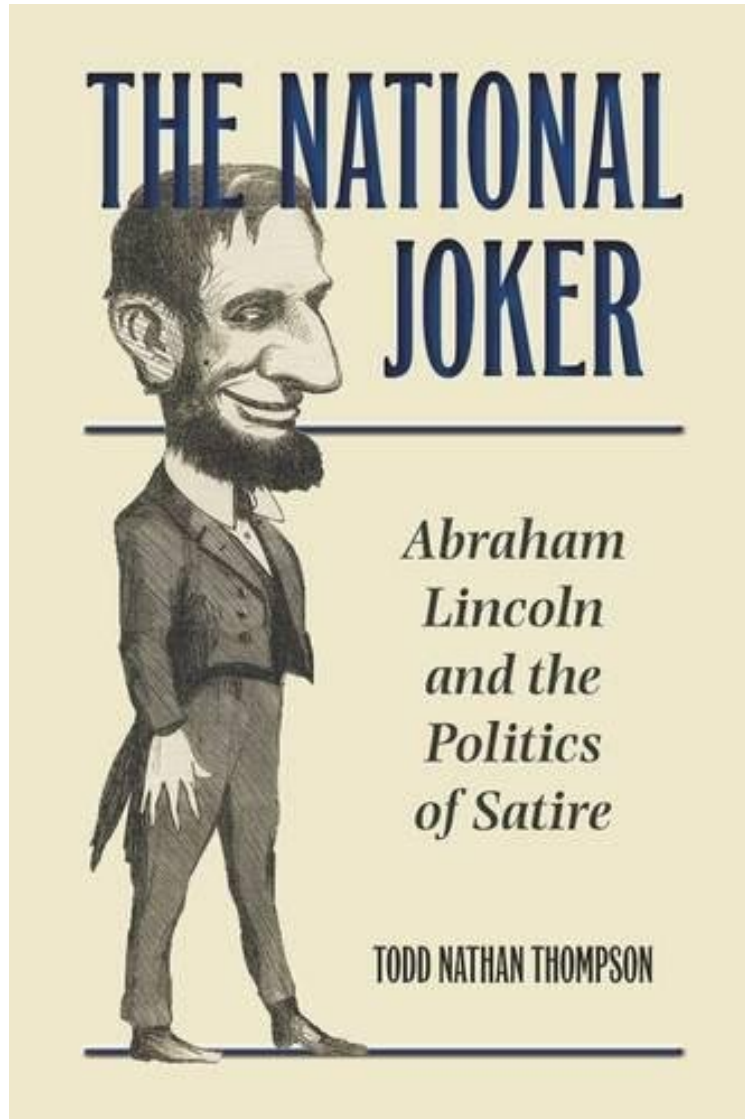


(Free read ebook) The National Joker: Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Satire

The National Joker: Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Satire

Todd Nathan Thompson

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Todd Nathan Thompson : The National Joker: Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Satire before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The National Joker: Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Satire:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Lincoln and political satireBy WEISFELD GlennThis is an unusual Lincoln book. It analyzes Lincoln's treatment by political cartoonists, as well as his management of his public image and use of storytelling to make political points and entertain his audiences. The book examines Lincoln's deft use of self-ridicule to pre-empt and neutralize disparagement of his humble background and anatomical peculiarities in print

and imagery. The book is interesting and well written throughout, but is somewhat repetitive. Of particular value is the selection of cartoons and the information on development of techniques allowing wide dissemination of these works at this pivotal time in the nation's history. The contrast between those cartoons and contemporary ones was striking to me. These Civil War era artists really knew anatomy, unlike many graphic artists today. Because of the inherent appeal of the human body, accurate drawings offer esthetic appeal just by their draftsmanship. Also noteworthy is the detail of these earlier works, which often feature a multitude of political actors recognizably drawn, and captions festooning the panel in various locations. As a result, a single cartoon can convey several political messages. The famous Thomas Nast began his career at this time, and his efforts are exemplary. Also striking to me were the many references to the Classics and literature in general. Readers then apparently were often better educated in the humanities than students today. For example, the young author himself apparently was ignorant of the notion of the incubus, the nightmarish demon that sat on the stomach of victims to torment them, which is depicted in one cartoon in the form of Lincoln stifling a supine Jefferson Davis. In short, this short book offers an entertaining and informative monograph to the art lover, Lincoln buff, and student of rhetoric.

