

Best war ever
america and world
war ii history essay



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The objective of this book is to subject the chief features of the Good War myth to bright analysis in the hope of present an additional realistic picture, one that does not demean the achievement of the United States and of liberal democracy but that at the same time does not diminish the stress, suffering, problems, and failures inevitably faced by a society at war. The war was good for the economy. It was liberating for women. It was a war of tanks and airplanes — a cleaner war than World War I. Americans were united. Soldiers were proud. It was a time of prosperity, sound morality, and power.

But according to historian Michael Adams, our memory is distorted, and it has left us with a misleading — even dangerous — legacy. Challenging many of our common assumptions about the period, Adams argues that our experience of World War II was positive but also disturbing, creating problems that continue to plague us today.

Michael C Adams has contributed to *The Best War Ever: America and World War II* as an author. Michael C. C. Adams, a professor of history at Northern Kentucky University, is the author of “*The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I*” (1990).

Much of the events of WWII has been mythologized not only by Hollywood and government propoganda, and over the years this mythology has been perpetuated by those who lived through the war themselves. Michael C. C. Adams has sought to expose these stories for what they are, fabrication and oversimplifications, and provide the basic facts that facilitate a truer

understanding of WWII and the world wide cultural changes surrounding it, both before and after the war itself.

In chapter one, " Mythmaking and the War", Adams sets out the myth itself, as defined by Hollywood dramatization, government propoganda, advertisement agencies, and the revised memories of those who stayed home, as well as those who fought in the war itself. The war became " America's golden age, a peak in the life of society when everything worked out and the good guys definitely got a happy ending." (Adams, 2) The WWII era came to serve a purpose; to be the bygone age which America once was, and if worked hard enough for, could be again. It was, in a sense, America's Garden of Eden, the time and place where all things were right. Of course, this was a manufactured ideal, what Adams calls a " usable past." " In creating a usable past, we seek formulas to apply in solving today's problems. Americans believe that WWII proved one rule above all others...it is usually better to fight than to talk." (Adams, 4) " To make WWII into the best war ever, we must leave out the area bombings and other questionable aspects while exaggerating the good things. The war myth is distorted not so much in what it says as in what it doesn't say." (Adams, 7) This applies not only to the war itself, but also to the home front.

Chapter two, " No Easy Answers," begins the process of deconstructing the myth, and demonstrating that the events leading up to WWII began long before the Treaty of Versailles, and the ramifications of WWII will last much longer than the generation that fought it. Adams lays out the frame of the complex political, cultural and economic histories of each of nations which would become involved in WWII, and shows that there was no obvious point

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at which one decision would have prevented the war from happening. Taken in context, the actions each nation took leading up to WWII make sense. Adams asks, what could have been done differently? Apparently, not much; appeasement didn't work in Europe, and determent didn't work in Asia. There really were no easy answers.

Chapter three, " The Patterns of War, 1939-1945" lays out the way in which each nation fought the war, with a new speed and brutality made possible by technology and the remoteness of the enemy. Chapter four, " The American War Machine," demonstrates how the tools were created and sent into battle, and how the soldiers and organization of each army differed, for better or worse. Chapter five, " Overseas," outlines the realities of life for the American soldier both in the European and Pacific theatres, while chapter six, " Home front Changes," does the same for those who stayed home. These chapters have one unifying purpose; to define the reality of the WWII era, expose the complex history and actors, and above all, disabuse us of the reigning WWII mythos. Chapter seven, " A New World," takes us one step further and debunks the myth that returning GIs readjusted quickly without lasting physical ailments and emotional traumas and into a society awaiting them with open arms, friendly smiles and loving families.

Above all else, Adams has provided an interesting and easily accessible framework with which one can examine WWII and appreciate the complexities and realities of the era. While his history is intentionally brief and uncomplicated by example and detail, it does achieve its purpose. By identifying the mythos and realities of WWII, the " Good War" can be

appreciated for what it actually was; an ugly, brutal and ultimately necessary war.

Adams says that the existence of the WWII distortions is not entirely the fault of the American public. It is also the fault of the Federal Government and the media. The government censored controversial material during the war and only delivered to the public details that were uplifting and beneficial to the cause. The media also used the war to its advantage, promoting products using references to the war.

