

# **BOOK REVIEW OF *ABRAHAM LINCOLN A TRUE LIFE* WRITTEN BY JAMES BALDWIN**

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## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1 Background of Writing**

*Abraham Lincoln: A True Life* is a book written by James Baldwin and published by American Book Company at 1904. This novel is based on the life of a historical figure Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of United States of America. According to his book *Abraham Lincoln: A True Life*, this novel is separated into three books in one, which are *Book the First - Preparation*, *Book the Second-Probation* and *Book the Three –Performance* (Baldwin, 1904: 5-7).

Abraham Lincoln is the 16<sup>th</sup> president of United States of America who served from March 4<sup>th</sup> 1861 until he had murdered in April 15<sup>th</sup>, 1865. He was born at Kentucky on 12<sup>th</sup> February 1809. He got an education for a year, but with that such of short time he could read, write, and count. When he grew up, he used several of his time to read books (Suhindriyo, 1999: 56).

### **1.2 Purpose of Writing**

The writer's purpose of writing is to describe the strong points and the weak points from the book *Abraham Lincoln: A True Life* through the intrinsic and extrinsic aspects such as plot, language styles, and settings. The writer hopes that this review will give a portrait of biography and a 20<sup>th</sup> century literature.

### **1.3 James Baldwin and His Works**

According to his biography in the *Junior Book of Authors* (1951), James Baldwin (1841-1925) is an American author and editor. Born in Indiana, he worked as a teacher and administrator at age 24, and years later he was promoted as a superintendent of the graded school. He worked with several publishers such as *Harper and Brothers* and *American Book Company*. Aside of editing school books, he began to make his own literature works.

## **2. Summary of *Abraham Lincoln***

Abraham Lincoln was born at Kentucky, 1809. During his youth, his family moved from several places. He lost his mother when he was a boy, and his father married other woman years later. He began his own life in New Orleans, where he took a job as a boatman. When he moved to Illinois, he became a store clerk. During Black Hawk War in 1832, he assumed the rank of captain of his volunteer company but saw no action.

He was first elected during the same time he failed to be an Illinois legislature. Two years later, he successfully became a Whig Party general assembly member for eight years, at the same time his law career soared. He was accepted to the bar

in 1837, and then he moved to Springfield. In 1842, he married Marry Todd, who gave birth to four sons. Unfortunately, two of them died during childhood.

Lincoln joined the seat of congress in 1846, during which he moved to Washington DC. He tried to speak against the Mexican War and slavery, but to no success. He then returned to Springfield in 1849 to become a lawyer and take care of his family. Just when his life of politic seemed to end, the issue of slavery reappeared. Lincoln decided to return, but failed to join the senate. However, his speech gained him fame and support.

In 1860, Lincoln won the national election, despite the low percentage of popular vote for him. With an anti-slavery figure at the helm of the nation, secession became a considerable option for some of the Southern states.

The separatism wave was begun by South Carolina, by the forming the Confederate States of America. Lincoln sought to reinforce Fort Sumter in Charleston, but this decision was met by the first aggression of the Confederate force. He called for the militia to stop the insurgency, but then some countries, led by Virginia, decided to secede.

The Unity of the State may be the main goal, but slavery was also a key factor. Lincoln held a tremendous authority as the nation's leader, and with such power he strengthened the jurisdiction of the executives and the federals. He also passed several laws regarding currency, homesteaders, railroads, taxes, and several other aspects.

The war dealt great loss for both parties, for even though the North held the biggest force and resource, the Southern forces were supported with skillful tacticians. Lincoln managed to reclaim the seat in 1864, and as the end of war is imminent, he prepared several attempts in order to rebuild the country which was torn by the Civil War.

Not long after the Southern state submitted, Lincoln was assassinated. He got shot in the Theatre in Washington D.C and died on the next day at twenty minutes past seven o'clock. The Union had lost a charismatic figure, but his attempts of reuniting the country would not die with him, neither would his works for his motherland. He was buried in Springfield and his immovable conviction and victory against slavery had earned him the title as an American Hero figure.

### **3. Review of James Baldwin's *Abraham Lincoln: A True Life***

#### **3.1 Characters**

##### **3.1.1 Abraham Lincoln**

Abraham Lincoln is the main character of this book. He was a 16<sup>th</sup> President of United States who led his nation to end the Civil War, removed the slavery and kept the unity of the states. He is a humble and hard-worker person. It could be proved that he was born from a poor family and his mother was deceased at his young age. He was struggling in his life by working as a store clerk, a woodcutter, a boatman, and a lawyer. He is also a courageous and firm person because of his actions against slavery.

##### **3.1.2 Stephen Arnold Douglas**

Born at Brandon, Vermont, Stephen Arnold Douglas was an American politician who was a re-elected senator from Illinois. He was defeated by the Republican's candidate, Abraham Lincoln at presidential election in 1860.

