

## Fremont Public Library Great Books Book Club

### Doris Kearns-Goodwin's "Team of Rivals"

July 29, 2023

1. How was Abraham Lincoln able to win the Republican nomination in 1860 over his three chief rivals, Seward, Chase, and Bates—all of whom were more experienced, better educated and better known?
2. The night before his election as president, Lincoln made the decision to put each of these three rivals into his cabinet. What led him to this decision? What does it say about his temperament?
3. Are there parallels that can be drawn between Fort Sumter and the Iraqi War beginnings?
4. Could Seward or one of the other presidential possibilities have kept the country out of war or at least delayed it?
5. Lincoln and his cabinet's solution to the slavery issue was controversial. Was there a different solution to the resolution of the slavery problem that, in retrospect, may have been preferable to the one employed?
6. How did Lincoln's thinking about slavery evolve over time? What led him to issue his Emancipation Proclamation? How would he answer complaints that the Proclamation did not free the slaves in the border states? How did Seward contribute to the timing of the Proclamation?
7. Why did Lincoln put up with Chase for so long, knowing that he was maneuvering against him to win the nomination in 1864? What finally undid Chase? Why did Lincoln appoint him Chief Justice?
8. At the start of the war, Lincoln was plagued with a series of ineffective generals. Was this inevitable?
9. President Barack Obama has said he followed Lincoln's example of surrounding himself with rivals and people who question him and argue with him. Do think Obama used some of the same strategies that Lincoln used for the Presidential nomination? What are the factors in our modern media and political culture that make it more difficult for a president to create and maintain a true team of rivals?
10. Lincoln has often been portrayed as suffering from depression all his life. Yet, Goodwin suggests that while he had a melancholy temperament, he developed constructive resources to combat his spells of sorrow. By the time he reached the presidency, Lincoln was the one who could sustain everyone else's spirits. What were the means he used to shake off his sorrow?
11. How would you describe the change in Stanton's attitudes toward Lincoln from the time they first met as lawyers to the end? How did their opposing styles lead to positive results in the cabinet?
12. What compromises did each of the four men make with his beliefs in order to further his political career?
13. How did the women in the story affect the lives and careers of the men surrounding Lincoln—Frances Seward, Kate Chase, and Julia Bates?
14. Putting Lincoln to one side, which of the men (the rivals) would you most like to meet and why? Start a business with?

#### Sources:

<https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/non-fiction/1024-team-of-rivals-goodwin?start=3>

[https://www.seniorlearn.org/bookclubs/readerguides/Rivals\\_Goodwin.html](https://www.seniorlearn.org/bookclubs/readerguides/Rivals_Goodwin.html)

<https://www.simonandschuster.com/books/Team-of-Rivals/Doris-Kearns-Goodwin/9780743270755>