Adams also goes into detail the Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome the soldiers endured during the war.

The book does go into some historical accounts of WWII. Most of Adams' references though were secondary sources. I would have liked to see him use more primary sources which would have provided more authenticity and credibility to the book. I do recommend the book if you are looking for a quick read about WWII, but if you are looking for a military history about WWII, this is not the book for you.

3-John F. Kasson, AMUSING THE MILLION: CONEY ISLAND AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Amusing the Million examines the historical context in which Coney Island made its reputation as an amusement park and shows how America's changing social and economic conditions formed the basis of a new mass culture.

Exploring it afresh in this way, John Kasson shows Coney Island no longer as the object of nostalgia but as a harbinger of modernity—and the many photographs, lithographs, engravings, and other reproductions with which he amplifies his text support this lively thesis.

After studying the whole book my point of analysis on this book is that In these times, when entertainers bare body parts normally kept strictly covered, it is hard to believe the cover photo of this book was considered rather racy a century ago. It shows a line of girls on the beach at Coney Island where the skirts on their swimsuits have been raised to reveal the shorts underneath. Considering that they also appear to have full-length tights on underneath the shorts, to modern eyes, they look overdressed. There were many social commentators at the end of the nineteenth century that argued that the egalitarian social structure of Coney Island was debasing the social fabric of the nation.

As Coney Island was the most conspicuous example of the dramatic social changes taking place in the United States. By the turn of the century, the people were generally no longer rural tillers of the soil, having been transformed into urban tillers of the machines. Furthermore, by this time, the social distinctions between the upper and other classes were being blurred. As the author points out, at Coney Island, many of the stiff social restrictions came down. People who otherwise would not speak to each other became friendly and shared rides, beach water and other amusements.

The members of the compressed urban society craved simple and inexpensive recreation and Coney Island provided it. Therefore, as Kasson

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points out so well, it was a phenomenon that grew out of a social need and in many ways served as a social release. People could, for a very small fee, leave their crowded dwellings and engage in a day of escape. Everyone was equal on the rides and the beaches, so at least at that location, social distinctions disappeared.

Until I read this book, I had never considered the amusement park as a barometer for social change. However, it is now clear that Coney Island was a metaphor for a dramatic change in the social fabric of the nation and from this book, you can learn many of the details.

These were all much the same in nature, differing mainly in size and duration. Their reason for being and the reason for them becoming a thing of the past is all the same.

The book suggests that they started in the mid-1800's is stretching the point somewhat as Fairs of all types were around for many centuries and only differed in how big they were, how far people travelled to them, how much new inventions became incorporated and how long they lasted.

It seems that throughout history people loved to gather for just about any reason, but generally some sort of amusement along with the hope of "seeing something new". Thus there were Races, Exhibitions of animals, crafts, products for prizes or sale, Auctions, Magic shows, Plays, Sporting events; and on and on ad infantilism.

This happened at Stonehenge and before, at the Roman Collisium, and Religious Celebrations. It didn't take much to create an event; heck, even a "

Hanging” was enough to get a huge crowd out. The same sort of thing continues today. So instead of taking the Subway to Coney Island or some other Amusement park; we go to the great Theme Parks, National Parks, Sporting Events, Concerts, Casinos, Vegas, Nashville, Ski Hills, Cruises, or even events and locations around the world, such as World Fairs or the Olympics.

The old adage “ The more things change, the more they become the same” applies to Amusement Parks, just as it does to everything else.

The greatest change is in the ease of travel, the amount of disposable income available, and the introduction of TV where everything can be brought right into the living room. That doesn’t leave much but the Thrill Rides, the Smells and Sounds, the Crowds and the Outdoors; but that’s coming too. The Canadian National Exhibition continues to run for 3 weeks in August: however it gets poorer and tackier every year and who knows how much longer it will continue.

Amusement parks that began to exist during the turn of the century served as venues for fun and excitement as well as helped to release the repressed from the gentility of the Victorian Age of the nineteenth century. John Kasson examines the social and cultural ramifications that occurred in American society in his book, *AMUSING THE MILLIONS: CONEY ISLAND AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY*. In his study, Kasson shows how the American landscape became playgrounds, especially in New York, which extended the use of recreational space, New York’s Central Park, and expositions that commemorated and celebrated the American historical past, Chicago’s

Columbian Exposition of 1893. They magnified the cornerstones and building blocks of the city, and the behavior that was exhibited with the rising middle class, which attracted a mass audience. The city became cosmopolitan and modern where many engaged and frolicked, and helped to unlatch social, racial, and economic boundaries that were bestowed upon many individuals; they also helped to rejuvenate cities through urban planning.