He was Abraham Lincoln's most powerful political rival, and his debates against Lincoln well known as "Lincoln-Douglas Debate" or "The Great Debates of 1858".

### **3.2 Settings**

The story of this novel took several places in United States. In the beginning, when Abraham Lincoln was still a child it took place in Kentucky and when he grown up, he moved to Illinois, New Orleans, and Mississippi. When he became President, the story took place in Washington D.C, and when he dead, he buried in Springfield. This story took a time in 19<sup>th</sup> century.

### **3.3 The Strong and Weak Points of the Book**

#### **3.3.1 The Strong Points of the Book**

This book contains the historical story about the life of Abraham Lincoln. This novel is worth for reading especially for someone who studying the history of America, American politics, and old American literature.

##### **3.3.1.1 The Settings**

The first strong point in this book is the settings. James Baldwin's way to describe the settings of this novel such as the place, conflict, and atmosphere is very clear and detail.

“Autumn came again, and with it came trouble and sorrow. A strange disease had broken out among the settlers. It was believed to be caused by some plant which grew in the woods. If cow ate the plant, their milk was made poisonous, and those who drank of it grew sick and were almost sure to die. On account of this belief the disease was called “milk-sick.” Sometimes the cows themselves died; but nobody could ever find the strange plant or describe its appearance or manner of growth. The disease was known only in new settlements among the clearings and the woods; and physicians, even to this day, have been unable to tell what was its true cause.

Thomas Sparrow and his wife were the first to be attacked by this dreadful sickness. The narrow half faced camp which was their home was a cheerless place at its best, and the disease did tis work quickly two graves were made side by side on the sunny slope of a hill, and there the poor people were laid by their sorrowing kinsfolk and neighbors. And then Abraham Lincoln’s mother was stricken down. The hardships of the past two years had already taken the flush of health from her cheeks. Exposure to dampness and cold in the camp and unfinished cabin had robbed her of the strength and made her easy victim to the disease. Her husband and children nursed her with tender care, and did all they could to help her. There was no doctor for whom they could send; but they gave her such simple remedies as their had, and her bedside, watching her with loving eyes.”(Baldwin1904:48-49)

This quote describes the atmosphere, place, and conflict “*VI Great Sorrow*”. It explain that it was in the autumn seasons in the narrow half faced camp in Kentucky at the year of 1818, where a sickness called”milk-sick” became a serious plague. This quote is describing about how Nancy Hanks Lincoln and the folks around the camp are suffering because of this sickness. It also gives the strong description to the readers about how deadly the “milk-sick”. Milk-sick also known as Tremetol Vomiting is a kind of disease caused by poisoned milk from a cow that was eating white snakeroots (*AgeratinaAltissima*), a poisonous herb from East and North America which is believed as Lincoln’s mother causes of death.

### **3.3.1.2 Plot**

The second strong point of the novel is the plot. This novel has the well-organized plot which is separated in specific chapters and books. This novel arranges the situations sequentially and very detail. The chronology of the story is explained very clearly without any flashbacks because the plot is just straight forward, and only focused on one character. The specific stories are separated in three books. *Book the First-Preparation* tell the journey of Abraham Lincoln from his birthday, childhood, getting educations, his movement from New Orleans to Mississippi, his career as a woodcutter and a shop clerk, he became a lawyer and ended when he started his political career.

### **3.3.2 The Weak Points of The Book**

#### **3.3.2.1 The Book's Cover Design**

The first weak point of this book is from the extrinsic aspects of the book, its cover design. This book's cover design is too simple and not attractive, even the picture of this book shows a man with an axe sitting on the wood log and reading a book which gave an interpretation of young Abraham Lincoln. This first published version of this book did not show the complete title of the book on the cover.

#### **3.3.2.2 The Type of The Text**

The second weak point of this book is most of the texts in this book are too focused on narrative. The conversation in this book rarely happens. It will take a long time for ordinary people to read this book until the end because they will feel bored to read this book.

### **3.3.2.3 The Ending**

The third weak point of this book is the murderer of Abraham Lincoln at the end of the story and the place when he had murdered is not mentioned. This novel just ended with the Walt Whitman's poem in "XXIII Elegy", the last chapter of this novel.

## **4. Conclusion**

*Abraham Lincoln: A True Life* is an informative book for someone who is studying American Literature, American Politics and American History. It contains the well information about the story of the 16<sup>th</sup> President of United States, Abraham Lincoln.

The first strong point of this book, it describes the settings such as the place, conflict, and atmosphere so well. The second strong point of this book, the plot of this book is just straight forward without any flashback.

The first weak point of this book is its cover design which is not attractive and it shows an incomplete title of this book at the cover. The second weak point of this book is this book text is too focused on narrative and the conversation is rarely happened. The third weak point of this book, the ending of this book is not clear, because the murderer of Abraham Lincoln and what happened to him is not mentioned.

With these strong and weak points, *Abraham Lincoln: A True Life* is a recommended book to read.



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