Abraham Lincoln's sense of humor proved legendary during his own time and remains a celebrated facet of his personality to this day. Indeed, his love of jokes—hearing them, telling them, drawing morals from them—prompted critics to dub Lincoln “the National Joker.” The political cartoons and print satires that mocked Lincoln often trafficked in precisely the same images and terms Lincoln humorously used to characterize himself. In this intriguing study, Todd Nathan Thompson considers the politically productive tension between Lincoln's use of satire and the satiric treatments of him in political cartoons, humor periodicals, joke books, and campaign literature. By fashioning a folksy, fallible persona, Thompson shows, Lincoln was able to use satire as a weapon without being severely wounded by it. In his speeches, writings, and public persona, Lincoln combined modesty and attack, engaging in strategic self-deprecation while denouncing his opponents, their policies, and their arguments, thus refiguring satiric discourse as political discourse and vice versa. At the same time, he astutely deflected his opponents' criticisms of him by embracing and sometimes preemptively initiating those criticisms. Thompson traces Lincoln's comic sources and explains how, in reapplying others' jokes and stories to political circumstances, he transformed humor into satire. Time and time again, Thompson shows, Lincoln engaged in self-mockery, turning negative assumptions or depictions of him—as ugly, cowardly, jocular, inexperienced—into positive traits that identified him as an everyman while attacking his opponents' claims to greatness, heroism, and experience as aristocratic or demagogic. Thompson also considers how Lincoln took advantage of political cartoons and other media to help proliferate the particular Lincoln image of the “self-made man”; underscores exceptions to Lincoln's ability to mitigate negative, satiric depictions of him; and closely examines political cartoons from both the 1860 and 1864 elections. Throughout, Thompson's deft analysis brings to life Lincoln's popular humor.

“Todd Nathan Thompson's valuable study provides what no previous scholar has attempted: a careful, illuminating study of Lincoln's adroit and compelling uses of satire. The author clearly demonstrates, thoughtfully and convincingly, that Lincoln's familiar humor often had larger political and rhetorical purposes. A useful examination that presents an even more complex Lincoln.”—Richard W. Etulain, author of *Lincoln and Oregon Country Politics in the Civil War Era* “In this illuminating and subtle study, Thompson shows that Abraham Lincoln brilliantly used self-effacing humor and stories to advance his political cause. The *National Joker* is an important book that anyone interested in America's greatest president should read.”—David S. Reynolds, editor of *Lincoln's Selected Writings: A Norton Critical Edition* “Thompson has produced a shrewd and sophisticated study of the way in which Lincoln used humor, including self-deprecating, for strategic and often satirical purposes. The *National Joker* is a valuable contribution to Lincoln studies.”—Richard Striner, author of *Father Abraham: Lincoln's Relentless Struggle to End Slavery* “Lincoln's contemporaries best recognized his rhetorical powers through his sense of humor, which became legendary. Thompson's new book, *The National Joker: Abraham Lincoln and the Politic of Satire*, demonstrates just how shrewd and purposeful the president's sense of humor was. . . . A strength of Thompson's book is that he shows not only how Lincoln used satire, but how it was used on him- and how Lincoln responded in turn. Lincoln was one of the most complex individuals in the nation's history, and Thompson is exploring one of his most sophisticated and fascinating (and largely unexplored) facets. Best of all, Thompson does so in a way that sheds light on the entire panorama of Lincoln's times. His insightful look at Lincoln, then, proves to be an insightful look at America.” -Chris Mackowski, author of *Grant's Last Battle: The Story Behind the Personal Memoirs of Ulysses S. Grant* “[Thompson's] book...is crammed with insight. He knows his satirists, and the Civil War had them, thick as brevet generals.” —Mark Wahlgren Summers, *The Annals of Iowa* “Thompson's analysis is a quick but fascinating read, filled with political cartoons that illustrate how Lincoln was portrayed, vilified, and reimagined by the press.” —*Journal of Illinois History* “What sets *The National Joker* apart is its exploration of precisely how Lincoln leveraged his depiction in the press for political gain. As Thompson establishes Lincoln's comic sense, he supports each of his assertions with numerous examples, offers concise historical and political context, and presents the anecdote or punch-line along with an

analysis of the comic function and political outcome of each of Lincoln's little stories." —Project MUSE"Thomson shows us how Lincoln continually outpaced his opponents, using his frontier wit and comic homespun caricature to outmaneuver the press and win his way to the White House. No other American president before or since has so deftly used satire to elevate himself in the eyes of the electorate. That he did so when the nation was at war with itself, grieving over the loss of a generation of Americans, and when the Union, Confederate, and British press gave him little reason to laugh, is a testament to his resilience, and to the power of a good sense of humor. " —William Furry, *Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society* "As Thompson shows in his study, the freakishly tall man with unkempt hair, homely face, ill-fitting clothes, and a rustic way of speaking admitted his own shortcomings freely and with infectious good humor. Consciously or unconsciously, he turned satire against itself. Satire works best against those who hide behind their social prestige; however, Lincoln embraced his low-class status. His political image—the common man; roughhewn and self-made—resonated with the American public. This well-written book is recommended for students of Lincolniana, political cartoons, and propaganda." —Stephen Curley, Texas AM University at Galveston