Indeed, Kasson explores the world of imagination. The amusements ran the gamut from a Barnum and Bailey atmosphere to reveling along the boardwalk amongst exotic and unusual exhibits that coveted Coney Island's Luna Park and Dreamland Park. And within the text Kasson highlights those who helped architect this unrestrained environment of excess, such as Frederick Law Olmstead, Daniel H. Burnham, George C. Tilyou, Frederic Thompson, James Gibbons Huneker, and Maxim Gorky. Undoubtedly these were elaborate and spacious constructed palatial playgrounds of pleasure full of materialism and consumption where many gathered for pure utopian enjoyment. According to Kasson, these amusements also served as an outlet for artists and painters whose works did not particularly belong in museums. However, they reflected the modernist and realist genres of the art world before they came into vogue, and they depicted " technological, urban, populous, egalitarian, erotic, hedonist, dynamic, and culturally diverse" images that the public were not accustomed to (88).

Overall, this is an interesting trip down nostalgic memory lane. Through the revealing pictures and detailed narrative, Kasson shows readers how Coney Island at the turn became a form of liberation for an array of classes. In essence, this is a good source to refer to when studying or reading about the <https://assignbuster.com/best-war-ever-america-and-world-war-ii-history-essay/>

American Dream as it relates to amusement parks that transcended social and cultural change in American society.

4-John Kenneth Galbraith, THE GREAT CRASH, 1929

The Great Crash, 1929 is a book written by John Kenneth Galbraith and published in 1954; it is an economic history of the lead-up to the Wall Street Crash of 1929. The book argues that the 1929 stock market crash was precipitated by rampant speculation in the stock market, that the common denominator of all speculative episodes is the belief of participants that they can become rich without work and that the tendency towards recurrent speculative orgy serves no useful purpose, but rather is deeply damaging to an economy. It was Galbraith's belief that a good knowledge of what happened in 1929 was the best safeguard against its recurrence.

Galbraith wrote the book during a break from working on the manuscript of what would become *The Affluent Society*. Galbraith was asked by Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. if he would write the definitive work on the Great Depression that he would then use as a reference source for his own intended work on Roosevelt. Galbraith chose to concentrate on the days that ushered in the depression. "I never enjoyed writing a book more; indeed, it is the only one I remember in no sense as a labor but as a joy." Galbraith received much praise for his work, including his humorous observations of human behavior during the speculative stock market bubble and subsequent crash. The publication of the book, which was one of Galbraith's first bestsellers, coincided with the 25th anniversary of the crash, at a time when it and the Great Depression that followed were still raw memories - and stock price levels were only then recovering to pre-crash levels. Galbraith <https://assignbuster.com/best-war-ever-america-and-world-war-ii-history-essay/>

considered it the useful task of the historian to keep fresh the memory of such crashes, the fading of which he correlates with their re-occurrence.

For the purpose of the summary and analysis phase of this book I thought that the Republican Great Depression of 1929-1939 has been an unending source of mystery, fascination, and disinformation for the past four generations. As you're reading these words, there's a huge push on by conservative think-tanks and wealthy political activists to reinvent the history, suggesting that Roosevelt prolonged the Depression or that New Deal programs were ineffective. At the same time, folks like David Sirota are valiantly pushing back with actual facts and statistics, showing that Roosevelt's New Deal was startlingly effective, particularly when compared with the Republican policies of 1920-1929 that formed the bubble that crashed in 1929, and the Republican failures to deal with its consequences during the last three years of the Herbert Hoover administration (1929-1933).

To really understand what brought about the great crash, however, it's most useful to read an historical narrative written by one of the world's preeminent economists when that world-changing event was still fresh in his and his readers' minds. The Great Crash is that book, first written by Galbraith in 1953-54 (and published in 1955) and updated for modern readers in 1997.

