

### LOOK AT LINCOLN: Lincoln's Use of the Press

Frank J. Williams

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## Feature Essay

Fall 2014

**Williams, Frank J.** *LOOK AT LINCOLN: Lincoln's Use of the Press.*

*Lincoln and the Power of the Press* is a massive undertaking by a prolific and insightful scholar who has written over 47 books—most relating to Mr. Lincoln.

While some may cavil with its length and extensive background on reading the history of newspapers, their owners and publishers, most readers will come away understanding how Lincoln was able to co-op the press before and during his presidency—unheard of today by political leaders, especially since the Vietnam War and Watergate.

The press in Lincoln's day was anything but impartial as independence and journalistic fairness disappeared with the rise of political parties. Holzer writes, "The antique values of independence and journalistic impartiality, if they ever really existed, vanished with the rise of political parties and the development of...printing presses fast enough to produce some five thousand printed pages every hour." Readers are treated to the mind-boggling effort by Lincoln to influence newspapers as he, "never overlooked a newspaper man who had it in his power to say a good or bad thing of him."

Interrelated are the most powerful publishers of the day: Horace Greeley of the *New York Tribune*, Henry Raymond of the *New York Times* and James Gordon Bennett of the *New York Herald*. While Holzer is judicious in portraying these famous men, he is unsparing in his depiction of their prejudices. Lincoln's stature grew from his debates with U.S. Senator Stephen A. Douglas in 1858 that moved him toward the Republican nomination and election in 1860. As such, the press became more and more interested in him and he with them.

Essentially three themes run through this volume: 1) Lincoln as a journalist; 2) Lincoln as his own public relations agent; and 3) restrictions on the press and censorship during the Civil War condoned or initiated by the President. This is a comprehensive agenda that offers something for nearly all readers: scholars,

students, independents, liberals, conservatives and libertarians. Though some may object to the author's approach, Holzer's analysis is more than grist for analyzing America's best and most effective president. This is a must read and essential addition to any library.

*Frank J. Williams is the Chair of the Lincoln Forum and author of Lincoln as Hero, and is a contributing columnist for the Civil War Sesquicentennial.*