates from a base of similar financial strength, and eventually China and then India will as well. The emergence of these separate poles of economic might is already squeezing American freedom of maneuver as sole superpower.

In this new world that is upon us, the skills of a Kissinger, who made his name as a scholar with his study of Prince Metternich's diplomacy in the era of Europe's concert of great powers after 1815, could come into their own once more. But any future Kissinger had better know much more about global economics than the original. It is no accident that the only American figure in the last two decades other than a president to achieve international status as a sage and global guru equal to Kissinger's has been central banker Alan Greenspan. What we know about America's future challenges suggests that the abilities of both a Kissinger and a Greenspan will be required. But we can certainly do without another Nixon.

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Our Inner Abes

Reviewed by Florence King

LOOKING FOR THE REAL ABE LINCOLN IS like looking for Moby Dick, Rosebud, and the silver lining, all at the same time. Do not be fooled by the title of this book. Some stores will inevitably stock it under Travel, but its real purpose is to explore why America's most complex, contradictory president still exerts such a psycho-

logical hold over us.

While a boy growing up in Illinois, *Weekly Standard* senior editor Andrew Ferguson collected the usual artifacts and memorized the Gettysburg Address, but he

LAND OF LINCOLN:

Adventures in Abe's America.

By Andrew Ferguson.
Atlantic Monthly Press.
279 pp. \$24

had become a Lincoln buff in remission. It seemed to him that Lincoln no longer belonged to the ages but to special pleaders, such as bipolar sufferers who latched on to his melancholia, or imaginative gay-rights advocates who saw a connection between his hellish marriage and the long circuit rides he made with other young lawyers in his Springfield days.

Then in late 2002, Richmond, Virginia, erupted in controversy over the city council's proposal to erect a statue of Lincoln and his son Tad commemorating their brief visit to the Confederate capital at the end of the Civil War. Ferguson covered the story and found that Lincoln was once again the man of the hour, the bee in every bonnet, and the fork in every tongue. On one side were the pro-statue diversity buffs of the "healing power" persuasion, and on the other, hot-eyed cavaliers of the Sons of Confederate Veterans trailed by paranoid homeschoolers who eagerly bought their educational materials (e.g., an "Arm Yourself With the Truth" booklet).

Ferguson realized that the dispute was not about the Civil War itself but about what kind of man Lincoln was. The cavaliers, citing his proposal to repatriate blacks to Africa, saw him as a hypocritical closet racist and a war mongering Big Government dictator, while the pro-statue crowd saw him as approachable, introspective, nuanced, and comfortable with ambiguity—or, in Ferguson's delicious analogy, "If Lincoln had been born 125 years later, he could have been Bill Moyers."

Americans, it seems, still need Lincoln to love or to hate, to explain or to excuse, to identify whatever it is about ourselves we consider essential. To understand ourselves we must first understand Lincoln, Ferguson suggests, and so he embarked on an American odyssey in search of people and places whose inner Lincoln lives on.

He gained entrée to memorabilia collectors

such as Louise Taper of Beverly Hills, who owns one of the largest private collections of Lincolniana. Her interest in Lincoln began when she read *Love Is Eternal*, a 1950s historical romance novel by Irving Stone based on the Lincoln marriage. She began to haunt rare-books-and-manuscripts outlets, in part, she speculates, as a way to escape the fate of being one of the ladies who lunch. She got so good at identifying Lincoln's authentic handwriting that today she is an expert in the field.

Taper couldn't quite nail down the reason she's so taken with Lincoln, except to say, "He was just an amazing man." She came closer to the truth when she spoke about Mary Todd Lincoln, Lincoln's wife and the heroine of the novel that started it all: "People hated her because she didn't fit the mold." Ferguson insightfully connects her Lincoln obsession with the pains she takes to avoid becoming another typical Beverly Hills matron. For Mrs. Taper, Lincoln plays a seemingly unlikely role: He's the inspiration for a feminist-style journey by this woman who is determined to chart an individual course.

The last place Ferguson expected to find Lincoln was in a management training seminar held in Gettysburg, but there he was, presented as the ultimate successful executive. Lincoln as business guru is, Ferguson points out, a stretch. His brief career as clerk of a frontier store ended when "the store went broke so spectacularly that its proprietor felt compelled to flee the territory." All his closest associates spoke on record about his dearth of money sense, his chaotic law office, his disregard for systems, and his lack of any head for figures. He forgot to cash his paychecks and kept important papers in his hat.