From this book I like to discuss some points in its summary phase. From the Introduction

The people who remained sane and quiet Extracts from “ The Great Crash: 1929”, John Kenneth Galbraith, First Published 1955, Page 27 “ Even in such a time of madness as the late twenties, a great many man in Wall Street remained quite sane. But they also remained very quiet. The sense of responsibility in the financial community for the community as a whole is not small. It is nearly nil. Perhaps this is inherent. In a community where the primary concern is making money, one of the necessary rules is to live and let live. To speak out against madness may be to ruin those who have succumbed to it. So the wise in Wall Street are nearly always silent. The foolish thus have the field to themselves. None rebukes them.”

From Chapter 1: “ A Year to Remember” Opportunities for the social historian

Extracts from “ The Great Crash: 1929”, John Kenneth Galbraith, First Published 1955, Page 26

“ In the autumn of 1929 the mightiest of Americans were, for a brief time, revealed as human beings. Like most humans, most of the time, they did some very foolish things. On the while, the greater the earlier reputation for omniscience, the more serene the previous idiocy, the greater the foolishness now exposed. Things that in other times were concealed in a heavy facade of dignity now stood exposed, for the panic suddenly, almost obscenely, snatched this facade away. We are seldom vouchsafed a glance behind this barrier; in our society the counterpart of the Kremlin walls is the thickly stuffed shirt. The social historian must always be alert to his opportunities, and there have been few like 1929.”

From Chapter 7: " Things Become More Serious" Things keep getting worse

Extracts from " The Great Crash: 1929", John Kenneth Galbraith, First Published 1955, Page 130 " In the autumn of 1929 the New York Stock Exchange, under roughly its present constitution, was 112 years old. During this lifetime it had seen some difficult days. On 18 September 1873, the firm of Jay Cooke and Company failed, and, as a more or less direct result, so did fifty-seven other Stock Exchange firms in the next few weeks. On 23 October 1907, call money rates reached one hundred and twenty-five per cent in the panic of that year. On 16 September 1922 - the autumn months are the off-season in Wall Street - a bomb exploded in front of Morgan's next door, killing thirty people and injuring a hundred more.

A common feature of all these earlier troubles was that, having happened, they were over. The worst was reasonably recognizable as such. The singular feature of the great crash of 1929 was that the worst continued to worsen. What looked one day like the end proved on the next day to have been only the beginning. Nothing could have been more ingeniously designed to maximize the suffering, and also to ensure that as few as possible escaped the common misfortune. The fortunate speculator who had funds to answer the first margin call presently got another and equally urgent one, and if he met that there would still be another. In the end all the money he had was extracted from him and lost. The man with the smart money, who was safely out of the market when the first crash came, naturally went back in to pick up bargains. The bargains then suffered a ruins fall. Even the man who waited out all of October and all of November, who saw the volume of trading return to normal and saw Wall Street become as placid as a produce

market, and who then bought common stocks would see their value drop to a third or a fourth of the purchase price in the next twenty-four months. The Coolidge bull market was a remarkable phenomenon. The ruthlessness of its liquidation was, in its own way, equally remarkable.”

5-Ronald G. Walters, AMERICAN REFORMERS, 1815-1860

With *American Reformers*, Walters has composed a fine synthesis of secondary literature on the varied antebellum reform movements. In doing so, he argues that the reform impulse emerges out of evangelical Protestantism but by the Civil War takes a more secular turn more involved in legislating social controls than converting the hearts of individuals. As he develops this argument he addresses the different forms that this reform impulse took and organizes the book thematically. He discusses in successive chapters utopian movements and secular communitarians, abolition, the women’s movement and the peace movement, temperance, health reform and spiritualism, working man’s reform, and institutional reform, into which he groups mental hospitals, prisons and schools.

Walters demonstrates the secularization of reform in the realm of communitarian societies. Thus, the early nineteenth century utopian settlements that often emerged out of pietistic impulses gave way to more secular experiments in social engineering such as Owenism, or as in the case of Oneida, how a once religious community endured only as a commercial venture. Similarly he shows institutions such as asylums wove their religious inspiration with the science of the times but like prisons and almshouses became holding pens for outcasts rather than places for healing and reform.

