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Reviewed by James L. Swanson

Abraham Lincoln: A Life

Michael Burlingame. Johns Hopkins Univ., $125 two-volume boxed set (2,024p) ISBN 978-0-8018-8993-6

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Between this fall and the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth in February 2009, publishers will overwhelm bookstores and readers alike with a flood of more than 60 titles on the ever-popular president. One can hardly keep track of them all: one certainly cannot read them all. Of the dozens of these books competing for attention, a few stand out, foremost among them this title.

The trend in Lincoln scholarship has been away from the magisterial narrative comprehensiveness of Carl Sandburg in favor of a narrow, deep dive resulting in the so-called "slice" book: thus entire volumes about one magnificent speech; a key incident; the deepest crisis; the most pivotal year; and so on. A number of these works have merit, but have failed to capture a wide, popular audience.

Abraham Lincoln: A Life is the antithesis of a thin slice from the Lincoln pie. In the sweeping style of Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals*, Burlingame has produced the finest Lincoln biography in more than 60 years and one of the two or three best Lincoln books on any subject in a generation.

A distinguished scholar who probably knows more about Abraham Lincoln and his world than anyone else alive, Burlingame has devoted the last quarter century to editing 11 books on the Lincoln primary sources, including the writings of the president's secretaries John Hay, John Nicolay and William Stoddard. Now Burlingame has produced the most meticulously researched Lincoln biography ever written. He resurrected Lincoln's lost early journalism, when the young prairie politician—little more than an immature, unscrupulous hack—wrote more than 200 anonymous op-eds; Burlingame scoured thousands of 19th-century newspapers and discovered hitherto unknown stories; he read hundreds of oral histories, unpublished letters, and journals from Lincoln's contemporaries; and he re-examined the vast manuscript collections at the Library of Congress and National Archives. Burlingame's astonishing chapters covering Lincoln's hard early years and his difficult marriage, and his fresh insights on the profound crisis that made Lincoln great, are worth the price of the book.

Do not let the intimidating length or the formidable price deter you. The book need not be read in one sitting. Each part stands alone. Burlingame's Lincoln comes alive as the author unfolds vast amounts of new research while breathing new life into familiar stories. This is a critical, skeptical, loving but never fawning tribute to the man Burlingame praises for "achiev[ing] a level of psychological maturity unmatched in the history of American public life."

This book supplants Sandburg and supersedes all other biographies. Future Lincoln books cannot be written without it, and from no other book can a general reader learn so much about Abraham Lincoln. It is the essential title for the bicentennial. *(Nov.)*

James L. Swanson is the author of Manhunt: The 12-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer. *His next book is* Chasing Lincoln's Killer *(Scholastic, Feb. 2009).*

in the Middle East are well-advised to consult this riveting text. *(Jan.)*

Murderers in Mausoleums: Riding the Back Roads of Empire Between Moscow and Beijing

Jeffrey Tayler. Houghton Mifflin, $24 (320p) ISBN 978-0-618-79991-6

Tayler (*Siberian Dawn*) takes readers on an extraordinary adventure across the largest landmass on earth, from Russia through the Caucasus into South Ossetia and Georgia, on to Central Asia and Kazakhstan, and across Xinjiang and Mongolia. Equal parts history, politics, economic theory and anthropology, he brings into sharp focus the ordinary lives behind the news headlines. Of particular interest are two recurring discoveries he makes—replacing totalitarian dictators with "democratically elected" (often U.S.-backed) leaders opens the door to enormous corruption, and that where there is electricity, there is always a disco. Tayler marshals hundreds of years of history, from the conquests of Genghis Khan through the dislocation caused by WWI and WWII to the Chinese Communist revolution and the glossy, urban China of today. While the author's approach to exploration is haphazard at times, his impressive ability to build instant rapport and cull local knowledge in a remarkably short span of time gives his journey steady momentum. Tayler conveys his encounters in prose that is as richly textured as the stories he gathers in some of the remotest places imaginable. *(Jan.)*

Fakers: Hoaxers, Con Artists, Counterfeiters, and Other Great Pretenders

Paul Maliszewski. New Press, $23.95 (256p) ISBN 978-1-59558-422-9

In this detailed if uneven meditation, Maliszewski explores the complicated world of deception and those who practice it. The book begins with the author defending his own habit of publishing letters to the editor under pseudonyms while working as a reporter in upstate New York. He describes his actions as satire, although his lengthy, sometimes bitter mea culpa drags by the end. However, his analysis of literary and journalistic deception—a sampling that includes Stephen Glass, James Frey and JT LeRoy—finds

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