What could a corporate seminar do with such a man? Ferguson, who published a hysterical essay on the self-improvement industry in his first book, *Fools' Names, Fools' Faces* (1996), mimics the way PowerPoint software might boil down one of the most exquisite prose styles in the English language:

VISION: BIG PICTURE

- $4 \times 20 + 7 = 87$ years ago
- Forefathers \Rightarrow continent \Rightarrow new nation
- Key Proposition: *Everybody* Equal
- Civil war \Rightarrow long endurance test
- Battlefield = cemetery (final resting place) = hallowed ground
- Caveats: cannot dedicate
cannot consecrate
cannot hallow
- Action step: new birth of freedom

Ferguson figured that the Lincoln facilitators would merely teach history from a different angle, but by the seminar's end he realized that they weren't just teaching history, or even business techniques, but "something else that, nowadays, is harder to come by, and harder to make stick": "They've taken the most American of pursuits, and potentially the most crassifying—getting ahead, making lots of money, climbing the greasy pole of success—and turned it into an occasion for painless, gentle moral instruction. Lincoln lets them do it."

Spending a couple of days studying this man who talked about "the better angels of our nature," who felt malice toward none and charity to all, who personified our ideal of equality, is bound to have a positive effect on people committed to the workshop mindset of conflict resolution, anger management, and group decision-making. And better people, so the thinking goes, make better leaders. At the very least, Ferguson suggests, dwelling on the kindness, sympathy, and patience Lincoln so often displayed might in some small way help stem the tide of coarseness overtaking American life.

The same regard for a blend of money-making and personal growth pervades the Lincoln Presenters—they reject the label "impersonators" as too show-biz. They're mostly tall, lanky men who were told so often that they looked like Lincoln that they decided to turn it into a career. Headquartered in Cincinnati, the group was founded in 1990 and now numbers more than 250. Presenters hire themselves out



The clothes make the man: On special occasions, the Lincoln Presenters wear the hat of the former president.

to speak to organizations, march in parades, and in general make history pay. In these re-enactment-happy times, some of them even make a living at it: \$50 for cutting a ribbon and \$200 for a major appearance. The job requires them to log a lot of time on the road, and sometimes they have to sleep in their cars, but they feel a calling. "Lincoln is as close to perfect as a human being could be," said one. "That's what gives us a sense of mission."

The only place Ferguson visited that is immune to inspiration and beyond redemption is the Lincoln homestead in Springfield, now part of the Lincoln Heritage Trail preservation project run by the federal government. "The reigning ideology of the Park Service is party pooper—a constant vigil against anyone taking unauthorized pleasure in a Park Service property." The funky authenticity he remembers from his boyhood visits is gone; everything near the house has been torn down, replaced by a

sterile visitors' center. Inside, a theater loops through an orientation film. Security cameras monitor all who enter. Speakers broadcast constant announcements ("Your safety is our primary concern. . . . A heart defibrillator is located in the visitors' center") and warnings that an alarm will sound if visitors step off the rubber walking guides. Worst of all are the robotic Smoky the Bear-garbed guides, their voices flattened by the boredom of reciting the same memorized material day after day, who rattle off their speeches so mechanically that they lose all power of inflection and say things

like "We *are* now in the parlor."

Andrew Ferguson is a writer with perfect pitch and flawless timing who can go from hilarity to poignancy without missing a beat. Whether he is describing the seedy glories of Route 66 or the Holocaust survivor who believed Lincoln came to him in a dream, his reporter's powers of observation and his instinctive understanding of the human condition produce the satisfying blend of entertainment and instruction he delivers in this marvelous book.

FLORENCE KING writes a column, "The Bent Pin," for *National Review*.

IN BRIEF

ARTS & LETTERS

A Man of Ideas

SHAKESPEARE THE THINKER begins and ends with a reminiscence about a meditative walk to the English village of Shottery. Late one afternoon, A. D. Nuttall flees the tedium of the biennial International Shakespeare Conference in Stratford to go off on his own, wandering down a country lane "looking for the boy who would grow up to become the author of *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *As You Like It*, and all the other amazing plays that bear his name." The anecdote nicely captures the spirit of the author, a beloved Oxford don who considered himself a maverick, an independent reader impatient with the triviality and dead ends of academic squabbles. Nuttall died suddenly in his rooms at New College this past January, and *Shakespeare the Thinker* stands as a fitting tribute to his learning, his humane values, and his pedagogical talents.

SHAKESPEARE THE THINKER.

By A. D. Nuttall.
Yale Univ. Press.
428 pp. \$30



William Shakespeare, c. 1610

Nuttall permits himself a few preliminary and marginal swipes at current (and by now not-so-current) fashions in literary theory, especially the solipsism of poststructuralism