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Walters also situates the emergence of reform in the particular circumstances of antebellum America. He argues that the emergence of the middle class created made it possible for people to devote time to reform, and those technological advances in printing made it possible for people to actually make a living as an “agitator.” He also argues that reform helped shape the identity of the emerging middle class. This point comes through particularly clearly in his chapter on working man’s reform.

Walters’ synthesis suffers from its grand scope and short length. In it he sacrifices a certain amount of detail and analysis for space and clarity. The section on utopian movements, for example, traces the personalities of the major reformers and a brief outline of the community that followed without in-depth analysis. Throughout the book quotations from primary sources would have been helpful in giving a feel for the particular movement under discussion. The lack of primary source material allows Walters to sacrifice documentation, and the reader sometimes wishes for some assistance in discerning the origin or fuller development of a particular point. To his credit, Walters provides a good bibliographical essay at the end, but the lack of documentation sometimes proves frustrating and thus interrupts the otherwise smooth flow in the text. Nonetheless, *American Reformers* is a very readable and useful synthesis of the secondary sources on antebellum reform. As such, it is a helpful and welcome addition to the field.

In my mind, this is an introductory text, albeit a fine one. Walters is very accessible, he tries to include necessary historical perspective and whatever cultural information he deems to be valuable to the story he’s telling in each chapter. And while each chapter is a story of a different movement or

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people, he also demonstrates those things these groups have in common. I won't spoil it for you, but at the least of it, they were all idealists who thought to affect the world around them.

Material and political changes transformed America at a dizzying pace in the 1820s and 1830s. The expansion of industrialization, the creation of roads and canals to connect manufacturers to new markets, westward migration, a prolonged period of economic depression following the panic of 1837, and the broadening of voting rights triggered vast social upheavals. Reform movements were often attempts to cope with the consequences of these changes. Some movements wanted reform of institutions like prisons, schools, and asylums. Others looked to individual regeneration to transform the whole society. Some reformers drew attention to a particular group's suffering: Richard Henry Dana's *Two Years before the Mast* (1840), for example, pressed for expanded legal rights for sailors. Others, like the founders of Brook Farm, sought "radical and universal reform."

A powerful source of reform emerged from the Second Great Awakening, the religious revivals sweeping the nation from the 1790s through the 1820s. Like the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s, this series of revivals emphasized individual, often emotional religious experiences. Yet unlike the first period of revival, the Second Great Awakening had an even broader impact. The disestablishment of religion in the early national period and the deism associated with America's founding fathers (that is, their belief in the power of reason and the existence of a Supreme Creator and their skepticism about supernatural religious explanations) seemed to threaten the nation's Protestant moral foundation. Moreover, many Christians

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attributed certain social ills (drinking, dueling, disregard for the Sabbath, and the like) to Christianity's decline. Ministers such as Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) and Charles Grandison Finney (1792-1875) responded with messages about wickedness, conversion, and the imminent return of Christ. Moving away from the Calvinist doctrines (such as predestination) associated with the initial Great Awakening, they preached individual moral agency and personal salvation, moral improvement and perfection, and a responsibility to hasten the coming of God's Kingdom.

These religious ideas contributed to the desire for reform and creation of voluntary benevolent societies such as the American Education Society (1815), American Bible Society (1816), and American Tract Society (1825). These organizations distributed religious literatures, but their members also led efforts to stem Sabbath-breaking, drinking, and other forms of vice. Various female moral reform societies focused on ending prostitution, sexual exploitation, and the sexual double standard. The ostensibly moral concern with sexual vice also helped justify the not-so-pious demand for reform literature featuring fallen and wronged women in texts like Maria Monk's *Awful Disclosures* (1836) and George Foster's *New York by Gas-Light* (1850).

Evangelical reformers also played important roles in other reform movements. Theodore Dwight Weld (1803-1895), a disciple of Finney, began his career distributing tracts and preaching against strong drink. In 1829 Weld shifted his efforts to the campaign against slavery and authored two antislavery classics, *The Bible against Slavery* (1837), which dismantled biblical pro-slavery arguments, and *American Slavery As It Is* (1839), the text <https://assignbuster.com/best-war-ever-america-and-world-war-ii-history-essay/>

that inspired Harriet Beecher Stowe (1811-1896) to write Uncle Tom's Cabin (1851-1852).

Evangelical reform spread popular literature as tracts, sermons, Sunday school books, and temperance testimonies. The revivals also had an important influence on developments in literary style. Religious writings became more emotional and imaginative, formally less rigid, and theologically less rigorous. Antebellum religious texts began to rely on vivid narratives to illustrate, edify, and entertain. This "new religious style," as David S. Reynolds calls it in his study *Beneath the American Renaissance* (p. 15), reshaped not only evangelical writing but also the style of liberal reformers, popular writers, and transcendentalists.

6-James M McPherson, ABRAHAM LINCOLN

—In honor of the bicentennial of Lincoln's birth, renowned Civil War scholar James M. McPherson has written a wonderful brief biography of our 16th President. This book will be a wonderful source for beginners to study Lincoln and will serve as a good framework for larger works, like David Herbert Donald's *Lincoln*.

This book covered the important aspects of Lincoln's life from his birth and childhood in Kentucky and Indiana to his coming to Illinois, to his administration and death. McPherson discussed Lincoln's tarnished relationship with his father and his wonderful relationship with his step-mother, which presented a more personal side of the man.

Though short, this book does a great job of discussing Lincoln's life in the larger context of American history. McPherson summarized the important
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moments and events during his life and provided a wonderful look at the war and its effect on him.

True to his scholarly reputation, McPherson used great sources for this little biography, including the Collected Works of Lincoln and Lincoln at Cooper Union to name a couple. In addition to using great primary and secondary sources, McPherson provided a bibliographic essay that provided a great synthesis of the historiography of Lincoln and where it may be heading in the coming year.

There are many things to like about this book. It is a well-researched, but brief biography that will reach a wide audience. The reputation of James McPherson as a scholar lends great weight to the legitimacy of this biography. Abraham Lincoln is a wonderful beginning to the scholarly celebration of the Lincoln bicentennial.

— James McPherson has emerged as one of America's finest historians. *Battle Cry of Freedom*, his Pulitzer Prize-winning account of the Civil War, was a national bestseller that Hugh Brogan, in *The New York Times Book Review*, called "history writing of the highest order." In that volume, McPherson gathered in the broad sweep of events, the political, social, and cultural forces at work during the Civil War era. Now, in *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*, he offers a series of thoughtful and engaging essays on aspects of Lincoln and the war that have rarely been discussed in depth.

McPherson again displays his keen insight and sterling prose as he examines several critical themes in American history. He looks closely at the <https://assignbuster.com/best-war-ever-america-and-world-war-ii-history-essay/>

President's role as Commander-in-Chief of the Union forces, showing how Lincoln forged a national military strategy for victory. He explores the importance of Lincoln's great rhetorical skills, uncovering how-through parables and figurative language—he was uniquely able to communicate both the purpose of the war and a new meaning of liberty to the people of the North. In another section, McPherson examines the Civil War as a Second American Revolution, describing how the Republican Congress elected in 1860 passed an astonishing blitz of new laws (rivaling the first hundred days of the New Deal), and how the war not only destroyed the social structure of the old South, but radically altered the balance of power in America, ending 70 years of Southern power in the national government.

The Civil War was the single most transforming and defining experience in American history, and Abraham Lincoln remains the most important figure in the pantheon of our mythology. These graceful essays, written by one of America's leading historians, offer fresh and unusual perspectives on both.

From my analysis point of view the book itself in hardcover is a joy to hold with its compact size, readable typeface and bound-in ribbon bookmark. Whoever worked on this project obviously did it as a labor of love. They worked the details on this one. You can't honestly compare this work to others like Carl Sandberg's "Lincoln" or "With Malice towards None" or even my nice coffee table book of photographs taken of Lincoln. This work COMPLEMENTS those more comprehensive volumes. That said, it is not incomplete. It does an excellent job of hitting the hundreds of high - and low - points in Lincoln's too brief life. The pace moves quickly and precisely along so that you never have the feeling that you're being 'written down to'

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if that's the phrase I'm looking for. This one has NOT been dumbed down for the reader.

Personally I see this smaller volume as an 'annual read' to remind me of just how special Lincoln was as a man and as our nation's leader. He was willing, even at great personal cost, to do the right thing on the toughest, most entrenched issues in our nation's hist